

India at Zapad 2025: a Move Redefining Global Balances?

Published on 17/09/2025

The **Russian-Belarusian military exercise Zapad 2025**, which involved about 30,000 soldiers from 20 countries, has attracted international attention, not only for its purpose of testing Russian readiness in case of conflict with NATO, but also for an unexpected participation: that of a small Indian military contingent. This decision by New Delhi raises questions and challenges future geopolitical balances.

The Logic Behind India's Participation

Indian participation, although modest in size (65 military personnel from the army, air force, and navy), is not an isolated event. Officially, India aims to improve **interoperability** between armed forces and exchange tactics and procedures with participating countries. This move is part of a long tradition of military cooperation between India and Russia, which has been a pillar of bilateral relations since the Cold War. Most of India's conventional military equipment is of Russian or Soviet origin, and the two nations have numerous joint development programs, such

as the BrahMos cruise missile.

However, it is the first time India has sent an active contingent to a Russian exercise on European soil, outside the usual Asian theater. This marks an escalation in collaboration, going beyond the mere presence of observers.

Conflicting Signals and New Delhi's "Non-linearity"

India's decision has been described as "puzzling" by Anglo-Saxon analysts, especially at a time of heightened tensions between Russia and NATO. The **Washington Post** and the **Times** have reported concerns that this move may raise doubts about the extent of security ties between the United States and India. Some experts, like David Merkel, believe that this participation demonstrates the priority India places on its relations with Moscow, a choice that could be influenced by uncertainties in relations with the U.S. administration.

However, India's behavior must be analyzed in the context of its historic policy of strategic **non-alignment**. Although New Delhi has forged significant ties with the United States, particularly through the "Quad" (the partnership with the United States, Japan, and Australia aimed at containing Chinese influence), it does not intend to depend on a single power. India has a complex and often conflicting relationship with China, which it considers its main strategic rival in Asia.

Therefore, the move to participate in Zapad 2025 can be seen as a way for India to maintain a **diplomatic balance** and reaffirm its strategic autonomy. **Maintaining strong ties with Russia, a historic partner, also serves to prevent Moscow from getting too close to Beijing**, creating an even stronger Sino-Russian alliance that could threaten Indian interests. India is also actively seeking to diversify its military arsenal, reducing dependence on Russia, and is independently developing its own weapon systems.

In conclusion, India's participation in Zapad 2025 is not a simple military choice, but a further demonstration of its complex foreign policy. India continues to navigate between major powers, strengthening ties where necessary to protect its interests, without irrevocably binding itself to any alliance, thus confirming its role as an autonomous and unpredictable actor on the global stage.

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