

India's RCEP Refusal, Russia's Eurasian Vision, and Next Week's BRICS Summit

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Global Research, November 06, 2019

Theme: [History](#)

India's refusal to join the RCEP mega-bloc endangers the viability of Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership supercontinental integration vision, which not even next week's BRICS Summit might be able to save after Modi crossed the Rubicon of self-imposed regional economic isolation and thus imposed very clear limits on just how much Moscow's ambitious plans can realistically achieve, unless Russia decides to compensate for India's lack of participation in regional economic integration processes by replacing it with Pakistan.

India's RCEP Refusal Rocks Eurasia

[Eurasia was rocked by a geopolitical earthquake](#) after India refused to join the RCEP mega-bloc at the very last minute following seven years of negotiations that were supposed to successfully conclude earlier this week, which finally put to rest the long-running speculation about whether or not it's been groomed by the US this entire time to spoil the process of Eurasian integration at its most pivotal moment. There should be no doubt at this point that India has been co-opted by the US [in a Kissingerian fashion](#) to turn it against China in the [New Cold War](#) in a similar manner as the US did with China vis-a-vis the USSR in the Old Cold War through the skillful exploitation of the preexisting security dilemmas between them, meaning that the nascent Sino-Indo split will probably end up being just as an impactful of a geopolitical force as the Sino-Soviet one was. This has enormous implications for Russia's dual grand strategic visions of building the [Greater Eurasian Partnership](#) and then ["balancing" between its Chinese and Indian pillars](#) in order to indefinitely stabilize this supercontinental integration structure that was planned to bring together its Eurasian Union (EAU), China's [Belt & Road Initiative](#) (BRI), ASEAN, the SCO, and possibly even one day the EU and other members as well.

The Sino-Indo Split: Economic Dimensions

[Next week's BRICS Summit in Brazil](#) will probably fail to make any progress in fixing the rapidly developing Sino-Indo split despite whatever predictable photo-ops might emerge from that mostly symbolic event. It's the height of taboo to talk about in the [Alt-Media Community](#) and even the more formal think tank one, but the fact of the matter is that China and India's many differences with one another appear to be irreconcilable. Although China is India's second-largest trading partner, New Delhi regularly complains about not having what it believes is fair market access to the People's Republic that would help balance the enormous trade deficit between the two. On top of that, India has been [reluctant to enter](#) into strategic technical cooperation with China by delaying its decision on Huawei's bid to construct the country's future telecommunications network. India and China do indeed cooperate on some international financial matters such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS Bank, but Indian voices have expressed

concern in the past that these two are dominated by China, hence why their country doesn't contribute more than it already is.

The Sino-Indo Split: Military Dimensions

Their competition is even more acute when one considers the military dimension of their security dilemma after the [2017 Donglang/"Doklam" Drama](#). China is [adamantly opposed to India's de-facto annexation of Kashmir](#) because it believes that it infringes on its territorial integrity seeing as how Beijing administers the region of [Aksai Chin](#), to say nothing of New Delhi blatantly violating international law with impunity in a similar manner as its new American patron has been known to do as well. South Tibet, which India administers as "Arunachal Pradesh", is another bone of territorial contention between the two too, and it doesn't help any that the Indian military has recently been [conducting drills](#) in these two disputed regions over the years as well. Even more disturbing, India signed several so-called "foundational agreements" with the US including [logistics](#) and [communications](#) pacts to improve its military "interoperability" with American forces, and it's also envisaged as one of the two anchors of the Pentagon's "[Indo-Pacific](#)" strategy for "[containing](#)" China. Taken together, no amount of friendly photos, humble handshakes, or annual meetings between their leaders will change the economic and military dimensions of the ever-growing security dilemma between China and India.

Moscow's Dilemma

Russia, for its part, has sought to "balance" between its two nominal BRICS and SCO partners, though it has in recent months leaned a lot closer towards India following the announcement that they're now "[global partners](#)", the establishment of the [Vladivostok-Chennai Maritime Corridor](#) (VCMC) between them, and the [planned signing of a military logistics pact](#) similar to the one that India has with the US, all of which is occurring against a backdrop of Russia [procrastinating on making any tangible progress](#) fulfilling President Putin's [publicly professed plans](#) from earlier this year to integrate the EAU with BRI. After refusing to join RCEP at the very last minute and almost exactly a month after Modi hosted President Xi in Malappuram for their "[Chennai Connect](#)", India lost the trust that it used to have from China, and the People's Republic is beginning to change its perception of the increasingly strategic and especially military nature of Russian-Indian relations in this developing context. Moscow will thus need to "recalibrate" its "balancing" strategy through more sustained and tangible outreaches to Beijing lest it risk inadvertently provoking a security dilemma with the East Asian Great Power as well (which might actually be what New Delhi hopes ends up happening to "isolate" its rival).

The Neo-NAM

In reality, however, it would be Russia that ends up "isolated" just like the [rogue state of India](#) is rapidly becoming by none other than its own choice because its growing relations with India cannot compare to the ones that it currently has, and prospectively could have in the future, with China. This holds true even if Russia tries to lead a new Non-Aligned Movement (Neo-NAM) like Valdai Club expert [Oleg Barabanov](#) proposed in May and his colleagues [Alexey Kupriyanov and Alexander Korolev](#) then suggested in September could even be jointly led together with India since that move would almost certainly be perceived by China as a major indirect strategic hostility aimed at unofficially "containing" it given the current context of the Sino-Indo split unless Moscow first "recalibrates" its "balancing"

strategy by improving relations with Beijing in parallel with any progress that might be made on the Neo-NAM (with or without New Delhi) so as to avoid inadvertently provoking a security dilemma. It should be said that the Neo-NAM itself is a theoretically sound idea supposing that the authors are correct in their presumption that the world is actually more bipolar than multipolar, and it would indeed be comparatively beneficial in that scenario for China-friendly Russia to play a leading role in it in order to “balance” out the influence of China’s unofficial Indian rival, but the utmost geostrategic care must be taken in order to prevent this from becoming the straw that breaks Russia’s delicate “balancing” act.

“Recalibrating” The “Balancing” Act

As such, it is of the utmost importance that Russia urgently considers how it can “recalibrate” its “balancing” act in order to accommodate for the recent developments of India’s refusal to economically participate in Eurasian integration processes such as RCEP, the unofficial acknowledgement of the Sino-Indo split because of it, and the nascent security dilemma that’s forming between Russia and China due to Moscow’s perceived preference for New Delhi in recent months over Beijing, all of which are collectively undermining the ultimate viability of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. It should be taken for granted after the latest developments that India will only play a bilateral role in this Russian-led and Chinese-backed vision instead of the comprehensive multilateral one that was originally envisaged for it, but Russia must seriously consider replacing India’s initially intended role with the [global pivot state of Pakistan](#) in order to both “balance” out New Delhi’s pro-American pivot and also assuage any of Beijing’s concerns that Moscow can no longer be trusted like before. No third party is adversely affected through Russia’s possible prioritization of the [apolitical and purely economic N-CPEC+ corridor](#) connecting itself with Pakistan via Central Asia and post-war Afghanistan, and progress on that front would kill the two aforementioned birds with one stone and also cultivate the trust-based conditions where China probably wouldn’t mind all that much if Russia then decided to lead the prospective Neo-NAM.

Concluding Thoughts

It’s “politically incorrect” to publicly say and will likely be dismissed as “senseless fearmongering” by reactionary critics, but it convincingly appears to be the case that Russia’s “balancing” act is becoming increasingly unbalanced in light of recent events in the Sino-Indo relationship beyond its direct control, meaning that a “recalibration” is absolutely necessary if Russia is to retain its middle ground strategic position vis-a-vis both of its nominal BRICS and SCO partners with an aim to promote the grand strategic goal of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. India can still play a role in this vision, albeit likely only a bilateral one after signaling its reluctance to commit to multilateral economic integration, but Russia can prospectively replace it with Pakistan through N-CPEC+ in order to simultaneously strengthen trust with China and reinforce its [renewed presence in South Asia](#). Without the inclusion of Pakistan as a leading player in Russia’s Greater Eurasian Partnership through N-CPEC+, the vision itself will always remain incomplete in principle, but in the current context of the evolving Sino-Indo split, it might not even succeed at all if Russia doesn’t use it as a means to prove the sincerity of its commitment to integrate the EAU and BRI. At risk of being called “alarmist”, the author feels obligated to conclude by saying that the situation is currently very critical and that the moves that Russia makes across the next year will determine the trajectory of Eurasian geopolitics for years to come, for better or for worse.

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This article was originally published on OneWorld.

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