

Russian and Indian Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region in the Context of Sanctions¹

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Abstract

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and India, although not in a formal alliance, were strategic partners in the full sense of the word. Soviet naval forces operated in the Indian Ocean, limiting the potential of an American presence. The USSR supported India's policy on the Middle East. Moscow, New Delhi and Baghdad created a "rouble-rupee" triangle which untied bilateral trade from the dollar and created a working mechanism for mutually beneficial trade. With the collapse of the USSR, Russia's sphere of influence declined substantially. However, in 2000 Moscow announced its return to South Asia, and it has gradually regained its influence in the region since then. There, the new India is expanding its influence, claiming the status of a great power and the role of a regional leader.

This article discusses the prospects for cooperation between Russia and India in the Indo-Pacific region in the context of the American imposition of sanctions against Russia. It analyzes promising areas in which the implementation of joint Russia-India projects is possible and concludes that opportunities for such projects exist in virtually the entire Indo-Pacific region, including small island states, Africa and the immediate neighbourhood of India. The author divides countries into three categories: potential U.S. allies (from Washington's point of view), adversaries of the United States and countries toward which the United States does not pursue an active policy. The article concludes that Russia should build relations with all three groups of countries while maintaining contact with India. This will help consolidate anti-American forces in the region and will erode the sanctions regime. The most promising areas for trilateral projects are the traditional fields of cooperation between Russia and India, primarily military-technical cooperation and energy projects.

Key words: Russia; India; sanctions

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Cooperation between Russia and India has a long history. For decades, the Soviet Union has been one of India's key economic, military and political partners. After the collapse of the USSR, relations between Russia and India significantly cooled: the new Russian government paid little attention to the eastern countries, focusing mainly on the United States and Western Europe. India, in turn, having lost the USSR as one of

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its most important trade and political partners, carried out large-scale reforms and re-oriented its policy toward cooperation with the countries of Southeast Asia, proclaiming the Look East policy.

Soon both Moscow and New Delhi realized the need for a rapprochement. After the collapse of the USSR, the world became theoretically unipolar, but the United States was not ready for the role of hegemon. As a result, a multipolar world began to take shape in which Russia and India turned out to be natural allies. Both claimed a role as a new centre of power, both were de facto great powers, they had no territorial disputes and they held similar views on the main problems of the world. Moscow and New Delhi began to restore old ties. In 2000, the Declaration on Strategic Partnership was signed, which New Delhi took as the long-awaited revitalization of old ties [Basu, 2000, pp. 1763–4]. Since then, Russian-Indian relations have generally developed in ascending order, although there have been periods of cooling, in particular, in the last years of Manmohan Singh's tenure. However, after Narendra Modi became prime minister, bilateral relations intensified significantly [Stobdan, 2016, p. 74].

The strength of these relationships was tested in 2018. Despite the risk of falling under American sanctions, New Delhi has demonstrated its intention to cooperate with Moscow on the whole spectrum of issues of interest to both sides, adhering to the spirit of strategic autonomy and considering Russia to be a key promising strategic partner. Russia, in turn, also sees India as an important strategic partner.

Political relations between Russia and India are developing successfully, but economic relations are clearly lagging behind. In contrast to the Soviet era when the USSR was one of the main trading partners of India, current trade between the two countries cannot surpass the \$10 billion mark (for comparison, the trade between India and China, who are not strategic partners, has exceeded \$80 billion). The threat of sanctions from the United States further complicates the development of trade and economic relations.

Nevertheless, Russian leadership set an ambitious task to increase trade, bringing it to \$30 billion by 2025. To accomplish this task a thorough analysis of potential areas of cooperation is required. As a rule, such an analysis highlights the functional areas of cooperation (defence industry, nuclear energy, space exploration). Researchers pay particular attention to deepening contacts in these areas, as well as expanding their list. Relatively little attention is usually paid to the geographic dimension of cooperation, that is, the search for possible forms of cooperation with the participation of third countries despite the fact that this issue was raised at the talks between Russian president Vladimir Putin and Indian prime minister Narendra Modi in October 2018. In the final joint press statement, "Russia-India: A Reliable Partnership in a Changing World," the potential cooperation of Moscow and New Delhi in third countries is mentioned three times [President of Russia, 2018, Para. 27, 36, 42]. Nevertheless, analysis of the geographic fields of promising cooperation has not yet appeared.

This article is intended to fill this gap. It analyzes possible areas of cooperation between Russia and India and proposes specific projects and mechanisms that could

be implemented in these areas. To achieve this goal, the interests of Russia and India in the region are analyzed, as well as the intersection points of these interests. Due to the fact that only a small number of such projects are currently being implemented or are at the final stage of discussion (for example, the nuclear power plant in Ruppur, Bangladesh) or were implemented in Soviet times (the USSR-Iraq-India rouble-rupee triangle), the analysis inevitably is largely hypothetical.

Consideration and analysis are limited to the Indo-Pacific. In the interpretation of New Delhi, which differs markedly from the interpretation of Washington, this region includes the entire Indian Ocean and surrounding countries, as well as the western part of the Pacific Ocean, stretching in the south to Australia, in the east to Polynesia, in the north to the Bering Strait.

In Russian foreign policy discourse, the Indo-Pacific as a topic is rather poorly developed: Russia traditionally uses the concepts of Asia-Pacific and IOR (Indian Ocean region) as independent regions. This is not necessarily a problem: if desired, Indo-Pacific can be perceived as a combination of Asia-Pacific and IOR without prejudice to the main idea of large-scale bilateral cooperation.

Russia-India: Cooperation in the IOR and the Asia-Pacific Region in Retrospect

In the Soviet period, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) led by India was friendly to the USSR; it sought to create a favourable political situation in the world and to facilitate the exit of the former colonies from the political orbit of the colonial empires. Many newly formed countries chose the socialist way as the most suitable for themselves. India, which sought to develop Soviet-style heavy industry, pursued a pro-Soviet policy on the whole.

The Soviet Union, being one of the two superpowers, had strategic interests in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They were formed on the basis of two considerations: the need to create a friendly foreign policy environment for the USSR and opposition to American influence in these regions. These tasks were accomplished by expanding the Soviet economic and military presence in the regions. The key role in ensuring security and projecting Soviet interests was played by operational squadrons (10 Operational Squadron in the Pacific and 7 Operational Squadron in the Indian Ocean). Soviet ships maintained a military presence in the regions, secured the interests of the USSR and provided implicit support to Soviet allies and partners; for example, during the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979, Soviet ships blocked the entrance to the Gulf of Tonkin and ensured the transfer of equipment for Vietnam, while during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, Soviet ships shadowed the U.S. task force, which showed support for Pakistan.

In the Pacific, the zone of Soviet interests included countries adhering to a socialist orientation (Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea (Cambodia) and Indonesia (until 1965)). In the Indian Ocean, it included East African and Middle Eastern countries

(Mozambique, Ethiopia, Syria, Iraq, Madagascar, South Yemen, Somalia (until 1977) and Egypt (until 1976 and since 1984)), that had taken the side of the USSR in the Cold War. In addition, the Soviet Union maintained friendly relations with the countries of South Asia which were part of the NAM and adhered to a pro-socialist orientation (India, Burma and Sri Lanka).

India, in turn, desired a security zone in the Indian Ocean while almost completely ignoring the possibility of expansion in the Pacific. New Delhi's interest in the IOR has been evident since India gained independence and became the largest local player in the region. Within this framework, the so-called Indira doctrine (as it was called in the western media with reference to the name of the country's prime minister, Indira Gandhi) implied complete Indian domination in the IOR in the future. These plans, however, came up against the objective problem of lack of resources. Throughout the Cold War, the Indian Navy did not have enough ships or personnel to realize these plans even partially. In this context, the Soviet presence in the IOR was perceived positively by India. The USSR modernized the Indian naval base in Vishakhapatnam and the presence of Soviet ships restrained the activity of the U.S. fleet, allied to Pakistan [Srivastava, 2017, p. 84]. At the same time, there was a constant fear that, if a third world war began, the IOR countries would be drawn into it due to the presence of Soviet and American forces in the region; however, New Delhi, realizing that it would not be possible to force the USSR and the U.S. to withdraw their forces, pursued a realistic policy under these conditions, advocating the transformation of the Indian Ocean into the Zone of Peace (IOZOP) in the long term.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation changed dramatically. Russia, as the successor state to the USSR, has largely lost its political and economic influence in the world: the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), in which Moscow had played a leading role, ceased to exist, while a drop in industrial production and a break in trade ties led to a reduction in foreign trade. India, to the contrary, following the results of reforms and thanks to a well-thought-out foreign policy, has become a great power with sufficient potential to project influence in both the IOR and the Asia-Pacific. While the goals of India in the Indian Ocean have not fundamentally changed since the time of Indira Gandhi, in the Pacific Ocean New Delhi relies primarily on cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), perceiving it as a key player in the economic and regional security fields.

Russia, in turn, has demonstrated a lack of serious interest in the Indian Ocean for most of the post-Soviet period. At the same time, it remained quite active and determined by security considerations in the northern Pacific. Outside of its territorial waters, Russia, like India, focused primarily on cooperation with ASEAN, supporting its claims to be a key player in the Asia-Pacific.

The following features characterize the balance of power and interests of Russia and India in 1991–2014. The first is a decrease in the economic, political and military capabilities of Russia, and a geographical reduction in the sphere of its interests in par-

allel with a corresponding increase in the possibilities and sphere of interests of India. In fact, the ability of the two countries to project influence is now equal. The second is a change in the political goals of Russia and India. Russia no longer sets the goal of an ideological struggle with the United States, acting only as one of the great powers and trying to restore its zone of influence as far as possible. In turn, India in a vacuum of power has become an independent player, also acting as a great power, claiming to dominate its zone of influence. The third relates to global political changes – the end of the Cold War and the actual formation of unstable unipolarity. This drastically changed the strategy of most countries in the world, which now had not only to survive, but to achieve maximum benefits and security guarantees in conditions of general uncertainty.

In fact, during this period Russia and India did not have specific points of geographical contact: Russia's presence in India's zone of direct interests was quite insignificant.

The situation changed again in 2014 when Russia announced its intention to restore, at least partially, its former sphere of influence. Now, Moscow is expanding its presence on the western borders of the Indian Ocean (Syria and Iraq, East Africa), while at the same time showing more activity in the Pacific Ocean. In turn, India, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, has shown a steady interest in strengthening its position in the IOR and expanding it in the Asia-Pacific. It was during this period that the concept of the Indo-Pacific, proposed by the Indian theorist Gurprit Khurana in January 2007, began to gain popularity.

The mutual expansion of spheres of influence created the foundation for the further rapprochement of Russia and India. However, the process of this rapprochement is negatively affected by the sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Russia in order to guarantee the interests of their companies in the markets of third countries.

This tactic looks quite reasonable in the context of the gradual loss hegemony by the U.S., increasing multipolarity and the emergence of China as a second superpower. It helps to undermine the position of one of China's important partners and at the same time to expand the capabilities of American business. India and Russia have a fundamentally different role in this scheme. If India is seen by Washington as a potential ally in confronting the PRC, Russia is a convenient adversary. The United States, for obvious reasons, seeks to stabilize this scheme, turning India into a junior ally. This scheme is not beneficial either to Moscow or New Delhi because India and Russia are interested in preserving the possibility of manoeuvre by staying away from the confrontation between the U.S. and China while building up their influence, turning into stable centres of power. It is obvious, however, that America's anti-Russian course will not change in the near future. Russia and India, if they intend to continue to avoid their inclusion in the U.S.-China confrontation, have to look for new mechanisms and fields of cooperation.

The ideal strategy for Russia may be as follows. Moscow is interested in maximizing cooperation with countries that are perceived by the United States as potential allies. At the same time, it is interested in developing relations with U.S. opponents.

In the first case, Russia actually puts the United States in a difficult situation, forcing Washington either to put pressure on a potential ally, thereby provoking dissatisfaction and the growth of anti-American sentiments, or to put up with the build-up of Russian influence, which in most cases will be perceived by local elites as weakness and will lead to a further increase in cooperation with Russia. In the second, Russia, also under attack by the United States, is seen by the elites of these countries as a natural ally. Finally, there is a third group of countries for which the United States does not pursue an active policy: there are also opportunities for expanding the Russian presence there.

Russia-India cooperation plays a special role in these conditions: India, which does not want to become a junior partner of the United States, forms the third pole of power acting together with Russia. This third pole is beneficial both to the countries considered by the United States as promising allies, and to their opponents. The presence of the third pole allows countries of both groups to avoid being drawn into the U.S.-China confrontation and to expand their foreign policy capabilities. Accordingly, both Russia and India have a brilliant opportunity to expand their spheres of influence.

Under current conditions, a number of points and whole subregions where successful Russia-India cooperation is possible can be distinguished. They form a kind of arc that stretches along the entire coast of the Indo-Pacific from South Africa to Vladivostok.

East Africa

In Soviet times, the countries of East Africa were of particular interest to the USSR because of their rich resource potential and favourable strategic position. The latter made it possible to ensure the military-political presence of the Soviet Union in the IOR through access to the ports of Mozambique and Tanzania in the south and Ethiopia in the north. The USSR provided the friendly regimes with financial and military assistance. It is significant that these countries, although they experienced a significant political transformation after the Cold War, maintain economic ties with Russia.

In the current situation, Russia is interested both in re-establishing ties with the old allies, primarily Mozambique, and in building up relations with new players who were in another camp during the Cold War – South Africa and Kenya. The former claims to be a subregional leader, while the latter is a significant player in African affairs. However, Russian business at this stage is reluctant to go to Africa. However, the state could play a leading role by ensuring cooperation (for example, naval) with these countries.

This seems particularly promising in the context of Russia-India relations. The Indian concept of maritime security implies dominance in the Indian Ocean and control over the choke points, two of which (the waters around the Cape of Good Hope and the Mozambique Channel in the south and the Bab-el-Mandeb in the north) are located off the coast of Africa [Indian Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015a, p. 57, 2015b, pp. 17–21]. Yet, the Indian Navy, despite the stated desire to become a security pro-

vider for all IOR basin countries [Naidu, 2013, pp. 201–2] often does not have enough resources. Meanwhile, East African states are concerned about the rise of unconventional threats to maritime security (piracy, human and arms trafficking, drug trafficking and smuggling). The emerging vacuum of power is either filled by external players (China in Tanzania), or leads to a deterioration of the situation on the maritime borders of African states.

The current situation is conducive to stepping up the Russian presence. Under these conditions, Russia could act as a force contributing to the strengthening of the naval capabilities of African countries. Now the navies of East Africa are mainly equipped with obsolete ships from the fleets of European states or the People's Liberation Army Navy. Favourable conditions have been created for Moscow to act as a new player in the ship supply market for African countries. This will not require special expenses because the most popular ship is a patrol vessel with a displacement of 300–400 tons, armed with 40- or 20-mm guns and capable of fighting against pirates and smugglers. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of providing the navies and coast guards of East African countries with Russian-built ships. In addition to creating a promising market for Russian shipbuilders, it will help strengthen Russia-Africa ties and will help create the necessary conditions for the return of a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Thus, the potential Russia-India cooperation in East Africa is strategic: Russian naval and military-technical cooperation with countries of the subregion does not threaten Indian interests. Moreover, it frees India from the need to independently ensure the safety of East African waters and allows it to focus on the implementation of the main task – control over the Indian Ocean.

Middle East

During the Cold War, the Middle East was a zone of interest for both the USSR and India and was one of the regions where they successfully worked together to mutual benefit.

Syria, which has an exceptionally advantageous strategic location, was one of the key allies of the USSR in the region. The Soviet military presence there created a hotbed of constant concern on the southern flank of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); in addition, the USSR was given the opportunity to use Syrian ports to base its ships, which thereby facilitated access to the Indian Ocean. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia-Syria relations experienced a period of decline. The process of restoring Russia's positions in Syria began after 2000, although it was interrupted by the civil war. In this war, Russia naturally supported the government of Bashar al-Assad, which guaranteed the consideration of Russian interests.

For India, Syria was of interest mainly as one of the players of the NAM. New Delhi conducted a course aimed at supporting secular Arab regimes to counter Pakistan's influence and secure access to the region's oil and gas. As a result, India supported Syria

on the return of the Golan Heights. Syria, in turn, supported India in preventing the internationalization of the Kashmir territorial dispute.

Iraq was also a strategic ally of the USSR, receiving significant military and economic assistance from Moscow (during the Iran-Iraq War, for example). This strategic line was interrupted only in 1991 due to the reorientation of Soviet foreign policy and the rash actions of Saddam Hussein. During the Cold War, Iraq was one of the important elements in the system of USSR-India cooperation: it implemented the scheme of a trade triangle that worked in the rupee-rouble trading system and proved its effectiveness.

India, in turn, regarded Iraq as a key ally in the region, having signed a friendship and cooperation agreement in 1952. Despite periodic cooling in relations between Baghdad and New Delhi, Iraq remained one of the largest markets for Indian goods in the region. Even after the outbreak of Iraqi aggression in Kuwait and the breakdown of USSR-Iraq cooperation, India continued to assist Iraq, condemning Operation Desert Storm and accusing the United States of provoking war [Joshi, 2015, p. 254]. The 2003 U.S.-UK intervention was a painful blow for India; the contacts between New Delhi and Baghdad were closed and began to recover only after the holding of democratic elections in Iraq.

At the moment, circumstances are pushing both Russia and India to increase cooperation in the Middle East. Russia is busy restoring its influence in the countries of the region, primarily in Syria, where it provides support to government forces fighting the terrorists, and in the future in Iraq, which is gradually regaining sovereignty. In turn, India is also interested in restoring its position in the region, although this aspiration has not yet taken shape in a sustainable concept like Look East/Act East [Teja, 2015, p. 90]. Due to changes in the global political situation, the participation of Iraq and Syria in the NAM is no longer the same and India has shown much less interest in traditional schemes of interaction with Arab countries, trying to diversify its policy by establishing relations with both Israel and the Arab monarchies of the Gulf. But its imperatives remain the same: countering Pakistani influence in the region; ensuring uninterrupted oil supplies; and ensuring the security of the Indian diaspora in the region (in 2015–16 alone, it transferred \$35.9 billion to India) [Pethiyagoda, 2017]. The significance of the first factor is gradually decreasing, but that of the second and third is increasing [Kumaraswami, 2008, pp. 581–3].

Such stability in determining interests lays a solid foundation for strengthening Russia-India cooperation. It is significant that both Russia and India are expanding the network of contacts in the region, including those countries that were previously on the other side during the Cold War (for example, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UEA)), which opens up opportunities for involving them in tripartite cooperation schemes, which, in turn, will objectively contribute to the weakening of the sanctions regime. There is a possible partnership in the production of weapons: Russia is interested in getting a share of the arms markets in Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars (for more details see Kalinina

[2013] and Yussef Nassasra [2017]). However, this is hindered, among other things, by the fear of causing U.S. discontent. If the expansion of Russian weapons to the markets of the Arabian Gulf countries goes through India according to the scheme in which Indian companies produce weapons under Russian licenses, these concerns will be removed. In addition, both Russian and Indian companies are interested in developing the high-tech sector of the Gulf countries, in particular, the implementation of the Neom project. If Russia and India submit package proposals for the construction of solar energy and infrastructure facilities, the chance of winning the tender will increase markedly.

For objective reasons, the restoration of the rupee-rouble trade triangle, beneficial to Russia, India and Iraq, currently looks unrealistic. Iraq still has limited sovereignty and is largely dependent on the United States. However, any tripartite projects benefit both Russia and India. At present, Iraq is home to thousands of Indian business people; India is interested in stabilizing the situation in Iraq, which can be achieved only as a result of the complete defeat of the militants of the IS, which cannot be achieved without the participation of Russia.

Russia, in turn, is interested in the direct participation of India and the Indian diaspora in restoring the Syrian economy, since India maintains warm ties with Syria, helping it train personnel for industry. Russia is interested in the implementation of the “Afghan Scheme” in Syria and Iraq, aimed at large-scale Indian assistance to these countries while building up Indian influence as opposed to Iranian. Obviously, this option will not be fully realized due to the fact that the countries of the Middle East play a much smaller role in Indian foreign policy than Afghanistan; however, it is beneficial for Moscow to maximize India’s involvement in Middle Eastern affairs and turn it into one of the key players whose interests coincide with those of Russia in restoring stability in the region.

In addition, building up Russia-India cooperation with new players such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other monarchies of the Gulf looks promising. India’s interests in these countries are much broader than its interests in Iraq, and are considered by individual Indian experts as potentially leading to the formation of strategic partnership relations [Pradhan, 2013, pp. 232–5]. In addition, these countries are traditionally perceived in the region as U.S. allies, and building ties with them will objectively undermine the sanctions regime.

An important feature of the Middle East as a region of promising cooperation is that most of the states located there are relatively less exposed to the danger of secondary U.S. sanctions, either because they are perceived by the Americans as an enemy (Syria), or because of their importance for U.S. foreign policy (Saudi Arabia). In addition, the specifics of financial mechanisms (Islamic banking, hawala) makes it difficult to track money transfer channels, preventing Washington from determining the final beneficiary in the implementation of transactions. In India, hawala mechanisms are well-developed, in particular, due to the use of a hundee system compatible with hawala [Dobaev, 2016, p. 124]. In general, in 2014 Islamic banks operated in 75 countries

and their total assets reached \$1.6 trillion (excluding hundee) [Podvoisky, 2015, p. 30]. The existence of a single hawala/hundee system allows Russian companies to receive and make payments in the countries of the Middle East through the Islamic banking system and to use it for payments to their counterparts in the countries of South Asia. It is worth mentioning that “jointly exploring the possibilities of forming regional trade mechanisms with the participation of third countries” and “the use for mutual benefit of new opportunities that arise as a result of integration processes in the global economy” are mentioned in the 2000 Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of India [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2000].

In sum, Russia is interested in increasing the number of allies in the region. The most promising of them is India, which seeks to restore the position compromised as a result of the American invasion in 2003.

Iran

Russia-Iran and India-Iran relations have never been simple. Initially, during the Cold War, Iran was in the western camp; after the Islamic revolution, it left the western bloc, but did not join the Soviet one. Moreover, Tehran’s relations with both Moscow and New Delhi have deteriorated significantly due to the support provided by India and the USSR to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. In addition, Iran actively supported Pakistan, which caused discontent in India.

In the 1990s and 2000s Iran’s relations with both Russia and India improved. Moscow and Tehran, as well as Tehran and New Delhi, have successfully cooperated in both the energy and military spheres. In 1989–91 Moscow and Tehran signed military contracts worth \$5.1 billion; in 1992, agreements were signed on cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the resumption of construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. India, in turn, during this period supplied Iran with spare parts for Soviet-made equipment and trained Iranian sailors. In 2005, a number of important agreements were signed between India and Iran on the supply of oil and liquefied natural gas [Dietl, 2012, pp. 875–7].

At present Iran, not claiming the status of a great power, nor even more so a superpower, is becoming a subregional leader, increasing its influence in Syria and Iraq and among the Shiite diaspora in the Arab monarchies of the Gulf. Its importance is growing for the South Asian players Pakistan and India: both countries are experiencing difficulties in the supply of hydrocarbons, and Iran is becoming an important partner for them. In addition, Iran directly borders Pakistan, which creates a complex geopolitical configuration, and forces New Delhi and Islamabad to flirt with Tehran [Ramana, 2012].

India’s interest in establishing contacts with Iran is clearly visible from the fact that New Delhi partly ignored the threat of U.S. sanctions by continuing to implement its projects in Iran, including the North-South Corridor.

Russia's interest in maintaining good relations with Iran is connected both with the interaction of the two countries in Syria and with the general geopolitical situation. Iran, like Russia, is the subject of U.S. sanctions, and the validity of these sanctions is disputed by other western countries. In these conditions, the rapprochement of Moscow and Tehran seems natural.

Iran's significance for Russia and India is also determined by the fact that the North-South Corridor – the shortest and most promising trade route connecting India with the European part of Russia and western Siberia – passes through its territory. Until recently, its development was slow due to lack of funding and its potential was not fully utilized. However, in 2016–17 India began active funding of the southern and south-eastern section of the Corridor [Dunaeva, 2017, pp. 197–8]. In addition, it is to be expected that in the case of the signing of the free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and India, the goods flowing through it will be activated; at the same time, due to lack of funds, Iran is not able to independently ensure the creation of the necessary infrastructure on the central and northern sections of the route, the development of which will be jointly undertaken by Russia and India.

Thus, Russia is interested in the development of any form of bilateral or trilateral cooperation with the participation of Iran and India. The most promising are energy projects and maritime interaction in the form of rescue and relief exercises. Given that the main route for oil supplies to India passes through the Strait of Hormuz, New Delhi might be interested in this form; however, it should be remembered that India will not break off relations with the United States for the sake of a rapprochement with Tehran.

India's Immediate Neighbourhood

Indian foreign policy thinking considers the world through the concept of concentric circles. The zone of its immediate neighbourhood, including the small countries of South Asia and a number of island states in the Indian Ocean, is perceived as critical for ensuring the country's security.

In this zone, Russia has certain, rather limited economic interests related primarily to the construction of energy facilities – for example, the construction of a hydroelectric power station in Nepal and the Ruppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh; the latter project is planned to be implemented in cooperation with India, which should provide technical assistance [Zakharov, 2018, p. 126]. This project is currently the only large-scale joint India-Russia project being implemented in a third country, and it could become a pilot for further joint initiatives both in India's immediate neighbourhood and in other regions. The fact of cooperation in such a high-tech industry has allowed some Russian scientists to talk about the formation of a potential “nuclear union” between Moscow and New Delhi [Pechishcheva, 2018, p. 154].

In the absence of serious Russian political and security interests in the countries of South Asia, it was reasonable to strengthen Indian influence in exchange for guarantees of compliance with Russian economic interests. Russia's lack of ambition in the

region is its strong side: in the current conditions of India-China rivalry and mistrust, the emergence of Russia, which is interested in stabilizing the situation and mitigating contradictions between India and China rather than inciting them, as does the United States, would be positively accepted by the small countries of India's immediate neighbourhood. None of these countries is connected with the United States so seriously as to risk falling under sanctions in case of trade with Russia. Thus, building contacts with them, Russia opens its window of opportunity.

The Pacific and ASEAN

Compared to the years of the Cold War, when Asia-Pacific countries were part of the opposing blocs which made their full-fledged cooperation impossible, the situation has radically changed. ASEAN, which could not fulfil its claims to be the centre of power during the confrontation of superpowers, has replenished itself with new members and become one of the most important centres of the world economy and a determining factor in regional politics.

Russia relied on the development of relations with ASEAN all along, considering the Association to be the main regional player. In 1996, it received the status of a dialogue partner and in 2004 it joined the Bali Treaty. In turn, India in 1985 began a cautious rapprochement with ASEAN [Sridharan, 1996, pp. 163–83] which in 1991 turned into the Look East policy (transformed into the Act East Policy in 2014). Under this policy ASEAN is considered to be the main partner of India in the west Pacific: it is an important source of finance and technology for New Delhi seeking to avoid dependence on the United States or China. Thus, both Russia and India perceive ASEAN as an important mechanism for stabilization and development in the Pacific.

The idea of ASEAN's centrality plays a big role in the formation of the concept of the Indo-Pacific. The perception of ASEAN as the eastern pillar of the Indo-Pacific allows us to avoid identifying this concept with Quad and transforming it into a regional security subsystem in which India has an auxiliary role. Thus, the Indo-Pacific in the Indian and ASEAN understandings is turning into a region where India is the dominant power in the IOR and ASEAN is the dominant power in the western part of the Pacific, being the main axis of the whole construct and maintaining a leading position in the region. Such an interpretation equally suits both India and the ASEAN countries. An alternative development scenario, which implies the formation of the Indo-Pacific as a structure with American dominance, will mean a decline of their influence.

Russia and India are involved to varying degrees in cooperation with ASEAN countries. However, there are a number of countries with which both parties are interested in developing relations.

Vietnam, traditionally maintaining close relations with Russia, has recently been the focus of the Indian Act East policy. Hanoi is perceived by India as a potential ally to counteract the growth of Chinese influence [Kaura, 2018, p. 55]. This interest opens up a wide field for trilateral cooperation, which could include both joint projects in the

energy sector and naval exercises (at the moment, a mechanism has been developed for holding them between all potential participants in the triangle in a bilateral format).

Another country with which Russia and India are equally interested in cooperation is *Indonesia*, a developing power with great potential, claiming to be the unofficial leader of ASEAN. India has long-standing and strong ties with Indonesia [Shekhar, 2010]. Indonesia has its own view on the Indo-Pacific, which differs significantly from the American one and can become the basis for a pan-ASEAN concept. Possible cooperation projects with Indonesia involving India may include both military and naval exercises, as well as the supply of Russian-designed and Indian-made weapons necessary for Jakarta to confirm its claims to subregional leadership.

Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte demonstrates the desire to diversify external relations, considering Russia among potential partners. India, in turn, supports cooperation with the Philippines focusing, inter alia, on the fight against terrorism, a topic that Russia is also interested in developing and promoting. Thus, tripartite antiterrorist mechanisms have great potential. They may include joint exercises, the exchange of experience and information and arms assistance to the Philippines in the fight against the Islamic State.

Laos during the Cold War was in the Soviet sphere of influence. In the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and Laos noticeably cooled. Now they are recovering and Laos is interested in attracting Russian enterprises that could help to modernize worn-out infrastructure and organize mining in the country. India, being one of its largest trading partners, is also interested in strengthening economic relations with Laos and modernizing its infrastructure. A promising area of trilateral cooperation could be joint infrastructure projects – the repair of roads and equipment for the extraction of resources by Russian firms using Indian funds.

Myanmar is now in a difficult situation, constantly the object of pressure from western countries due to the tough policy toward the Rohingya Muslims. With Myanmar risking sanctions, tripartite formats are of particular value. India is interested in developing relations with Myanmar not only in the energy (primarily participation in the development of gas projects [Twining, 2008, p. 17]) and military areas, but also in infrastructure projects such as the laying of the India-Southeast Asia corridor and assistance in the modernization of ports and roads. In this case, Russia, already under American sanctions, could undertake the implementation of infrastructure projects in which the Indian side is objectively interested.

In summary, ASEAN countries are far more vulnerable to American pressure than countries in the western part of the IOR; at the same time, their economic and political weight in the region leaves no alternative for Russia, forcing it to build the closest possible relations with them. In this scheme, India may act as Russia's partner in the implementation of the tripartite projects listed above as a party not threatened by U.S. sanctions. In turn, Russia itself can assist India in countries that are already at risk of being sanctioned.

Japan and Korea

The situation with Japan and Korea is much more complicated. Both countries are tied to the United States with legally binding treaties; during the Cold War, they were part of the western bloc. Japan, among other things, has limited sovereignty, not being able to legally protest the deployment of American bases on its territory and being de facto in a state of territorial dispute with Russia. At the same time, the extremely warm relations between Japan and India, rooted in the late 19th century, should be taken into account.

In the context of the transformation of the world system, Moscow is interested in developing relations with Tokyo and turning Japan into a friendly, strong and fully independent state. Establishing strong and trusting relations with the new Japan could fundamentally change the situation in the region. In the current context such radical transformations are unlikely, but this does not mean that they should not be sought. The trilateral Russia-India-Japan dialogue can help bring these countries closer. It is better to carry it out on Tracks II and 1.5. It is significant that Japan is the only Asian country that has imposed sanctions, and Tokyo has done so reluctantly and under pressure from the United States.

The situation with Korea is different. Although this country is also under actual American control, its degree of independence is much greater. Russia is a member of the six-party talks and is interested in normalizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula and attracting Korean capital for the development of the Russian Far East in exchange for the supply of hydrocarbons necessary for the development of Korean industry.

Both Japan and Korea maintain close relations with India, actively invest in it and conduct joint projects with Indian banks and companies. Pulling them into tripartite formats, such as dialogue on Tracks II and 1.5 on security issues, construction of off-shore supply vessels for oil projects with Indian share (Sakhalin-1, Vankor), and attraction of Japanese and Indian investments in infrastructure projects in the ports of the Russian Far East (Vladivostok, Nakhodka) would benefit both Russia-India relations and the situation in the region, weakening sanctions.

Island States of the Pacific

Finally, a promising area is cooperation with the small countries of the Pacific Ocean in Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, which are now the field of confrontation between the United States and its allies on the one hand and China on the other. At present, neither Russia nor India has strategic interests in this region due to limited resources and capabilities. The certain interest of India is explained by the presence of the Indian diaspora on some islands (primarily Fiji); until recently, this factor played an insignificant role in Indian foreign policy. However, Narendra Modi, after coming to power, demonstrated that the Indian zone of strategic interests is gradually expanding and may include Fiji in the future [Raja Mohan, 2015, pp. 170–2].

In turn, Russia is interested in small Pacific states mainly due to their votes in the United Nations General Assembly. It must be borne in mind, however, that small countries can change their position as demonstrated by the example of Tuvalu and Vanuatu, which recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but subsequently reversed this decision. In this regard, Russia needs to determine the possible formats for cooperation with small island states, building a clear strategy, choosing the preferred regimes and key countries of the region and taking into account possible interaction with China and India. A major plus is the relatively small interest of the United States in the economies of the Pacific countries, which makes it unlikely that local financial institutions will be subject to sanctions, especially when implementing joint Russia-India projects.

Fiji seems to be the most promising country due to the presence of a large Indian diaspora, favourable conditions for tourism and the availability of minerals. Joint humanitarian projects, such as opening schools and clinics, have great potential.

Cooperation with reliance on Australia and New Zealand seems inappropriate due to the clearly pro-western position of these countries regarding sanctions.

Far Eastern Corridor

In addition to these trilateral formats, it is necessary to mention a bilateral one, the potential India-Vladivostok axis. Indian business has repeatedly shown increased attention to participating in development projects in the Russian Far East, but so far these wishes have remained unfulfilled. India is currently seeking to diversify its hydrocarbon consumption and Russia, with its deposits in Sakhalin and the Arctic, could provide it with the necessary opportunities. Indian business is now present in the Sakhalin-1 field and is developing its presence in the Arctic; it is necessary to intensify this process.

Meanwhile, Russia is interested in attracting Indian capital to the region, both on its own and in order to balance China's influence. It is necessary to formulate a Russian concept of the Indo-Pacific that would look attractive to India and the ASEAN countries and would be combined with the existing Indian and Indonesian concepts, representing the Far East as the north-eastern flank of the Indo-Pacific and the link with the Arctic and Siberia.

Conclusion

In the future the zone of cooperation between Russia and India may cover the entire coast of East Africa and Eurasia, washed by the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The most promising approaches are trilateral, which make it possible to bring the positions of Russia and countries under U.S. sanctions closer and to erode the American influence on potential allies. India is a weak link in the chain of American sanctions as demonstrated by the story of the sale of S-400 systems. India's geopolitical significance for

the United States is too great to jeopardize a potential alliance with New Delhi due to anti-Russian sanctions.

As can be seen from the above examples, the most promising is the implementation of projects in which Russia and India have rich experience in cooperation: energy, military-technical cooperation and space. In addition, countries that were previously part of the Soviet zone of influence are interested in the participation of Russian specialists in the modernization of infrastructure. Indian engineers and workers with experience in operating Soviet-built structures can also be involved in these projects. The experience of humanitarian cooperation is in demand, for example the creation of schools and hospitals, the training of foreign specialists in Russia and India, and the publication of literature in Asian languages.

The sanctions imposed by western countries on Russia present a serious challenge for it, forcing it to seek allies in the East. One of those is India, a traditional Russian partner in South Asia, whose area of interest is constantly expanding.

It should be borne in mind that the way out of sanctions does not at all constitute the main content of Russian policy toward India. Moscow's interest in building relations with New Delhi is long-term but sanctions impede Russia-India cooperation, so the erosion of the sanctions regime is important for relations between the two countries.

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Сотрудничество России и Индии в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе в условиях санкций¹

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В годы холодной войны Советский Союз и Индия, хотя и не состояли в формальном союзе, были в полном смысле стратегическими партнерами. Советские военно-морские силы присутствовали в Индийском океане, ограничивая потенциал американских операций, СССР поддерживал политику Индии на ближневосточном направлении. Москва и Нью-Дели создали с участием Ирака треугольник «рубль – рупия», позволявший отвязать двустороннюю торговлю от доллара и создать работающий механизм взаимовыгодной торговли. С распадом СССР сфера влияния России существенно сократилась. Однако в 2000 г. Москва заявила о возвращении в Южную Азию и с тех пор постепенно восстанавливала свое влияние в регионе, где она имеет стратегические интересы. Там же расширяет свое влияние и новая Индия, претендующая на статус великой державы и роль регионального лидера.

В статье рассматриваются перспективы сотрудничества России и Индии в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе в условиях введенных против России американских санкций. Автор анализирует перспективные зоны, в которых возможна реализация совместных российско-индийских проектов. В результате он приходит к выводу, что возможности для таких проектов существуют практически во всем Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе, включая малые островные государства, Африку и зону непосредственного соседства Индии. Автор разделяет страны на три категории: потенциальные союзники США с точки зрения Вашингтона, противники США и страны, в отношении которых США не проводят активной политики. По мнению автора, России следует выстраивать отношения со всеми тремя группами стран, поддерживая контакт с Индией. Это поможет консолидировать антиамериканские силы в регионе и будет способствовать размыванию режима санкций. Наиболее перспективными сферами для трехсторонних проектов являются традиционные поля сотрудничества России и Индии, в первую очередь ВТС и энергетика. Помимо этого, автор предлагает обратиться к советскому опыту использования «мягкой силы» в Азии как хорошо зарекомендовавшему себя в годы холодной войны.

Ключевые слова: Россия; Индия; санкции

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