



China and Russia Relations

For Prelims: Location on Maps, South China Sea, Cold War, NATO, SCO, BRICS, Ukraine Crisis, Belt and Road Initiative, Eurasian Economic Union

For Mains: India and its Neighbourhood, Bilateral Groupings & Agreements, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, India-Russia- China Relations and way forward for India.

Why in News

Recently, in a joint statement, **China and Russia** affirmed that their new relationship is superior to any political or military alliance of the **Cold War** era.

- The statement comes amid **Russia's standoff with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on Ukraine**.



What are the Historical Dynamics of China- Russia Relations?

- Despite being together in rejecting US unipolarity, the relationship between **Russia and China** is

complex and layered.

- Each has its **distinct worldview and specific interests in its geographical region**, and its own battles to fight.
- Relations between **China and the former Soviet Union were frosty, marked by mistrust and doctrinal differences for most of the Cold War decades.**
- The **change came in 1989**, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the first Soviet leader to visit China since Nikita Khrushchev in 1958.
- Russia and China declared **“mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence”** as the basis of their bilateral relations.
- A decade after the Soviet Union broke up, **disappointed and humiliated by the way the West had downgraded it**, and deep in economic crisis, Russia turned to China.
- In 2001, the two countries signed the **Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation**, paving the way for expanding economic and trade ties, including sales of defence equipment and energy by **Russia to China, and Russia’s backing for China’s position on Taiwan.**
- In June 2021, **the two countries extended the treaty at a virtual meeting** where Russia claimed that **“Russian-Chinese coordination plays a stabilising role in world affairs”.**

What are the Current Developments in China- Russia Relations?

- Russia’s 2014 **[annexation of Crimea in Ukraine](#)** led to a sharp downturn in Russia’s ties with the US, NATO, and **[European Union \(EU\)](#).**
 - This was also the **turning point in Russia’s ties with China**, which revealed the possibilities, potential, and the limits of the relationship.
- When the US, EU, and Australia imposed **sanctions on Russia**, Russia turned reflexively to China.
- **Russia opened its doors wide for Chinese investments**, and struck a **USD 400 billion deal for Gazprom, the Russian state monopoly gas exporter**, to supply 38 billion cubic metres (bcm) annually to China for 30 years from 2025.
- Earlier in January 2022, the two countries **signed a deal for another pipeline, Power of Siberia 2**, which will add 10 bcm of gas to the annual supply for 30 years.
- Since 2016, **trade between the two countries has gone from USD 50 bn to over USD 147 bn.**
- China is now Russia’s **largest trading partner**. Towards a modus vivendi in Central Asia, the two countries agreed to work towards speeding up the linking of the **[Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union](#)** and the Chinese **[Belt and Road Initiative](#).**
- With their ties closer than ever before, the crisis in Ukraine has been an opportunity for each country to express **solidarity with the other’s grievance against the US.**
 - Should the West impose financial and banking sanctions on Russia, **China is expected to assist Russia, perhaps with alternative payment methods.**
- The recent joint statement backed the Russian opposition to any expansion of the Western military alliance in Europe.
- Russia **reaffirmed support for the [One-China principle](#)**, and opposed any form of independence for Taiwan.
- The statement also **hit out “against the formation of closed bloc structures and opposing camps in the Asia-Pacific region”** and **“the negative impact” of the US’s Indo-Pacific strategy.**

How is Russia & China’s Interest Different?

- As several observers have pointed out, the **China-Russia compact is not yet a formal security alliance against the West, nor is it an ideological partnership.**
- Back in March 2014, in the **vote on UN Security Council resolutions on the referendum in Crimea**. China had abstained — and despite the recent bonhomie, **has not recognised Crimea’s accession to Russia.**
- China’s main **security interests** lie in Asia; Russia’s are in Europe. From Russia’s demands in ongoing negotiations with the West, it is clear that **Russia is seeking the restructuring of European security.**
- Russia, which wants to be recognised as a great power once again, **has positions independent**

of China on many issues — including on the **relationship with India**.

- As the smaller economy — **Russia's [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#) is a tenth of China's** — but with a strong memory of its lost superpower status, Russia is not willing to become China's junior partner.
- China drives a hard bargain. Russia is conscious that its **gas exports to Germany and the rest of Europe gets much more revenue** — and that China anyway has other pipelines to tap. Also, despite talk of Russia-China co-operation in Central Asia, **Russia still sees the region as part of its sphere of influence**.
- For China, war in Ukraine is the least suitable of options. **It would take US military energies away from the [South China Sea](#)**, but might also stall talks to resolve trade issues.
- **China and the EU are each other's biggest trading partners** — China's trade with Russia is small by comparison. China will not fight the war if it breaks out, but it will nonetheless find it messy and complicated to negotiate.
- As for Ukraine, it is a crucial link in Xi's BRI project. **China is also Ukraine's biggest trading partner** — and its agricultural exports, particularly corn, have sustained China during its trade war with the US.

What Policy Should India Follow?

- India's best bet would be to **treat its relations with both countries and the US separately** — or it runs the risk of shrinking its own space.
- India's relationship with Russia is not what it used to be, but there is much that **both sides continue to see as mutually beneficial**.
 - The Russia-China statement did not mention China's border dispute with India; it only made a reference to developing cooperation among the three countries.
 - After the Russian-linked Redfish media teased a documentary that drew parallels between Kashmir and Palestine, **the Russian embassy clarified that Redfish was not official media, and reiterated that Kashmir was an issue for India and Pakistan to resolve bilaterally**.
- The structural constraints posed by the great power dynamic and vastly different appreciation of the **regional security environment could be reduced if matters improve between the US and Russia**.
 - **A less conflictual relationship between the two will be a huge relief for India**.
 - Also, the US-China quest for power or Russia's deepening ties with China would have mattered less to India if its relations with China were more peaceful and stable.
- India should also **promote mutually beneficial trilateral cooperation between Russia, China and India** that could contribute towards the reduction of mistrust and suspicion between India and China.
 - In this context, the **[BRICS](#), [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) and [RIC trilateral forum](#)** must be leveraged.

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