

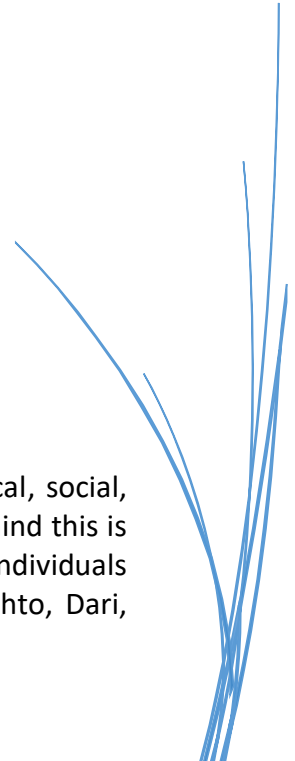
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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA



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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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA

Introduction

As global politics becomes increasingly unstable due to the imposition and expansion of economic sanctions, volatility in energy markets, climate change, rising trade tariffs, and ongoing wars and great-power military rivalries, Russian President Vladimir Putin paid an official visit to India on 4–5 December of the current year. The formal purpose of this visit was to participate in the 23rd India–Russia Annual Summit.

However, Putin's visit to India was not merely a ceremonial or routine diplomatic engagement. Rather, it carried particular strategic importance, as it reflected a reassessment of the long-standing partnership between Russia and India in light of evolving global and regional dynamics. The visit took place at a time when the war in Ukraine had disrupted international security institutions, Western countries had imposed extensive political and economic sanctions on Russia, European energy policies had undergone significant changes, and NATO had expanded its strategic role.

At the same time, Russia is seeking to construct an Asian–European, or Eurasian, framework that does not rely on Western or European participation. China has intensified its efforts to expand its economic and military influence in the region, while India has also been working to strengthen its regional and global role. These developments have significantly reshaped regional security and political calculations. India aims to maintain balanced relations with multiple global powers without becoming fully dependent on any single strategic bloc. In parallel, Russia, despite sustained Western pressure, is actively searching for alternative strategic and economic opportunities in Asia. In this context, following the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, Russia has redefined its relations with the Islamic Emirate and has moved toward the stage of formal recognition.

Within this complex regional and international environment, key questions arise: What is the significance of Putin's visit to India at this particular moment? What implications do strong Russia–India relations have for the Islamic Emirate? This article seeks to address these fundamental questions through an analytical approach, examining the political, economic, and security dimensions of the visit in a comprehensive and in-depth manner.

PUTIN'S VISIT TO NEW DELHI AND INDIA'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN FOREIGN POLICY

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in New Delhi on Thursday evening for a two-day official visit. The visit took place at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and marked Putin's first trip to India since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. It coincided with



the 25th anniversary of the India–Russia strategic partnership and was organized in connection with the 23rd bilateral summit between the two countries.

President Putin was accompanied by several senior Russian officials, including the Minister of Defense Andrei Belousov, Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov, Minister of Agriculture Oksana Lut, Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Health Mikhail Murashko, Minister of Internal Affairs Vladimir Kolokoltsev, and Minister of Transport Roman Starovoit.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally welcomed President Putin at the airport. In a message posted on X (formerly Twitter), Modi wrote: “I am pleased to welcome my friend, President Putin, to India. I look forward to our discussions tonight and tomorrow. The India–Russia friendship is a long-standing partnership that has brought significant benefits to our people.”

After gaining independence from Britain in 1947, India sought to avoid formal alliances with major powers. During the Cold War, India positioned itself as a non-aligned country; however, from the 1960s onward, it developed closer ties with the Soviet Union. Following the end of the Cold War, India deepened its strategic and military relations with the United States while maintaining friendly relations with Russia. The outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war has challenged this delicate balance. Putin’s visit demonstrates that Prime Minister Modi intends to manage India’s competing relationships in a balanced manner, without sacrificing one partnership for another.

The Russia–Ukraine war has led NATO to shift its focus eastward, driven by the perception that Russia poses a major threat to Europe. The European Union, which was previously highly dependent on Russian gas, has significantly reduced its imports and pledged to eliminate reliance on Russia in the energy sector. In response, Moscow has turned toward Eastern markets to compensate for these losses, including through increased investment and the recognition of new governments, such as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Within the region, India represents a major strategic opportunity for Russia. India is located in Asia, has growing energy needs, and plays an important political role in platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS. India has maintained and strengthened its ties with Russia in both the defense and energy sectors. Since the start of the Ukraine war, India has increased its imports of discounted Russian crude oil to control domestic inflation and ensure energy security. At the same time, India has expressed concern over the war and repeatedly emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution based on the United Nations Charter and the principle of territorial sovereignty.



India's objective has been to avoid alienating Russia over the Ukraine conflict while also preventing tension with the United States, with which it maintains strong relations across multiple sectors. In this context, India has demonstrated its strategic autonomy by resisting pressure to choose sides. This approach reflects India's belief that it has the right to maintain relations with all major powers, provided that its security and diplomatic standing are preserved and strengthened.

INDIA'S SECURITY AND DEFENSE NEEDS

India perceives its security environment as fragile, particularly due to tensions with Pakistan. As a result, it seeks advanced military equipment from Russia. During the 2025 Pahalagam terrorist attack and India's subsequent "Operation Sindhoor" inside Pakistan, India tested Russian missile systems and identified operational shortcomings. This experience reinforced India's interest in acquiring more advanced weapons, modern technology, and military ammunition from Russia. Russia, in turn, has found India to be a valuable and reliable defense market and has worked to maintain strong ties.

India's relationship with Russia also holds importance in terms of deterrence. During Operation Sindoor, India sent a message to Pakistan that it not only possesses the capability to use military force but also has regional security partners that take India's position seriously. India continues to import fighter aircraft, missiles, air defense systems, and other critical military equipment from Russia.

INDIA'S ECONOMIC AND TRADE INTERESTS

When former U.S. President Donald Trump initiated a trade war and imposed tariffs, India was compelled to seek alternative export markets. India's Minister of Commerce, Piyush Goyal, has stated that New Delhi aims to expand and diversify its exports to Russia. Key export targets include automobiles, electrical equipment, information-processing tools, machinery, industrial components, and food products. Goyal noted that "Russia has a large demand for industrial products and consumer goods, creating many untapped opportunities for Indian businesses."

At a time when the United States has recently imposed tariffs on Indian goods, Putin's visit provides India with a significant opportunity to diversify its trade relations. Russia also aims to expand bilateral trade with India, including through regional trade corridors such as Russia–Iran–India and Russia–Afghanistan–India. These initiatives are part of Russia's broader Eurasian strategy, which seeks greater economic integration and envisions Eurasia as a unified continental space characterized by peace, stability, mutual trust, development, and shared prosperity.



PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA FROM RUSSIA'S PERSPECTIVE

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India holds particular significance within the framework of the long-term strategic relationship between the two countries. From Moscow's perspective, the visit provides an important opportunity to expand and consolidate cooperation in the defense and energy sectors. It also allows Russia to preserve its market position in India and secure continued exports of oil and energy products.

At the same time, the visit creates space for gaining India's diplomatic support within BRICS and other multilateral institutions. Given India's emphasis on strategic autonomy, cooperation with New Delhi is especially valuable for Russia at a time of increased international pressure. As a result of the Russia–Ukraine war, Russia is facing a growing labor shortage and is seeking to address this challenge by attracting foreign workers, including from India. The deployment of skilled Indian labor, alongside defense and energy cooperation, was therefore among the key issues discussed during the visit.

According to projections by Russia's Ministry of Labor, the country is expected to face a shortage of approximately 3.1 million workers by 2030. Indian workers, widely recognized for their technical and professional skills, are seen as well-positioned to help fill this gap. Russia thus aims to open its labor market to Indian workers and gradually shift away from its traditional reliance on largely low-skilled labor from Central Asia. Such labor migration would not only have a direct positive impact on workers' livelihoods but would also further strengthen bilateral ties between India and Russia.

The visit also signals that Russia takes India's concerns regarding the China–Pakistan strategic alignment seriously. Beyond its significance in countering Western pressure, the visit strengthens prospects for long-term cooperation in technology transfer and defense production, while reinforcing India's position as an independent and reliable market for Russian products. At the domestic level, closer India–Russia relations may also serve as a buffer against negative Western narratives about Russia.

More broadly, this visit enhances Russia's long-term access to regional markets and strengthens its economic and political influence across Asia. It not only deepens bilateral relations with India but also contributes to expanding Russia's presence within key political and economic networks at the global level.

THE IMPACT OF PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA ON AFGHANISTAN

At a time when the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has been formally recognized by Russia and enjoys a growing level of regional and international confidence, and given that India has historically viewed Afghanistan largely through the lens of its relationship with Russia,



President Putin's visit to India carries notable political and economic significance for Afghanistan.

From a political perspective, Russia is a strategic and trusted partner of India in the region. In an interview with *India Today*, President Putin stated regarding Afghanistan: "The Islamic Emirate exercises full control over Afghanistan, and its leadership has been successful in combating terrorism and drug trafficking. This is a reality that must be acknowledged."

Such remarks, made by a major world leader through a prominent media outlet with wide audiences in India and beyond, contribute to enhancing the Islamic Emirate's image in India. More broadly, they help strengthen regional and international confidence in Afghanistan's current authorities. This, in turn, may encourage other countries, alongside India, to expand engagement with Afghanistan and move toward formal recognition.

When the role of Pakistan is also considered, the significance of this development becomes even clearer. Under current conditions, Pakistan has promoted extensive negative narratives about Afghanistan. Russia, however, due to its wide network of reliable partners and allies at both regional and global levels, is well-positioned to counter such narratives. Positive statements by Russia regarding the Islamic Emirate help neutralize Pakistan's claims, and many countries are likely to give greater weight to Russia's position than to Pakistan's messaging.

From an economic standpoint, deeper Russia-India relations are also likely to have positive implications for Afghanistan. If Russia and India expand trade through Central Asia and the Chabahar port, transit through Afghan territory would become increasingly important. In such a scenario, Afghanistan would benefit not only from significant transit revenues but also from greater political and security support from these countries. This is because sustained trade routes require stability and security, which in turn create incentives for regional powers to support political order and security in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that Russia and India may also increase their political and security support for the Islamic Emirate as part of broader regional cooperation.

CONCLUSION

President Putin's visit to India took place at a highly sensitive moment in global strategic transformation—one shaped by the Ukraine war, Western sanctions, shifts in global energy markets, NATO's expansion, and the emergence of a new Eurasian political landscape. The visit provided an important opportunity to renew and reinforce the long-standing strategic relationship between India and Russia, demonstrating the determination of both countries to preserve and strengthen an independent, balanced, and bilateral partnership despite growing international pressures and crises.



By reaffirming its strategic autonomy, India managed to maintain strong relations with the United States while also preserving its historic partnership with Russia. At the same time, Russia—facing extensive Western sanctions, particularly from the United States—has increasingly turned toward Asian markets and political support, with India emerging as a key partner. In the areas of defense, economy, energy, and labor, India has proven to be an essential partner for Russia. This visit clearly indicates Russia’s intention to develop a new strategic axis in Asia, with India playing a central role within this framework.

From Afghanistan’s perspective, Putin’s visit also carries positive implications. Russia has openly expressed a favorable position toward the Islamic Emirate, while India—viewing Afghanistan through Russia’s strategic lens—has gained a clearer understanding of Afghanistan’s regional importance. The expansion of Russia–India economic corridors, increased trade through the Chabahar port and Central Asia, and broader regional connectivity create new opportunities for Afghanistan in terms of transit revenues, political stability, and regional trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan should make strategic use of Russia’s positive stance to strengthen its international legitimacy. At the same time, it should actively pursue deeper engagement with India by advancing economic and transit cooperation agendas, ensuring Afghanistan’s participation in the Chabahar, Central Asian, and Eurasian economic corridors.
2. India, Russia, and Afghanistan should establish joint security mechanisms to support regional transit and economic projects. Sustainable economic cooperation can only succeed in an environment of lasting security and political stability.
3. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan should expand security cooperation with regional partners—particularly Russia and India—in the fight against terrorism. Strengthening such collaboration will help build trust, attract broader regional and international support, and create effective deterrence against negative narratives and destabilizing activities promoted by Pakistan.

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