



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title: **EVOLUTION OF RUSSIA-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONS**

Chairperson: Capt HPS Sodhi, Senior Fellow, CAPS

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- The relative coldness of Russia's relations with the US and EU has given a new warmth to the Russia-China bilateral relations. Scholars, Academicians and journalists are still discussing the prospect of evolution of a probable alliance between the two strong regional players.
- However, many instances in history clearly demonstrate that the relation between Moscow and Beijing is a "marriage of convenience" where both the countries have come closer for their mutual benefits. However, the other view also is that strategic and even ideological factors form the basis of China-Russia ties and predicts that the two countries—both of which see the US as a possible obstacle to their objectives—will eventually form an anti-US, anti-Western alliance.
- The growing proximity between Russia and China is an important subject of study as they share common goals and mutual concerns where both the countries have emerged as crucial economic, defence and strategic actors in world politics.



- Russia's "pivot to Asia" policy could be termed as the "pivot to China". Kremlin realised that the 21st century being termed as an "Asian century", it needs to engage with Beijing in order to be part of this. According to The Economist, the partnership between the two nations can be termed as "Frenemies".
- The three major I's of Insecurity, Identity and Ideology in Russian foreign policy are related to Russian insecurity of the growing American influence in the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union only increased this insecurity. Identity is another major aspect in Russian foreign policy where it differs from rest of the nations of both Asia and Europe. The socialist ideology of Russian foreign policy also defined its relations with the international community.
- For sure Russian foreign policy has been driven by the leaders who have been an influential part of the decision making process. Post 2000, the world saw the evolution of Russian policy through its energy politics and revival of its defence industry.
- Asia pivot, for Russia has become an imperative rather than choice. Russia has started reviewing its focus on Asian region and reviewing its policy regarding the Asian region. Historically though, China was against the peaceful co-existence movement by Russia clearly indicating that it was a means to appease the west.
- The border dispute between China and Soviet Union came to fore in 1963, wherein next year Soviet Union started the military build-up along the Chinese border. Soviet Union continuously expanded its forces in Siberia to the Far East, thereby posing a major threat to China. Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 raised Chinese concerns of possible Soviet expansion into Asian mainland.
- With the collapse of the Soviet Union, this equation between Russia and China changed. In 1996 both Beijing and Moscow agreed on a formula for a long term partnership. The establishment of the new world order reshaped the foreign policies of both Russia and China, wherein both the countries have started looking forward to a more stable regional order along with the greater economic cooperation and stable strategic payoffs for both the countries.
- In 1996, Shanghai Cooperation council emerged as the most feasible vital choice for both the nations. Another major change was brought about due to the need of the Russian

defence equipment by the Chinese. This was a mutual trade wherein Russia required the huge funds to keep its defence industries functioning which were received from the sale of defence equipment to China. And thus China became one of the most important clients for Russia.

- The major factors that have led to the convergence of interests between the two nations are the establishment of a multi-polar world and also to challenge the US global hegemony. The burgeoning trade relations between Moscow and Beijing as well as China's increasing demand for energy resources along with the defence trade have led to the convergence of interests between the two nations.
 - The speaker pointed out that for greater strategic cooperation border disputes between the two nations should be resolved. However the threat perception regarding US policies has played a greater role in the convergence of interests between Russia and China. However, the future of Sino-Russian relations largely depends on the policies of the US towards China and Russia at the individual level.
 - The speaker also suggested that the over-dependability of Chinese on Russians can lead to potential vulnerability in the bilateral relations. China can no longer be termed as the "junior" in this partnership between Russia and China. Hence, according to the speaker, it is a "partnership of convenience" rather than true partners as national interests may lead to opposing views in the international realm that had already been witnessed historically.
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