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## *Ignoring Washington, India Embraces Russia and Multipolarity*



Despite Washington's concerns – and even warnings of consequences – it has not been able to wean New Delhi away from Russia. Instead, India has decided to deepen its ties with Russia. On the one hand, India's alliance with Russia not only allows the former to maintain a balance between Russia and the US, but an alliance with Russia also comes with another critical benefit. With Russia being a vocal supporter of multipolarity and India being an ambitious global player itself, a multipolar world is a system that can meaningfully accommodate India, the world's most populous state now. This was most clearly evident during the recent visit of India's Prime Minister Modi to Russia.

Washington's Warnings

“I will look to Prime Minister Modi’s public remarks to see what he talked about but as I said, we have made quite clear directly with India our concerns about their relationship with Russia”, a State Department spokesperson said in a press briefing recently. He further added that the US expects India to “make [it] clear that Russia should respect the UN Charter, should respect Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.” There is, thus, a menu of demands that Washington expects from any country in the world to fulfil before it can (continue to) develop ties with Russia in the current context. Jake Sullivan, the current US National Security Advisor, **further said** that the US would (continue to) talk to India about the “specifics and the nature” of the latter’s relationship with Russia. If a country, according to this, fails to satisfy Washington, it could become a target of sanctions (like Russia) and be declared part of the ‘reactionary alliance’. But is this menu of demands enough to wean countries like India away from Russia?

### **New Delhi Ignores Washington**

Modi’s recent visit to Russia did everything, opposing Washington’s demands. One reason for Modi’s happy embrace of Russia is an anticipated loss of the Democrats in the upcoming US elections to the resurgent Donald Trump. Donald Trump had a lot more stable ties with Russia than the Biden administration. He has also already indicated on several occasions to end ongoing military conflicts via diplomatic means. This could revitalize Russia’s ties with the US (and the EU/NATO too). India, therefore, could be banking on the same ‘Trump wave’ to deepen its ties with Russia. However, there is a lot more to India’s foreign policy than meets the eye.

At the heart of India’s approach is its strategic autonomy, translating into a policy that seeks to maintain a balance between the opposing blocs. In effect, this is a reinforcement of the Cold War era movement for ‘non-alignment’.

Still, in the contemporary era, India has developed a strong ambition to project itself as a ‘major power’. This ambition has been wetted by the recent resurgence of the global discourse of multipolarity. This narrative matches India’s own policy ambitions. However, it can realize its ambitions only by fully embracing this narrative. It was this specific embrace that unmistakably presented itself during Modi’s Russia visit.

### **New Delhi Embraces Multipolarity**

During the visit, Modi discussed with Russia’s Putin the use of cash payments and the national payment cards to settle bilateral payments. **Russian officials confirmed** that “70% of the trade turnover are already serviced by national currencies”. The ambition is, accordingly, to expand this arrangement even further. Now, this is important – not only

because it facilitates bilateral trade but also because it reinforces a system far away from the reach of the US-led global financial system prone to US sanctions and manipulation. Creating a system that bypasses the US-led financial system and supports an alternative system at the same time is at the heart of a multipolar system.

Modi reinforced the new, alternative, multipolar order also by confirming his participation in the upcoming BRICS summit to be held in Kazan, Russia in October 2024. The agenda of the summit, as announced by Russia's foreign minister in June, is extensive. **To quote Lavrov**, BRICS is “actively working to implement the decisions of the Johannesburg summit last year, particularly when it comes to improving the international monetary and financial system, developing a platform for settlements in national currencies in mutual trade.” In short, India is actively supporting a new system, shaking the foundations of the old system, and behaving in ways that clearly do not conform to the behaviour ‘expected’ from US allies.

### **Why the US is Losing**

A key reason why the US increasingly finds itself unable to shape other state's policies is its inability to a) recognize that the world has already changed enough that its course towards multipolarity cannot be reversed, and b) that states like Russia and China are powerful enough to chart new courses. The US could have prevented this situation from emerging if it had chosen cooperation and healthy competition over confrontation and containment. Out of the 'realist' instinct for self-survival, it chose confrontation as the only possible – and viable – means to restrict the growth of Russia and China to maintain a unipolar, US-centered world order. However, this is already too little and too late.

As it stands, the narrative of multipolarity is no longer confined to Moscow and Beijing. States, including middle powers like India, across the world have embraced it already. The corpus of these states is too large even for the collective West to resist and reverse. As a result, the US-led system is fast returning to the West. This is not to suggest that this system will disappear altogether, but that its capacity to shape politics and the economy will be increasingly confined to the transatlantic region, i.e., the West. Even this possibility is facing challenges from the 'Make America Great Again' narrative of Donald Trump, who does not see 'transatlantic unity' bringing any concrete benefits to the US.

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