



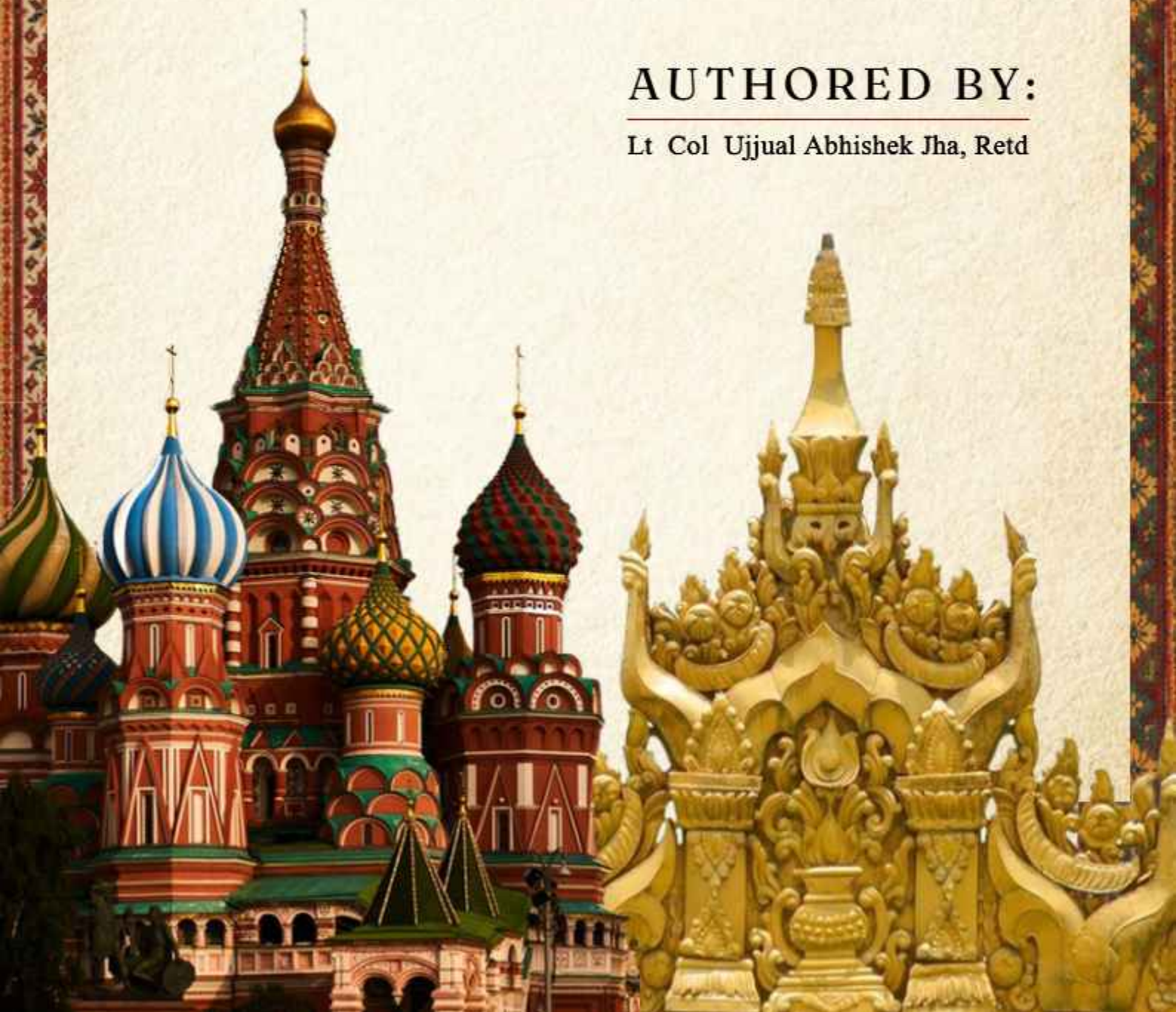
**Red Lantern
ANALYTICA**

GEOPOLITICAL CONVERGENCE:

**EVOLUTION AND TRAJECTORIES OF
MYANMAR-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP**

AUTHORED BY:

Lt Col Ujjual Abhishek Jha, Retd



GEOPOLITICAL CONVERGENCE: EVOLUTION AND TRAJECTORIES OF MYANMAR-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP

The formal diplomatic relation between Myanmar (earlier Burma) and Russia was [established](#) on 18 February 1948, making it one of the earliest bilateral relationships, formed post-independence of Myanmar. For most of the years in between, the relationship was peripheral for either country. Myanmar was under military rule for a long time and stayed isolated while the Soviet Union and later Russia were more [focused](#) on China, Vietnam and Indonesia.

This fringe relationship swiftly transformed into a strategic partnership, primarily for two events. Firstly, military transfer of power in Myanmar on 01 February 2021 leading to Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), widespread internal conflict and subsequent isolation of Myanmar junta rule. This led Myanmar to lean heavily on Russia and China for military hardware, political support at the United Nations (UN) and gaining international legitimacy.

In February 2022, a year later, Russia invaded Ukraine and resultantly lost western market and partners. This common isolation possibly led to strategic partnership between the two countries.

In August 2026, with the visit of President Min Aung Hlaing to Russia, the bilateral relationship was enhanced, beyond the military hardware, into a structured architecture. The partnership was expanded to the fields of defence, nuclear energy, space, hydrocarbons, port and power infrastructure, finance and payments, education and diplomatic support in multilateral forums as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Although, the centre of gravity of the relationship remains defence, ties have broadened into the economic, energy, nuclear and space domains.

EVOLUTION OF MYANMAR- RUSSIA TIES

Post-Independence Era & Shadow of the Cold War (1948-1988) – Diplomatic relations between the two countries began on 18 February 1948 and during the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union [extended](#) significant technical and economic assistance to Burma, including construction of a technological institute, hotel and a hospital, in conjunction with Burma's rice exports to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The 1962 coup in Burma by Ne Win and consequent policy of 'Burmese Way to Socialism' carried the country into self-imposed isolation, thereby, reducing bilateral engagement despite the formal relationship remaining intact.

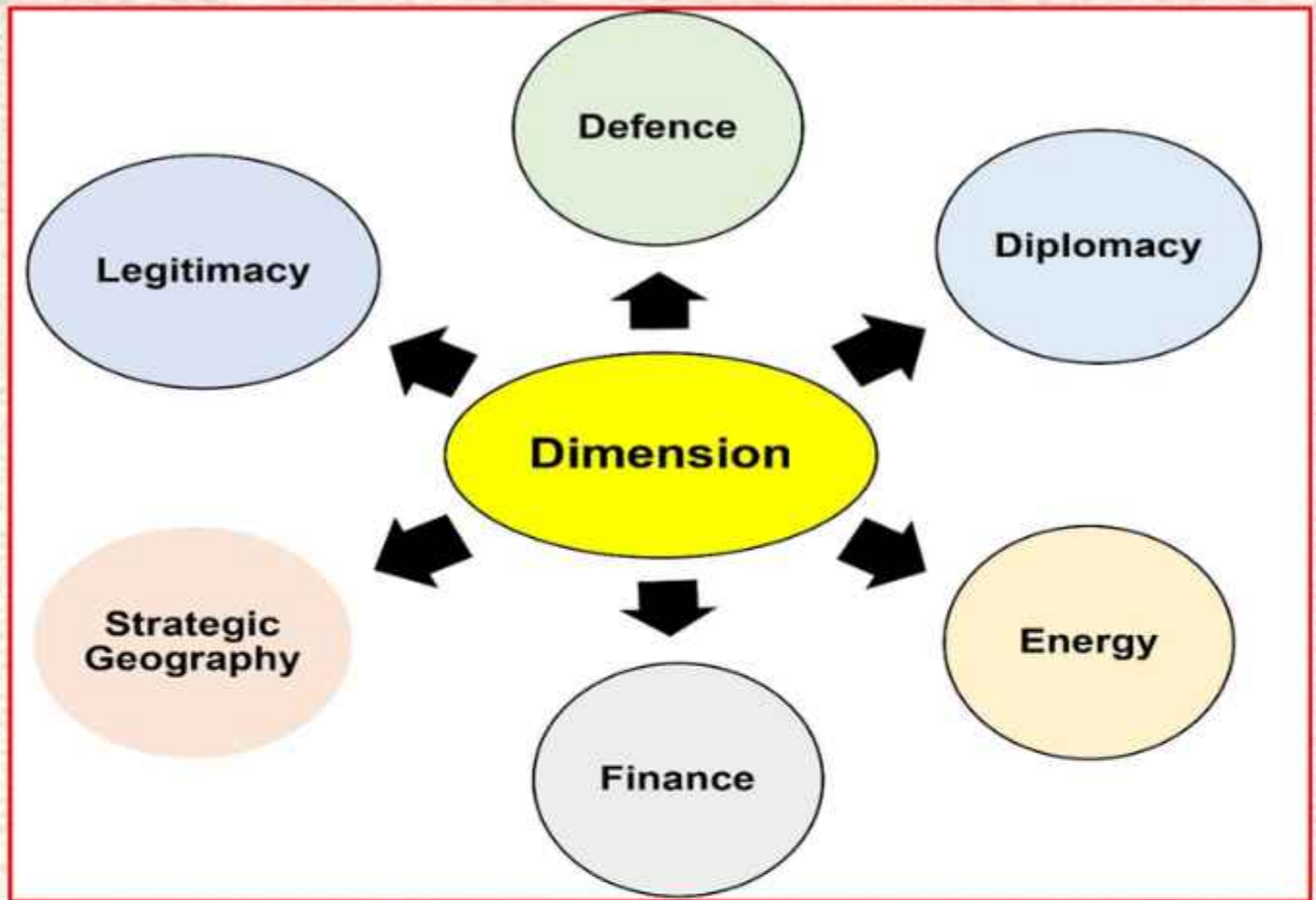
Post-Soviet Moscow and the Junta: Rebuilding Military Ties (1991-2010) – Myanmar recognised the Russian Federation as the successor state of USSR, in December 1991. [Relations](#), from the late 1990s improved and accelerated in 2000s through military and technical cooperation. Russia, along with China, emerged as the two principal [suppliers](#) of major weapons systems to the Tatmadaw, including MiG-29 fighters, armoured vehicles and air-defence equipment.

Democratization and Sidelining of Moscow (2011–2021) – In Myanmar, the quasi-civilian government under President Thein Sein (2011-2016) and the subsequent National League for Democracy (NLD) government under State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi (2016-2021) pursued reconciliation with the West. This resulted in suspension of existing sanctions and diversification of Myanmar’s diplomacy. The weightage to Russia, in the foreign policy of Myanmar witnessed decline, although, visits and military hardware sales continued.

Post-2021 Pivot: Russia’s Return to Centre Stage (2021-2024) – Post February 2021, Russia was amongst first countries to engage with junta. Alexander Fomin, Deputy Defence Minister of Russia [attended](#) the Armed Forces Day parade in Naypyidaw on 27 March 2021. Further, Russia [abstained](#) the June 2021 UN General Assembly resolution calling for an arms restriction on Myanmar. 2021 onwards, Min Aung Hlaing made repeated visits to Russia and in September 2022, the two governments signed a roadmap on nuclear-energy cooperation. In November 2023, first ever [Joint Naval Exercises](#) between the countries were conducted in Andaman Sea.

Period	Time Period	Nature of Engagement	Key Events
Diplomatic Root	1948-1962	Cordial but modest development assistance	Soviet aid projects, rice-barter trade
Isolation Phase	1962-1988	Reduced bilateral relations	Formal relations continue
Military Driven Agenda	1991-2011	Transactional	MiG, military training
Peripheral Era	2011-2021	Western reconciliation and Russia in backseat	Continued but decline in engagement
Strategic Axis	2021-present	Expanded sphere of agreements - defence, energy, nuclear, space, finance, diplomacy	Five year military pact, Kyat-Ruble settlement

DRIVERS OF RELATIONSHIP



The convergence of needs is key to the partnership between the two countries, Myanmar's requirement of weapons, legitimacy and revenue and Russian need of markets, diplomatic partners and a narrative of strategic reorientation towards Asia.

Drivers for Myanmar

For Myanmar junta, the partnership with Moscow is essentially about survival. The Russian aircraft, helicopters and weaponries have been key to the sustained air operation of Myanmar Air Force. These air operations have partially counterbalanced the loss of territorial control since Operation 1027, in 2023. The dual engagement strategy of China in Myanmar creates trust issue and is concern for Min Aung Hlaing. The Russian engagement paves a path for reducing the existing overdependence on China and also diversifies diplomatic and military relations. This presents Russia as a limited counter although, contiguous border provides more leverage to China. Russian statements defending the junta at the UN Security Council and endorsing elections provides international legitimacy and diplomatic cover to Myanmar. Financial architecture as Kyat-Ruble settlement, payment linkage and the August 2026, offers junta an alternative to dollar. In additions, energy security and infrastructure projects address chronic electricity shortages and reduce reliance on domestic gas fields.

Drivers for Russia

On the other hand, for Russian, the partnership is more diplomatic and transactional in nature. Post closure of traditional Russian arms market, Myanmar acts as an arms export avenue for running its defence industry. The internal conflict in Myanmar offers a testing ground to evaluate military hardware and its tactical employability. aircraft, Myanmar support to Russia at various international forums provides modest but valuable diplomatic cover amidst isolation over Ukraine war. Aligning with Myanmar helps Russia demonstrate its foreign policy narrative of retaining traction in Southeast Asia despite western sanctions broader strategic pivot into Southeast Asia, secure a strategic access project to Bay of Bengal ([Dawei](#)) and prized Indian Ocean foothold near the port of Dawei, and initiate export markets for nuclear and space technology.

DOMAINS OF ENGAGEMENT

Nuclear Energy Cooperation

Nuclear cooperation between the two nations included September 2022, Rosatom-Myanmar roadmap, February 2023 [agreement](#) on peaceful uses of atomic energy and [opening](#) of a Nuclear Technology and Information Centre in Yangon. During Min Aung Hlaing to Russia, on 04 March 2025, both the countries signed an [agreement](#) for a 110 MW Small Modular Reactor (SMR) project, two 55 MW RITM-200N reactors with potential expansion to 330 MW. This project, if completed, would make Myanmar the first Southeast Asian state to operate nuclear-generation capacity.

Space Cooperation

In [March](#) 2025, Roscosmos and Ministry of Science and Technology of Myanmar signed a memorandum on peaceful space cooperation, covering human-spaceflight training, GLONASS ground-station infrastructure and near-Earth-object tracking cooperation. Myanmar established a national space agency in 2025 to anchor this cooperation.

Energy and Infrastructure

In April 2026, Ministry of Electricity and Energy of Myanmar [signed](#) a cooperation agreement with RC-Investments Fund of Russia, covering crude oil, petroleum products and LNG. There is also an MoU between Inter RAO and Launglon Economic Development Company for a power plant at the Dawei Deep Sea Port Special Economic Zone. This highlights Russian efforts to create larger energy footprints in Myanmar, beyond nuclear power.

Defence Cooperation

Defence continues to remain the most consequential element of the relationship. Since February 2021, as per [United Nations Special Rapporteur](#) reported more than USD 400 million arms transfers from Russian to the Myanmar military with Russia state arms exporter Rosoboronexport identified as the single largest source of weapons transfers, since 2021.

In February 2026, a five-year Russia-Myanmar military cooperation agreement, was signed during visit by Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu, thereby, formalising the defence relationship. A tabulated details of military hardware supplied by Russia to Myanmar, since 2021, is given below.

<u>Defence System</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Su-30SME (6 units)	Multirole fighter	US \$400 million contract, delivered Dec 2024
MiG-29	Fighter aircraft	Fleet, spare parts and upgrades
Yak-130	Trainer with Combat capability	Used in strikes
Mi-35	Attack helicopter	Most used for strikes
Mi-38 (3 units)	Utility/ Assault helicopter	Myanmar first foreign operator, inducted Sept 2025
Mi-17	Transport helicopter	In active service across
Pantsir-S1	Short-range air defence	Delivered in 2021
Orlan-10E	Reconnaissance UAV	Delivered in 2021 with Pantsir-S1
Naval Frigate/ Corvettes	Naval warship	Fleet modernisation

Finances

Nuclear cooperation between the two nations included September 2022, Rosatom-Myanmar roadmap, February 2023 [agreement](#) on peaceful uses of atomic energy and [opening](#) of a Nuclear Technology and Information Centre in Yangon. During Min Aung Hlaing to Russia, on 04 March 2025, both the countries signed an [agreement](#) for a 110 MW Small Modular Reactor (SMR) project, two 55 MW RITM-200N reactors with potential expansion to 330 MW. This project, if completed, would make Myanmar the first Southeast Asian state to operate nuclear-generation capacity.

Diplomatic Support

In June 2021, at the UN, Russia abstained on General Assembly arms embargo resolution and has since worked with China to veto or weaken any stronger action on Myanmar. Russia has also formally endorsed December 2025-January 2026 elections of Myanmar. Myanmar presently, is acting as coordinator for dialogue between Russia and ASEAN and [formed](#) part of ASEAN-Russia Summit in Kazan in June 2026, co-chaired by Putin and Philippine President Marcos. The manifesto of present ruling party clearly states its ambition to get permanent [membership](#) of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, both anchored by China and Russia.

Beyond Government

In the Myanmar-Russia bilateral ties, people-to-people links is growing. As of [August](#) 2026, approximately 400 Myanmar students were studying in Russia and Russian language is now being taught at universities in Yangon and Mandalay and also at the military academy. [Myanmar](#) is planning to open a consulate in Vladivostok and Visa free arrangements have been made easier for scientists, students, tourists and athletes to travel.

Cultural and religious ties are also expanding, with Myanmar centres being [established](#) in Altai, Kaluga and Moscow in Russia. Permission to establish Russian Orthodox church in Yangon has been approved. In addition, Myanmar Airways International has resumed, rebuilding air links.

CHALLENGES

The relationship between Myanmar-Russia appears to have expanded, however, it faces deep structural constraints, in practice.

The biggest challenge to this relationship is Chinese primacy in Myanmar. China continues to be largest trading partner, investor, arms supplier and holds larger leverage over both the junta and key ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar. Russia, while, militarily significant, finding difficult to substitute economic dependency of Myanmar, on China. This aspect is further increased by western sanctions on both countries (Myanmar and Russia) indicating financing gaps and also limited economic capacity of Russia in the present scenario.

The ongoing internal conflict in Myanmar, with anti-junta forces controlling approximately 40% of the territory, has constrained junta government and manifestation of infrastructure projects including the proposed Dawei power plant and nuclear site seems at risk, both logistically and physically. Therefore, these agreements/ MoUs seems more symbolic in nature rather than executable.

These seem more for signalling international relevance of junta.

The continuous military hardware supply leading to documented crime against humanity increases possibility of more sanctions to both Myanmar and Russia and international legal action.

Moreover, the relationship between Myanmar and Russia is uneven and struggles to have legitimacy. Even the visits of State Head are completely asymmetrical in nature (Min Aung Hlaing has reportedly visited Russia 14 times since 2021, while Putin has never visited Myanmar), reflecting an imbalance in the strategic priority of Russia's relative relevance to Myanmar.

Notwithstanding the intensity of recent diplomatic steps, the relationship has visible constraints, limiting the sphere of Myanmar's partnership and Russian larger Asia strategy.

ANALYSIS OF FALLOUT OF MYANMAR-RUSSIA RELATIONS

The growing interest and engagement of multiple powers with Myanmar junta is leading to change in geopolitical scenario by tilting towards present dispensation thereby reducing international leverage. The diplomatic arrangements with China and Russia are underplaying the ASEAN leverage, shield at UN and allowing Russia to gain foothold in Bay of Bengal without disturbing Chinese interests.

At the same time, the divergent Western posture, softening of sanctions by USA and rigid EU policies, raises concerns for regional powers as India and Japan, for maritime security and dual-use port infrastructure. A tabulated analysis showing various players, their stance towards junta and corresponding impact on Myanmar-Russia relations is shown below.

Player	Positioning towards Junta	Impact on Myanmar-Russia Relations
China	Renewed engagement since 2025, dominant player (economic/ security)	Complementary, Russia avoids core Chinese BRI interests
ASEAN	Junta excluded, Five-Point Consensus largely defunct	Russia-Myanmar defence drills and summit diplomacy reduce ASEAN leverage
USA (2025-26)	Eased some sanctions	Reduces collective Western pressure
European Union	Maintains sanctions	Difficulties for Russian finances
Japan	No recognition, concern on port/ energy access	Views Russian Dawei as an Indo-Pacific access risk
India	Calibrated engagement for connectivity/ security	Non-confrontational and no direct challenge
Russia	Full diplomatic, defence, economic and nuclear engagement	Core external patron alongside China

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

India shares 1643 km land border and vital maritime border with Myanmar. The growing footprints of Russia in Myanmar can impact these two borders. The continued flow of Russian military hardware to Myanmar is helping to prolong the internal conflict resulting in inflow of Myanmar nationals, instability and increase in illegal activities.

Combining this challenge, India itself has defence support from Russia which restricts India's opposition to military hardware supply to Myanmar. Furthermore, Russia Dawei and port project in Myanmar is further complicating the situation in Bay of Bengal and creates challenges for India to navigate and safeguard its own interests.

MAPPING THE PATH FORWARD

Trajectory of the Myanmar-Russia Relationship is likely to witness continue increment, unless, there is a decisive shift in internal conflict in Myanmar or in Russia-Ukraine war. In the present scenario, five-year military agreement, from 2026-2030, will also continue along the decided lines. It likely also indicates deliveries of more arms, work on drone technology and production, attempts to continue small modular reactor project as a flagship project, possible growth in trade and investment if Kyat-Ruble channel functions well and endured support of Myanmar at various multilateral forums. A broad scenario based mapping of way forward is shown below.

Scenario	Likelihood	Implication
Status quo	High	Gradual institutionalisation of defence, nuclear and financial ties
Acceleration driven by Ukraine war conclusion	Moderate	Ceasefire/settlement could free Russian capacity and capital for Myanmar projects
Stalling due to Myanmar state fragmentation	Moderate	Continued conflict could render major projects inexecutable, reducing cooperation to arms and diplomacy only
Negotiated political transition	Low-Moderate	Federal settlement reduces the junta's external military dependency and thereby Russia's leverage
Intensified, power competition	Moderate	Contest over alignment of Myanmar raise connectivity and Bay of Bengal stakes

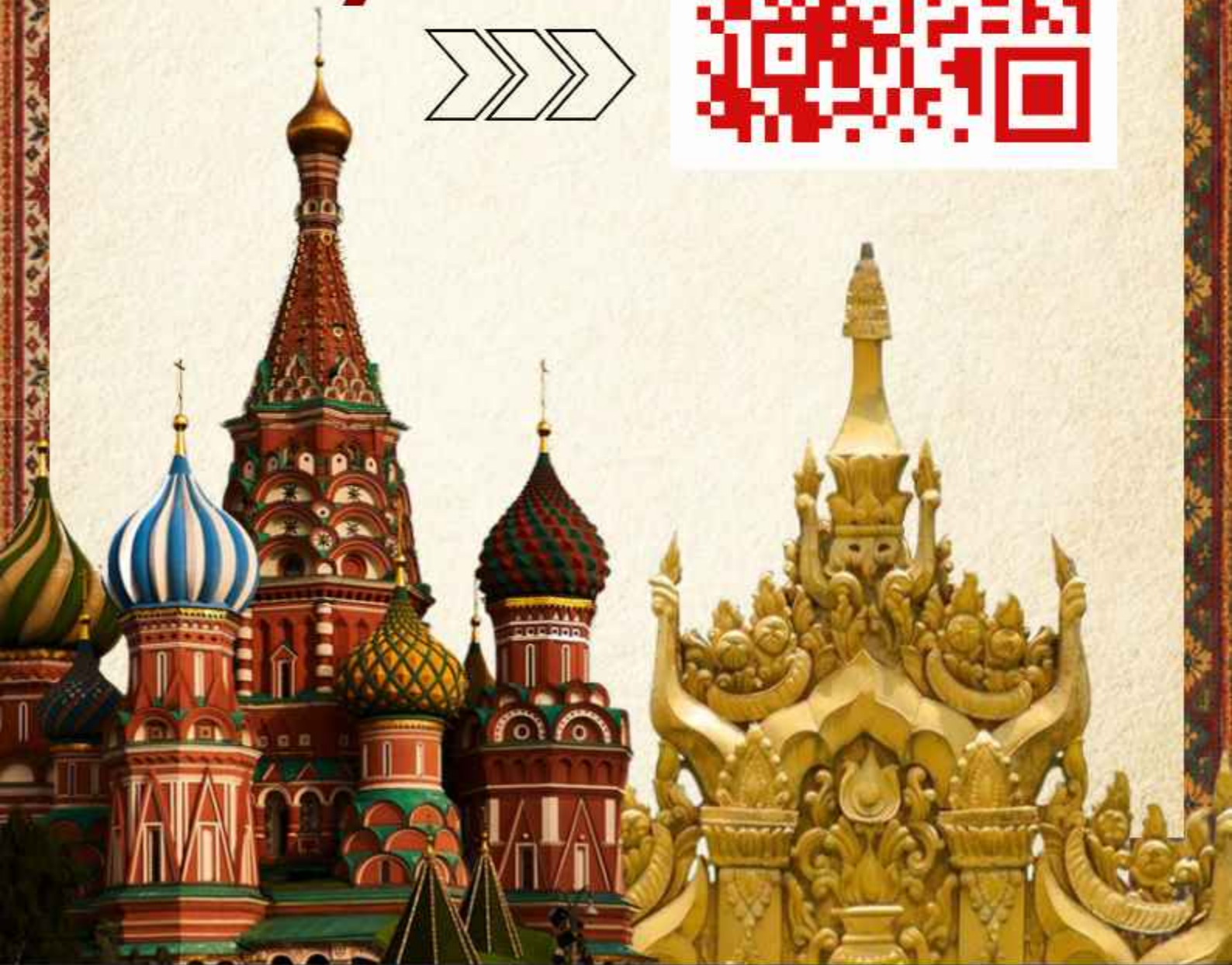
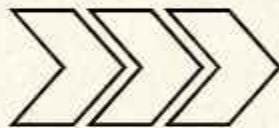
CONCLUSION

Post 2021, the Myanmar-Russia relations have expanded owing to mutual international isolation. The sphere has expanded from military hardware to strategic partnership of defense, energy and diplomacy. However, the Chinese dominance and ongoing internal conflict restrict the maximization of this alignment. At the same time this alignment puts a strain on ASEAN and has capability to increase power-game in the Bay of Bengal. For India, the way forward seems to stay pragmatic in Myanmar engagement with both junta and relevant Ethnic Armed Organisations.



**Red Lantern
ANALYTICA**

Everything Analytica.



REDLANTERNANALYTICA.COM

© 2026 Designed by Nripan Babu for Red Lantern Analytica (RLA). All rights reserved.