

SSIS Dialogue

Russia and the Contemporary World Order

27 October 2018

OBJECTIVES

The day-long symposium titled 'Russia and the Contemporary World Order' is part of the SSIS Dialogues. The symposium aims to develop a deeper understanding of Russia in the context of recent developments in the political, social, economic and security spheres. More specifically, the objective of the event is to introduce the audience to Russia's internal political framework, Russian foreign policy and its implications for the world order. The symposium will also endeavour to throw light on the changing nature of India-Russia relations.

RESOURCE PERSONS

Amb. P.S. Raghavan,
Convenor of India's National Security Advisory Board and
Former Indian Ambassador to Russia

Prof. Sanjay Pandey
Director,
Russian and Central Asian Area Studies Programme,
School of International Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Dr. Sanjay Deshpande
Director, Centre for Central Eurasian Studies,
University of Mumbai

Dr. Ankur Yadav
Teaching Associate, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies,
Savitribai Phule Pune University

FORMAT

Each session will have two to three speakers who will present their views. This will be followed by a Q & A session.

BACKGROUND

Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Central Asia constitute a large and populous part of the Asian continent, with each having a long history and rich civilizational heritage. This region has witnessed the great degree of trade and cultural interflow since ancient times. The Soviet Union played a very decisive role in shaping the global politics of the 20th Century. However, with the collapse of Soviet Union, people started to lose interest in its successor Russia and very few academicians concentrated on the working of the country. Current President of Russia, Vladimir Putin is instrumental in shaping Russia's re-emergence as an important global power. The resurgence of Russia under the Putin administration has attracted the attention of 'Russia watchers' in the United States and Europe. In

this context, it is imperative for us to understand Russia's internal and external dynamics. We need to know more about political structure, processes and social forces working in Russia. The appearance of Russia in Indian discourse has declined, particularly after the Soviet disintegration. Thus, it is of vital importance to develop a deeper and broader multi-dimensional understanding of Russia and its engagement with the region and the world, particularly amongst the younger generation.

Session Plan:

Session I: Understanding the Domestic Drivers of Russian Foreign Policy

The aim of a country's foreign policy is to realise the domestic and international objectives. Formulation of foreign policy involves inputs from different stakeholders, where domestic politics also play an important role. Russia is no exception. Some factors that influence foreign policy include the leader's personality and cognition and international and domestic interest groups. The symposium aims to unveil Russia, to understand the conceptualization of the Russian foreign policy in both a historical and modern context. Putin was able to establish the top-down nature of the political process and concentrate power in the Kremlin. The session traces the political framework of the United Russia Party, the Russian constitution, followed by deciphering Russia's quest for regional and global leadership by taking into account Russia's Parliamentary and Presidential Elections. The session also tries to throw light on the role of media under the Putin's presidency.

Session II: The rise of Eurasia

Eurasia is the largest landmass on Earth and region is also home to many great human civilizations. With the fall of the Berlin wall and the opening of China, the Eurasian landmass is once again emerging as a vital geopolitical entity. The re-emergence of Eurasia as a contiguous and coherent landmass may play an important role in an emerging new world order. Both China and Russia are already thinking through Eurasian terms – China through its "Belt and Road" initiative and Russia through Eurasian Economic Union. The European Union (EU) has yet to release a coherent policy document about the idea of Eurasia. The session explores the idea of re-emergence of Eurasia and highlights the evolving geopolitical developments in the region.

Session III: Russia's Pivot to Asia

History reminds us that Russia has always had close relations with Asia and played a vital role in the geopolitical setting of the region. Both political and economic interests motivate Russia's pivot to Asia in the last few years. Russia has enjoyed a very symbiotic relationship with all the Central Asian Republics, which emerged on the world stage after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, although the shift is not progressing as quickly as the Russian administration want and occasionally encounters difficulties; the process has begun. This panel shall discuss Russia's opportunity to project itself as a prominent player in Asia. Russia's engagements with the Central Asian countries, its role as the 'security provider', its cultural influence and strategic pivot, shall be discussed in detail. India and Russia have had a unique relationship which resonates with the common people, the 21st Century has seen a new dynamic emerge in this bilateral relationship. In the first week of October, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited India and participated in the 19th bilateral summit-level

meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi; the panel will deliberate on the outcomes of the recently concluded summit between Putin and Modi, also delving into Russia's relationship with China.

Session IV: Russia and the West

This session will discuss Russia's Foreign Policy vis-a-vis the larger world, specifically with the West. Russia's newly approved foreign policy concept note talks about strengthening the country's position as a major centre of influence in the modern world. Last year, the RT television network received additional funds for the creation, development, maintenance, and distribution of its channel in French. The Russian government has also cited the spread of European propaganda against the country. Moscow wants to propagate its views, particularly on the Ukrainian and Syrian crises. Russia views Germany, France, and Italy as their main partners in Europe., these countries were those most affected by the mutual sanctions regime. There is reciprocity from several European leaders as well. Many European politicians are also talking about building relations with the Kremlin.

On the other hand, few leaders in Europe are of the view that Russia is supporting the spectre of populist nationalism. Today, Europe's political stability, social cohesion, economic prosperity, and security are threatened, and Russia is a major factor behind continents instability. Some European countries have demanded that NATO draft a contingency plan and hold military exercises to rehearse for a possible war. The panel attempts to explain unease in the relationship between Russia and Europe.

The bilateral relations between Russia and the United States (US) are of paramount importance for the global politics. Russia looks at Asia with a hope to counter the US. Russia's growing closeness with Pakistan is indicative of its keenness to enter into a geopolitical game of Afghanistan and occupy the vacuum created by America's exit from the country. In the recent past, Russia had invited all the regional players interested in Afghanistan as well as sent positive signals to the Taliban for talks. The Trump administration is not very positive about Russian involvement in Afghan affairs and has come up with a new policy for Afghanistan. Besides that, due to the alleged Russian involvement in the US Presidential elections of 2017, the relationship with the Putin administration has become a thorny issue in US domestic politics.

In this context, the session will try to cover the changing geopolitics in Afghanistan post-2014 and its implications for the US–Russia relations. The panellists will also attempt to decipher the alleged Russian involvement in the US presidential elections.
