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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Why Russia's Growing Dependence on China Threatens India's Security

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If Russia is irreversibly tilting toward China, should India formally pivot away from its "special and privileged strategic partnership" with Moscow, or is preserving residual leverage worth the strategic cost?"

EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

The Indian Express argues that Moscow's growing dependence on Beijing after the Ukraine war creates a structural risk for India's defence and strategic autonomy. India's response must combine continued bilateral engagement with Russia to preserve influence with an accelerated programme of supplier diversification and indigenisation that ends single-point dependency in critical platforms.

A SIXTY-YEAR PARTNERSHIP UNDER STRESS

The India-Russia relationship is not a transactional supplier-buyer arrangement. It is the longest continuous strategic partnership in India's foreign policy, rooted in the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, sustained through the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and formalised in 2010 as the "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership." Russia has supplied an estimated 60-70 per cent of India's military inventory across decades — Sukhoi Su-30 MKI fighters, MiG-29 squadrons, T-72 and T-90 tanks, IL-76 transport aircraft, Kilo-class conventional submarines, and the leased Chakra nuclear submarine programme. Beyond hardware, the partnership encompassed technology transfer (the BrahMos joint venture, licensed production, training), nuclear cooperation (Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project), and political coordination at the UN Security Council on issues including Kashmir.

The post-February 2022 Ukraine war has stress-tested every layer of this partnership. The most visible effect has been on supply: the S-400 Triumf programme has faced delivery delays as Russian production is reabsorbed by the war effort; spare-parts pipelines for legacy Russian platforms have slowed; and Western

secondary sanctions create payment and shipping friction even for transactions India and Russia both wish to complete. Behind the supply effect lies a deeper structural shift — Russia’s accelerating dependence on China across every dimension that defines great-power autonomy.

THE SINO-RUSSIAN REORIENTATION

Russia’s pivot to China is not a wartime improvisation. It is a structural reorientation accelerated by sanctions but rooted in choices made before 2022.

DIMENSION	PRE-2022	POST-2022
Trade volume	~\$140 billion (2021)	\$240+ billion (2024)
Settlement currency	Mixed; significant US dollar share	Predominantly rouble-yuan
Payments architecture	SWIFT-mediated	CIPS adoption rising
Energy exports	Diversified buyers	China and India dominant
Military-tech flow	Russia-to-China	Reversal in some categories
Diplomatic alignment	Cooperative but distinct	“No limits” partnership

The proposed Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, if completed, would lock Russian gas exports into Chinese demand and structurally tie Moscow’s energy fiscal base to Beijing’s purchasing decisions. Russian banks have adopted China’s Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) as a SWIFT alternative. Sino-Russian trade — recorded above \$240 billion in 2024 — is settled increasingly in yuan, with the rouble’s share rising correspondingly. Most striking for India: in selected military-technology categories, the historical flow has reversed, with Chinese components reportedly entering Russian platforms.

This is not a relationship of equals. It is a relationship in which the senior partner is Beijing, and Moscow’s room for autonomous foreign-policy choices is narrowing.

THE TRIANGULATION RISK FOR INDIA

For India, the question is not whether Russia and China are close — they have been close, with episodic frictions, for two decades. The question is whether the degree of dependence is now sufficient that Chinese preferences could systematically shape Russian decisions adverse to Indian interests. The triangulation risk takes three concrete forms.

First, UN Security Council coordination. Russia has historically supported Indian positions on Kashmir, vetoed or abstained on hostile resolutions, and backed Indian aspirations for permanent membership in a reformed Council. A Russia that needs Chinese diplomatic cover at the UN may find it harder to advance Indian positions when those conflict with Chinese ones.

Second, the Line of Actual Control. The June 2020 Galwan clash, in which 20 Indian Army personnel were martyred, and the continuing standoff at multiple friction points along the LAC, are India’s primary near-term security concern. Russian silence — or worse, Russian acceptance of Chinese framings — would matter strategically.

Third, the Indo-Pacific maritime space. Joint Sino-Russian naval exercises have already expanded in scale and reach. Exercises in waters India considers sensitive — the Bay of Bengal approaches, the Andaman Sea — would alter the strategic geography in ways that previous Russian behaviour did not contemplate.

INDIA’S SUPPLIER DIVERSIFICATION TRAJECTORY

The response has been under way since the late 2000s and has accelerated since 2020. India has not announced a “pivot away from Russia” — and is unlikely to, because public posture matters less than procurement reality. The procurement reality has shifted significantly.

SUPPLIER	MAJOR PLATFORMS / PROGRAMMES
France	Rafale (36 + ongoing Rafale-M for Navy), Scorpene-class submarines (Project 75), Pinaka rocket cooperation, potential SSN technology track
United States	P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol, AH-64 Apache, MH-60R Romeo, C-17 Globemaster, C-130J Super Hercules, GE F-414 engine technology transfer for Tejas Mk-2
Israel	Heron UAVs, SPYDER air defence, Barak-8 (joint), Spike anti-tank missiles, Harop loitering munitions
South Korea	K9 Vajra-T self-propelled howitzer
Domestic	Tejas Mk-1A and Mk-2, ATAGS, Akash air defence, LCH Prachand, Pinaka, BrahMos (Indo-Russian JV)

The Atmanirbhar Bharat framework in defence has provided the policy spine. Successive positive indigenisation lists issued by the Ministry of Defence since 2020 have placed several hundred categories of equipment, sub-systems and ammunition under domestic-only procurement, with phased timelines. The Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 elevated the Buy IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) category to highest priority. The Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu defence industrial corridors, anchor public-sector units like

HAL, BEL, BDL and the new defence PSUs created from the OFB corporatisation, and a growing private-sector base (Tata, L&T, Mahindra, Adani Defence and Aerospace, Bharat Forge) constitute the production architecture.

The BrahMos export to the Philippines and ongoing negotiations with Vietnam and other Indo-Pacific partners represent the next-stage capacity — India not merely diversifying away from Russian supply but emerging as a supplier to others.

PRESERVING INFLUENCE WHILE REDUCING DEPENDENCE

The temptation in any analysis of a deteriorating partnership is to recommend a sharp pivot. Indian Express's argument is more careful. A precipitate public pivot away from Russia would surrender residual Indian influence over Russian decisions, accelerate Moscow's slide into Chinese dependence, and discard the value of Russian platforms that will serve India for another two decades. The S-400 systems, the Sukhoi fleet, the Kilo-class submarines, the BrahMos cooperation — these are not switched off by diplomatic posture.

The recommended posture is therefore dual-track. India continues high-level engagement with Moscow — Prime Ministerial visits, annual summits, energy purchases — to preserve influence and complete inherited programmes. Simultaneously, India accelerates indigenisation under DAP 2020 Buy IDDM, fast-tracks new supplier relationships (a French nuclear-powered submarine track, deeper US co-production, expanding ties with South Korea, Germany and Poland), and builds Indo-Pacific partnerships that reduce reliance on any single great power.

The Quad provides one architectural anchor; an emerging EU-India strategic partnership provides another; and bilateral tracks with France, Australia, Japan, and the UK supply the operational substance. The objective is not to abandon Russia. It is to ensure that when Russia's autonomy is constrained by Chinese preferences — as it increasingly will be — India's defence and strategic posture does not depend on those constrained choices.

UPSC MAINS ANALYSIS

GS Paper 2 — India's Bilateral and Multilateral Relations GS Paper 3 — Security, Defence Indigenisation, Atmanirbhar Bharat

- **1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation:** foundational instrument of India-USSR/Russia strategic cooperation; provided diplomatic and military backing during the 1971 Bangladesh War.
- **2010 Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership:** elevated India-Russia relations to a unique category among India's strategic partnerships.
- **Defence inventory composition:** approximately 60-70 per cent Russian-origin — Sukhoi Su-30 MKI, MiG-29, T-90, IL-76, Kilo-class submarines, Chakra leased SSN.

- **S-400 Triumph procurement:** signed October 2018 (\$5.4 billion); deliveries began December 2021; subsequent squadrons delayed by Ukraine war demand on Russian production.
- **Sino-Russian trade:** crossed \$240 billion in 2024; settled increasingly in yuan; CIPS adoption rising as SWIFT alternative.
- **Power of Siberia 2 (proposed):** would lock Russian gas exports structurally into Chinese demand.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence:** positive indigenisation lists since 2020; UP and Tamil Nadu defence corridors; DAP 2020 Buy IDDM as highest-priority procurement category.
- **Supplier diversification:** France (Rafale, Scorpene), United States (P-8I, Apache, MH-60R, GE F-414), Israel (Heron, SPYDER, Barak-8), South Korea (K9 Vajra-T).
- **Indigenous platforms:** Tejas Mk-1A and Mk-2, Akash, ATAGS, LCH Prachand, Pinaka, BrahMos (Indo-Russian JV).
- **Quad and EU-India strategic architecture:** complementary tracks for reducing single-point dependency.
- **BrahMos exports:** Philippines contract; ongoing engagement with Vietnam and other Indo-Pacific partners.

Mains Questions:

- 1 Russia's growing dependence on China after the Ukraine war creates a triangulation risk for India. Critically examine the dimensions of this risk and suggest a calibrated Indian response.
- 2 India's defence supplier diversification since 2014 has been **incremental** rather than transformational. Evaluate this assessment with reference to specific procurement decisions.
- 3 Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence has produced policy architecture but has not yet ended India's import dependence. Discuss the structural constraints and reforms required.
- 4 The "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" between India and Russia remains operationally significant even as Russia tilts toward China. Examine the case for and against preserving this partnership in its current form.

Keywords: Indo-Soviet Treaty 1971, Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership 2010, S-400 Triumph, CAATSA, Sukhoi Su-30 MKI, Sino-Russian trade \$240 billion, CIPS, Power of Siberia 2, triangulation risk, Atmanirbhar Bharat defence, positive indigenisation lists, DAP 2020 Buy IDDM, UP and Tamil Nadu defence corridors, Tejas Mk-2 GE F-414, Rafale, Scorpene, P-8I, Heron, K9 Vajra-T, BrahMos export, Quad, EU-India strategic partnership, Line of Actual Control, UN Security Council reform

Indian Express's underlying argument is that the most consequential foreign-policy shift of this decade for India is not happening in Washington, Brussels or Beijing — it is happening in Moscow. A Russia bound increasingly to Chinese decisions is a Russia whose value as a strategic partner declines even as its inherited platforms continue to fly Indian skies and patrol Indian waters. The intelligent response is neither nostalgia for the partnership of the 1970s nor a noisy pivot of the 2020s, but a quiet acceleration of indigenisation and diversification that ensures India's defence does not depend on a Moscow whose choices are no longer fully its own.

Source: Indian Express — Editorial Pages

● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

The Ukraine war (since February 2022) has accelerated Russia's economic, technological and military dependence on China, eroding the autonomy of the historic Indo-Russian "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" (2010) and creating a triangulation risk where Beijing's preferences could shape Moscow's decisions adverse to Indian interests.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- Russia's pivot to Beijing is structural: record Sino-Russian bilateral trade above \$240 billion in 2024, growing rouble-yuan settlement, CIPS adoption to bypass SWIFT sanctions, and the proposed Power of Siberia 2 pipeline locking Russian gas into Chinese markets.
- India's defence inventory is heavily Russian-origin — IL-76 transports, MiG-29 and Sukhoi Su-30 MKI fighters, T-90 tanks, Kilo-class submarines — and Russia's wartime production strain has already delayed deliveries of the S-400 Triumf and stretched spare-parts pipelines.
- India has begun supplier diversification with France (Rafale, Scorpene), the United States (P-8I, Apache, MH-60R, GE F-414 engine technology transfer), Israel (Heron, SPYDER, Barak-8), South Korea (K9 Vajra-T) and indigenous platforms (Tejas Mk-1A, ATAGS, LCH Prachand, Akash) — but the transition is partial.
- Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence is gaining traction through positive indigenisation lists, the Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu defence corridors, and the Defence Acquisition

Procedure 2020 Buy IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) priority category.

COUNTER

A precipitate pivot away from Moscow would surrender residual Indian influence over Russian decisions, push Russia further into China's embrace, and ignore the continued value of Russian leverage in energy markets, UN Security Council coordination, and inherited military platforms that will serve India for two more decades.

WAY FORWARD

India should preserve high-level engagement with Russia while accelerating defence indigenisation under DAP 2020 Buy IDDM, fast-track supplier diversification (French SSN option, US co-production, Korean and German platforms), deepen Quad and EU-India strategic partnerships, and use the BrahMos-to-Vietnam template to build Indo-Pacific defence export relationships that reduce single-point dependency.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

Russia's deepening economic and military dependence on China after the Ukraine war creates a structural risk for India's defence and strategic autonomy. Critically examine the implications and suggest a calibrated response. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Express argues that Russia's accelerating dependence on China after the Ukraine war is no longer a transient wartime adjustment but a structural reorientation that will outlast the conflict — and that this reorientation directly threatens the autonomy of the India-Russia "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" forged in 2010.

BODY

The 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation laid the foundation for six decades of dense defence cooperation; an estimated 60-70 per cent of India's military inventory is still of Russian origin, including Sukhoi Su-30 MKI fighters, T-90 tanks, IL-76 transports, Kilo-class submarines and the leased nuclear submarine programme. The Ukraine war has disrupted this supply base.

The S-400 Triumph squadrons have faced delivery delays as Russian production is consumed by the front; spare parts for legacy Russian platforms are slowing; and Western secondary sanctions create payment friction even when goods are available. Sino-Russian trade crossed \$240 billion in 2024, settled increasingly in yuan and routed through the Chinese CIPS payment system.

The proposed Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, if completed, would tie Russian gas exports structurally to Chinese demand. Military-technology flows have begun to reverse in selected categories, with Chinese components reportedly entering Russian platforms.

The triangulation risk for India is concrete: Russian abstentions on UN Security Council reform, Russian silence on Chinese assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control, and the prospect of Sino-Russian joint exercises in waters India considers sensitive. India has responded by diversifying suppliers (Rafale and Scorpene from France, P-8I and Apache from the US, Heron and Barak-8 from Israel, K9 Vajra-T from South Korea), expanding the GE F-414 engine technology transfer for Tejas Mk-2, and pushing positive indigenisation lists under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The UP and Tamil Nadu defence corridors and DAP 2020 Buy IDDM category have begun to anchor indigenous capacity. Yet the transition is incomplete, and a single-point dependency risk persists.

CONCLUSION

India's response should not be a public pivot away from Moscow, which would accelerate the very Sino-Russian convergence it fears. It should be a quiet, sustained acceleration of indigenisation, diversification and Indo-Pacific partnerships — preserving residual Russian leverage while ensuring that India's defence and strategic autonomy no longer depend on a Moscow that increasingly defers to Beijing.

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