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The China-Russia Relationship

Why in news?

Xi Jinping is seemingly with Vladimir Putin against the US, but the relationship between the countries is complex as their interests do not always converge.

How did the China-Russia relationship evolve?

- **Cold war days-** For most of the Cold War decades, relations between China and the former Soviet Union were marked by mistrust and doctrinal differences.
- The change came in 1989, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the first Soviet leader to land in Beijing since 1958.
- Both the leaders declared certain points as the basis of their bilateral relations. Those include
 - mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity
 - mutual nonaggression
 - non-interference in each other's internal affairs
 - equality and mutual benefit
 - peaceful coexistence
- **After the collapse of Soviet Union-** In 2001, the two countries signed the **Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation**.
- It paved 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 2021, the two countries extended the treaty at a virtual meeting between Putin and Xi.

What about the cooperation between both the countries?

- **Energy-** Russia opened its doors wide for Chinese investments, and struck a 400 billion dollar deal on gas to supply 38 billion cubic metres (bcm) annually to China for 30 years from 2025.
- The [Power of Siberia pipeline](#) began operations in 2019 for sending gas to China.
- Last week, 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.
- **Trade-** The trade between the two countries has tripled from 50 billion dollar to over 147 billion dollar since 2016.
- China is now Russia's largest trading partner.
- **Connectivity-** 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](#).
- **Geo-political-** Russia reaffirmed support for the One-China principle, and opposed any form of independence for Taiwan.
- Both the countries are opposing camps in the Asia-Pacific region and the negative impact of the US's Indo-Pacific strategy.

How did the China-Russia alliance turn against the U.S.?

- Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea in Ukraine led to a sharp downturn in Moscow's ties with the US, NATO, and Europe.
- When the US, EU, and Australia imposed sanctions on Russia, Putin turned towards Beijing.
- If the West imposes financial and banking sanctions on Russia, Beijing is expected to assist Moscow with alternative payment methods.

What are the differing interests between the two countries?

- **Partnership-** 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.
- **Annexation of Crimea-** In 2014, in the vote on UNSC resolutions on the referendum in Crimea that was used by Putin as an excuse to annex the Black Sea peninsula, China had abstained and has not recognised Crimea's accession to Russia.
- **Area of interest-** China's main security interests lie in Asia whereas Russia's are in Europe.
- **Relationship with other countries-** Russia, which wants to be recognised as a great power once again, has positions independent of Beijing on many issues including on the relationship with India.
- **Energy-** The negotiations on the pipeline and gas prices were worried and Russia is conscious that its gas exports to Germany and the rest of Europe gets much more revenue and China has other pipelines to tap.
- **Espionage-** As two independent great powers, China and Russia are also engaged in espionage against each other.
- In 2020 and 2021, evidence mounted over the level of Chinese spies' aggression in Russia, including hacking attempts aimed at stealing designs for the latest weapons systems.
- **Diplomacy-** The nationalist emotions of China's leadership playing a bigger role in Beijing's foreign policy as evidenced by the wolf warrior diplomacy phenomenon are likely to become a factor in the relationship once again.
- Stronger Chinese nationalism, if directed at Moscow, is likely to fuel a revival of Sinophobia in Russian society too.
- **Relation with Ukraine-** Ukraine is a crucial link in Xi's BRI project and China is also Ukraine's biggest trading partner and its agricultural exports, particularly corn, have sustained China during its trade war with the US.
- **In the event of Russia's war over Ukraine-** For Beijing, war in Ukraine would take US military energies away from the South China Sea, but might also affect the talks to resolve trade issues.
- Beijing will not fight the war if it breaks out, but it will find it messy and complicated to negotiate.

What is the view from New Delhi?

- In this crisis with many moving parts, all actors are trying their bets in ways that are altering the geopolitics of Europe and Asia in real time.
- India would restrict its foreign policy choices and undermine its own status as a rising power of global standing if it takes sides in a conflict.
- New Delhi's best bet would be to treat its relations with both countries and the US separately.
- The Russia-China statement did not mention China's border dispute with India and 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.

References

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