



China-Russia ties as a major determinant

Context:

- In June 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping described Russian President Vladimir Putin, as “my best friend and colleague”.

Why is such a description significant?

- For past 70 years such public bonhomie has not been seen between leaders of Russia and China.
- It has sparked intense discussion on whether they are moving in the direction of a formal alliance.
- Coordinated action in multilateral forums, increasingly sophisticated joint military exercises, and including activities with third countries such as Iran, reinforce beliefs about possibility of alliance.
- Politically reliable, trustworthy defence supplier with shared misgivings about China, that was USSR, has long been replaced by a politically agnostic, commercially motivated Russia that no longer shares our concerns about China.



How China has been a key part of Global Geopolitics since end of WW-II?

- The triangular relationship between America, China and Russia has, for the most part, shaped global politics since 1950.
- During Cold War, US viewed China as a road to victory of its ideology and breaking up the communist camp.
- Post-Cold War, Russia seems to believe that the road to revival of Russian power and prestige similarly runs through China.



- For three decades the Americans had occupied the favoured position in terms of its relations with the other two. China seems to have assumed that position now.

What factors have strengthened the Sino-Russian Partnership?

- The disintegration of the Soviet Union essentially negated the Russian threat in Chinese eyes which brought both countries closer.
- A peaceful boundary is one of the pillars on which the Sino-Russian partnership currently rests.
- Both share a concern over American plans for “regime-change”. A shared distrust of American intentions has thus pushed China and Russia into closer axis.
- Western sanctions have tended to push the Russians closer to China and it has served to strengthen China’s position in the strategic triangle.
- Falling oil prices and fears of new sanctions on Russian gas supplies are demolishing the core of Russian exports to Europe, thus compelling Russia to look for alternatives like China.
- Increasing Economic & Industrial ties in the aftermath of western sanctions.
- China-Russia trade has more than doubled to \$108 billion.
- Russia’s central bank has increased its Chinese currency reserves from less than one per cent to over 13%.
- China has surpassed Germany as the principal supplier of industrial plant and technology.

What are challenges that prevent Russia & China to forge formal alliance?

- The growing power-gap is threatening to further reduce Russian influence in their ‘near-abroad’ and to confine Russia to the periphery of global power, which Russia is not comfortable with.
- Russia still regards itself as a world power and hopes to be at the centre of a Eurasian arrangement that stretches from the Pacific to the Atlantic. This doesn’t align with strategic objectives of China’s Belt & Road Initiative.
- While Russia presently enjoys a nominal trade surplus, China has a clear advantage going forward.

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- Most of China's exports to Russia are now at a higher technology level while the share of labour-intensive goods has declined.
- At the other end of the spectrum, Russian exports have continued to focus on raw materials, especially oil and gas.
- Chinese continue to nurse historical grievances despite the formal resolution of the border issue.
- Mr. Xi's talk of "rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" has raised fears in Russia about Chinese revanchism.
- China still make critical references to the nearly 600,000 square miles of Chinese territory that Tsarist Russia allegedly annexed in the late 19th century.
- Russia is also concerned over Chinese migration in the Russian Far East.

Conclusion:

- The new reality of Sino-Russian relations is thus one where substantial expansion of bilateral cooperation is accompanied by growing asymmetry and China's pre-eminence.
- Moscow is in real danger of permanently becoming the '**junior partner**'.
- India and Russia have a shared belief that some form of multipolarity is better than any sort of Sino-U.S. condominium. Therefore, India-Russia relationship deserves more attention from both sides.