

THE MOSCOW RESET - EDITORIALS - HINDUSTAN TIMES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Russia

Jun 26, 2020-Friday

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India invests in its relationship with Russia, but increasingly in return for neutrality rather than support. Defence minister Rajnath Singh visited Moscow to help mark World War II Victory Day just after external affairs minister S Jaishankar attended a virtual Russia-India-China summit hosted by Moscow. The defence minister asked Russia to speed up its delivery of the first battery of the S-400 air defence system. He did not ask Moscow to reconsider its steadfast neutrality during the altercation along the Sino-Indian border.

This should not come as a surprise. Russia is not the Soviet Union. Its economy is half the size of India and its enormous economic relationship with China is essential to its prosperity. The two have a crude geopolitical convergence in their common antagonism towards the United States. Moscow supplies arms and hydrocarbons to both India and China. Russia is powerful enough to maintain relationships with both, but not strong enough to choose between them. And Russia sees its interests in maintaining this position. Among other things it is profitable: China was its first customer for the S-400.

New Delhi has already begun seeking to reset its relationship, especially as the defence element is starting to fade. Energy and strategic minerals are now rising in importance between the two countries and this is evident in the bilateral investment figures. Moscow still wields a veto in the United Nations and will remain a diplomatic partner in many areas. More differences will crop up, as is evident already over Afghanistan, as the knob on bilateral ties is turned down from special to normal. All this flows naturally from a changing global order and New Delhi should adjust its policies without sentiment.

END

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