



## Russia-India-China (RIC) Meet

### Context:

- Virtual meeting of the foreign ministers of the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping on 23rd June 2020.
- Together, the RIC countries occupy over 19 percent of the global landmass and contribute to over 33 percent of global GDP.
- All three countries are nuclear powers and two, Russia and China, are permanent members of the UN Security Council, while India aspires to be one.



### What is RIC?

- RIC is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the **late 1990s** under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as **“a counterbalance to the Western alliance.”**
- This idea of a ‘strategic triangle’ took a tangible form when former Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, and India met on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2002.
- The group was founded on the basis of **ending Russia’s subservient foreign policy guided by the USA** and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.
- The grouping was formed in an aim to ensure that it is not left to the America-led West alone to shape the rules of global governance.

### What is the relevance of RIC for India?

- Membership for India was always about containing China in Eurasia.
- **Forum for Cooperation:** Even though India, China and Russia may disagree on a number of security issues in Eurasia, there are areas where their interests converge, like, for instance, on Afghanistan. RIC can ensure stable peace in Afghanistan and by extension, in Central Asia.



- **Governance over Arctic:** With the Northern Sea Route opening up due to climate change, the RIC has a common interest in ensuring that it is not left to the West and Russia alone and that India and China also have major say in rules governing the Arctic route.

### What are the key takeaways of Virtual RIC 2020 meet?

- The special meeting of RIC on 23rd June 2020 was held to mark 75 years of the victory over the Axis powers in World War-II.
- The ministerial-level engagements took place in the backdrop of ongoing border tensions between India and China, which has resulted in the first army casualties in 45 years.
- However, bilateral matters (Indo-China) were not discussed.
- India stressed upon respecting international law, recognising the legitimate interests of partners, supporting multilateralism and promoting common good are the only way of building a durable world order.
- There was no joint statement due to differences over few paragraphs.

### Critical Analysis of RIC

- India's growing strategic partnership with the United States, Japan, and Australia conflicts with the RIC's goals and objectives of seeking to undermine Washington's role in the Indo-Pacific.
- There is **growing Russia-China Axis** which undermines the grouping relevance for India.
- China is Russia's biggest trading partner and the largest Asian investor in Russia.
- China sees Russia as a powerhouse of raw material and a growing market for its consumer goods.
- The West's approach towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and recent US-China trade war has brought Russia & China much closer.
- There is also growing dependence of Russia on Chinese consumption.
- Also, over 70% of China's arms imports now come from Russia.



## So is Russia now a permanent ally of China?

- Not necessarily, western analysts see Russia-China as a “friendship of convenience” between two countries.
- Russia has been extremely calibrated in its statements on issues on which Beijing is most sensitive to: Huawei’s 5G rollout, Hong Kong and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- China does not recognise Crimea as part of Russia, and Moscow, formally speaking, takes a neutral stance on Beijing’s claims in the South China Sea.
- Russia maintains steady relationship with India. Nearly 60 to 70 % of India’s defence supplies are from Russia.
- India decided to reach out to RIC since it believes Russia has leverage and influence to shape and change Beijing’s stance on certain issues.

### Conclusion:

- Far from enjoying equal status, member countries in groups like the BRI, BRICS, RIC, SCO, RCEP are seconded to Chinese special interests.
- Therefore, India’s policy makers must wriggle out of the China’s embrace and seek friends in other places like the Quad and Japan-America-India (JAI) formulation.