



Indian – Russian Relations in Cold War. A Bird Eye View

Mr. Basapattan
S. A.

Professor & HOD, Dept. of Political Science, Govt. First Grade College KALAGI .

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the history of Indo-Russian military and nuclear cooperation. The "special" Moscow-New Delhi relationship during the Cold War, it concludes, was based upon Indian needs. In the post-Cold War era this relationship has persisted due to continued short-term Indian military needs, and Russian economic needs. This bond, therefore, may be fractured by an eventual improvement in Indian military self-reliance. Indias strategic culture, rooted in Indian history, geography and political culture, has created an Indian strategic mindset impervious to American nonproliferation efforts. The paper finds, moreover, that there are no short-term "silver bullets" to cure the current Indo-American rift, which flows from causes in addition to Indias nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

KEYWORDS : Indian.Russian, Military, Help, Need, Cooperation

Introduction

History, geography, and political culture all played crucial roles in the development of Indias conventional forces and nuclear capabilities during the Cold War. Indias sudden emancipation in 1947 after centuries of subservience created "a fierce determination to preserve Indian independence no matter what the cost an attitude often bordering on paranoia." Any attempt by outside powers, whether Soviet or Western, to exert influence upon India was often met with open defiance. While the Soviet Union, especially under Khrushchev, would be more understanding of Indias "paranoia" and would treat India with respect, the United States often presented India with demands, even when providing food aid. Furthermore, the United States would exacerbate Indias geographic isolation by providing arms and technical data to both Pakistan and China, thus adding fuel to Indian militarism.

Indias Post-Cold War Identity

Having defined its identity and prestige in international politics as the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indias *raison d'être* and identity in international relations became uncertain with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. "The pursuit of autonomy without power was premised, first, on a balanced stalemate between the Atlantic and Soviet blocs..." The removal of the "Soviet bloc" from the "stalemate" effectively ended the stalemate and, consequently, the rationale for the non-aligned movement. Indians also came to realize that the absence of a bilateral competition between the two superpowers meant that Indias geo-strategic role as a "counter-weight" no longer existed. "When the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union collapsed, India found that few people outside the region cared much about the country. India neither had economic influence nor risked becoming a major source of instability the two most important criteria for earning foreign attention." Furthermore, the rise of secessionist movements throughout India, South Asia and Central Asia shifted Indian defense concerns back to the issue of internal stability. Finally, after three decades of protectionist economic policies, India was forced to abandon its Soviet-supported "fortress mentality" and turn to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for economic rejuvenation.

Russias Post-Cold War View of India

Unable to stabilize its own domestic environment, Russias leadership, specifically President Boris Yeltsin, emphasized a need for the "de-ideologization of its foreign policy." This "de-ideologization" policy resulted in Russia adopting a "wait and see" policy towards India. "The main thing was that Moscow wanted its policy towards India to be pragmatic and flexible." Perhaps the greatest source of Russian neutrality towards India during the transition period of the early 1990s was a Russian political leadership that was "dominated by Westerners and the Atlanticists." Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin both appeared to rest their hopes for a rejuvenation of the Russian economy on some variant of the Marshall Plan. Both men failed to understand that a Marshall Plan scenario at least in the variation pursued in West Germany required not only defeat but also an occupation of the targeted state to ensure that the required infrastructure and "rule of law" were in place. As is well documented, the tremendous amount of corruption and disorganization within Russias bureaucracy curtailed the potential effectiveness of

Western financial assistance.

Strained Indo-Russian Relations

It was in this atmosphere of uncertain Russian foreign policy objectives that the post-Cold War relations between Russia and India were further strained by two events. The first of these destabilizing events centered around a contract dispute between the Russian space directorate "Glavkosmos" and the government of India for the purchase of cryogenic engines and the related technology. The contract, signed on 18 January 1991, stemmed from Indias desire to gain knowledge of the liquid oxygen propulsion system of Russian cryogenic engines in order to advance Indias geo-synchronous satellite launch vehicle (GSLV) program.

Over the next two years, the United States protested the proposed transfer of missiles and technology to India on the grounds that the sale would violate the April 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The growing threat of missile proliferation became well known to the United States following the Iraqi Scud missile attacks during the Gulf War and the testing of Indias Agni IRBM missile in 1989.

During the same time frame as the cryogenic engine fiasco, the "rupee versus ruble" debate flared up in Indo-Russian relations. As the Cold War concluded, India had an amassed debt of \$12-16 billion owed to the Soviet Union for arms purchases. While India proved willing to pay off its debt, a dispute emerged between the two states over the nature of the currency and the exchange rate that would be used. As noted earlier, the Soviet Union had been willing to accept rupee-for-arms arrangements since the initial Soviet intent in the military cooperation was to use India as a strategic counter-balance, not a financial pool.

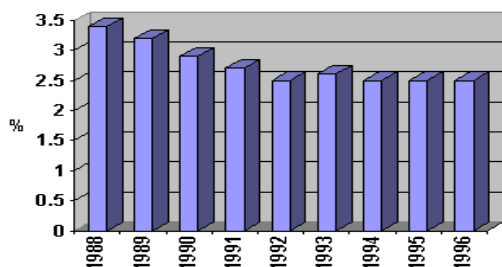
Indias Military Needs and Russias supplier-dependency

The primary short-term military concern for India in the early 1990s was its limited supply of spare parts and supplies for its Soviet-produced armaments. After three decades of reliance on Soviet-produced hardware, India was in a position in 1991 in which seventy percent of Army armaments, eighty percent of Air Force armaments, and eight-five percent of Navy armaments were of Soviet origin. Lacking the indigenous capability to produce spare parts and supplies for these systems, Indias military faced an immediate crisis. The break-up of the Soviet Union had caused a fracture in the Soviet-Indian military supply-line as the administrative control and actual locations of the Soviet defense industries were situated throughout the newly independent states. "As Air Vice-Marshal S. Krishnaswamy noted with some understatement, there was a hiccup in supply relations during 1991-92." Over-reliance on Soviet military hardware had allowed India to postpone developing a self-reliant indigenous defense industry. More to the point, "the dependence on Russian weapons over 30 years was a serious strategic defect."

In response to its economic crisis in 1990-91 and the temporary loss of its primary foreign arms supplier, India imposed a reduction in defense expenditures and a sharp reduction in arms importation (see Figures 1 and 2 below). After having been the top importer of conventional

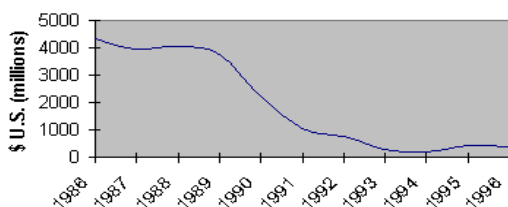
weapons in the world during the period from 1988 to 1992, India was ranked as the twenty-third largest importer of conventional arms by 1996. Meanwhile, Russia's share of the global arms market dropped from thirty-two percent in 1989 to eight percent in 1994. The inability of Russia to continue the Soviet flow of military hardware, coupled with the sharp reduction in Indian military expenditures, weakened the primary bond that had united India and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (see Figure 3).

Figure 1: Indian Military Expenditures as a Percentage of GNP, 1988-96



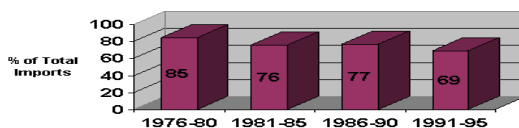
Source: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, SIPRI Yearbook 1998 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230.

Figure 2: Indian Arms Imports in Constant 1996 U.S. dollars



Source: Data obtained from, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1997

Figure 3: Percentage of Indian Arms Imported from the Soviet Union/Russia



Source: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security: SIPRI Yearbook 1996 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 482.

Conclusion

India is the only country which Russia has agreed to give access to Glonass. Describing their defence relations as “a crucial element of the strategic partnership,” India and Russia vowed to enhance cooperation in the key areas of rocket, missile and naval technologies. Indo-Russian defence ties were “unmatched by any other relationship” and Russia “will remain a key defence partner for India as we move into a stage of joint design, development and production of key defence platforms.” To enhance cooperation in the fields of rocket, missile and naval technologies and weapon systems.” India and Russia agreed to extend indefinitely their 15-year-old partnership for producing the Brahmos supersonic anti-ship missile and to develop a still more potent hypersonic version of the missile.

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