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Recalibration of India-Russia Ties

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This article is based on **“The Moscow reset”** which was published in The Hindustan Times on 25/06/2020. It talks about India and Russia relationship amid growing strategic convergence between Russia and China.

Recently, Indian **Defence minister visited Russia to commemorate World War II Victory Day**. The defence minister also asked Russia to speed up its delivery of the first lot of the **S-400 air defence system**.

However, Russia’s leverage and influence to shape and change China’s hard stance on border issues remain a key element of India’s foreign policy goal vis-a-vis relations with Russia.

Though India and Russia share a long history of strategic and economic cooperation, the post-Cold war Russia and China strategic convergence remains a foreign policy issue for India.

As even today, Russia remains an indispensable ally for India, there is a need for recalibration in India’s Russia policy.

Strategic Convergence Between Russia And China

- **Economic Cooperation:** In the post-Cold War era, economic relations have formed the “new strategic basis” for Russia-China relations.
 - 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.

- **Common Adversary:** Dissatisfaction with American policy has grown in both Russia and China, which propelled a closer partnership between the two countries.
 - The Western countries' approach towards Russia after the **annexation of Crimea** through harsh sanctions in 2014 brought it much closer to China.
 - For China, whose policies aimed at European markets via the **One Belt-One Road project**, Russia is natural strategic partners as the maritime routes are under assertive control of the United States.
- **Areas of Cooperation:** Russia's decision to sell the latest military technology (like S-400 surface to air missiles and SU-35 fighter jets) to China and an invitation to participate in its largest military drill.

Also, the political and economic rapprochement is taking place between Russia and China in a number of fields: energy, arms production, trade-in national currencies and strategic projects in transport and supporting infrastructure.

Russia-China Relationship: A Friendship of Convenience

Many foreign policy experts are of the opinion, India should not fear the closeness in Russia-China ties, as it is of temporary nature and a result of the current geopolitical setup. This can be illustrated by the following observations:

- **Russia's Resurgence:** Russia is seeking to regain its status as a great power, therefore it will continue to view China as a potential strategic adversary of the future.
- **Battle for Influence In Central Asia:** A more problematic area for cooperation is that of the **Eurasian Economic Union**.
 - Economic integration in Eurasia was originally pursued by Russia with no immediate concern and/or interest for China.
 - However, it is becoming clear that China has developed strong interests in this region.
 - While each country has pursued independent projects in Central Asia, they will both struggle for domination in the region.
- **No Mutual Support on Core Foreign Policy Issue:** Further, China does not recognise Crimea as part of Russia, and Russia takes a neutral stance on China's claims in the **South China Sea**.

India and Russia Ties

Russia has been a long-time friend of India; it not only provided India arms to maintain a formidable military profile but also gave invaluable diplomatic support on a variety of regional issues.

- Although India has consciously diversified its new defence purchases from other countries, the bulk of its defence equipment (60 to 70%) is still from Russia.
Also, India needs a regular and reliable supply of spare parts from the Russian defence industry.
- However, apart from growing Russia-China quasi-alliance, in recent times there has been a divergence in India-Russia relationship.
 - Russia is reaching out to Pakistan for defence equipment sales, despite Indian reservations.
 - Further, more differences may crop up, as is evident in Russia's support to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Way Forward

Given strategic convergence between Russia and China, it is important that India draw up strategies that protect its national interests, which may include the following:

- **Deepening Ties With Russia:** Deepening its relationship with Russia, because Russia is an important balancer for India vis-à-vis China.
 - Also, India should seek to reset its relationship with Russia, especially as the defence element is starting to fade as India has started diversifying its defence procurements.
 - Energy and strategic minerals can be other areas of cooperation.
- **Using Diplomacy to Tackle China:** Within the framework of the excellent military relationship with Russia, India needs to pursue Russia that it should not transfer technology to China that could prove to be detrimental to India's security in the long run.
- **Leveraging Multilateral Institutions:** 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 **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** and **RIC trilateral forum** must be leveraged.
- **Pursuing US-Russia-India Triangle:** Finally, there is a need to develop closer ties not only with Russia but also with the United States, this could balance any moves towards a strategic partnership between China and Russia.

INDIAN NAVY'S DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA



- The Indian Navy got its first submarines — Foxtrot class — from Russia.
- Nine of the 14 conventional submarines operated by India are Russian.
- India is completely dependent on Russia for its nuclear submarine programme — both nuclear-powered & nuclear-attack submarines.
- While the Indian Navy currently operates a Russian nuclear submarine on lease — INS Chakra — it has signed a deal for another one that will be used for training and familiarisation of Indian crew.
- The sole aircraft carrier operated by India — INS Vikramaditya — is also of Russian origin, as are a host of other ships including the Talwar-class frigates.

Drishti Mains Question

“India needs to recalibrate its foreign policy vis-a-vis Russia, especially in the context of the strengthening Russia-China axis”. Analyse.



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This editorial is based on **“Control, not delete: On China apps ban”** which was published in The Hindu on July 1st, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.