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Cooperation of India and Russia in the Arctic: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract. The article examines the factors that have both a restraining and a facilitating effect on the development of cooperation between India and Russia in the Arctic. Attention is paid to the evolution of India's foreign policy shaped by economic, political and diplomatic factors. The current state and prospects of cooperation between India and Russia in the transport sector are considered. Given India's general interest in Arctic resources, it is more beneficial for India to participate not so much in the development of the Northern Sea Route as in the development of the "North–South" transport corridor and the southern sea route "Vladivostok–Chennai". In energy cooperation, India's involvement is limited to participation in the development of the Vankor and Taas-Yuryakh fields. Regarding mineral resources, India is most interested in the extraction and processing of rare-earth metals and diamonds, but these require long-term investment. In the scientific sphere, India is involved in studying the consequences of climate change and other fundamental research; however, the cooperation proposed by the Russian side has not yet been implemented. The main obstacles to India's more active Arctic cooperation with Russia seem to be the long-term reorientation of its economy towards cooperation with the West and pressure from the US.

Keywords: *Arctic, India's policy, international cooperation, India-Russia relations*

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Introduction

The general deterioration in relations between Russia and the West has also impacted Arctic politics. The region has not only lost its status as a "zone of peace and cooperation", but it is also shifting toward confrontation, as evidenced by the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO and the conclusion of defense treaties between the United States and the Nordic countries. A US policy of partial normalization of relations with Russia could help to stabilize the political atmosphere. However, Donald Trump is inconsistent and unpredictable, which makes a shift towards cooperation under the current US administration unlikely.

Non-Arctic states that are interested in resuming cooperation in the Arctic, primarily India and China, could serve as another "stabilizing factor". While China's activity has raised concerns in the West about the creation of an Arctic "axis of evil" represented by a Russia-China alliance, India

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maintains the authority of neutrality inherited from its non-aligned policy. However, the question arises as to how far India is willing to go in cooperating with Russia in the Arctic, given its tradition of neutrality and the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West. Statements have been made regarding India's cooperation with Russia in the Arctic, both bilaterally and within the BRICS framework, but what are the real prospects? So far, there has been no breakthrough in Russian-Indian cooperation in the Arctic.

Factors limiting cooperation

During Soviet times, relations between Russia and India were traditionally characterized by cooperation in many areas. However, despite the lack of direct economic benefits for the USSR, this cooperation was aimed at developing Indian industry and its scientific and technological base. In the 1990s, bilateral cooperation focused primarily on the military-technical sphere, amid the general decline of the Russian economy (Grishin, Galiullin, 2016) and the growth of the Indian economy. In 2000, a strategic partnership agreement was signed, the status of which was elevated to a privileged one. Russia supported India's accession to the SCO and its aspirations for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. However, the evolution of Russian-Indian relations in general, and in the Arctic in particular, is currently influenced by various factors.

These constraints are related to the specifics of India's foreign policy in general, which often have no direct relation to the Arctic. Looking at the overall picture of bilateral relations, there has been a steady growth in trade cooperation between Russia and India. Trade turnover between these countries increased from 6 billion to 66 billion US dollars between 2013 and 2024. In 2024 alone, trade turnover increased by 23.1 billion dollars, demonstrating strong trade growth. An agreement has been reached to increase trade turnover to 100 billion dollars per year by 2030. However, these figures should not be taken too optimistic. To date, this growth has been achieved primarily through India's purchases of oil, LNG, coal, mineral fertilizers, and vegetable oil. India's exports of pharmaceuticals, chemicals, medical equipment, tea, and coffee are growing. Russian exports amount to 61.4 billion dollars, while Indian exports total only 4.2 billion ¹.

Russian experts believe that India's political cooperation with Russia is hampered by the insufficient level of economic ties. India's political elites see a direct correlation between the level of economic cooperation and the strength of political relations (Kupriyanov, Makarevich, 2021). In this regard, one should not place great hopes on the political weight of the traditionally good relations between Russia and India.

In economic terms, India has grounds for deeper cooperation with the US than with Russia. By way of comparison, India and the US plan to increase bilateral trade to 500 billion US dollars a year by 2030, which is five times more than India's planned trade turnover with Russia for the

¹ Prospects for Indian exports to Russia are announced. URL: <https://mskgazeta.ru/ekonomika/nazvany-perspektivy-indijskogo-eksporta-v-rossiyu-14401.html> (accessed 12 October 2025).

same year². During a visit to the US on 13 February 2025, N. Modi and D. Trump reaffirmed the course set under J. Biden towards a strategic partnership between the US and India, implying close military-technical, technological, scientific and trade cooperation³. The United States has already significantly displaced Russia from the Indian arms market, where Russia's position until recently seemed quite strong⁴. This is evidenced, for example, by the establishment on 30 June 2025 of a joint Indian-American venture for the maintenance, repair and modernization of around 100 Russian-made MiG-29 fighter jets⁵.

An equally important constraining factor is the division within the Indian elite, a significant portion of whom prioritize cooperation with European countries and the US (Kortunov, Kulik, Simon et al., 2024), rather than with Russia. Since the 1990s, business cooperation, business needs and the training of specialists have gradually shifted towards Western countries and the US. The split among the elites stems not only from differing views on the significance of the US for India, but also from the process of division between the intellectuals of the "new wave" from the middle castes, who came from the provinces, and traditional elites, brought up under the influence of Western political culture. For various reasons, neither group regards cooperation with Russia as vital for India (Kupriyanov, 2022).

In the strategically vital Indo-Pacific region⁶, India is concerned about containing China, relying on defense cooperation with the United States, while Russia lacks leverage here, according to Indian experts⁷. Moreover, the Indian elites are concerned about the demonstrative rapprochement between Russia and China against the backdrop of confrontation with the United States. At the same time, India seeks to counterbalance China in the Indo-Pacific region, which is only possible by relying on US assistance⁸. D. Trump and N. Modi share the conviction that China is their main strategic rival, so both leaders focus on mutual support (Khurshid, 2023). It can be noted that J. Biden, despite all his differences with D. Trump, also adhered to an anti-Chinese policy.

It is significant that, ahead of his visit to the US in February 2025, N. Modi agreed to reduce import tariffs on American goods in the hopes of securing Donald Trump's trust before the talks.

² Kochegurov D. Meeting between D. Trump and N. Modi: a pragmatic and promising start. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/vstrecha-d-trampa-i-n-modi-pragmatichnyy-i-mnogoobeshchayushchiy-start/> (accessed 15 October 2025).

³ United States — India joint leaders' statement. February 13, 2025. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/united-states-india-joint-leaders-statement/> (accessed 05 August 2025).

⁴ Parachini J., Mishra V. Boosting U.S.-India private sector defense industrial cooperation. URL: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/boosting-us-india-private-sector-defence-industrial-cooperation-101736749653831.html> (accessed 03 September 2025).

⁵ US — India joint venture to modernize over 100 MIG-29 fighter jets in landmark defense agreement. URL: <https://www.indiandefensenews.in/2025/07/us-india-joint-venture-to-modernise.html> (accessed 10 September 2025).

⁶ The Russian Foreign Ministry considers the term "Indo-Pacific region" to be incorrect, but it is used in the article because it is applied by the Indian Foreign Ministry and the US State Department, and is also contained in the doctrinal documents of these countries.

⁷ Varma V., Sibal K., Mukherjee A. India and Russia: new geostrategic environment requires new relationships. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/indiya-i-rossiya/> (accessed 10 September 2025).

⁸ Smith J. Strategic Autonomy and U.S.-Indian Relations. URL: <https://www.heritage.org/china/commentary/strategic-autonomy-and-us-indian-relations> (accessed 11 October 2025).

The leaders agreed to increase cooperation in nuclear energy, space exploration, American oil supplies, American arms sales, technological cooperation, and the joint production of military products.

This position is confirmed in practice, as despite its official neutrality on the Ukrainian crisis, India's desire to move closer to the United States forces it to take into account the anti-Russian sanctions imposed by the West. Indian companies do not want to be subject to secondary sanctions due to their cooperation with Russia in the Arctic, and all cooperation projects proposed to India by the American side envisage the curtailment of projects with Russia. At the same time, Narendra Modi's inner circle believes that rapprochement with the United States does not mean subordination, but rather contributes to strengthening India's "strategic autonomy", which is understood as independence in decision-making and a focus on national interests. It is considered undesirable to make India's interests dependent on the policies of great powers or on membership in organizations (Kupriyanov, 2022).

However, other facts suggest that this is not a matter of "strategic autonomy", but rather that India's political leadership does not want to have problems with the United States, given its global influence. Even before Modi's concessions to the Trump administration in 2025 (made under threat of sanctions), as far back as 2009, under US pressure, India abandoned the construction of a pipeline from Iran through Pakistan. Experts believe that US pressure continues to hinder India's active participation in the Northern Transport Corridor project (Khan, Omidi, Alkan, 2024).

On the other hand, striving for "strategic autonomy", national elites are driven by India's growing global influence and the belief that the West is no less interested in cooperating with India (for example, the United States is interested in countering China), making its foreign policy more independent, confident, and assertive (Velichkin, 2024). This trend is reflected in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Self-Reliant India" and "Make in India" doctrines. Proponents of this viewpoint believe that India's rapprochement with the United States will not be deep and will not reach the level of a strategic partnership. They point to the mutual mistrust between the two countries, which is unlikely to be overcome quickly. If the United States is dissatisfied with India's cooperation with Russia, which runs counter to Western sanctions and Russia's isolation in the Arctic, then India doubts the United States' reliability in the fight against China and Pakistan. A significant event was the rapid US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, where it left its allies to fend for themselves (Abraham, Purushothaman, 2024). Against this backdrop, relations between India and Russia are characterized by trust and mutual respect, which have stood the test of time.

India's cooperation with Russia is constrained by the principle of equidistance in Indian foreign policy, which has replaced the principle of non-alignment. India's desire to cooperate simultaneously with the US, Russia and China could create a difficult situation for maneuver in case of escalation of contradictions along the US-Russia and US-China axes. For example, the US Department of Defense's Arctic Strategy, published in July 2024, identifies China and Russia as sources of military threats (Konyshhev, Sergunin, 2024). In public speeches, Donald Trump supports this rheto-

ric, claiming that the United States should acquire Greenland to “protect itself” from Russia and China⁹. Despite his friendly attitude toward Russia, N. Modi will be forced to take into account the priorities of US policy in the Arctic. In any case, experience shows that deterioration in relations with the US pushes Russia towards closer ties with the PRC; in response, India will inevitably gravitate towards the US to counter the PRC.

It is also important to keep in mind that the US administration will not take into account the principle of India’s equidistance, rigidly imposing its own viewpoint. In November 2024, the United States added 19 Indian private companies to its sanctions list for cooperating with Russia. In August 2025, it imposed 25% import duties on India for its purchases of Russian oil, which were added to the 25% duties previously imposed to address the trade deficit. Experts at the Arctic Institute (USA) believe that India will not be able to counter the US as China did, as it lacks comparable economic leverage and access to critical resources¹⁰. This will also push India to seek compromises with the US.

China’s increased activity in the Russian Arctic is also a cause for concern in India, which emphasizes that international cooperation in the Arctic should be multilateral in nature. In this regard, Indian experts point to the rapid pace of bilateral cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic as a negative trend and a strategic challenge for India¹¹ (Kupriyanov, Makarevich, 2021). Experts perceive the challenge in the fact that Russia could become China’s “junior partner”, with China remaining a key strategic rival for India, despite all efforts to normalize bilateral relations (Kapoor, 2024).

Factors facilitating cooperation

India’s growing interest in the Russian Arctic is linked to emerging opportunities for the development of its resources, the use of transport routes, and the need to address global challenges, attracting geographically remote countries to the Far North. For India, it is important that Arctic resources are located in a region that is more stable than the Middle East and Africa, where a significant portion of energy and other resources are imported. As in Russia, interest in the Arctic has deep roots in Indian culture and mythology (Zaikov, Bhagwat, 2022). While Russia began developing the Arctic around the 11th–12th centuries, India’s first step into the Arctic was related to the signing of the Spitsbergen Treaty in 1920.

The prospects for Russian-Indian cooperation are shaped by the similar approaches to Arctic policy. For Russia, the Arctic is a key resource base for the foreseeable future, which should be developed in accordance with sustainable development principles. India takes a similar stance,

⁹ Trump Says US Needs Greenland For International Security. URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/trump-says-us-needs-greenland-for-international-security-8035251> (accessed 10 September 2025).

¹⁰ Khorrami N., Osthagen A. India in the Arctic: Advancing a Path for Strategic Autonomy Beyond Russia. URL: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/india-arctic-advancing-path-strategic-autonomy-beyond-russia/> (accessed 13 September 2025).

¹¹ Bisen A. BRICS, Russia and the Arctic: India’s opinion. VIF Brief, February 2024. New Delhi: Vivekananda International foundation, 2024. URL: <https://www.vifindia.org/print/12460> (accessed 13 April 2025).

expressing interest in Arctic resources due to its rapid pace of domestic economic and technological development, increasing energy consumption, and population growth. India's Arctic strategy emphasizes that all activities in the Arctic should comply with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Russia and India are equally committed to the principle of multilateral international cooperation in the Arctic, built on a mutually beneficial basis. As in Russia, it is believed in India that global issues relating to the Arctic objectively stimulate international cooperation (Sharma, 2021).

A distinctive feature of India's Arctic policy is that, until recently, it was largely focused on scientific research. After the adoption of the Arctic Strategy in 2022, it began to reorient itself towards strategic and economic interests, international cooperation, acquiring the necessary capabilities, and creating the political, legal and institutional conditions for a presence in the Arctic¹². The formation of mechanisms for bilateral cooperation with Russia in the Arctic began.

In 2023, an agreement was reached to establish a joint Russian-Indian working group on cooperation on the Northern Sea Route. In July 2024, the Program for Russian-Indian Cooperation in Trade, Economic, and Investment in the Russian Far East and the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation, covering the period 2024–2029, was signed. It provides for the expansion of areas of cooperation, an increase in the supply of refined products, and the development of transport corridors, including the Northern Sea Route¹³. This policy is consistent with India's desire to diversify its economic relations, avoiding dependence even on neighboring countries. Prospects for India-Russia cooperation in the Arctic are linked to several areas.

Indian experts also view the prospect of a mutual naval presence in strategically important regions as a factor in strengthening the India-Russia partnership in the Arctic. Just as strategic stability in the Arctic Ocean is important to Moscow, stability in the Indian Ocean is important to Delhi. Interest in Russia's naval presence in the Indian Ocean is seen as a deterrent against China. In turn, India's military presence in the Arctic seas is viewed as part of its policy of mediation between the West and Russia and as a counterbalance to the excessive expansion of China's influence in the Arctic¹⁴.

These factors have a multifaceted impact on Russian-Indian cooperation in the Arctic, which, despite its complexities, has significant potential for development in many areas.

Transport cooperation

For various reasons, including sanctions policies, traditional supply chains in international trade are being disrupted, leading to rising shipping costs. In this context, the development of new routes is a priority for India, including via the Northern Sea Route (which, from 2025, has been considered part of

¹² Suryanarayanan K. Third pole's view on the North Pole — India's Arctic policy. URL: <https://polarconnection.org/third-pole-india-arctic-policy/> (accessed 20 October 2025).

¹³ Joint Statement on the Results of the XXII Russian-Indian Annual Summit "Russia-India: A Strong and Expanding Partnership". URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/6168> (accessed 12 September 2025).

¹⁴ Wahden L. The West should encourage India to become Russia's Arctic alternative to China. URL: <https://www.arctictoday.com/the-west-should-encourage-india-to-become-russias-arctic-alternative-to-china/> (accessed 11 October 2025).

the Trans-Arctic Transport Corridor, running from Murmansk to Vladivostok). Indian companies are exploring opportunities for the transport of LNG, oil, coking coal and ore. The prospects for container transport are also being considered, despite a number of constraints: irregular navigation due to seasonal and weather conditions; the unsuitability of conventional container ships for the Arctic; low navigation speeds; the Northern Sea Route's national rather than international status; relatively low demand for container transport on this route (Chawla, 2023).

In order to accelerate the development of bilateral cooperation in the Arctic, it is planned to create a joint working body to coordinate the actions of Russia and India at the intergovernmental level (similar to the one previously established by Russia and China). India has expressed its willingness to participate in the development of infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route, including seaports, airports, railways, and information and telecommunications projects ¹⁵.

However, to ensure its presence in the Russian Arctic, India needs to have ice-class vessels. Joint projects with Russia in this area are beneficial for India, which has committed to supporting its domestic shipbuilding industry. Russia benefits from India's production capacity, which allows for rapid vessel construction; besides, loans in India are cheaper than in Russia ¹⁶. The first steps have been taken: Russia has ordered four non-nuclear icebreakers for year-round use along the Northern Sea Route. The contract is valued at 68 billion rubles. Although Indian shipyards lack expertise in icebreaker construction, Russian experts believe that the high quality of their products will ensure the successful fulfilment of the order ¹⁷.

However, due to its geographical location, India views cooperation with Russia on the Northern Sea Route only in conjunction with two other transport corridors. The first, the eastern corridor "Vladivostok – Chennai", serves as a natural extension of the Northern Sea Route for India. The second, the multimodal northern corridor "St. Petersburg – Mumbai", will be extended in future to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. For Russia, this transformation is beneficial because it will increase cargo traffic along the Northern Sea Route.

For India, the northern corridor shortens the delivery of goods to Northern Europe, allows for the receipt of goods from the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, and serves as an alternative to the Chinese "Belt and Road" initiative (Khan, Omid, Alkan, 2024). Furthermore, the northern corridor will provide additional benefits if significant cargo flows from India continue via the Trans-Arctic Transport Corridor, rather than through the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal. This trend is driven by increased security risks in the Red Sea.

¹⁵ Russia and India are ready to cooperate on developing maritime transport along the Northern Sea Route. URL: <https://portnews.ru/news/365206/> (accessed 25 October 2025).

¹⁶ Sergeev K. Indian shipbuilding – for Russia and beyond. URL: https://www.korabel.ru/news/comments/sudostroenie_indii_-_dlya_rossii_i_ne_tolk.html (accessed 20 September 2025).

¹⁷ Indo-Russian Arctic Collaboration to Guarantee Affordable, Stable Energy. URL: <https://sputniknews.in/20241113/indo-russian-arctic-collaboration-to-guarantee-affordable-stable-energy-8393281.html>; Rosatom ordered four non-nuclear icebreakers from India for 68 billion rubles. URL: <https://morvesti.ru/news/1679/111962/> (accessed 15 September 2025).

Since the “St. Petersburg – Mumbai” northern corridor has three branches leading to the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia, it will become the main transport route for Eurasia in the future. According to expert estimates, by 2040, the volume of transported goods (food, timber, pulp, ferrous metals, oil and petroleum products, coal) could reach 60–75 million tons¹⁸.

Obstacles to the implementation of this project include US sanctions against Iran, the shallow waters of Russia’s Caspian ports and the lack of a unified electronic document management system. US pressure is hindering India’s active participation in the project; nevertheless, in 2024, an agreement was concluded with Iran to transfer the management of the Chabahar port, which has access to the Indian Ocean, for a period of ten years¹⁹. However, the most important aspect of the northern corridor is the creation of a single multimodal operator capable of resolving all emerging issues along the entire transport corridor²⁰.

Nevertheless, some Indian experts take a more pessimistic view of the importance of the Trans-Arctic Transport Corridor for India. According to them, the Indian Ocean is much more strategically and economically important, more than half of global container and petroleum product shipments passed through it before the situation in the Red Sea deteriorated. Furthermore, the interests of the US and China intersect in the Indian Ocean, and cooperation with the US would allow India to counterbalance China while simultaneously strengthening its geopolitical influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Bhagwat, Bisen, 2024). In particular, this refers to the possibility of blocking Chinese maritime shipping. However, close cooperation between Russia and China on the Northern Sea Route reduces the effectiveness of the containment policy due to China’s diversification of maritime transport (Kortunov, Kulik, Symon et al., 2024). Following this logic, the eastern “Vladivostok – Chennai” route and the northern “St. Petersburg – Mumbai” route are far more important for India²¹.

The further development of cross-polar air routes from Asia to North America via Russian territory offers favorable prospects for Russian-Indian cooperation. It is estimated that these routes can reduce flight costs by up to 25%. In 2019, 19,968 flights were operated, but their number subsequently declined due to the start of the special military operation. However, countries friendly to Russia continue to actively use cross-polar routes, including the Indian airline Air India Limited (Sergunin, 2024). Within Russia, airports in Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk and Yakutsk,

¹⁸ Russia and BRICS are building the logistics of the future. An international transport corridor from the Baltic to the Indian Ocean: figures, maps, and forecasts. URL: <https://1520international.com/content/2024/iyul-2024/the-north-south-corridor-how-russia-and-the-brics-are-shaping-eurasia-s-global-logistics/> (accessed 28 October 2025).

¹⁹ Tehran and New Delhi shook hands at the port of Chabahar. URL: https://logirus.ru/news/infrastructure/tegeran_i_nyu-deli_pozhali_drug_drugu_ruki_v_portu_chabakhar.html (accessed 10 September 2025).

²⁰ Kamalakaran A. Astrakhan is India’s gateway to Russia. URL: <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/astrakhan-indias-gateway-russia/>; Cargo needs a unified digital platform. URL: <https://gudok.ru/content/freighttrans/1631880/> (accessed 10 September 2025).

²¹ Singh M. India in the Arctic: legal framework and sustainable approach. URL: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/india-arctic-legal-framework-sustainable-approach/> (accessed 11 September 2025).

which have runways over 3,000 m long, are used for cross-polar routes. They are capable of handling Boeing 747-8, Airbus A350 and other wide-body aircraft ²².

Energy cooperation

Another area of cooperation is related to the extraction and supply of oil and gas. This is particularly relevant for India due to its increasing energy consumption and simultaneous plans to reduce coal use. Demand for oil and gas is expected to double by 2040 (Bhagwat, 202). By 2023, India was importing up to 38% of its oil from Russia, following its practice of diversifying its energy sources ²³. Russia and India have adopted a mutually beneficial approach by concluding long-term (10 or 20 years) energy supply agreements. The main partners of Indian companies in energy supply are Rosneft, Gazprom, and Novatek. On the Indian side, partners include Essar Group, Indian Oil Corporation Limited, Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation, and Petronet LNG Limited.

However, under threat of US sanctions, Indian state-owned companies refused to accept tankers carrying Russian oil during the period from November 2023 to February 2024, and they were redirected to China. This was despite the fact that the significant discounts offered by Russia had a positive impact on the Indian economy and helped the ruling party win the 2024 elections. In August 2025, Donald Trump announced additional tariffs of 25% on Indian goods for the purchase of Russian oil (the combined tariffs reached 50%). Bilateral relations were at one of their lowest points in history, as Indian expert P. Mehta noted. However, this crisis is linked to Donald Trump's personal style, as he publicly forced N. Modi to choose between compromising and losing face, or allowing relations to deteriorate ²⁴. This situation is not in the long-term interests of either India or the US, but for India it threatens a 40–45% reduction in exports to the US in 2025–2026 ²⁵. A compromise will likely be found over time.

It should not be forgotten that the position of India's leading think tanks is also contributing to a general policy shift toward the West. In particular, the Observer Research Foundation and Carnegie, which have strong ties to Western think tanks, support a policy of defeating Russia in the conflict with Ukraine. Within government circles and public opinion, these think tanks are reinforcing the view that it is more advantageous for India to cooperate with the West than with Russia, and that India can count on US support in case of escalation in relations with China (Bhagwat, Rogachev, 2025).

Despite all the fluctuations in the oil procurement market, India continues to participate in the development of the Vankor (Krasnoyarsk Krai) and Taas-Yuryakh (Yakutia) fields. At the Vankor

²² Air Shipping Routes. URL: <https://arcticportal.org/shipping-portlet/aviation/air-shipping-routes> (accessed 10 September 2025).

²³ Wahden L. The West should encourage India to become Russia's Arctic alternative to China. URL: <https://www.arctictoday.com/the-west-should-encourage-india-to-become-russias-arctic-alternative-to-china/> (accessed 12 September 2025).

²⁴ Guardian: Trump's sanctions threats have undermined India's trust in the US. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/24705839> (accessed 08 September 2025).

²⁵ Leaders of countries whose soldiers recently fought hand-to-hand can now shake hands. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7990671> (accessed 13 September 2025).

field, ONGC Videsh and a consortium including Oil India, Indian Oil Corp., and Bharat Petroresources collectively hold a 49.9% stake. Environmentally friendly technologies are used here: almost all associated gas is utilized, and drill cuttings are processed into construction material.

As part of the project, the Sever Bay oil terminal is under construction, which will enable oil to be transported via the Northern Sea Route. Total reserves of premium oil amount to 6.6 billion tons. In addition, the aforementioned consortium acquired a 29.9% stake in Taas-Yuryakh Neftegazodobycha. High-tech and environmentally friendly oil production technologies are also used here. Total gas reserves are estimated at 190 billion m³, as well as 169 million tons of oil and gas condensate (Veselova, 2024).

Opportunities have opened up for the development of bilateral cooperation on the exploration of deposits and the extraction of mineral resources onshore and offshore. For example, according to estimates by Russian experts, in the first half of the 21st century, the Kara and Barents Sea basins will be the main sources of energy resources, the volume of which is estimated at 80 trillion m³ (Astafiev, Tolstikov, Naumova et al., 2018). According to a statement by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov, India could become the first non-Arctic state to extract resources in the Arctic ²⁶.

Cooperation with Russia in the Arctic also offers broader prospects for India's energy strategy. In the long term, this cooperation, combined with transport corridor projects, will provide access to the "arc" along the following line: Persian Gulf – Caspian Sea – Central Asia – Siberia – eastern Russian Arctic and Far East – Alaska – Canada. It is estimated that up to 80% of the world's oil and gas reserves are concentrated in this "arc", which will enable India to reduce its dependence on energy supplies from the Persian Gulf. In the long term, the role of Central Asian countries will grow, where India will compete with China's "Belt and Road" initiative, as well as the interests of the US and Russia. However, Indian experts believe that the main players will be the US and China, while India and Russia will have to find their place in this complex geopolitical landscape. Kazakhstan will be India's priority partner due to its proximity to the northern corridor and its large oil and gas reserves (Khan, Omid, Alkan, 2024).

Exploration and development of mineral deposits

The development of high technology in India requires access to a variety of mineral resources. One of the most promising areas of cooperation with Russia relates to diamond mining. This takes place in the Arkhangelsk Oblast and in Yakutia, which accounts for 82% of diamond production. The most promising project among the 12 known diamond-bearing areas in Yakutia is the development of the Popigai impact diamond deposit. This area is unique as its diamond reserves exceed the combined reserves of all known diamond deposits in the world ²⁷.

²⁶ The Russian Foreign Minister spoke about India's potential for resource extraction in the Arctic. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/691188> (accessed 20 August 2025).

²⁷ In Yakutia and Arkhangelsk: where diamonds are mined. URL: <https://arctic-russia.ru/article/ne-tolko-gaz-zoloto-almaz-i-metally-v-arktike/> (accessed 12 September 2025).

One of the world's largest rare earth metal deposits, the Tomtorskoe deposit (Yakutia), is estimated to contain 154 million tons of ore with a high oxide content of approximately 10 rare earth metals. Russia's interest stems from the fact that, while it holds the second-largest rare earth metal reserves in the world, it is one of the last in terms of their production. The importance of developing the deposit is demonstrated by its inclusion in the state program "Development of Industry and Improving its Competitiveness". Russia will require both investment and technology, which India can provide. India, in turn, also needs rare earth metals to develop its own high technologies²⁸.

According to Russian experts, the development of these two deposits could create a large industrial region similar to Norilsk. The two units of the nuclear power station in Khatanga (55 MW each) are capable of supplying energy²⁹. India's interest is not only in accessing raw materials, but also in counterbalancing China's monopoly, which accounts for 50% of reserves and 95% of global production of rare-earth metals³⁰.

There are numerous other resource-rich deposits in the Arctic region of the Russian Federation; however, significant constraints for India include the need for long-term investment, doubts regarding the profitability of resource extraction and delivery, and environmental risks posed by economic activity in the Arctic.

Scientific cooperation

In the Arctic, India is interested in studying atmospheric phenomena, the dynamics of ice and permafrost melt; the mechanisms and consequences of climate change; ocean biochemistry; and Arctic ecosystems and biodiversity. To support Arctic navigation and communication, Indian scientists have accumulated experience gained in Antarctica in areas such as collecting hydrographic and oceanographic data, mapping the Antarctic seabed (with the participation of Russian scientists), developing navigational safety equipment, and providing satellite communications and surveillance (Verma, Kumar, 2023). India also planned either to purchase an ice-class research vessel or to build one in collaboration with other states, but these plans were never realized.

The Indian Arctic research is led by the Ministry of Geosciences, the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research, and the National Institute of Ocean Technology. At the national level, Arctic affairs are also overseen by the inter-ministerial Task Force on Arctic Policy, headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences. The group's work is coordinated by the National Security Council of India. The group comprises representatives from several ministries and meets

²⁸ Wahden L. The West should encourage India to become Russia's Arctic alternative to China. URL: <https://www.arctictoday.com/the-west-should-encourage-india-to-become-russias-arctic-alternative-to-china/> (accessed 12 September 2025).

²⁹ Development of rare earth deposits will create a new industrial region in the Arctic. URL: <https://arctic-russia.ru/news/razrabotka-mestorozhdeniy-redkozemov-pozvolit-sozdat-novyy-promyshlennyy-rayon-v-arktike/> (accessed 10 October 2025).

³⁰ Tomtorskoe deposit. URL: <https://arctic-russia.ru/project/tomtorskoe-mestorozhdenie/> (accessed 10 October 2025).

every six months³¹. In total, more than 25 scientific institutions in India are engaged in Arctic research³².

Based on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change³³, India is proposing a research model that links the climate processes of the three poles: the Arctic, the Antarctic, and the Himalayas. According to Indian scientists, climate fluctuations in the Arctic cause monsoon instability in India and a decline in agricultural yields. The connection between Arctic warming and melting ice in the Himalayas is less clear, but overall, these are key topics for India (Bhagwat, Bisen, 2024). Melting ice in the Himalayas could also lead to the introduction of pathogens into rivers and the risk of epidemics, as animals and humans lack immunity.

The prospect of cooperation on climate change is also linked to the fact that falling groundwater levels are leading to a shortage of water for irrigated agriculture. Indian experts are considering the option of expanding the geographical area of agricultural production through cooperation with Russia, where 10–20% of Arctic territories could become suitable for agriculture (Suhag, 2022). The melting of Arctic ice is accompanied by a rise in global sea levels, which threatens to flood 1,300 Indian island territories in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

Currently, Indian scientists have experience of cooperation on climate change issues at the Himadri station on Spitsbergen, which operates 180 days a year with Norwegian support, as well as with South Korean and Canadian partners. Indian scientists are planning to conduct an oceanographic expedition to the Greenland Sea. Joint research with Russia is currently being discussed, either on a bilateral basis or within the framework of BRICS Arctic research.

For its part, Russia is offering India the broadest possible scientific cooperation in the Arctic on the study of climate change. In 2017, the St. Petersburg Declaration expressed the intention to launch projects to study and develop Arctic resources. In 2024, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Russian Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute and the Indian National Centre for Polar and Oceanic Research, and a year later, Indian scientists received an invitation to participate in research on the year-round ice-resistant platform “North Pole”, equipped with the latest technologies³⁴. In 2023, Russia invited India and other BRICS members to establish an international scientific station on Spitsbergen. The existing Russian research center on the Spitsbergen archipelago, where 13 Russian organizations operate, the Cape Baranov station on Severnaya Zemlya and other research facilities have been opened up for cooperation with India.

³¹ Government of India, Ministry of Earth Sciences. Rajyasabha unstarred question no.29, answered 20/07/2023. URL: https://sansad.in/getFile/annex/260/AU29.pdf?source=pqars#:~:text=The%20EAPG%20is%20headed%20by,**** (accessed 12 April 2025).

³² Verma K. India's Emerging Role in Polar Diplomacy. URL: https://icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=10899&lid=6924 (accessed 11 September 2025).

³³ Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. URL: <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/> (accessed 16 October 2025).

³⁴ India and Russia are discussing a joint Arctic project comparable in significance to the ISS. URL: https://nauka.tass.ru/nauka/20677679?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com (accessed 10 October 2025).

However, the Indian side did not take advantage of the opportunities that arose, but instead actively developed scientific cooperation with the US, Norway and Canada (Bhagwat, Rogachev, 2025). The passivity of the Indian side in Arctic cooperation with Russia can be explained by pressure from the US, the strong position of the pro-Western segment of the Indian elite, and the relatively low level of funding for Arctic research (five times less than for Antarctic research).

Conclusion

India's cooperation with Russia in the Arctic has attained some success and has good potential for the future, but in recent years it has virtually "stagnated". The slow development of cooperation depends on a complex set of conflicting political and economic factors influencing India's foreign policy. The long-term reorientation of India's economic and technological development to the West, which began in the 1990s, played a crucial role. Donald Trump's political escapades undoubtedly complicate bilateral relations, but they do not negate the pro-Western trend among India's elites or the policy to contain China, which consolidates the US and India in the long term.

With increasing polarization between the US on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other, India will face difficult choices if it continues to adhere to a policy of equal distancing and maneuvering. This has a direct impact on India's cooperation with Russia in the Arctic, which, according to the latest US doctrinal documents, is considered a zone of confrontation between the collective West and the Russian-Chinese bloc. For India, deepening cooperation with Russia brings risks for its relations with the United States, which will seriously hinder the initiative of the Indian leadership. Abandoning cheap Russian oil, which is necessary for economic growth, is not in India's interests, nor is abandoning other areas of cooperation. But deterioration in relations with the US is even less desirable.

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