India–Russia Logistics Agreement (RELOS)

Mains: *GS II – International relations*

Why in News?

Recently, misinformation circulated on social media claiming that the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), allows the permanent stationing of 3,000 Russian troops in India or vice versa, leading to concerns that it represents a military alliance.

What are Logistics Support Agreements (LSAs)?

- **LSAs** – They are foundational defence cooperation arrangements that enable the armed forces of two countries to access each other's military facilities for logistics purposes.
- **Provisions** – These agreements facilitate the provision of fuel, supplies, maintenance, transportation, medical support, and other services during agreed military activities.
- Typically, LSAs are used during Joint military exercises, Training programmes, Port calls by naval vessels, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, Peacekeeping missions, Transit and operational deployments.
- **Primary objective** – To reduce bureaucratic delays and improve operational efficiency by establishing pre-agreed procedures for logistics support and reimbursement.
- Importantly, LSAs do not confer rights for military bases, permanent troop deployments, or territorial control.
- **India's Logistics Agreements –** India signed its first major logistics agreement, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), with the United States in 2016.
- Similar agreements have subsequently been concluded with, United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, Russia.
- Additionally, Oman provides logistical access under a broader defence cooperation framework.
- These agreements follow a common template and facilitate reciprocal logistical assistance while preserving India's strategic autonomy.
- The Ministry of Defence has clarified in the past that such agreements do not establish military bases.
- **Covered services** – They cover services such as , food and water supply, fuel and lubricants, accommodation, transportation, medical assistance, storage facilities, communication services, repair and maintenance, spare parts support, port and airfield services
- Thus, RELOS should be understood within this broader framework of military logistics cooperation rather than as an alliance arrangement.

The Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement was signed in Moscow on 18 February 2025.

It was subsequently ratified by the Russian Federation in December 2025 and became operational in January 2026.

What are the key features of the India–Russia RELOS agreement?

- **Reciprocal Access to Military Facilities –** Both countries can use designated military infrastructure such as naval ports, airbases, airfield facilities and logistics depots.
- This access is intended to support visiting military personnel, ships, and aircraft during approved activities.
- **Support for Military Operations –** RELOS enables logistical and technical support for military aircraft, naval warships, military formations and other defence equipment.
- The agreement streamlines the provision of fuel, maintenance, repairs, and supplies.
- **Joint Exercises and Training –** The agreement facilitates smoother conduct of bilateral and multilateral military exercises by reducing administrative delays and ensuring access to necessary logistical infrastructure.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) –** During natural disasters or humanitarian crises, both countries can rapidly provide support through shared logistics arrangements.
- **Medical and Technical Assistance –** The agreement provides for Medical facilities for military personnel, Technical maintenance support, Delivery of food and essential resources, Repair and servicing of equipment.
- **Does RELOS Allow Troop Stationing –** A major misconception regarding RELOS concerns the provision mentioning a maximum limit of 3,000 personnel.
- Some social media narratives interpreted this as permission for the permanent deployment of 3,000 Russian troops on Indian soil or vice versa. This interpretation is incorrect.
- The provision merely establishes an upper operational limit for military personnel participating in mutually agreed activities such as Joint exercises, Naval visits, Training programmes, and Temporary military deployments.
- The number accounts for the size of contingents that may accompany ships, aircraft, or military formations during official engagements.
- Importantly, no permanent military bases are established, no long-term deployment rights are granted, every visit requires mutual consent and activities remain subject to national laws and agreed procedures.
- Therefore, RELOS does not transform India and Russia into formal military allies nor does it permit permanent stationing of forces.

What are the strategic significance of RELOS?

- **Enhanced Operational Reach –** The agreement extends the operational reach of both countries' armed forces by providing access to logistical facilities far from home bases.
- For India, this means greater flexibility in areas where Russian infrastructure may be

useful, particularly in northern maritime regions.

- **Improved Defence Cooperation –** RELOS deepens military-to-military engagement and complements existing defence cooperation, including:
- Joint military exercises
- Defence technology collaboration
- Arms procurement and maintenance
- Maritime security cooperation
- **Faster Operational Turnaround –** Ships and aircraft can obtain fuel, repairs, and supplies without returning to their home country, thereby improving mission endurance and reducing costs.
- India has previously utilised similar agreements to sustain naval deployments in the Gulf of Aden and support long-range maritime patrol aircraft operations.
- **Support During Emergencies –** The agreement enables rapid logistical support during humanitarian emergencies, evacuation operations, or disaster relief missions.
- **Arctic Cooperation –** One of the most significant aspects of RELOS is its potential role in facilitating India's access to Russian military and logistical infrastructure in the Arctic region.
- As climate change leads to the gradual opening of Arctic sea routes, the region is emerging as an important strategic and economic frontier.
- Access to Russian facilities could support India's growing Arctic interests in scientific research, maritime connectivity, resource exploration, polar governance.
- **Broader Context of India's Defence Diplomacy –** India's logistics agreements reflect its evolving defence diplomacy and aspiration to become a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Rather than entering military alliances, India has pursued a policy of strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, issue-based partnerships.
- The existence of logistics agreements with countries that may themselves have divergent geopolitical interests demonstrates this approach.
    - **For example,** India maintains such agreements with both the United States and Russia despite tensions between those countries.
    - This underlines that logistics agreements are practical military arrangements rather than alliance commitments.

What are the challenges and concerns?

- **Strategic Perceptions –** Partner countries and rival powers may sometimes perceive such agreements as indicators of deeper military alignment.
- **Dependence on External Infrastructure –** Excessive reliance on foreign logistics networks could create vulnerabilities during geopolitical crises.
- **Balancing Multiple Partnerships –** India must continue balancing its relations with diverse strategic partners while preserving autonomy in decision-making.

What lies ahead?

- The India–Russia Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) is a standard military logistics arrangement designed to facilitate reciprocal access to logistical facilities, technical support, and operational assistance during mutually agreed

activities.

- It does not permit permanent military bases or troop stationing and should not be interpreted as a military alliance.
- Instead, the agreement strengthens defence cooperation, enhances operational flexibility, supports humanitarian missions, and provides India with strategic opportunities, particularly in the Arctic region.
- In line with India's broader policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, RELOS represents a pragmatic instrument for improving military readiness and international defence cooperation while preserving national sovereignty.

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Reference

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