MTC between India and Russia: A Stable Development Against the Backdrop of New Threats

There has been global confrontation between the US and China for many years. Against this background, the regional confrontation between China and India continues. The two mighty neighboring Asian powers have long been competitors, having territorial issues and vying for influence in neighboring states. Fortunately, the struggle is mainly in the economic sphere, but to be sure that it will remain there, the countries are building up their defense.

Pakistan is another long-standing and strong adversary of India, which shares a common border with it. Pakistan has worked closely with China in recent years. Considering Chinese activity in other neighboring countries of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka, it could be said that India is gradually finding itself in a “hostile ring”. It should also be borne in mind that, in addition to those countries that are unfriendly to India or pro-Chinese regimes, there’s agents of international terrorism operate in neighboring countries that are not averse to using those conflicts between Muslims and representatives of other religions that reignite in India for their own purpose. Terrorists are particularly strong in Pakistan, which, as you know, shares a border with Afghanistan. Their activity has been observed in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh for some time now. In recent years, the terrorist threat in the region has multiplied in connection with the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. In such conditions, India needs outside support.

Therefore, New Delhi is developing cooperation with its long-standing strategic partner, the US. And the US is now
trying to unite its main allies, such as Great Britain, Australia and Japan, and regional competitors of China, such as India and South Korea, to build a joint anti-Chinese front. To this end, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) was created in 2007, formed with the USA, Australia, India and Japan. In 2021, the AUKUS defense alliance was established, included with the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom.

India actively purchases American weapons and regularly participates in the Malabar joint naval exercise with the United States and Japan, and Australia has also participated in them since 2020.

However, excessive rapprochement with America and full participation in American military blocs is hardly a factor in the Indian plans, which is a long-term and consistent participant in the Non-Aligned Movement. Participation in military alliances implies an obligation to other members to act on their side in the event of an armed conflict. It is unlikely that such a powerful and, at the same time, peace-loving player like India would like to participate in any war not related to the defense of Indian territory, which is not in line with Indian interests and initiated by third countries.

Even though New Delhi and Washington are pursuing a common goal to weaken China's influence, or at least prevent its further growth, the Indian leadership cannot but understand that the United States and India are in different conditions: India lies next to China and has a common border about 4,000 km long, and America is located across the ocean. In addition, the United States is known to have a propensity to fight "by someone’s hands." Considering the worst-case scenario, a military conflict between China and its anti-Chinese forces, in the event of India being forced to participate, India will take on the most difficult blows of the Chinese Armed Forces. Therefore, in its cooperation with Washington, New Delhi prefers not to go too far and maintain a reasonable distance.

One may say that India is in a bit of a pickle: it is too vulnerable to China without collaborating with Washington. India can be drawn into a destructive conflict with China even when it does not correspond to Indian interests.

To maintain a balance in relations with the United States, India needs to cooperate with a third force comparable in power to the United States or China and, at the same time, not take an active part in their confrontation. Russia is such a force.

India and the Russian Federation are long-standing and reliable partners who have cooperated for many decades in various fields, including military and technical. Back in Soviet times, during the Cold War, the Indian strategy took shape: following the Non-Aligned Movement rules, maintaining good relations with both the USSR and the United States, and, if possible, using their support in its confrontation with China and Pakistan. This strategy is as relevant for India today as it used to be.

In 2018, an agreement was signed on the supply of five sets of S-400 air defense systems by Russia to India, which caused great discontent and threats of sanctions from Washington. The American threats were ignored. In the same year, during a visit to India, Russian President Vladimir Putin recalled that Russian-Indian relations have a "particularly privileged strategic partnership" nature.

2021 was not an easy year for all states, especially for India: it was among the countries most affected by the COVID-19 virus at the beginning of the year. The deaths of many people and the closure of production due to quarantine measures have dealt severe blows to Indian society and the economy. However, India's military-technical cooperation with Russia continued to develop.

At the beginning of 2021, the amount of Indian military and technical orders from the Russian Federation exceeded $ 14 billion.

In February 2021, in the Indian city of Bengaluru, Aero India 2021 took place, which is an international event dedicated to the achievements of the aviation, space and defense industries. As usual, one of the largest expositions was presented by Russia. India has decided to buy 12 Russian Su-30MKI aircraft worth more than $ 1.4 billion and 21 Russian MiG-29 fighters.

In August 2021, India-Russia joint training exercise INDRA 2021 took place. The event, held in the Volgograd region of the Russian Federation, was attended by 250 Indian and Russian military personnel, armored vehicles, multiple launch rocket systems and aviation were involved.

At the end of August 2021, the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan was complete, and now this country is officially under the rule of the Taliban terrorist group (banned in the Russian Federation). This is a common challenge for India, which may now face a manifold increase in the terrorist threat from Pakistan and Russia, whose
security sphere includes the Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan. Let's recall that even if the Taliban have not yet demonstrated hostile intentions towards neighboring states, there are many other terrorist groups in Afghanistan whose interests go far beyond the borders of this country.

In connection with this situation, on August 24, 2021, a telephone conversation took place between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin. After that, a Russian delegation headed by Nikolai Patrushev, Director of Russia's Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, was sent to New Delhi to discuss cooperation issues in security and combating terrorism. On September 9, 2021, Patrushev met with Narendra Modi. They discussed further development of Russian-Indian relations and interaction on regional security issues, including Afghanistan. In the opinion of both sides, Russia and India must coordinate their actions to prevent an escalation of violence.

On December 6, 2021, Vladimir Putin arrived in New Deli. During his discussions with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, all aspects of Russian-Indian cooperation were touched upon, including security issues and the situation in Afghanistan. It was decided to provide humanitarian assistance in the near future. On the same day, a Russian-Indian intergovernmental agreement was signed on a program of military-technical cooperation until 2030. The signing of the document was attended by the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Defense Minister of India, Rajnath Singh. All details of the agreement have not yet been disclosed. Still, it is already known that, among other things, licensed production of 600,000 new Russian AK-203 assault rifles is planned in Indian territory.

According to Sergei Shoigu, India is one of the key partners of Russia in the defense sphere.

Military and technical, and defense cooperation between Russia and India is still developing firmly and steadily. Continuing to maintain contacts with Washington for the sake of their national interests, New Delhi understands that the Russian Federation is a country with which India has neither ideological contradictions nor territorial issues. At the same time, it is on the same continent and, accordingly, is much more interested in common Eurasian security than the United States. In addition, considering Moscow's friendly relations with Beijing, Russia can assume the role of mediator in some disagreements between India and China and contribute to their mutually beneficial outcome to a greater extent than Washington, which prefers the language of threats and sanctions. In conclusion, relations with Russia are of particular value to India and will be strengthened in future.

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