

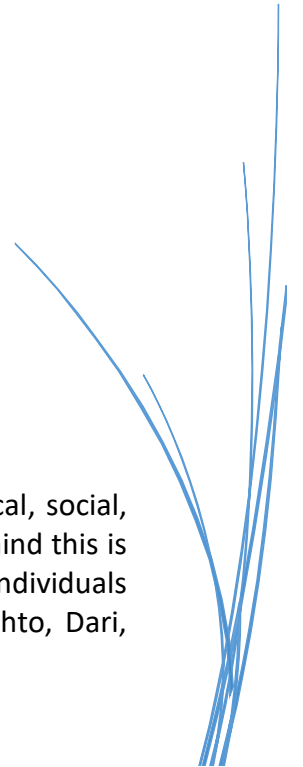
WEEKLY ANALYSIS

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PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA'S VISIT TO RUSSIA: THE AFGHANISTAN ISSUE



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA'S VISIT TO RUSSIA: THE AFGHANISTAN ISSUE

Introduction

During the Cold War, India was a friend and ally of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, India supported this invasion and stood by the Soviet Union. After the Cold War, India and Russia signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2000, laying the foundation for the alliance and friendship between the two countries. India also signed a strategic partnership agreement with the United States in 2005, marking the beginning of a new era of friendship between India and the United States.

After 2005, India faced a significant challenge in its foreign policy, needing to maintain a balance in its relations between the two major powers, Russia and the United States, a balance that has sometimes been difficult for India. When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, India faced another delicate test, as NATO and U.S. allies condemned the attack as an invasion of Ukraine's territory. The United States expected India, as a friend, to condemn the attack. However, India did not want to jeopardize its historical friendship with Russia, so it remained silent on the matter.

However, the Indian Prime Minister did not meet with Russian President Putin until July 2024, and India did not participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Kazakhstan on July 3 and 4, 2024. India did this to maintain a minimum balance in its relations with the United States and Russia. After being re-elected, Russian President Vladimir Putin planned visits to some of his current and former foreign policy allies, including North Korea, Vietnam, Belarus, Uzbekistan, China, and several other countries. However, Putin did not plan a visit to India, which caused concern in India. The visit to China, in particular, raised concerns in India, leading to fears that India might lose its historical friendship with Russia in favor of Sino-Russian relations. Consequently, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi planned a visit to Russia and visited Moscow on July 8, 2024. During this visit, the two countries will strengthen their mutual relations, including economic cooperation and the Ukraine conflict. The situation in Afghanistan will also be discussed and reviewed.

In this analysis, we will examine the impacts of the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Russia and, on the other hand, review their joint position in the statement issued by the two countries regarding the issue of Afghanistan.

PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA'S VISIT TO RUSSIA AND ITS IMPACT ON RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

On July 8, 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Moscow and met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. During this visit, the two leaders discussed strengthening bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields. However, three key issues emerged that are likely to provoke a reaction from the West, particularly the United States:



1. **Economic Relations:** The two sides agreed to increase bilateral economic ties from \$65 billion to \$100 billion by 2030, which includes the purchase of Russian oil. Despite Western restrictions on buying Russian oil, India remains the second-largest purchaser of Russian oil after China.
2. **Military Cooperation:** Officials from both countries discussed enhancing military relations and agreed on cooperation in the production and sale of arms.
3. **Currency in Trade:** The two countries agreed to use their national currencies in trade transactions instead of the U.S. dollar.

In response to this visit, Matthew Miller, spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State, expressed concern, stating that Russia is under sanctions due to the Ukraine conflict. He emphasized that India's actions cannot negate these restrictions and urged India to take steps that would contribute to peace in Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also reacted to the visit, lamenting on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) that it was regrettable to see the Indian Prime Minister supporting someone he described as responsible for atrocities against children and women in Ukraine. This visit was indeed a challenging decision for India, which has fostered close relations with the United States in recent years, investing significantly in this partnership.

India seeks to achieve two main objectives with this visit: preserving its historical friendship with Russia and maintaining a balanced foreign policy in a multipolar international system. By visiting Russia, Modi demonstrated India's independent foreign policy stance, indicating that it is not solely dependent on the United States and desires to maintain balanced relations with both Russia and the U.S.

In the same year (2024), Modi also plans to participate in the BRICS summit in Russia, a move that reflects India's strategy to balance relations between the two major powers. Another important factor is the upcoming U.S. presidential election, with polls indicating a potential return of Donald Trump to power. India believes that if Trump is re-elected, U.S. policy towards Russia will soften while becoming more stringent towards China. This belief reassured Modi in making the trip to Russia, as India expects that a Trump administration would not harm U.S.-India relations and might adopt a more lenient stance towards Russia.

JOINT STANCE OF INDIA AND RUSSIA ON THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

India and Russia share common interests and objectives in the region, particularly concerning Afghanistan. Both countries collaborate in addressing security challenges in the region and Afghanistan. They participated in and supported the third Doha meeting organized by the United Nations. While both nations maintain contact with the Islamic Emirate, the nature and level of their relations vary.

After the Islamic Emirate came to power in Afghanistan, Russia perceived an increased security threat. In March 2024, an attack in Moscow, claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), resulted in approximately 140 deaths. Russian intelligence indicated that the attack was



planned from the geographical regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additionally, two Russian diplomats were killed in Kabul in 2022.

India also views the geography of Afghanistan as a security threat. It believes that militants fighting in Kashmir receive training in Afghanistan, are stationed there, and then come to Kashmir to engage in conflict. This concern is primarily related to the instability in Afghanistan. Therefore, a shared stance between India and Russia is that stability and peace must be established in Afghanistan. Once stability is achieved, there will be no safe havens for militants threatening Russia and India.

Another shared position of the two countries is their approach to the Islamic Emirate's recognition. Both India and Russia engage in multilateral diplomacy aimed at recognizing the Islamic Emirate while simultaneously refraining from formally recognizing it.

DIFFERENCES IN INDIA'S AND RUSSIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

While India and Russia share common positions regarding the Islamic Emirate, their policies and approaches toward engagement with the regime differ significantly. This summary highlights these differences.

After the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate, Russia, despite concerns over security threats from Afghanistan, generally welcomed the U.S. withdrawal from the region. Conversely, India was not pleased with the resurgence of the Islamic Emirate for two main reasons: firstly, the historically strained relations between India and the Islamic Emirate during its previous rule, and secondly, India's concern that the Islamic Emirate's rule in Afghanistan would increase Pakistan's influence in the region, which contradicts India's national interests.

Notably, after the re-emergence of the Islamic Emirate, Russia reopened its embassy in Kabul and initiated direct engagement with the regime. In contrast, India closed its embassy in Kabul and later reopened it only with a technical team, focusing primarily on organizing humanitarian aid. This contrasts sharply with Russia's approach, as Russia continues to issue visas to Afghan traders and students, with regular visits from Afghan officials. India, however, has maintained a visa suspension for Afghan students and ordinary citizens for three years, leaving many students in a state of uncertainty.

Additionally, in early 2022, Russia accepted an Islamic Emirate diplomat as the chargé d'affaires at the Afghan embassy in Moscow, indicating a gradual move toward formal diplomatic relations. India, however, has yet to recognize an Islamic Emirate diplomat or the regime's flag at the Afghan embassy in New Delhi.

Another critical distinction is Russia's early 2024 announcement of efforts to remove the Islamic Emirate from the list of terrorist organizations, signaling a broader diplomatic shift. Russia has even encouraged Central Asian countries to consider similar actions, as exemplified by Kazakhstan's decision to delist the Islamic Emirate as a terrorist organization. India, by contrast,



appears reluctant to take such steps, maintaining a cautious stance that is markedly more conservative than other regional actors.

In summary, Russia seeks to engage directly and incrementally with the Islamic Emirate, expanding this engagement over time. India, on the other hand, adopts a "Watch and Wait Policy," observing the Islamic Emirate's policies before committing to formal relations.

JOINT STATEMENT BY MODI AND PUTIN ON THE AFGHANISTAN ISSUE

Following Narendra Modi's visit to Russia, both leaders issued a joint statement addressing Afghanistan's situation. They discussed the following issues:

1. Security challenges and their implications for the region.
2. The current political status of Afghanistan.
3. Issues related to terrorism.
4. Islamic extremism.
5. Drug trafficking.

Both parties emphasized the desire for a stable, independent, and unified Afghanistan. They highlighted the importance of respecting human rights, combating terrorism, and promoting peaceful coexistence with neighboring countries. The leaders commended the Islamic Emirate's efforts against terrorism, particularly its fight against ISIS, deeming these actions crucial for regional security. They also agreed to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people, irrespective of political considerations.

CONCLUSION

India and Russia, two historic friends and major powers in Asia have navigated a period of testing their bilateral friendship following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This was the first high-level meeting between the leaders of the two nations since the Ukraine conflict began, a hiatus of nearly two and a half years. The visit sparked reactions from the West, particularly the United States.

India maintains that while it values its friendship with the United States, it will not sacrifice its longstanding ties with Russia. Both countries share a mutual interest in the security and stability of Afghanistan, viewing it as essential for regional security. They have also agreed on the importance of combating terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan. During their latest meeting, the leaders of India and Russia exchanged views on Afghanistan, commended the Islamic Emirate's efforts against ISIS, and emphasized the provision of humanitarian aid to Afghans, irrespective of political considerations. In summary, Russia aims to gradually strengthen its relationship with the Islamic Emirate. Thus, the Islamic Emirate could potentially use Russia as a mediator to improve its relations with India.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Regional Security and Stability:** The security and stability of Afghanistan benefit the entire region, including India and Russia. Therefore, India and Russia should collaborate with other regional countries to promote security and stability in Afghanistan and prevent malevolent forces from threatening this stability.
2. **Balanced Diplomacy:** The Islamic Emirate should maintain a balanced approach in its relations with India, China, Russia, and the United States to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a battleground for great power competition.
3. **Assurances to India:** The Islamic Emirate should leverage its close ties with Russia to assure India that Afghan territory will not be used against Indian interests and that the Islamic Emirate seeks to establish close and friendly relations with India.
4. **Engagement over Confrontation:** The Islamic Emirate should prioritize engagement over confrontation in its relations with regional countries, particularly major powers.
5. **Regional Coordination:** The Islamic Emirate must work to foster regional coordination to achieve lasting security and stability in Afghanistan.

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