



## India and the great power triangle

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**(Mains GS 2 : Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests & Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.)**

### **Context:**

- The recent visit of Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov to Delhi and Islamabad is among multiple signs of India's changing relations with the great powers.
- The others include the dramatic rise of China and Beijing's new assertiveness.

### **India's shifting priorities:**

- India's growing strategic partnerships with the US and Europe have begun to end India's prolonged alienation from the West.
- Meanwhile, India's own relative weight in the international system continues to increase and give greater breadth and depth to India's foreign policy.
- Change is the only permanent feature of the world and India has to recognise it fully.
- for example, the shifts in the triangular relations between Russia, China and America.

### **The changing global politics leads to changing strategies of the countries:**

#### **The Flip flop in Russia-China relation:**

- Lavrov's claim in Delhi last week about relations between Moscow and Beijing being in their best-ever phase today.
- They were probably even better in the 1950s when Russia and China were ideological soulmates united by expansive economic and security cooperation.
- The leaders of the two nations — Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong — signed a formal treaty of alliance in 1950.
- Russia not only invested massively in the economic modernisation of China, but also gave it technology that made it easier for Beijing to become a nuclear weapon power.
- However, by the 1960s, the two communist states were at each other's throats, arguing about ideology and a lot else.

- Dispelling the illusions that communist states don't fight with each other, the armies of Russia and China fought each other on their frontier in 1969.
- The Sino-Soviet split had consequences way beyond their bilateral relations. None of them more important than the efforts by both Moscow and Beijing to woo Washington.

### **Changing India - Russia relations:**

- The break-up between Russia and China also opened space for Delhi against Beijing after the 1962 war in the Himalayas.
- As Sino-Russian relations worsened in the 1960s along with the deterioration of India's relations with China, Delhi and Moscow found common interest in balancing Beijing.
- Back in the 1960s and 1970s, China strongly objected to Delhi's partnership with Moscow (much in the manner that Beijing complains about India's relations with America today).
- Although the Indo-Russian strategic liaison endured, it was never without its share of problems that Delhi had to cope with.

### **Pressure on Russia from the west:**

- Under intense American pressure on Russia in the 1980s, Moscow sought to normalise ties with Beijing.
- After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow's first instinct was to become a part of the political West.
- But disappointed with the Western response, Russia turned to build a stronger partnership with China.

### **The US-Russia relations:**

- Russia, which today resents India's growing strategic warmth with the US, has its own long history of collaboration with Washington.
- Moscow and Washington were allies in defeating Hitler's Germany and in constructing the post-War Yalta system on which the current world order rests.
- The alliance between Washington and Moscow, however, quickly degenerated into a Cold War by the late 1940s.
- By the turn of the 1960s, Russia was seeking peaceful coexistence with America.
- US-Russia together laid the foundations for nuclear arms control and sought to develop a new framework for shared global leadership.

### **The US- China relation:**

- China was visceral in its denunciation of the US-Soviet detente in the 1960s and 1970s.
- But Mao's answer was not in staying away from both, but in leaning towards America.
- Although he fought a costly Korean War with the US in the early 1950s, Mao had no difficulty cosyng up to Washington in 1971 to counter the perceived threat from Russia.

- He was merely following the old Chinese dictum of “aligning with the far to balance the near”.
- His successor, Deng Xiaoping, refused to extend the 1950 security treaty with Russia that expired in 1980.
- Deng turned, instead, towards building a solid economic partnership with the US and the West that helped accelerate China’s rise as a great power.
- Today, the Chinese economy is nine times larger than that of Russia.
- If Moscow was the big brother in the 1950s, Beijing is the senior partner today.
- It is a reminder that power balances will inevitably change over time.

### **The dilemma for india:**

- Delhi was happy to welcome Russia’s repeated veto in the United Nations Security Council against Anglo-American interventions on the Kashmir question.
- But it was anxious about the dangers of a potential US-Russian global condominium.
- This is not very different from Delhi’s worries these days about America and China setting up a G-2 over Asia and the world.
- Delhi was especially concerned about the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty system, with all its constraints on India’s atomic options, that Moscow and Washington constructed in the late 1960s.
- Many other global and regional issues, including Russian interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, created political difficulties for India.
- Delhi never relished Moscow’s ideas on “Asian collective security”.
- Despite all their venting on India joining an “Asian Nato”, China and Russia have not stopped seeking special bilateral relationships of their own with America.
- The problem is not about principle, but the difficulty of finding acceptable terms of accommodation with Washington.
- Delhi has no reason to rule out important changes in the way the US, Russia and China relate to each other in the near and medium-term.

### **Steps in right direction:**

- The twists and turns in the triangular dynamic between America, Russia and China noted above should remind us that Moscow and Beijing are not going to be “best friends forever”.
- Nor will America’s ties with China and Russia remain permanently frozen.
- Delhi has successfully managed the past flux in the great power politics; it is even better positioned today to deal with potential changes among the great powers, thanks to the size of the Indian economy and a more broad-based foreign policy.
- In the last few years, India has finally overcome its historic hesitations in partnering with the US.
- Delhi has also intensified its efforts to woo European powers, especially France.
- Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s visit to Delhi later this month promises a fresh start in India’s difficult postcolonial ties with Britain.

- India is also expanding its ties with Asian middle powers like Japan, Korea and Australia.

**Conclusion:**

- The current troubles with China seem to be an unfortunate exception to the upswing in India's bilateral ties with global actors.
- Despite the current differences over Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific, Delhi and Moscow have no reason to throw away their mutually beneficial bilateral partnership.
- However, India and Russia relations with other parties like China and America are evolving. But none of that change is impossible for India to manage.