

**POST 9/11 SINO-RUSSO ENTENTE: RESHAPING  
THE ASIAN SECURITY DYNAMICS AND  
CHALLENGES FOR INDIA**

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BY

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July, 2019

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled '**POST 9/11 SINO-RUSSO ENTENTE: RESHAPING THE ASIAN SECURITY DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES FOR INDIA**' has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Nishtha Kaushiki, Assistant Professor, Centre for South and Central Asian Studies, School of Global Relations, Central University of Punjab. No part of the thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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## CERTIFICATE

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## ABSTRACT

### **Post 9/11 Sino-Russo Entente: Reshaping the Asian Security Dynamics and Challenges for India**

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China and Russia belongs to the group of major players of the international system. The strategic convergence between the two countries occupies a considerable geopolitical weight. The Sino-Russian relations witnessed a dramatic change after the demise of the Soviet Union. The bilateral relations since then have witnessed a positive trend i.e., from being adversaries to strategic partners. To a large extent, both the countries seem to have overcome the problems that used to hamper their relations. Although, it was predicted that the Sino-Russo strategic partnership is full of challenges and is not going to last long, however, the two sides have been successful in sustaining their partnership so far in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, their strategic entente is becoming stronger day by day and the main reason behind this is that they are focussing more on converging interests. The U.S. factor plays a key role in the mounting Beijing-Moscow entente. The 'Asia Pivot' policy and the Ukraine crisis further boosted their bilateral relations. While responding to the U.S. hegemonic designs and unilateralism, both China and Russia found themselves on the same page. Therefore, the two sides have been countering Washington's strategic designs both individually as well as jointly. Furthermore, the two powers have used the vacuum created by the U.S. involvement in the long-drawn Afghan and Iraq wars to enhance their strategic outreach. America's relative decline has made their path of countering the U.S. hegemony easy. Both the sides in the current security scenario have been engaging the United States on two fronts i.e., Russia in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and China in the South China Sea. Initially, Pentagon was not taking any serious note of the China-Russia strategic partnership, however, since the past few years it has started to view the rising Moscow-Beijing strategic proximity with grave concern. In fact, the Trump administration in its recently published security strategies has vowed to take serious note of the Sino-Russian strategic designs which are undermining the U.S primacy in the world. All these developments are changing the security scenario of Asia, thereby resulting in the emergence of great-power competition. India being situated in such a geopolitical position can no longer remain aloof from these developments. The changing security dynamics has unfolded a plethora of challenges for India. While responding to these developments, India in one or the other way is showing its tilt towards the United States and its allies and strategic partners in the subcontinent.

It is perhaps in this backdrop that Russia has made revisions in its Pakistan policy by showing positive overtures towards the latter. Furthermore, India seems to be losing its time-tested friend Russia to its arch-rival China in the changing geopolitical realities as Moscow-Beijing partnership has become much more than the 'axis of convenience'. In fact, it has become difficult for New Delhi to balance its relations between Russia and the United States. Although, New Delhi has been successful so far in walking the tight rope quite well, however, it is becoming more challenging for it to maintain its strategic autonomy. While looking at the developments these challenges are going to become more intense for India in the years to come. Keeping these developments in view, this work analysed the strategic proximity between Beijing and Moscow with special focus on its current status. Secondly, the U.S. factor in the mounting Sino-Russian strategic embrace, and how this partnership is undermining the U.S. predominance in Asia, has been analysed. Finally, the challenges that this emerging great-power rivalry has unfolded for India and its response to the changing geo-political realities have been analysed.

Hilal Ramzan

Dr. Nishtha Kaushiki

***Dedicated to my Parents***

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Sr. No.	Full form	Abbreviation
1	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor	AAGC
2	Antiballistic Missile	ABM
3	Area Denial	AD
4	African Development Bank	AfDB
5	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	AIIB
6	Advanced Heavy Lifter	AHL
7	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation	APEC
8	Association of South East Asian Nations	ASEAN
9	Aviation Industry Corporation of China	AVIC
10	Anti-Access	A2
11	The British Broadcasting Corporation	BBC
12	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation	BECA
13	The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation	BIMSTEC
14	Balance of Power	BOP
15	Barrel Per Day	BPD
16	Belt and Road Initiative	BRI
17	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa	BRICS
18	Central Asian Republics	CARs
19	Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act	CAATSA
20	Central Treaty Organization	CENTO
21	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures	CICA

22	Common Wealth of Independent States	CIS
23	Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement	CISMOA
24	China National Petroleum Corporation	CNPC
25	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement	COMCASA
26	China Pakistan Economic Corridor	CPEC
27	Collective Security Treaty Organization	CSTO
28	Defense Planning Guidance	DPG
29	Eurasian Economic Union	EAEU/EEU
30	European Union	EU
31	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	ESCAP
32	Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft	FGFA
33	Freedom of Navigation Operation	FONOP
34	Free Trade Area	FTA
35	Gross Domestic Product	GDP
36	Group of Eight	G8
37	Group of 20	G20
38	Helicopter Operations from Ships other Than Aircraft Carriers	HOSTAC
39	International Monetary Fund	IMF
40	International North South Transport Corridor	INSTC
41	Indian Ocean Region	IOR
42	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria	ISIS
43	Jamaat-ud-Dawa	JuD
44	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement	LEMOA
45	Lashkar-e-Taiba	LeT

46	Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle	MIRV
47	Memorandum of Understanding	MoU
48	Metric Tons	Mt
49	Multirole Transport Aircraft	MTA
50	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation	NATO
51	National Defense Strategy	NDS
52	National Missile Defence	NMD
53	Nuclear Posture Review	NPR
54	Non-Proliferation Treaty	NPT
55	Nuclear Supplier Group	NSG
56	National Security Strategy	NSS
57	One Belt One Road	OBOR
58	Pacific Command	PACOM
59	People's Republic of China	PRC
60	People's Liberation Army	PLA
61	Russia, India, and China	RIC
62	Rim of Pacific	RIMPAC
63	Revolution in Military Affairs	RMA
64	Research and Development	R&D
65	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	SAARC
66	Surface-to-Air Missile	SAM
67	Shanghai cooperation organisation	SCO
68	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation	SEATO
69	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute	SIPRI
70	Strategic Trade Authorisation	STA
71	Theatre Missile Defence	TMD
72	Trans-Pacific Partnership	TPP

73	United Nations	UN
74	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas	UNCLOS
75	United Nation's Security Council	UNSC
76	United States	US
77	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	USSR
78	Weapons of Mass Destruction	WMD
79	World Trade Organisation	WTO

### Introduction

#### **1.1: Background–**

China and Russia belongs to the group of major players in the international system. The strategic convergence between the two countries occupies a considerable geopolitical weight. The western world particularly the United States is viewing Sino-Russian relations with great concern and as inimical to their interests.

Sino-Russo relations encompass a history of widespread disagreements and efforts at ensuring their respective dominance in the international arena. Their disagreements date back to the thirteenth-century Kievan invasion by Mongols to the attacks of Amur, Ussuri, and the border areas of the Central Asian region in the nineteenth century (Belopolsky, 2009).

Nevertheless, these complexities in their bilateral relations have also been balanced by mutual cooperation. In the backdrop of common ideological approaches of communism, China-Russia relations witnessed a dramatic surge during the period from 1949 to 1960. Despite, signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in 1950, the two sides could not overcome the problems of suspicion completely (Bolt & Cross, 2009). In 1960, the relations witnessed skirmishes due to the ideological disputes between Mao Zedong and Nikita Khrushchev, which led to the alienation of the two widely reckoned communist giants and subsequent militarization of their shared borders. Relations between the two countries were marked by the coldness in the following decades until 1989<sup>1</sup> when the relations were normalised (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006). During this period, the decade of 1966-1976, witnessed the 1969 armed confrontation (at Damanski Island on the border of Ussuri River) between the two countries, and the subsequent Sino-US rapprochement in the early 1970s, which marked the highest intensity of the Sino-Soviet conflict<sup>2</sup> (Rozman, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> The diplomatic efforts were initiated in 1982 so as to end the longstanding mistrust resulted in a summit between Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989. The outcome of this summit was the restoration of the party-to-party ties between the Communist Party of China (CCP) and Communist Party of USSR (CPSU) and thereby the normal bilateral relations were re-established.

<sup>2</sup> The prime reason for this was the Sino-US rapprochement in the early 1970s, which heightened the Sino-Soviet tensions within the framework of Cold War.

### **1.1.1: End of the Cold War and Sino-Russo Normalisation–**

The Sino-Russo relations witnessed a dramatic change since the collapse of the communism. With the end of the Cold War, the arms sales between the two countries increased which in 1993 led to the subsequent signing of the five-year defence cooperation agreement (Kornberg & Faust, 2005). Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the two countries engaged themselves in enhancing their bilateral cooperation on various diplomatic fronts with the aim of strengthening their relations. In order to deepen their relations, the two countries set up 'strategic partnership' in 1996. This was the result of many developments encompassing the Gulf War, the Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-1996), NATO expansion, U.S. missile defence, etc., posing geostrategic challenges (Bin, 2005). The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, initially created in 1996 as the 'Shanghai Five',<sup>3</sup> was designated as a regional organisation while incorporating Uzbekistan in June 2001. The SCO has provided a platform for both the countries to secure their interests in the resource-rich Central Asian region and has translated the idea of Sino-Russian strategic partnership into practice in this volatile region. It has also increased the intensity of their cooperation as well as competition in some areas by having Central Asian countries as its members. Apart from this, China and Russia also signed the 'Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness, and Cooperation in 2001' (Bolt & Cross, 2009).

### **1.2: Post 9/11 Sino-Russo Entente–**

The Sino-Russian strategic partnership has been rigorously tested in the post 9/11 years as the two communist giants embraced their regional policies amidst the years of pre-emption and unilateralism. In the post 9/11 world, Sino-Russo relations continue to be on the positive track of rapid improvement. The Moscow-Beijing strategic relationship has significantly become more visible and influential since the last decade. Both the countries joined together to vociferously criticise Washington's actions in Iraq and in calling for NATO withdrawal from the vital Central Asian region. They have to a large extent overcome the problems that hampered the bilateral relations and which have now become a remote memory. The 2004 settlement of a series of border disputes along their border which

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<sup>3</sup> Shanghai Five includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

hindered their relations for centuries can be cited towards this end (Brakhus & Overland, 2007). The two countries have institutionalised their strategic partnership while having joint regular summits and other working-level meetings and also through security cooperation under the banner of SCO. The declaration of 2005 as the year of Russia in China and 2006 as the year of China in Russia further boosted their bilateral relations. This, in turn, helped in the expansion of economic opportunities for companies on both sides and also in endorsing cultural and person-to-person exchanges (Mankoff, 2009: 193-194).

Today, China and Russia are strategically cooperating at different levels that encompass trade, geopolitics at regional as well as global level. The two countries held significant military exercises both within the SCO framework as well as bilaterally, like 2005 and 2007 Peace Missions, the Peace Shield 2009, the 2010 antiterrorist exercise, the first-ever joint Sino-Russo naval exercise was held in the strategically vital Yellow Sea in 2012. The 2013 Beijing-Moscow exercise paved the way for more institutionalisation of joint exercises (Swanstrom, 2014) and the trend of holding joint exercises continued in the ensuing years. Through the holding of these exercises, the two sides display their commitment towards their strategic partnership, and also sending a clear message to the West of their strengthening cooperation. More importantly, Xi Jinping was the highest profile foreign leader on the Russian Victory Day parade in May 2015, in the absence of Western leaders who rejected the invitation from Vladimir Putin to attend this parade.

### **1.2.1: Convergence of Interests–**

The Moscow-Beijing ties are witnessing the rise because of several converging interests.

Firstly, the two countries share almost a similar position as far as the international order is concerned. Neither of the two countries favours the world order to be dominated by America alone, rather they continuously speak about the multilateralism. Being the veto powers of the United Nations Security Council, China and Russia to a large extent use 'multilateralism' as a slogan for discussing and settling international issues through the United Nations (Jakobson, et al.,

2011). Beijing and Moscow seem uncomfortable with their perceived American dominance of the world order. Given their apprehensions regarding the US intentions, China and Russia have worked together on various occasions to balance the menace they perceive from Washington. The two powers are also concerned with NATO's expansion and both the powers stand in its opposition for their own reasons. Towards this end, the leading example may be Xi Jinping's statement during the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures (CICA) held in May 2014, in which he, as reported by BBC (2014, May 21) said–

Strengthening military alliances with a third party does not benefit the maintenance of regional security. Matters in Asia ultimately must be taken care of by Asians, Asia's problems ultimately must be resolved by Asians, and Asia's security ultimately must be protected by Asians (“China president speaks”, 2014: para. 7).

As China and Russia share borders with the Central Asian region both agree on the point that a stable Central Asian region is in their interest. Towards this end, they are engaged in several efforts at different levels to ensure the stability of this vital region. Despite supporting the US-led NATO efforts for eliminating Taliban outfits in Afghanistan, the two powers soon became concerned about the mounting presence of the U.S. in this region. Given this backdrop, the two countries have been cautiously engaging themselves in efforts to balance Washington's strategic outreach in this region. Apart from this Beijing and Moscow are also desperate to exploit the regions rich natural resources.

Secondly, energy relations comprise an important aspect of Sino-Russian relations. Both the countries are engaged in efforts to diversify their energy relations with other countries. China which is on a constant rise needs energy supplies to boost its economy and on the other hand, Russia has the potential to provide China with the same. Also, amidst the deteriorated relations with the West, Russia is in need of alternative markets for its energy resources, for which China serves as the best option.

Thirdly, defence ties also constitute the major part of the Sino-Russo relations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became the foremost source of military technology to China. From the Russian perspective, China's import of

arms from Russia became a major source of income for the later to sustain its arms industry. Moscow's arms sales to Beijing constitute an important factor in their closer cooperation (Haas, 2013). More importantly, the Chinese premier Xi Jinping became the first foreign leader to be allowed to visit Moscow's strategic defence headquarters and "war room" which gives a clear indication of continuance in Sino-Russo strategic military cooperation (Harner, 2013). The table given below shows that Russia dominates China's major weapons import and accounted for 65 per cent (as shown in the Table: 1.1, below) of the latter's arms imports. Despite the rapid advancements in Beijing's military industry, Russia continued to be its major exporter of a number of engines for domestically designed military equipment.

**Table: 1.1– The Five Largest Importers of Major Weapons and their main Suppliers, 2013-2017**

Importer	Share of arms imports (%)		Percentage Change from 2008-12 to 2013-17	Main suppliers (share of importer's total imports, %), 2013-17		
	2013-17	2008-12		1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>India</b>	12	11	24	Russia (62)	USA (15)	Israel (11)
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	10	3.4	225	USA (61)	UK (23)	France (3.6)
<b>Egypt</b>	4.5	1.6	215	France (37)	USA (26)	Russia (21)
<b>UAE</b>	4.4	3.2	51	USA (58)	France (13)	Italy (6.6)
<b>China</b>	4.0	5.4	-19	<b>Russia (65)</b>	France (14)	Ukraine (8.4)

Source: SIPRI Fact Sheet March 2018

Finally, apart from these converging interests, there are also other areas where their interests converge. Both countries share similar positions on the initiatives made at the international level to overcome the problem of the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The two powers also assert that the sovereign state has the right to establish its own political system (Jakobson et al., 2011). While speaking in this line Menon (2009) rightly argued that–

While Russia and China do not reject universal human-rights conventions and treaties (they have signed several), they do see Western governments' concern with liberties in other countries as an intrusion at best, an ideological offensive at worst (Menon, 2009: 107).

### **1.2.2: Divergence of Interests–**

Despite the above convergences there persist also the limits to this convergence, particularly in the areas where their interests conflict.

Firstly, as far as Russia and Georgia conflict is concerned, China did not support the Russian position and was rather irked by its invasion of Georgia. This was because of the fact that China fears that Russia's de facto division of Georgia into Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia could have an adverse impact on Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang provinces. Russia on the other side refused to be on China's side as far as the latter's territorial claims in the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea is concerned. Apart from this, Moscow has also signed deals on the extraction of oil and gas with Hanoi (a party in the dispute with Beijing) in the areas which are claimed by Beijing (Swanstrom, 2014).

Secondly, given the strategic interests of both communist giants in Central Asia, the region has also become an area of competition apart from cooperation between the two countries. As far as multilateral institutions for engaging the Central Asia region is concerned, the preferences of both the countries diverge. Despite being a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Russia prefers Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)<sup>4</sup> as a means to engage the Central Asian region and views SCO as Chinese creation (Bellacqua, 2010).

Thirdly, despite the sale of armaments appear to be a core area of cooperation between Russia and China; further sales have been impeded because of Russia's concerns that it is boosting the military development of a country which in future might undermine its security. It is in this backdrop that Russia's has refused to provide China with certain types of advanced military equipment. Russia's refusal of the Chinese proposal to sell the latter Tu-22M backfire supersonic tactical strike bombers can be cited towards this end. On the contrary, Moscow has been ready

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<sup>4</sup> Collective Security Treaty Organisation, is a regional security bloc signed in 1992, comprised of seven former Soviet republics and excludes China

to sell these equipment's to New Delhi (Tsai, 2003). Although there were reports in January 2013 that Beijing has brought the entire Tu-22M3 production line, however, these reports were turned down by the Rosoboronexport which denied any negotiations with China in this regard (Cenciotti, 2013).

Fourthly, Sino-Russian energy ties traditionally comprise one of the weaker areas of cooperation or we may say it occupies a secondary position in bilateral ties between China and Russia. Kremlin also fears that over-dependence on Beijing as its export destination of energy resources could invite later exerting pressure on the former with its terms and conditions as for as price and quantity of gas and oil supplies are concerned (Bellacqua, 2010).

Finally, both China and Russia attach much importance to their bilateral ties with the U.S. than to one another. Despite Beijing-Moscow strategic partnership gives the impression of being Anti-American, both have vital interests in having peaceful relations with the U.S.

### **1.3: The U.S. Factor in Sino-Russo Relations–**

Realising that the geopolitical and security environment is changing and posing challenges on different fronts for both the countries, China and Russia agreed that closer ties are in their interest. In global politics, Beijing and Moscow found each other on the similar side on various critical issues. In the post-Cold War period, both China and Russia were concerned by the American predominance and its hegemonic posture with far-reaching influence. The two countries also joined hands in opposing the unipolar world order and voiced for the establishment of multipolar world order. With the failure of Boris Yeltsin's, ephemeral dalliance with the NATO and western world, Russia had to look for alternative options. Given this development, Moscow turned towards East in search of a more reliable partner. With the deterioration of Russia-United States relations, Moscow's relations with Beijing got a further boost and in the twenty-first century, Beijing occupies a central position in Moscow's foreign policy (Belopolsky, 2009).

On the other hand, China because of its own concerns filled in the vacuum. While having a close eye on the Gulf War of 1991, China realised the need to enhance its military capabilities after having a glimpse of the U.S. high-tech weaponry and

technological warfare deployed in this war. Russia appeared to be the only option for fulfilling this need because of the arms embargo of the Western powers in the post-Tiananmen period (Nojonen, 2011).

In recent times, some significant developments such as Asia pivot policy and Ukraine crisis took place which boosted the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship in one or the other way. China is concerned with the mounting American presence in the strategically vital Asia-Pacific region. In 2012, the Obama administration announced its "Asia Pivot" policy under which the United States aims to shift its focus away from the Middle East towards the Asia-Pacific region. Under this policy, Washington aims to increase its naval presence from the current 50/50 split between Atlantic and Asia-pacific to 40/60 respectively by 2020 (Logan, 2013). This policy is largely seen as an attempt to counter the growing clout of China which poses a direct challenge to the United States and its allies and friendly nations in Asia.

The Ukraine crisis, on the other hand, has changed the Russian foreign policy priorities to a large extent. Faced with an array of sanctions from the United States and European Union and the subsequent suspension from the powerful Group Eight (G8), Russia has further tilted towards China (Trenin, 2015). Thus, the conflicting interests of both the countries with the United States boosted their relations and have offered it an entirely different strategic perspective. Given this backdrop, it seems that Sino-Russian relations are going to witness more closeness in the years to come.

#### **1.4: Shifting Balance of Power and the Asian Security Dynamics–**

In international politics 'balance of power' is one of the oldest concepts. It is largely associated with the realist lexicon. The concept of balance power got popularity during the cold war period in which the world stood divided between two power blocs i.e., capitalist and the communist. During this period each side was engaged in all covert and overt efforts to balance the other. The formation of alliances like NATO, SEATO, WARSAW Pact, etc., was carried out with the aim of balancing and counter-balancing each other. However, with the disintegration of the Soviet

Union that marked the end of the Cold War, the concept of balance of power seemed to have lost that zenith reached in the decades of bloc politics.

In the post, Cold war period the United States appeared to be the sole power in the world politics which marked a shift in the world order from bipolarity to unipolarity. During the decade of the 1990s, America's hegemonic posture remained unchallenged. There was hardly any sort of efforts on part of major powers particularly China, to balance the United States. However, in the twenty-first century with the rise of the rest (Zakaria, 2008), the U.S. power projection witnessed decline due to various reasons like its engagement in Iraq and Afghan crisis, and global financial crisis. On the other side of the spectrum, China enjoyed a continuous rise. Its defence spending has witnessed a double-digit growth in the intervening years with the exception of 2010 since 1989 (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2014).

Asia which is characterised by a multi-polar Asian order (China, Japan, and India) has witnessed striking changes. Asia, where the U.S. used to enjoy a dominant position has no longer remained that much dominant, because of its relative decline. Its dominance has been challenged vigorously by the rising clout of China, which has undermined the security of its allies and friends in Asia. The U.S. and its allies and friends in Asia, are concerned about their perceived hegemonic posture of China. It is because of these factors that the U.S. has returned to Asia under the aegis of "Asia pivot" policy which is largely seen as a rebalancing strategy aiming at counter-balancing aggressive China. Russia's joining hands with China has further boosted the latter's morale against the U.S. In fact, the strategic partnership has also provided a much-needed support to Russia whose relations with the United States are currently at all-time low.

These developments have changed the security architecture of Asia, which according to Barry Buzan has led to the emergence of "Asian Super Complex" (Buzan, 2012). Under the current Asian security scenario, there seems to be the emergence of two axis of power realignments in Asia under the leadership of America and China. On the one side, the axis that is emerging, include countries like the U.S., Japan, Australia, India, Vietnam, etc., and on the other side, there is

China, Pakistan, Russia, and Iran. Since the announcement of Asia pivot policy and the recent Ukraine crisis, the Moscow-Beijing relationship seems to be at the central stage of their (China & Russia) overall foreign policy. Previously it was America and the Soviet Union who used to balance and counter-balance each other in Asia but now it is the United States and China.

### **1.5: India Amidst the Changing Sino-Russian Relations–**

As far as India's relations with these two communist powers are concerned, it enjoys closer ties with Russia than bullying China. India enjoyed amicable relations with the Soviet Union in the Cold War era and the latter appeared to be a trusted friend of the former. However, at the end of the Cold War, India feared that it had lost its trusted friend which used to stand on India's side in case of any eventuality. The leading example towards this end was Soviet Union's support to India in its war with Pakistan in 1970. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, India realised that it is not feasible for it to keep a distance from the west. Thus in order to boost its economy, it has established amicable relations with the west and thus it tilted towards the west in particular to the United States.

On the other side of the spectrum, India's relations with China are characterised by mutual distrust and fluctuations. The two rising giants of Asia (China & India) are involved in persistent border disputes. Apart from this, China always stood on Pakistan's side in case of any eventuality between India and its arch-rival Pakistan.

In the on-going century with the changing equations of power realignments, wide arrays of developments are taking place, which has changed the foreign policy priorities of major powers. This century has been defined as the Asian century because according to many policy analysts, the major developments are going to take place in Asia. It is to a large extent, due to the rising clout of China which has shifted the International attention towards Asia.

India, being situated in such a geopolitical position can no longer remain aloof from these developments. Since the past decade, the Sino-Russo relations have witnessed the positive trend i.e., from being mere adversaries to strategic partners. Their strategic ties got a further boost since the beginning of the second

decade of the twenty-first century due to various factors particularly, Obama's 'Asia Pivot' policy and the Ukraine crisis. India, on the other hand, is directly or indirectly showing its tilt towards the U.S. and its allies and friends in Asia. The leading examples towards this end might be the heads of Japan, the U.S, France, UAE, and The ASEAN being the chief guests of Indian republic day celebrations in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. Apart from this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his foreign visits outside the South Asian region, prioritized other countries especially the U.S. and its allies over China, and in particular over Russia—the major defence partner of India. It is perhaps in this backdrop that Russia made revisions in its policy towards South Asia and thereby showing positive overtures to Pakistan. This development also led to the signing of Russia-Pakistan "Military Cooperation Agreement" in November 2014". Simultaneously this military cooperation agreement between Moscow and Islamabad seems to have raised concerns for India (Roy, 2014).

Thus, the twenty-first century Asia is going to be the major area of international attention. This is because of several factors like the rise of China accompanied by its assertive territorial claims, U.S. relative decline, and its return to Asia, under the auspices of Asia pivot policy, Russia's pivot to east and strengthening of Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership. These factors have changed the Asian security architecture and led to the revisions in foreign policy priorities of major powers. In the shifting balance of power or in other words the changing power re-alignments, China and Russia strategic ties are becoming closer day by day. The major factor in bringing the two sides closer is the United States policies towards these two powers. On the other hand, India in the current century is directly or indirectly moving closer to the U.S. and its allies and friends in Asia. This may led India to lose its reliable defence partner in the form of Russia which has already made revisions in its Pakistan policy. Thus, India is situated in such a geopolitical position that it has to manage this shift cautiously.

## **1.6: Objectives–**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To examine the scope and prospects of the Sino-Russo strategic partnership.
- b) To examine how Sino-Russo strategic partnership has expanded its geostrategic influence beyond central Asia, thereby altering the status quo of the security dynamics in the Asian region?
- c) To study the challenges and opportunities it has created for India.

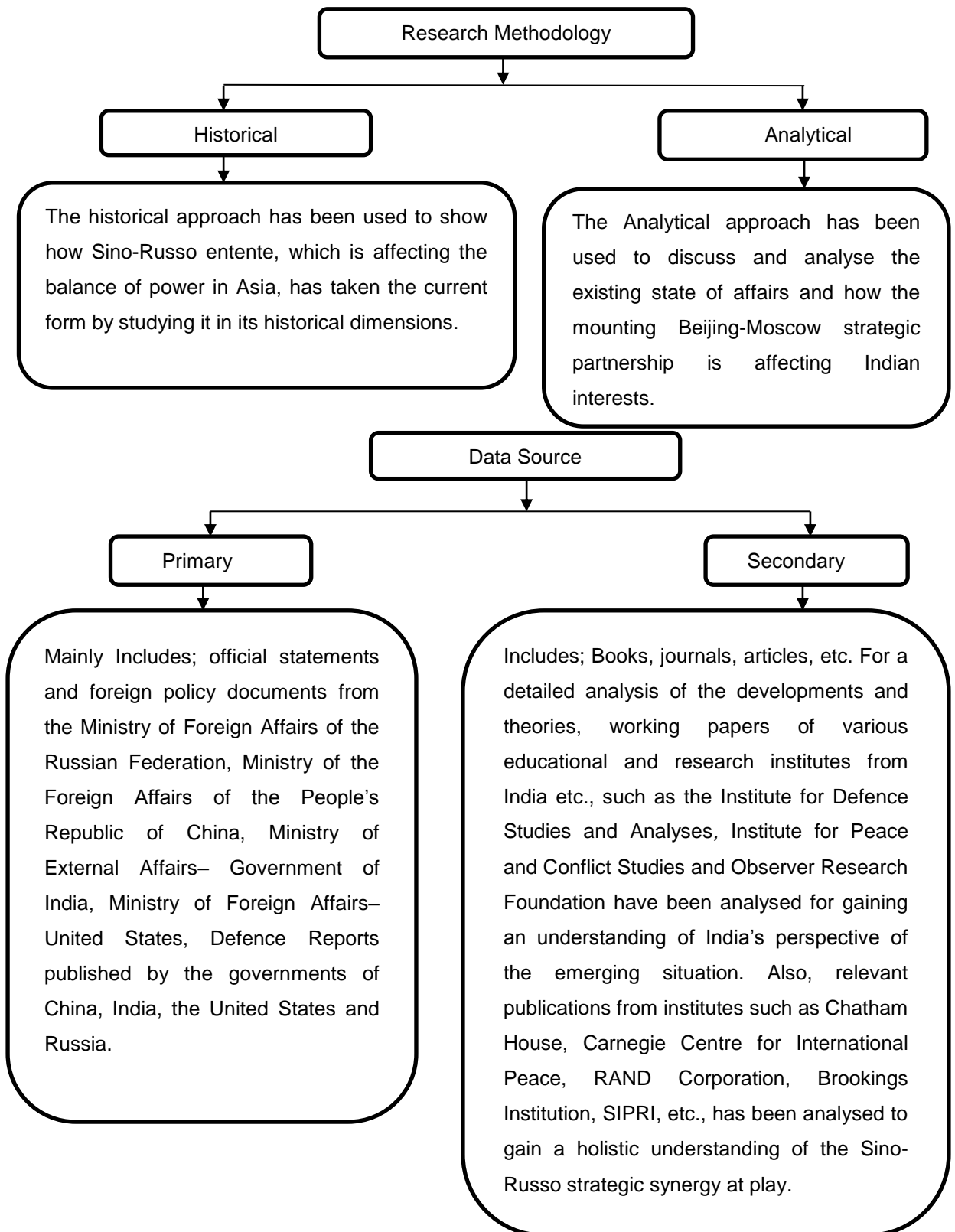
## **1.7: Research Questions–**

The study has been carried out on the following research questions;

- To what extent China and Russia have overcome their bilateral differences in the post 9/11 period?
- To what extent the mounting Sino-Russo strategic cooperation is altering the balance of power in Asia?
- How China and Russia have responded to the U.S. unilateralism thereby undermining the status quo?
- How is South Asia witnessing the impact of the growing Beijing-Moscow strategic synergy?
- To what extent will India reframe its policies to respond to the impact of the mounting Sino-Russo strategic embrace?

## 1.8: Research Methodology–

Figure: 1.1– Flow Chart Showing Research Methodology



### **1.9: Justification and Scope–**

The Sino-Russian diplomatic relations witnessed continuous progress after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Russian Federation in 1991. The Beijing-Moscow strategic cooperation has significantly become more visible since the last decade. Today both the sides are cooperating at different levels at regional as well as global level. Realising that strategic proximity between the two countries is in their interest; China and Russia are gradually coming closer to achieve their strategic goals like multipolar world order, enhancing their strategic outreach in Asia, outclassing the U.S. influence and dominance in Asia. These strategic goals are significant as they are leading the two countries to rise above their differences with the aim to achieve a greater good.

Sino-Russo entente is frequently debated in the international domain. The relations between the two countries have witnessed enormous changes i.e., from being adversaries to strategic partners. Being the major powers of the world and having animosity with the U.S., ties between the two countries have raised concerns for the West, particularly for the United States and its allies and friends in Asia. Apart from this, India is also concerned due to the changes that this entente is bringing in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in South Asia. Further, the U.S. factor is playing a crucial role in bringing the two adversaries together and recently the 'Asia pivot' policy and the Ukraine crisis have further boosted their relations. As the competition for influence or to outclass the other from Asia has become intense between China and the United States, there has been a subsequent shift in the foreign policies of major powers.

Indian foreign policy also has undergone significant changes. In the current security scenario of Asia, India is tilting towards the U.S. and its allies while on the other hand, Russia is tilting towards China and Pakistan. India being the rising power has attracted the attention of other powers particularly the U.S. and its allies. Experts also express their respective concerns on the issue of India losing its strategic autonomy. While tilting towards the U.S., India might lose its all-weather friend Russia. Thus, in the evolving Asian security architecture, Indian foreign policy is going to witness enormous challenges particularly in case of any intense deterioration of U.S. relations with China and Russia. Apart from this,

Indian policymakers have to respond cautiously to the developments taking place in the Asian geo-politics particularly in the Indo-Pacific region if not lose out to either of these major players. Since the available literature lacks various dimensions as mentioned in the knowledge gap in the next chapter (Review of Literature), a research on this topic seems to be a substantial contribution to the academics.

#### **1.10: Rationale and Significance of the Study–**

The significance of the study lies in the fact that during the last six years, the international relations of the Asian countries amongst themselves in general, and with the U.S., China and Russia in particular, have undergone significant changes, some of which can be summarized as follows:

- a. Enhanced Russo-Pak ties;
- b. China's expanded geopolitical outreach to South Asian states such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives;
- c. Russian resurgence in Asia;
- d. Extension of the US-Russo diplomatic rivalry to outdo each other in West Asia, Central Asia, etc.

The study is of immense significance as it attempted to examine and analyse the post-2012 developments and correlate it with the existing literature on the topic. In the process, it attempted to fill in the knowledge gap, thereby uncovering relatively new dimensions of the Sino-Russo strategic synergy.

#### **1.11: Chapterisation–**

##### **Chapter 1: Introduction–**

This chapter includes a general overview of the Sino-Russo entente, reshaping of the Asian security dynamics, and challenges for India. Furthermore, the chapter also includes the objectives, research questions, methodology, justification and the significance of the topic.

##### **Chapter 2: Review of Literature–**

This Chapter includes the review of literature and knowledge gap.

### **Chapter 3: China-Russia Relations: A Brief Historical Overview–**

This chapter gives a brief historical overview of the China-Russia relations. Main focus has been laid on the Cold War developments and 1990's developments in their bilateral relations.

### **Chapter 4: Post 9/11 Sino-Russo Entente: Rising above the Differences–**

This chapter examines in detail how China and Russia are rising above their differences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter discusses their relations under the aegis of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Furthermore, the chapter presents a detailed account of Sino-Russian bilateral economic and defence cooperation and how they are exploring new horizons in these sectors, such as, energy cooperation and joint military exercises.

### **Chapter 5: Unfolding of the New Asian Security Architecture: Setting the Stage for the Future Conflict–**

This chapter gives a detailed analysis of the U.S. factor in Sino-Russian Relations and How China and Russia are responding to the U.S. unilateralism both individually as well as jointly? While analysing the balance of power, the chapter discusses how these powers have engaged themselves in balancing and counterbalancing which in turn has led to the emergence of great-power competition thereby setting the stage for great-power rivalry.

### **Chapter 6: Locating India in the Emerging Great Power Competition: Challenges and Options–**

This chapter, analyses the Indian position amidst the emerging geo-political flux. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the challenges and opportunities that the emerging great-power competition has unfolded for India.

### **Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusions–**

This chapter includes a summary, conclusions, main findings, and recommendations.

### Review of Literature

The rising China-Russia relations have become a topic of intense debate in the international politics, especially in the Western policy circles. Their bilateral relations are touching new horizons and greatly reshaping the Asian security dynamics as they are undermining the U.S. hegemony. Meanwhile, India is facing enormous challenges in the changing power realignments. Ample literature is available on the topic. Most of the literature available on the topic holds the perspective that the relations between the two sides can't go longer because of the inherent problems. U.S. factor is a key to the mounting strategic partnership between the two sides. While coming on its concerns on India only a few studies are available in this aspect. The review of literature is divided into three subheadings.

#### **2.1: Scope and Prospects of the Sino-Russo Strategic Partnership–**

Tsai, (2003), "From Adversaries to Partners? Chinese and Russian Military Cooperation after the Cold War (Perspectives on the Twentieth Century)", in this work is of the opinion that while establishing the Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership in 1996, the two sides affirmed that their bilateral military cooperation would be further developed in various fields. The author in this book explores the course of their military cooperation in order to explain the nature of their military ties and also whether these adversaries (China & Russia) have overcome the historical legacies and mutual distrust to establish a full-fledged Sino-Russo military partnership. As the two countries are cooperating in certain areas like arms transfers, military-technical know-how, China and Russia were able to reduce political tensions. Western analysts are apprehensive of the closer China-Russia partnership that it would undermine the American interests to a large extent. Finally, the author concludes that, although Beijing and Moscow have succeeded to a large extent in overcoming the military tensions in border areas, the level of mutual trust has not witnessed the subsequent rise. Thus the nature of Sino-Russo ties remains frail.

Paramonov, & Stokov, (2006), in their study, "Russian-Chinese Relations: Past, Present & Future", are of the opinion that Sino-Russo relations in the past have

been arduous and ambiguous as they continue to remain so in present also. According to them, as far as the present developments in Sino-Russo relations are concerned it is difficult to guarantee the sustenance of their rapprochement in the future. It is because of the flux present in their relations. They are also of the opinion that the history of Beijing-Moscow relations is characterised by the periods of antagonism and rapprochement. Apart from this, the present-day relations in the political and military sphere are not boosting the economic relations between Beijing and Moscow, which are limited to trade and barely incorporate any industry and investment.

Norling, (2007), in his article, "China and Russia: Partners with Tensions", while exploring the relations between China and Russia since the Cold War era, held that although their bilateral relations have reached new heights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but the power relations between the two sides have reversed with the latter no longer be the dominant power. After analysing the troubled history of China-Russia relations and use of rhetoric by both to smoothen this over, Norling argued that Moscow-Beijing bilateral relations should be evaluated in terms of what they do rather than what the two sides say. Finally, the author after exploring the historical swings, reactive nature of their strategic partnership, exaggeration of rhetoric, is of the view, that there are only a few reasons to believe that Sino-Russian strategic synergy is going to be ever-lasting.

Bin, (2007), in his article "In Search for a Normal Relationship: China and Russia into the 21st Century", is of the opinion that Sino-Russian strategic partnership which dates back to 1996 is nothing more than a normal relationship as it is an amalgam of both cooperation and competition essence. Maintaining such a relationship by both sides is perhaps full of challenges. While having past experiences of 'best' and 'worst' periods, they have learned that mutual cooperation is in their interest. Further, the author argued that the SCO has set the stage from where both countries can adjust their significant interests in the strategically vital Central Asian region. Considering it a normal relationship, the author further opined that such a relationship may bring more benefits to these countries in the years to come. Such development is likely, not only because of their past experience but also due to the fact of mounting warmth in their bilateral

interactions. Their bilateral ties have been witnessing a shift from being mere adversaries to one of coexistence. Finally, the author argues that in the long-term, the bilateral strategic partnership may or may not be a reliable benchmark for the future course as China has to deal with the Russia which after Soviet disintegration faced the weakness and loss of pre-eminence on the world stage and is now on its way to recapture that lost pride.

Brakhus, & Overland, (2007), "A Match Made in Heaven? Strategic Convergence between China and Russia", in this work, examine the Moscow-Beijing strategic convergence. Authors in this study focus mainly on their congruity as complementary economies, shared concerns regarding American power, location and their political outlook. Towards this end, the match between Moscow's natural resources and Beijing's markets has been examined by them. After examining these factors Brakhus & Overland came with the conclusion that closer ties between the two powers are in their interest, but it would not take the shape of an alliance. Although China and Russia have common interests in restricting the preponderance of the United States, the formation of a full-fledged Sino-Russo anti-Western alliance is unlikely to prove applicable in the short term. However, if the U.S. continues to undermine their strategic space, both the powers are going to have strong incentives to intensify their strategic partnership.

Lo, (2008), "Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics", in this book, is of the opinion that Sino-Russian 'strategic partnership' has been misunderstood. Both the countries claim that bilateral ties are sound and closer currently than at any point in history. This book steers amidst overstated interpretation of Sino-Russian strategic partnership as an anti-US alliance and conceited (exaggerated) supposition that past frictions and challenging policies/plans ought to alienate the two nations constantly. The Beijing-Moscow ties demonstrate a new geopolitics, one characterised by the avoidance of formal alliances in support of more adjustable and opportunistic engagements.

The author argued that like most of the relationships, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is a 'normal relationship' which is a mix of good and bad elements. The author sees Sino-Russian ties as a limited partnership and not so much an

anticipated strategic partnership. He further argued that a closer look at the Beijing-Moscow relations makes it clear, that their apparent strengths are accompanied by flaws as well. Although they have managed to overcome various problems and are working together to take their relationship to new heights, still, there are lingering issues and mutual distrust (especially on Russian side) that undermines their efforts to have a strong bilateral strategic partnership.

While answering the question of how China and Russia managed to make closer cooperation work despite having numerous hindrances, he labelled their partnership as an “*axis of convenience*.” This indicates that no one among these two powers has inordinate expectations on other. Given this development, whatever disagreement occurs between these two powers there lies a limited possibility for disappointment as the primary expectations were somewhat modest. The anti-US rhetoric has greatly benefitted the bilateral relationship. America’s dominance in the regional and global dealings has served as a crucial binding factor between the two communist giants. Both the countries have been able to have at least a shared understanding as far as anti-hegemonic principle is concerned. The axis of convenience works in keeping the two countries engaged as both the sides recognize its significance of leading them to rise above their differences with the aim of achieving the greater good. While offering a future account of the bilateral cooperation the author argued that the shared interests are going to keep the two countries engaged. The Sino-Russian relationship is largely seen as an axis that poses a direct challenge to West’s strategic pre-eminence and the U.S. hegemony. Labelling Sino-Russian arrangement as an axis of convenience, the author argues that Beijing-Moscow ties are driven more by pragmatism, the constant dynamism of national interests identified by the ruling elites on both sides and external conditions, than by the shared vision. Finally, Lo opines that the Sino-Russian ties are not as impressive as anticipated by both the countries and their warmer relations didn’t pose the extent of the threat as perceived by the Western critics.

Weitz, (2008), in his work, “China-Russia Security Relations: Strategic Parallelism without Partnership or Passion?”, argues that despite Beijing and Moscow cooperation have witnessed positive trend in various important dimensions since

the last two decades, but the security cooperation between these two regimes have remained limited, intermittent and dubious. In other words, the Sino-Russo relationship remained in flux. There are areas where their interests overlap, and there are also areas where they are engaged in intense competition to outclass the other. The author in this book is also of the view that Sino-Russo relations would be affected by many factors like internal developments in both the countries and also by external developments. As far as external factors are concerned Washington's policies would definitely have a great impact on the foreign policies of both the countries. Given the apparent limits, the Sino-Russo strategic partnership is not essentially moving clearly in anti-US direction. Being the major powers and the significant actors in international politics, many policy directives of these countries do affect some of the U.S. national interests. Weitz, also opines that American think tanks, in particular, the national security planners should get ready for possible discontinuities in Beijing-Moscow relations. In other words, despite the fact that the U.S. should seek to develop cordial security relations with these powers, its officials must be ready to respond fully in case, the Beijing-Moscow partnership challenges the U.S. core interests and values. The author in this book suggested that the U.S. government should adopt a blend of "shaping and hedging" policies with the aim of averting a hostile Sino-Russian alignment that would undermine Washington's interests.

Mankoff, (2009), in his work, "Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics", is of the opinion that the emergence of Beijing as a major power in Asia presents a different challenge for Moscow's foreign policy than in dealing with the West particularly with the U.S. Despite the fact that China's rising clout accompanied by its assertiveness remains a cause of concern for Russia, China has so far dominated the Russian foreign policy priority list in the twenty-first century. The relations between the two countries continued to be on the warming trend since the past two decades. As far as Russia's policy towards the west is concerned the author argued that it may still occupy a key position for Moscow's policymakers but its relations with Beijing are offering a clear evidence of where its foreign policy is heading.

Bellacqua, (2010), edited, "The Future of China-Russia Relations", in this book, while exploring the current state of Sino-Russian ties, different scholars assess the future prospects of their cooperation and potential frictions in the current century. The contributors examined Sino-Russia perspectives on a wide array of issues encompassing security, defence ties, political ties, and economic intercourse. The Sino-Russian relations have dramatically advanced in the backdrop of their first bilateral diplomatic contact, mainly during the 20th century. The signing of documents in 1996 by the heads of China and Russia, in order to establish a formal 'strategic partnership' between the two countries, was the result of what Gilbert Rozman describes as "sustained upward trend" in Sino-Russian relations. During the past one and a half decade, both countries worked towards strengthening their bilateral relations accompanied by the aim of enhancing cooperation on various diplomatic fronts.

This book gives an account of how ideological disputes which hampered the relations between the two countries in the past have become a remote memory. Now, Sino-Russian strategic partnership appears to be on the positive track. Currently, it is mainly due to the realistic considerations on issues of converging interests that eventually steer the Sino-Russian relationship towards new heights.

The mounting strategic partnership between China and Russia has raised suspicions of Washington and also among the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Bellacqua argues that the Beijing-Moscow strategic partnership has given rise to questions like whether their relationship is aimed at countering America's dominance, and whether it poses a challenge in the form of threat to the western world. Even some view the Sino-Russian strategic partnership as the first step towards an absolute military alliance between the said countries. Whether SCO (Shanghai Cooperation) is going to emerge into a security alliance to counter NATO, or whether it will emerge as a tool for both China and Russia to establish military control.

The book gives an account of a variety of central themes where the interests of both the countries converge as well as diverge; these are International affairs, Central Asian region, Military ties, Energy strategy etc.

Jakobson et al., (2011), in their study, "China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia: Hopes, Frustrations and Uncertainties", has discussed the present status and the likely prospects of Sino-Russian relations. The main focus has been laid on their security and energy ties which are the two most important aspects of their relations. The authors in this study termed Moscow-Beijing relations as a pragmatic partnership of convenience and argued that it will continue to remain as such but not the partners based on the shared deeper strategic interests and worldviews. The Sino-Russian relationship may face anxiety over specific issues, but their partnership because of their pragmatism and willingness to discuss such issues behind closed doors is comparatively resistant to long-term damage. The study further concludes that relations between the two sides will remain stronger at the diplomatic level; however, the military and energy cooperation will continue to crumble in the coming years. This, in turn, will diminish the significance of Russia to China.

Lukin, (2013), in his paper, "China-Russia Relations", while delving into the importance of both China and Russia towards each other, argued that although there are some divergences between the two powers, their bilateral cooperation is at the peak of development. The relationship between the two sides is based upon their genuine national interests. Apart from this, the close cooperative and constructive partnership avoids the extremes of both the mutual hostility as well as the formation of an alliance which in turn fully corresponds to the interests of both Moscow and Beijing.

Haas, (2013), in his work, "Russian-Chinese Security Relations: Moscow's Threat from the East?", is of the view, that China-Russia relations have witnessed a wide-ranging developments in the post-Cold War period. The two sides are maintaining a strategic partnership encompassing their comprehensive cooperation in the key areas of diplomacy, security, defence, and energy. Haas further argues that unlike previously, Russia no longer plays a dominant role in their bilateral relations and this role is now shifting towards China because of its rising posture. Meanwhile, the author also talked about the problems that surfaced in the last decade and thereby made it apparent that the Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership is crumbling. Such issues include the Beijing's rejection of Moscow's war against

Georgia in 2008, and Russian recognition of Georgian's separatist regions, China's increasing influence in Central Asia and in Russia's Far East province, as well as Beijing's rapid military build-up. Apart from this, the author also highlighted the differences in their approach towards BRICS and SCO wherein Beijing stresses economic aspects and Moscow aims to reinforce its international standing. All these developments raised awareness in Russia about a threat from China. Finally, the author suggested that the West should follow a two-pronged policy by recognising Beijing's rising power and also maintain its relations with Moscow. All the Western powers should avoid taking sides between China and Russia.

Swanstrom, (2014), in his article, "Sino-Russian Relations at the Start of the New Millennium in Central Asia and Beyond", is of the opinion that China-Russia relations have experienced a revival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The relations between the two sides is not only described as good but also as a backbone of their respective strategies. The author in this article examines the overall Sino-Russian relations with special emphasis on Central Asia that has been a weathervane for Moscow-Beijing cooperation. The main argument that is brought forward by Swanstrom is that China-Russia cooperation is much more frailer than often imagined. Furthermore, despite their friendly ties today the hope that their cooperation will continuously strengthen overtime seems to be very little. While considering the backbone of China-Russia cooperation, the author concluded that there are many conflicts which the bilateral partnership is going to face over-time, however, it is not possible to say that their relationship will definitely dissolve. It is because that the most important reason that continues to bind China-Russia together is their conflict with the United States and EU.

Engelbrekt, & Watts, (2015), in their work, "Sino-Russian Strategic Collaboration: Still an 'Axis of Convenience'?", discussed the various domains (defence, energy, and diplomacy) of Sino-Russo relations. After reviewing the developments in these areas, the study suggests that Moscow-Beijing axis is no longer as "convenient" as it used to be in the past. Further, China and Russia may be convinced to either reaffirm, and expand their relationship or accept the rising asymmetry in bilateral partnership which, in turn, might cause problems within these different policy

areas. The authors concluded that the China-Russia “axis of convenience” very much continues in general sense of the term. Although the relations between the two sides have developed to a large extent, there are still the inherent limitations in their bilateral cooperation.

Carlsson, Oxenstierna, & Weissmann, (2015), in their book, “China and Russia: A Study on Cooperation, Competition and Distrust”, argued that as rising China is working to assert its new and more influential position in the world order and Russia going through resurgence to revive its past glory, the strategic partnership between the two sides has increasingly become the debatable issue. Both the powers share a geopolitical worldview of a multipolar world order. This study analysed the Sino-Russian strategic cooperation from an economic and political perspective. The authors discussed how both the sides compete and cooperate in many areas and how their ambitions and interests are demonstrated by their policies in the strategically vital Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific regions. Furthermore, the U.S. factor both as a competitor as well as a partner to both China and Russia has been explored by the authors and therefore Washington acts as a both unifying as well as separating factor for the two sides. Finally, the authors found the 2014 Ukraine crisis as a defining moment for Moscow-Beijing relations.

Kaczmarek, (2015), in his book, “Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order”, has explored the developments in the Sino-Russian relations in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. He argued that the economic crisis has transformed the Moscow-Beijing bilateral relations, regional communications and, has significantly changed the roles the two powers play in the international domain. The author discussed how bilateral cooperation has increased in energy trade, security, arms sales, diplomatic, and in the Russian Far-east. Subsequently, the study focussed on how this still mutually advantageous Sino-Russo strategic partnership has become more asymmetric thereby reflecting the PRC’s meteoric rise and Kremlin’s decline. Further, the author examined the alterations in regional dimensions particularly the emergence of a new status quo in Central Asia where the two have found means to divide their influences with Russia dominating the security realm and China the energy

sector. More importantly, the Sino-Russian rapprochement in the post-Cold War world order has turned out to be a long-lasting phenomenon. Kaczmarek finally concluded by explaining how the changing China-Russia strategic partnership is affecting the world order and the balance of power vis-à-vis the U.S. as well as Moscow and Beijing's changing approaches towards global governance.

Weitz, (2015), in his book, "Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises", discussed the rising number of Sino-Russian military exercises since the past few years. These drills are aimed at deterring and defeating (in case the need arises) the potential threats like the terrorist groups working to destabilise the energy-rich Central Asia. At the same time both the sides through these exercises reassure their partners especially the SCO members that Moscow and Beijing will protect them from any such challenges. Furthermore, the joint exercises also serve the purpose of sending a message to third parties, particularly the U.S. that Moscow and Beijing have real security partnership. Weitz, also opined that there is a mutual reassurance function in the Sino-Russian military exercises as well as other military activities. Both the parties get aware of each other's military potential which, in turn, helps them enhance mutual confidence in their friendly intentions towards each other. Finally, the author opined that although there are limits in key areas, Moscow-Beijing partnership has the potential to become a momentous development in the international security domain. Keeping this thing in mind Washington should continue to keep its vigil on the China-Russia defence relations.

Kuchins, (2016), in his work, "Russia and China: The Ambivalent Embrace", is of the view that Russian relations with China are shaped by an intricate mixture of geopolitical, historical, economic, and cultural factors adding up to a deep ambivalence. However, despite this ambivalence, Kremlin's policy towards PRC in the twenty-first century is driven by pragmatic considerations. The pragmatism in Sino-Russian relations has resulted in the gradual rapprochement and strengthening of their partnership. Kuchins, argued, that Russia has no desire to form any alliance with China, but the growing strains in its relations with the U.S. and Europe have benefited the Moscow-Beijing relationship. Although, it is probably true that Sino-Russian relations are better than ever today, the fears of

becoming a 'junior partner' in this relationship or as nothing more than a mere natural resource appendage is concerning Russia. However, these anxieties surface less frequently as Moscow's confidence continues to increase as it is gradually reviving its past glory. Furthermore, the leaders and policy experts from both sides realise that the breakdown of their relations during the Cold War was a tremendous strategic mistake.

Wishnick, (2017), in his article, "In Search of the 'Other' in Asia: Russia-China Relations Revisited", opined that because of normative affinities Moscow and Beijing have always been partners of consequence. The author while following a constructivist approach examined the shared norms that lead to the ever-closer China-Russia partnership, despite having inherent divergences in a number of areas. While coming to the prospects of an alliance for now it remains just a talk as resistance to alignments has been a longstanding principle and Moscow wants to engage itself with a broader Asia. Finally, the author argues that the rising normative affinities boosting their interdependence, is having wider implications that go beyond their strategic partnership. In the global arenas of joint action, Moscow and Beijing have reached up to the position of norm makers, rather than the norm takers.

Sinkkonen, (2018), in her paper, "China-Russia Security Cooperation: Geopolitical Signals with Limits", argued that the strategic partnership of China with Russia is the most comprehensive one among its strategic partnerships. The China-Russia relations witnessed a qualitative improvement in the twenty-first century. Sinkkonen argued that despite the deepened relations, Moscow and Beijing are not allies and any sort of military alliance between the two sides is also not in sight. Not only this, the author also argued that there is an increasing asymmetry as far as the power balance between China and Russia is concerned. Finally, the author concluded that as long as their congruent interest of opposing the West persists, the marriage of convenience between the two powers will prevail.

Lukin, A., (2018), in his book, "China and Russia: the New Rapprochement", has answered several questions regarding Sino-Russian strategic partnership (like what lies behind their mounting synergy? Is it simply the outcome of America's

deteriorated relations with both or is it a result of the fundamental alignment of their interests in the post-Cold War era?) by presenting a thorough and nuanced evaluation of ever-closer China-Russia relations. The author argues that the rising Sino-Russian rapprochement in recent times is the natural outcome of developments that the international relations had gone through in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Consequently, changes in global order exerted a significant impact on their rapprochement and the very fact that the two sides enhancing their strategic partnership also affect the international politics as well. While analysing the Moscow-Beijing partnership from the 1990s onwards, Lukin exemplifies how the economic and geopolitical interests of China and Russia drove them together despite having cultural and political differences. The author further explored the main areas of cooperation and the possible conflict. He argued that Sino-Russian strategic entente is a part of a non-Western world's rising system of cooperation, which has also witnessed the rise of a new political community called Greater Eurasia.

## **2.2: U.S. Factor and Response–**

Ko, (2006), "Strategic Partnership in a Unipolar System: The Sino-Russian Relationship", after examining the China-Russia cooperation in the post-cold war period, the author in this paper attempted to explain the reasons for the establishment of strategic partnerships as far as the unipolar system is concerned. While explaining the reasons, the author delves into the reasons why Moscow and Beijing pursue strategic partnership and not an alliance as well as what are the persistent differences between the two. The unipolar world order created by the preponderance of American power, mainly in military terms, has a direct impact on Sino-Russian relations. The author rightly argued that in the post-cold war era, China and Russia pursued political deterrence rather than military deterrence. They are involved in efforts to check the U.S. hegemonic position and thereby change the unipolar order itself. Keeping in mind that the alliance against the United States would prove ineffective and would undermine their larger interests, the two countries prefer strategic partnership as a means of enhancing their strategic outreach and in enhancing their influence at international level. Towards this end, the author cited the examples of the UNSC and the SCO, where both the

countries are involved in efforts to make their presence felt in the international decision-making process. It is through these areas that Beijing and Moscow are challenging Washington's supremacy.

Tsunekawa, (2007), in his chapter, "Post-9/11 Power Politics among the US, China, and Russia- Unilateralism and Central and Southeast Asia", discussed the post-9/11 developments followed by the rise in the U.S. unilateralism and distrust of China and Russia towards the United States. The author in this work shows how China and Russia initially supported the U.S. on its war on terror, and how in the ensuing years the U.S. policies created a sense of distrust in both China and Russia. Therefore, in order to respond to the U.S. hegemonic designs, Moscow and Beijing strengthened their partnership and also through the SCO platform pressurised Washington to withdraw from the strategically vital Central Asia. Finally, Tsunekawa argued that although the elimination of terrorism is a shared goal of the U.S., China, and Russia, but the way of approaching has led to differences between Washington and the other two. In the backdrop of these differences, a region-wide dynamism of their rivalry has come to the forefront.

Belopolsky, (2009), in his one chapter, "the Wounded Bear and the Rising Dragon", of the book "Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era", examines the various dimensions of Moscow-Beijing relations and how it has evolved over a period of time. The author has viewed the Sino-Russian relations from the Russian perspective. In the backdrop of mounting confidence through successful Sino-Russian engagement and deterioration of Russia-US relations, Belopolsky argued that Moscow's relations with Beijing are largely directed by global concerns. Furthermore, Kremlin's strategic engagement with PRC in quest of multipolarity seems to be highly indicative of Moscow's tactical use of Beijing to balance the United States. The author finally concluded that in the post-cold war period the threat of the rising dragon ebbed in the backdrop of more immediate threats to Moscow's interests. It is against these developments that the bear has sought to engage the dragon in a partnership fulfilling its short-term interests while shelving the inevitable reassessment of this strategic partnership as the latter has grown in strength.

Pipinashvili, (2011), in his article, “Sino-Russian Geopolitical Interests in Central Asia and South Caucasus”, has delved into the rising geopolitical competition in Central Asia, and South Caucasus between the U.S., Russia, and China. While realising the significance and the Pentagon’s increasing influence in Eurasia, both Moscow and Beijing support the idea of a stronger China-Russia partnership to outclass the U.S. strategic designs in the region. The author also highlighted the respective interests of both China and Russia and the distinctive nature of their individual ties with the United States. Central Asia and South Caucasus has been the main battlefield in the geopolitical games of the greatest powers. Pipinashvili concluded that the balance of power in the strategically vital Central Asia and South Caucasus displays that in this area of the world, multipolarity is a reality. Moscow and Beijing have chosen to cooperate because of several converging interests in this reality. The author further opines that, despite this fact, Washington still has the power to exert its influence in this region.

Ferguson, (2012), “The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’”, in this article explores the foreign policy and military strategy of China and Russia through the lens of soft balancing. He is of the view that an analysis of strategic thinking on both sides reveals that they want to outclass America’s military supremacy without the direct engagement of the U.S. power. Given this backdrop, strategists on both sides have incorporated ‘soft’ or ‘normative’ power assets as part of their strategic capabilities in military and foreign policy arena. The two countries have institutionalised soft power norms within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which is used to wipe out the U.S. presence in the resource-rich Central Asian region. He argued that both the sceptics and alarmists regarding Shanghai Cooperation Organisation generally have the consensus on the point that curtailing Washington’s influence in the vital Central Asian region is one of the key objectives of organisation. But apart from this strategic goal, their views radically deviate. Even some sceptics are of the opinion that divergent interests of Beijing and Moscow will offset any attempt aiming to balance (whether through hard or soft tactics) Washington.

Ferguson, argues that for American policymakers ascertaining soft balancing might be a complicated task. Soft balancing mechanism carries far-reaching implications. No doubt that Washington's military might provide a potential security cover against external threats, regional alignments could challenge Washington's interests across the globe. Towards this end, the author opines that the U.S. policymakers have to make cautious application of Pentagon's role as a significant offshore balancer. While talking about the sustenance of Sino-Russian strategic partnership as a counterweight to the U.S., the author argues that it would to a large extent rely on Washington's foreign policy.

Cheng, & Cohen, (2013), in their paper, "How Washington Should Manage U.S.-Russia-China Relations", analysed how the unipolar moment of the United States in the post-Cold War resulted in Sino-Russian rapprochement that has continued to develop in the twenty-first century. Although highlighting the inherent, limitations in the Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership the authors in this paper explain how China and Russia have put aside their differences and joined hands in countering the U.S. power. Meanwhile, Cheng & Cohen have also suggested how the U.S. could use the fault lines in Sino-Russia partnership to secure its interests. However, on the other end, the authors through their analysis concluded how close the Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership could undermine the U.S. interests abroad and dent its dominance in world affairs. Therefore, the time has come for Washington to respond to the growing Sino-Russian strategic proximity so as to protect its interests as well as of its allies.

Jingjie, (2013), in his paper, "Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership Cooperative Relations and the US Factor", is of the opinion that since the past two decades the relations between China and Russia have developed smoothly to a great extent with the leadership of both sides consider that current relations are better than they ever have been historically. Subsequently, the author argued that the U.S. factor plays a crucial role in bringing Moscow and Beijing together. China and Russia share the same interests in opposing the U.S. hegemony. Apart from this, the triangular dynamics between these three powers is not the 1970's triumvirate were both China and the United States opposed the Soviet Union; here it is China and Russia which are opposing the U.S. unilateralism.

Bolt, (2014), in his article, "Sino-Russian Relations in a Changing World Order", talked about the triangular dynamics between the United States, China, and Russia in Eurasia and the Asia Pacific. This strategic triangle is a more complicated game for the United States as China-Russia strategic partnership is mainly driven by their dissatisfaction with the Washington-led world order and its hegemony. Therefore, the U.S. should take this triangle seriously while formulating any policy. Bolt further examines the forces that drive Sino-Russian strategic cooperation as well as the apparent frictions in this partnership. Subsequently, the author discusses the Sino-Russian bonhomie in the domain of economics, security and the energy-rich Central Asia, and thereby examines the implications of Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership on the United States. The author further explored how U.S. policies are being detested by China and Russia and how U.S. attitude is boosting their partnership. Finally, while highlighting the limits of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, Bolt, explores the ways through which Washington can manage this triangle.

Gabuev, (2015), in his paper, "A 'Soft Alliance'? Russia-China Relations after the Ukraine Crisis", explores how Ukraine crisis has changed the relations of Kremlin with West and how it has intensified Sino-Russian cooperation. Amid the U.S. and EU sanctions, Russia has engaged itself in reorienting its economy towards Asia so as to overcome the impact of Western sanctions. China occupies a significant position for Russia towards this end. This, in turn, has provided Beijing with a unique opportunity to turn Moscow into a junior partner in their bilateral cooperation. Subsequently, the author examines the dynamics of Sino-Russian strategic synergy in the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis and explores its potential implications for Europe. The increasing cooperation could undermine the impact of sanctions on Russia and could provide Putin with a way to stand firm against the Western sanctions. Gabuev also found the possibility of Russia-China forming a soft alliance in the coming years so as to overcome the Western pressures.

Feng, (2015), in his work, "The New Geostrategic Game: Will China and Russia form an Alliance against the United States", is of the opinion that both China and Russia have played a significant role in raising the tensions in the international domain in recent times. This argument is in line with the assertive positions both

the sides are taking—Russia against the West and China in its on-going maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Simultaneously, Moscow and Beijing seem to be moving in the direction of forming a full-fledged partnership. Deng has examined the evolution of Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership since the end of the Cold War through a “threat-interest model of the partnership”. Subsequently, the author argued that despite several divergences between Russia and China, the converging threat perceptions regarding Washington in particular and the west in general has pushed both the powers to form a “soft alliance” against the U.S. Against this backdrop, the future of Sino-Russian strategic partnership still depends on how Washington and Europe are going to frame their policies towards China and Russia. Furthermore, in the new geopolitical game, Washington holds the first-move advantage to decide how this game will be played out. Finally, Deng warned that Washington and Europe should take the mounting Sino-Russian strategic synergy seriously and take steps to unsettle this partnership before it is too late.

Gabuev, (2016), in his work, “Friends with Benefits? Russian-Chinese Relations after the Ukraine Crisis”, discusses the post-Ukraine crisis developments in Sino-Russian relations. The author explores how Russia is embracing China, thereby turning fears into hopes. Amid the western sanctions, Kremlin has readjusted its economy towards the People’s Republic of China. While making the pivot, Moscow sought to overcome its diplomatic isolation thereby secure a market for its natural resources and advance greater access to Beijing’s credit and technology. While doing so Russia has eased informal impediments to PRC’s investment. Although there was a decline in the bilateral trade in 2015, the rapprochement has accelerated the work on projects that have been on the negotiating table for decades, resulting in concluding several agreements. Gabuev further argued that the results of this shift are mixed, however, if trends continue, Russia likely will further drift towards China. The author concluded that an asymmetrical Sino-Russian interdependence with global ramifications is emerging. Amidst an increasingly asymmetrical relationship, Russian deals with China might lead to its acceptance of a junior partner role. Finally, Gabuev, while looking at the developments of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, argued that western

expectations that the divergences between the two sides will inevitably lead to Moscow-Beijing rivalry might prove hollow.

J., S. (2017), in his chapter, "Sino-Russian Relations in a Global Context: Implications for the United States" analysed the mounting Sino-Russian closeness and the potential trajectory of their relations in the regions of Central Asia, the Middle East, and North-East Asia. Roy discussed how China and Russia have been maintaining friendly and cooperative relations since the past few decades as a result of their shared strategic interests and how relations between the two countries got boosted after the Ukraine crisis. Subsequently, the author assesses the implications of Moscow-Beijing entente for Washington and its strategic interests and policies.

Stent, (2018), in this study, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and its Impact on U.S. Policy toward Russia", examines the key policy objectives of the Pentagon toward Kremlin and explores the extent to which China-Russia partnership will develop and obstruct these objectives. The author in this paper argued that the key drivers of the Pentagon's policy towards Kremlin and PRC differ considerably. The driver between Washington-Moscow relations is that both being nuclear superpowers and the driver between Washington-Beijing relations is both being economic superpowers. Although having strains in their relations that may increase in future both China and Russia have the compelling reason to boost their cooperation like the suspicion toward the U.S. strategic designs and a shared commitment towards shaping a new world order. This, in turn, will continue to bind the two powers together. In such a scenario while pursuing its policy objectives with Russia, the U.S. should realize that Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership could make it more difficult for Washington to achieve its goals. Finally, if the Pentagon wants to prevent the rising China-Russia strategic entente from further challenging American interests, it must continue to remain an active actor on the world stage.

### **2.3: Implications for India–**

Unnikrishnan, & Purushothaman, (2015), in their work, "Trends in Russia-China Relations: Implications for India", have explored the trends in Sino-Russian relations which is an amalgam of convergences and divergences. There are

apparent fears on both the sides towards each other. However, the two sides are working more on converging interests so as to strengthen their partnership. Currently, the Moscow-Beijing partnership has not reached up to the level of a full-fledged strategic partnership, however, it is swiftly evolving towards reaching that position. Further, the authors termed this relationship as a tactical pragmatism. As long as their shared interest of countering Washington binds them together, Moscow and Beijing will continue to be close partners. This, in turn, will create all the necessary requirements for transforming their tactical contiguity into a full-fledged strategic partnership. Subsequently, Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman explored how the rising China-Russia relations impacts Indian interests and how New Delhi's strategic options will be largely constrained in case the Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership reaches its full zenith. As the Sino-Russian relations will have a significant role in determining the balance of power in the world amidst the rapidly changing world order with the emergence of new powers and alliances, India will find itself in a challenging position. Therefore, in such a scenario if Beijing and Moscow become close partners, New Delhi will be left with limited choices. India will have to either balance this partnership by drawing closer to the United States or cooperate with China and Russia.

Mitra (2015), in his article, "Russia, China and Pakistan: An Emerging New Axis?", explores the factors responsible for the emergence of the Moscow-Beijing-Islamabad triumvirate and how three powers complement each other in the changing Asian Security dynamics. Furthermore, the author argued that this axis is having serious implications for India as Russia's positive overtures towards Pakistan, and tight embrace with China and India's increasing ties with the U.S. shows the apparent divergences unfolding in Indo-Russian relations. The author further argued that in case the contours of alliances harden in Asia, New Delhi will have to take a strong stand in Asia and work closely with Washington and Japan.

Gupta, (2017), In his work, "Is the Growing Warmth in the Relationship Between Russia and China a Threat to India in the Next 10 Years?" opined that the world is going through a dramatic transition where there seems to be the emergence of complex alliances thereby by doing away with the unipolarity. Russia and China occupies a significant position in this scenario as both are backing each other's

fundamental interests as well as foreign policies on the global stage. While analysing the depth of Sino-Russian relations, the author also evaluates India-Russia relations thereby assessing the impact of their growing bonhomie on Moscow-New Delhi relations. Gupta concludes that as the Kremlin shares a special friendship with India, the rising Sino-Russo strategic embrace is not a threat to New Delhi. However, the author asserts that India is to realise its ambitions in the strategically vital Asia-Pacific region and it will need to seek opportunities to further enhance its ties with Russia. The Indian interests can best be served by embarking upon the multi-vector diplomacy with main powers—Moscow, Beijing, and Washington.

#### **2.4: Knowledge Gap—**

The twenty-first century is witnessing enormous developments at the international arena. According to many policy thinkers especially from the United States, the major developments are going to take place in the Asian continent. The Asian continent has become the centre of attention in the current century that is why this century has been considered to be the Asian century. The main drivers of such development are the rise of China, U.S. relative decline and its return to Asia under the auspices of Asia Pivot policy, and Russian resurgence and its tilt towards China. Since the last decade, China and Russia are coming closer to achieve their strategic interests. These developments are altering the balance of power in Asia and thereby changing the security scenario in the subcontinent. Given these developments, India in one or the other way is also concerned about the mounting Sino-Russo synergy and is engaged in efforts to overcome the challenges the above-mentioned developments are posing. Within this premise, the available literature on the topic lacks in the following aspects:

- a) The literature misses out to a large extent, the strategies that China and Russia have adopted to enhance their strategic outreach.
- b) The impact of Sino-Russo strategic ties on Asian security dynamics.
- c) The available literature, to a large extent, also misses in explaining the challenges India is facing in the backdrop of closer China-Russia relations.

d) The literature also misses, in exploring whether India's foreign policy is reactive or evolutionary in the above context.

e) The role of the U.S. "rebalancing strategy" and the Ukraine crisis on Sino-Russian strategic partnership has not been explored fully.

### **China-Russia Relations: A Brief Historical Overview**

In order to assess the 21<sup>st</sup> century Sino-Russo strategic cooperation a historical understanding of their relations is necessary. For this purpose, this chapter has been added. This chapter gives a brief historical overview of the China-Russia relations. The main focus in this chapter has been laid on the Cold War developments and 1990's developments in their bilateral relations. The first part of the chapter focuses on the China-Russia relations up-to the end of the Cold War era and has been covered in three subheadings. The second part of the chapter discusses the developments in Sino-Russian relations in the 1990s which led to the establishment of the Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership.

#### **3.1: Sino-Soviet Relations up-to 1970–**

Sino-Russo relations date back to the early seventeenth century when Eastern Serbia was taken over by Russia. Fyodor Baykov was the first official ambassador to China from Russia. He reached China in 1655, but he was expelled from China as he didn't act in accordance with Chinese diplomacy rules. This had set the stage for the bilateral interaction between the two, which largely remained fragile and adversarial, marked by the persistent mutual distrust (Dueben, 2013). The two countries for a long time favoured the non-interference in each other's internal affairs. However, with the weakening of the Qing Dynasty and the mid-nineteenth century Opium wars, their relations underwent significant changes. In a number of treaties<sup>1</sup> which were largely unequal, more than 1.5 million square kilometres of land<sup>2</sup> was extracted by Russia from China (Eder, 2014).

Despite all these things, a significant development took place in the field of infrastructure development. The construction of Trans-Siberian Railway<sup>3</sup> was started by Russians in 1891, which still enjoys the status of being the longest railway in the world. China and Russia signed a treaty in 1896 under which the former allowed the latter to construct a railway in its territory and on the other end Russia agreed to defend China in case of any eventuality against Japan. The

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<sup>1</sup> The unequal treaties like the Treaty of Aigun 1858, Treaty of Beijing 1860, treaty of Tarbagatai etc.

<sup>2</sup> This includes the parts of north-western Xinjiang and territories in the Amur and Ussuri river regions.

<sup>3</sup> It is a network of railways connecting Moscow with the Russian Far East. There are also connecting branch lines into China, Mongolia, and North Korea.

Chinese Eastern Railway– a joint venture, which started in 1903, appeared to be a big success as far as the history of Beijing-Moscow relations are concerned (Niemczyk, 2012).

However, in the intervening years, the revolution in both the countries (Russian Revolution 1905 and Xinhai Revolution 1911) led to the change of regimes. Monarchies were overthrown by these revolutions and which subsequently culminated in the establishment of communism in both China and Russia. Consequently, it was not easy going for both the countries as both had to find new ways to communicate with each other (Niemczyk, 2012). Meanwhile, the destructive Second World War took place in which China and the Soviet Union found themselves on the same page. Soviet's and Chinese faced the biggest losses in terms of citizens in the Second World War. As China was about to take the shape of a communist state, the relations between the two sides was painted as some sort of a gloomy picture (Niemczyk, 2012).

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China under the stewardship of Mao Zedong, the main concern for China was to ensure its national security, enhancing the power of the country, and economic development of the republic. Initially, the strategic affairs and international politics were not the centre of focus for China. However, as the Chinese didn't forget its war with Japan and the latter being the ally of the United States, the Chinese knew that forging a united front with other similar ideological states particularly with the Soviet Union could better serve its interests.

Relations between the two nations during the Cold War period were the amalgam of ups and downs. After the formation of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong was aware of the fact that China has no other option but to forge closer ties as far as possible with the Soviet Union in order to secure its interests. Keeping in view the fears of the American assault on the newly formed government led by Mao, he strived to shore closer ties with the Soviet Union. Mao's efforts didn't get vain as he was successful in concluding an agreement– the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance on 14<sup>th</sup>

February 1950 with the Soviet Union. This agreement enabled China with much-needed economic aid and security guarantees (Roquen, 2013).

Initial years of the 1950s were the significant one as far as the Sino-Soviet rapprochement is concerned. There was a dramatic surge in the bilateral relations and both were engaged in trade, training of Chinese technical specialists by the Soviet's, construction projects, nuclear cooperation, and warm military ties. The two communist giants in no time became the largest trading partners and not only this they also made it to the list of world's major military alliances. Apart from this, there was a radical transformation of the Chinese economy along the Soviet lines accompanied by proximity in economic aims and an extensive guidance by Soviets to Chinese development strategy (Moltz, 1995).

Unfortunately, during the second half of the 1950s, differences in terms of national interests and ideology emerged which undermined rapprochement between the two countries. The initial years of the 1950s decade were considered to be the "immaculate period" in the bilateral relations. However, this period couldn't last long and became the victim of differences that emerged in the late 1950s between the leaders of the two countries. The discrepancies in national interests and ideologies that took their head in the late 1950s led to severe disputes between the two in early 1960s. Reforms in the Soviet Union led by Khrushchev coupled with the then Chinese premier Mao's reluctance to 'dance to the tune' of the Soviet Union took the bilateral ties into a sudden blackout in 1960 over the varying issues of ideology, political course and security policy<sup>4</sup> (Moltz, 1995).

China's road to development in many fields got a serious blow with the breakneck withdrawal of Soviet advisors to China. As mentioned by Klinghoffer (1976) "USSR in 1960 repealed its oil technicians from China and terminated all of its assistance programs related to oil" (Klinghoffer, 1976: 542). Soviet leadership took this position as a response to Chinese criticism<sup>5</sup> of its policies and the later was

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<sup>4</sup> Particularly in the field of nuclear weapons.

<sup>5</sup> China criticized Soviet leaderships effort to stop Mao's Great Leap Forward, an initiative to attain communism in China, China's criticism of Soviet's efforts at improving ties with the West and accused that it was not adequately helped by the Soviet Union in the 1958 Quemoy crisis., renunciation of Moscow's nuclear assistance to Beijing in 1959 which the former has agreed upon in 1959. It was in the backdrop of these differences that China publicly criticized Soviet policies in 1960 (Yan Mei, 1985, p; 72, The maturing

labelled as 'ungrateful' by the former and this further aggravated the split between the two (Mei, 1985). This development led both the countries to accuse each other and USSR especially included China in the list of its main rivals.

The Soviet Union in the early years of its conflict with China hoped that there will be a change in the latter's attitude and it would soften its position and will join the Soviet camp as a subordinate entity. However, rhetoric was created in China especially under the auspices of 'Cultural Revolution' that the Soviet Union was the main source of Chinese miseries. This further deviated the two communist countries and China appeared to be a potential rival to the Soviet Union as far as the international communist movement is concerned. The rupture of the 1960s in Sino-Soviet ties culminated into a one and a half decade of very tense relations.

China's relations with USSR were also largely affected by its internal political problems where Mao and his followers under the aegis of the so-called "cultural revolution" (seen as a political terror) labelled their domestic rivals as Soviet agents. All these developments took the shape of an intense political and military rancour in the intervening years until the mid-1980s. Apart from this, the ground attained in the sphere of trade almost reached to a complete halt and the untoward incidents against each other by their military forces on the border led them to the brink of an all-out war. The rift between the two countries took a violent turn when in 1969 acute conflicts and border clashes took place. Soviet Union had also stationed almost one million of its forces and a good proportion of SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles along its border with China. With this, USSR threatened China for making a 'surgical' first strike on the latter's nuclear bases (Qimao, 1999: 288).

The years of political and military showdown led to the obliteration of the entire network of roads, railways, and infrastructure that once stood at the heart of Sino-Soviet rapprochement in the 1950s. In the initial years of the Beijing-Moscow conflict, ideological differences largely dominated the bilateral relations and at some instances, it was the absurd mutual distrust towards each other's intentions.

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of Soviet-Chinese Relations, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 481, PP 70-80).

However, gradually there appeared the signs of growing realism in their respective policies and dealing towards the other.

### **3.2: Sino-American Rapprochement–**

The 1969 Sino-Soviet border clashes beckoned the militarisation of the prevailing rift between the two ideological allies. The conflict was the clear manifestation of incessant estrangement of the 1960s. The remarkable development following the border clashes was a shift in their respective policies towards Washington. In apropos to the above developments, both the countries sought alignments with America (an ideological adversary) against each other. China especially in the 1970s altered its attitude to a more moderate policy towards the West and started rapprochement with the United States to overcome its perceived menace from the Soviet Union. In 1971, the People's Republic of China displaced the Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Regime (Taiwan) in the United Nations Security Council.

Amid Sino-Soviet split and Vietnam War, the then U.S. President Richard Nixon seized the opportunity to foster relations with China. The United States secretary of state Henry Kissinger, in 1971 visited China to arrange the President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972. The historic visit of President Richard Nixon to Beijing in 1972 marked a stage for rapprochement between the United States and the People's Republic of China. This simultaneously set the tune for the normalisation of relations between the two adversaries. In fact, this development took place almost after twenty years since mainland China came under the control of communists led by Mao Zedong. After the Washington-led United Nations forces in Korea were attacked by China in 1950, containing communist China became one of the key principles of America. The following years of China's intervention in Korea were characterised by the U.S. opposition to Chinese membership in the United Nations, Taiwan Strait crises, nuclear attack threats, offensive rhetoric and proxy war in Vietnam (Goh, 2005).

American President Nixon's visit to China made a dramatic reversal in their respective policies towards each other. As far as the Cold War is concerned, Washington-Beijing rapprochement was considered to be the most important strategic shift before 1989 and even more than the Moscow-Beijing split. The Sino-

U.S. rapprochement as claimed by President Nixon and Henry Kissinger (National Security Advisor) changed the world because it transformed the international system of Cold War era, characterised by two ideological blocs opposing each other into a tripolar one (Goh, 2005). Consequently the “national interest” and “balance of power” stood at the heart of the foreign policy of great powers.

The Sino-US rapprochement clearly fits in the realist mechanism of balance of power politics. It was in the backdrop of their respective apprehensions of rising USSR’s power undermining their national as well as strategic interests that the former adversaries sought to balance the menace they perceived from USSR (Khoo, 2005). Therefore, the shifting balance of power brought the former ideological adversaries together. This shifting balance of power was characterised by the reduction in American military superiority vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and on the other end of the spectrum, China no longer remained an ally but a weaker adversary engulfing a likely war with USSR (Goh, 2005). Therefore the strategic factor played a vital role in bringing the former adversaries on the table of rapprochement.

Beijing and Washington also agreed that both should restrain from seeking hegemonic posture in the Asia-Pacific region and also prevent any other country or a group of countries from establishing such a design. Both the countries agreed to counter Soviet influence in Asia by creating an anti-Soviet balance of power in the sub-continent. Following the replacement of Taiwan by the People’s Republic of China in the UN in 1971, the United States not only acknowledged Taiwan as a part of China (i.e., there is only one China and Chinese people from either side of the Taiwan Strait should maintain this fact) but also that Washington does not question that position (Ball, 1998).

In the backdrop of the Soviet’s emergence as the serious challenge to China’s vital security interests,<sup>6</sup> Beijing found it difficult to maintain a similar hostility towards the U.S. it once used to. By moving closer to the United States, PRC’s strategic position vis-à-vis USSR improved considerably. Not only this, the Sino-US rapprochement also has improved Beijing’s standing in the international

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<sup>6</sup> Especially to its safety in north and northeast border.

community. Gaining of its place in the United Nations in 1971 clearly manifested the strategic value of the Beijing-Washington rapprochement to China (Jian, 2001). It was in 1972 that Washington decided to recognise the People's Republic of China and thereby gave it a great power status (Swift, 2003). Apart from this, China's strategic turn towards the United States also enhanced its bargaining power with respect to Soviet leaders. The Sino-US reconciliation resulted in triangular dynamics between the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. This, in turn, acknowledged Beijing as a power of significant influence in structuring the relations between two superpowers i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union. Beijing was aware of the fact that in comparison to Washington and Moscow (the two superpowers) its position is relatively weak. Therefore, pitting one superpower against other could better serve its interests (Chuang, 1996). Jian (2001) mentioned two important factors regarding China's positive overtures towards America–

First, Beijing's leaders were pursuing a rapprochement with the United States within the context of radically redefining their concept of imperialism by identifying the Soviet Union as a "social-imperialist country" and arguing that Moscow had replaced Washington as the "bastion of reactionary forces in the world." Second, in terms of the relations between ideology and security concerns the Sino-American rapprochement was less a case in which ideological beliefs yielded to the security interests than one in which ideology, as an essential element shaping foreign policy decisions, experienced subtle structural changes as the result of the fading status of Mao's continuous revolution (Jian, 2001: 242).

Although the U.S. imperialism still haunted China, it no longer remained the primary enemy and had been replaced by social imperialism of the Soviet Union. As social-imperialist USSR was identified by China as the most inimical amongst all other imperialist countries, moving closer to America (an enemy but now less dangerous in comparison) became the only reasonable and justifiable way for Chinese leadership (Jian, 2001).

Looking at the profound schism between the two communist giants, the U.S. was quite aware of the fact that the exploitation of this split can better serve its interests. It was against this backdrop that Washington showed positive overtures towards China. Both countries sought closer relations with each other. The coming

together of the former adversaries has raised concerns for Moscow and has strengthened their position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The proximity between Beijing and Washington has led to the seclusion and uncertainty of Moscow (Swift, 2003).

Initially, Moscow's dominant concern was its relationship with Washington and the Beijing factor to the former was comparatively less important as far as the Soviet Union's assessment of triangular dynamics was concerned. USSR comprehended that China's importance was not the outcome of its intrinsic strength, but a result of cold war antagonism and the emergent heed among the superpowers to attach weightage to China. With the deterioration of superpower relations in the late 1970s and the 1980s especially after President Clinton's intent on relinquishing détente and advancing a comprehensive confrontational policy against USSR, did the Soviet Union took serious note of developments in the Beijing-Washington proximity. In other words, it was only when the United States entreated triangular relations as a measure of a much intensive anti-Moscow policy, there only the Sino-US rapprochement raised concerns for the security of the Soviet Union (Ross, 1993).

Following the Moscow-Beijing split, the soothing of Washington-Beijing tensions raised the anxieties of the Soviet Union. Soviet's identified that the United States is playing a shrewd game as far as its approach toward China is concerned. On the one end, America wants to utilise the PRCs anti-Soviet aspirations against the Soviet Union and on the other end it wants to establish its position in China thereby get access to its vast markets (Ball, 1998).

While coming to the world order, the Soviet Union contended that its evolving strength, especially in military terms has brought Moscow at par with Washington and therefore should be looked upon as such. Against this backdrop, USSR argued that along with Washington it has the sole right for shaping the global order and the "rules of the game". China's posing of itself as a "third front" and joining hands with the U.S. represented a challenge to Moscow's two-camp perspective, adored credentials of socialism, its hard-won status, and impediment toward its attempts at reshaping international relations (Su, 1983).

The United States, amidst the Sino-Soviet border clashes and Beijing's growing rancour towards Moscow, started to see China as an essential player in the "global chessboard." Subsequently, during the late 1970s, both the United States and China speed up their anti-Soviet rhetoric and started vigorously playing "China card" and "US card" respectively against the Soviet Union. Both the countries used their collaboration as a hedge against USSR for challenging their respective interests. All this raised Soviet apprehensions. The signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between China and Japan in 1978 has also fuelled the Soviet concerns. It is because with this Japan also entered the scene. Japan was seen as "an incipient ally" by China to counter USSR and Indian strategic designs (Ross, 2002).

Despite the easing of tensions in Washington-Moscow ties throughout the détente era and the warming of Sino-US and Sino-Japan relations in the 1970s, hardly any progress was achieved in intermittent talks between Moscow and Beijing. Even China's unilateral decision of ground forces reduction during the first half of the 1980s didn't have any actual impact on Beijing-Moscow relations. Moltz (1995) mentioned, "three conditions" of Beijing that clogged the Sino-Soviet relations during early the 1980s—

- 1) the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan; 2) the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Mongolia and the dramatic reduction of troops east of the Urals; and 3) the cessation of Soviet support for Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia (Moltz, 1995: 163).

With the normalisation of Sino-US relations officially in 1979, the ephemeral period of elation was promptly supplanted by a realistic assessment of Beijing's capabilities. USSR's anxieties reached the highest level with the start of military technology transfers from Washington to Beijing and not only this but other NATO members also started the process of military transfers to Beijing especially under the U.S. pressure. It was mainly in the backdrop of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, that the intensity of Sino-US military to military relations improved considerably. Ali (2005) has given the figures of the total amount of arms imports of China from the United States as—

In 1978-83, of China's total military imports worth \$520 m, the Soviet Union sold \$130 m worth and the USA, \$5 m. In 1981-85, imports from the US rose to \$30 m, increasing in 1982-86 to \$80 m. In 1983-87, the USA sold hardware worth \$150 m. This figure rose to \$210 m in 1985-89 (Ali, 2005: 147).

The Sino-US military relations got further momentum in the mid-1980s as visits to port Qingdao was made by American navy ships and worldly reputed "Thunderbirds"<sup>7</sup> demonstration team was sent to Beijing by Washington's air force. Even during this period the thorny impediments that hampered the military technology transfer to Beijing were apparently solved. This was because as mentioned by Yung (2015)–

Reagan administration agreed to four transfer deals: one involving investment and construction of a munitions factory; another involving the sale of Mk 46 torpedo; another involving the sale of artillery-locating radar; and lastly, a \$500 million deal to modernize the avionics on the F-8 interceptor (Young, 2015: 206).

Although these developments raised Soviet concerns, these worrying factors didn't last long because of the presence of deteriorating factors in the murky Sino-American relations. It was a kind of edgy relationship. Their respective interests brought them together. During the late 1980s problems emerged which undermined the momentum in the Sino-US bilateral relations. China's controversial transfer of HY-2 (Silkworm)<sup>8</sup> in 1986 irked the United States which led to the reassessment of Washington's military relations with Beijing by the U.S. Department of Defence (Gill, 1998). Not only this, the Tiananmen Square incident jolted the bilateral relationship and more importantly the military ties.

### **3.3: Detente in Sino-Soviet Relations–**

The Sino-Soviet relations got normalised with the coming of Mikhail Gorbachev into power. In fact, the process for the easing of Sino-Soviet tensions began in 1982 when Beijing started to implement a new autonomous foreign policy that also includes the gradual enhancement of its ties with the Soviet Union (Garver, 1989). Levine (1979) rightly argued that the "outcome of the epic Moscow-Beijing struggle for the ideological and organizational leadership of world communism was a loss

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<sup>7</sup> The USAF Air Demonstration Squadron "Thunderbirds" is the air demonstration squadron of the United States Air Force and was created in 1953.

<sup>8</sup> HY-2 is an anti-ship missile which is commonly referred to as "Silkworm" in the United States.

of authority for Moscow without a victory for Beijing” (Levine, 1979: 663). Towards this end, several talks were held between 1982 and 1984 between the two countries with the aim of normalising their relations.

As Gorbachev took the reign of the Soviet Union in 1985, the Beijing-Moscow ties in various fields encompassing, scientific, technological, cultural and educational areas were resumed and not only this the bilateral trade also started to expand. The improvement in the Soviet relations with China was given a high priority by Gorbachev and was willing to fulfil the Chinese conditions for the normalisation of relations. The work towards this end was started by 1986. Finally, the Soviet leader made a four day trip to China, thereby indicating the end of Moscow-Beijing hostility of almost two decades.<sup>9</sup> Soviet Union gradually withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and Mongolia and also reduced its military presence along the Sino-Soviet border. Gorbachev also recommended negotiations with respect to the withdrawal of forces mutually with the ultimate aim of transforming the Sino-Soviet border into a peaceful and friendly zone of interaction. Apart from this, the Soviet leadership also pushed Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Cambodia (Garver, 1989). All these efforts set the stage for the future course of Sino-Russo relations i.e., mending the differences.

The normalisation of China-Russia relations in 1989 marked an end to the decade’s long Moscow-Beijing conflict. The conflict, which started in the 1960s, had crushed the much-touted myth of the so-called international communist unity and thereby changed the terms of the strategic equation in the international domain. As far as foreign policy is concerned, the Sino-Soviet rift had given rise to the strategic triangle by positing the Washington, Moscow, and Beijing as the key decisive actors at the global level. While talking about the intensity of Sino-Soviet antagonism encompassing the astringent ideological disputes, military confrontations, and the geopolitical rivalry, it was believed that the mutual antagonism will last long and there are hardly any chances of rapprochement. However, the things didn’t turn out to be so.

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<sup>9</sup> Since 1959, it was the first visit to China by any top leader of the Soviet Union.

In the decade of 1980s, the leaders on both the sides started the efforts to overcome the extravagant and futile Sino-Soviet conflict. Unlike the deciduous alliance of the 1950s, the two countries started to establish a more durable relationship. Finally, with the Soviet President Gorbachev's visit to China in May 1989, the Moscow-Beijing conflict ended and both the sides decided to work towards the progress in their relations. Further, the 1989 bilateral summit meeting was designed to end the past differences in the interest of both the countries and also look for future cooperation (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006). Subsequently, the bilateral ties between the two countries expanded significantly encompassing political, economic, military, security, and cultural fields. However, both have renounced any intention of constructing a military alliance and have avowed of not involving in ideological disputes or internal interferences anymore (Levine, 1992).

The unfolding of the new Sino-Soviet cooperation under the 1980s international order bears a minute resemblance to the earlier Beijing-Moscow alliance of the 1950s. The socialist bloc at that time was largely seen as an autonomous and an alternative global order countervailed to the American dominated capitalist system that both China and the Soviet Union viewed as their historical adversary. As the socialist bloc had gone now both Moscow and Beijing started to blend into the global system that they used to condemn. Furthermore, the era of the much-touted strategic triangle of the 1970s has mostly become a thing of the past now (Levine, 1992).

During the 1989 Beijing summit, both the sides vowed to resolve their differences amicably and refrain from the use of threat and force against each other. This was followed by the 1990 agreement signed by the foreign ministers of both the sides (Eduard Shevardnadze of USSR and the Qian Qichen of China) aiming to scale down the number of forces on the Sino-Soviet border to a large extent possible in tune with the normal ties and the remaining forces to be stationed solely for the defensive purpose (Schwartz, 2014). Apart from this, both the sides also stepped up to boost military ties. In April 1990, the first military delegation from China in thirty years visited the Soviet Union and this was soon reciprocated as the similar kind of delegation from later visited the former. In the same year, USSR also decided to provide China with troop-carrying helicopters expedient for the use in

high altitudes (Levine, 1992). Apart from this, the breakthrough in the bilateral relations came in the last year of the Soviet existence i.e., 1991, when the Jiang Zemin—the PRC leader, visited Russia where an agreement on the “delimitation of the main part of the border” was signed and also the areas of cooperation in other fields were discussed (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006: 4). Thereafter, the developments in the bilateral relations moved more expeditiously beyond the anticipation of observers.

### **3.4: Sino-Russian Relations in 1990s: From Good Neighbourliness to Strategic Cooperation—**

Further developments in the Sino-Russian rapprochement got hampered, due to the gradual disintegration of the socialist bloc, for which Gorbachev personally was blamed by the Chinese leadership. The coming of President Boris Yeltsin to power in Russia was seen with some anxiety in the Chinese leadership circles as he embarked on establishing an apparent pro-western alliance (Norling, 2007) and was also looked upon as the ‘gravedigger of communism’ (Bakshi, 2002: 81). There also existed an innate animosity between the Chinese leadership and the Russian democrats, who enjoyed a dominant position in the foreign and domestic policies of Russia. These democrats were optimistic initially in their fervent belief that like the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the communist rule in Beijing would be deposed by the rising influence of democracy. The Russian democrats were also critical of what happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989 where pro-democracy student protestors were suppressed and also questioned the human rights record of China. On the other hand, their pro-Western orientation and the so-called ‘economic shock therapy’<sup>10</sup> policy were viewed with great suspicion and uncertainty by the leadership in China. Apart, from this China also stood behind

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<sup>10</sup> “The term ‘shock therapy’ is used by some economists to refer to the sudden release of prices and currency controls (economic liberalisation), withdrawal of state subsidies, and immediate trade liberalisation within a country, usually also including large-scale privatisation of previously public-owned assets.” Pettinger (2013), “Shock therapy is the belief that the best way to fix a broken economy is to implement radical changes and introduce new market oriented policies, in one fell swoop whatever the short term cost. Shock therapy is associated with the economist Jeffrey Sachs who advocated free market reforms for Eastern European countries like Poland and Russia in the early 1990s. Shock therapy is different to a more gradual approach which seeks to make incremental changes and transition. Shock therapy generally refers to policies used for making a transition from a Command (state controlled) economy to a mixed economy” (Pettinger, t. (2013). Shock Therapy Economics. Retrieved 12 November 2018, from <https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/7561/economics/shock-therapy-economics/>)

the United States, Japan, Western Europe and the Republic of Korea as far as the Russian foreign policy priorities were concerned. Even the Foreign Ministry of Russia insisted that Beijing was of secondary importance only in Moscow's foreign policy.

The pro-western lobby in Russia pressed for a tenacious alliance with the West in economic, political, ideological and even in military terms. Simultaneously, there was also an active pro-Taiwan lobby in Russia. Oleg Lobov, a former deputy minister and a close aide of Yeltsin concluded an agreement with Taiwan, in April 1992, on exchanging of 'semi-official' representation. Faced the resentment from China and also within the government of Russia, President Yeltsin in his September 15, 1992 decree, assured the adherence to 'one China' policy. Subsequently, the reciprocal higher level official visits were banned and only unofficial relations with Taiwan to be accentuated, to which China also agreed to (Hu, 2012).

Russian disappointment with the West and its assistance began to take place by the end of 1992,<sup>11</sup> but there wasn't any abrupt shift away from the West. Although the reforms were devoid of any abrupt changes, there were modifications in terms of priorities and emphasis. West no longer stood at the top priority of the Russian foreign policy. Emerged from the ashes of USSR and going through the process of resurgence, Russia was not in a position and even not intending to challenge the West in the same manner as the Soviet Union used to do during the Cold war era. However, Moscow commenced to pay greater heed to its Asian neighbours and more importantly the Russian President Yeltsin himself, with the aim of engaging its neighbouring countries took steps towards this end. During his visit to China in December 1992, he announced the change of Moscow's foreign policy to be one

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<sup>11</sup> This include various factors like West's refusal for large scale economic aid to Moscow; the enlargement of NATO; "the relationship was further compromised as Russian nationalists and communists began to mobilize their not inconsiderable base of support at home; and it was finally provided with a more material form as the Russian economy imploded because of what many in Russia saw as a deliberate western plan to reduce the country to the status of a Third World country. Certainly, long before Putin assumed office, there was a sizeable group of Russians who insisted that having given away everything to the West between 1989 and 1991, Russia had got nothing back in return other than broken promises and a raft of policy suggestions that had impoverished the majority and allowed a narrow band of oligarchs to seize control of the nation's assets" Cox, M. (2016). Not just 'convenient' China and Russia's new strategic partnership in the age of geopolitics. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 1(4), 317-334.

of 'balanced between East and West' (Wishnick, 2001: 799). While speaking in this line, Lo (2008) stated that–

under mounting domestic pressure and resentful of what he saw as the West's ingratitude for his part in ending the Soviet Union, Yeltsin moved Russian foreign policy toward a more "multi-vectored," less obviously Western-centric approach (Lo, 2008: 29).

It is in this line that relations with China and India– the two great nations of Asia, were strengthened through Presidential visits in 1992 and 1993 respectively. Subsequently, these visits were anticipated as conveying a greater balance to the Moscow's foreign policy between the East and the West. However, Beijing enjoyed a more significant position than New Delhi in the calculus of Moscow's policymakers. The reasons for this were that Russia-China relations had a direct impact on the Russian ties with the West as well as its interests in the strategically vital Asia-Pacific region. With the unfolding of events, Moscow and Beijing exhibited a strong desire accompanied by the enhanced diplomatic activism to boost their ties and also to evolve a platform for bolstering multifaceted cooperation (Bakshi, 2002).

The wide array of developments took place after the visit of President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev to Beijing in 1992, which among others include the Russian troop withdrawal from Mongolia; similar reduction of troops in the Russian Far East also took place, and both the sides reached upon an agreement in December 1992, regarding the withdrawal of troops and offensive weapons within the area of 100 miles from their shared border (Norling, 2007). Yeltsin's 1992 visit to China marked an end to the initial phase of uncertainty between the two countries and the 17-19 December 1992 summit, became to be recognised as a historic breakthrough in the bilateral relations.

Andrei Kozyrev, the then foreign minister of Russia visited China in January 1994. During his meeting with the Chinese officials, Kozyrev conveyed President Yeltsin's ambition for developing Moscow-Being relations into a "constructive partnership." After receiving the positive response from China for close cooperation in settling the bilateral issues through peaceful means, Russia wanted to reaffirm and even enhance its relations with China. However, Beijing took some

time to fathom the intentions behind such a proposal. With the visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin, to Russia in September 1994, the partnership attained official status. In 1995, a series of meetings took place between the two sides in which the intentions about the role of Sino-Russo partnership with respect to international relations became certainly defined. Kozyrev, during his visit to China in March 1995, emphasised the common interests of both the countries. While talking about the common interests, Kozyrev said that both countries stand against hegemonism and unilateralism, and both will endeavour together in structuring a new world order based on the principle of equality. Apart from this, Boris Yeltsin again reiterated for enhancing bilateral ties and developing a true partnership during the Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Russia on 7-9 May 1995, to attend the victory-day celebrations against fascism long years back (Rozman, 1998). Russian President Yeltsin as cited by (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015) also said in 1995, "China is a very important state for us. It is a neighbour, with which we share the longest border in the world and with which we are destined to live and work side by side forever" (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015: 6).

Yeltsin didn't criticise China on 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, rather pitched for the peaceful reunification. With the aim of transforming the constructive partnership into a strategic partnership, President Yeltsin during his April 1996 visit to China stressed for strengthening the Moscow-Beijing partnership by replacing the word "constructive" with "strategic" one (Rozman, 1998). By doing this, Russia and China could excel in establishing further closeness and the evolving relationship will be further boosted. The Chinese leadership responded positively in transforming the rhetoric into action. During 1996, summit meeting in Shanghai, the presidents of the two sides signed a communiqué on establishing a "strategic partnership". The concluding of the Sino-Russo strategic partnership appears to be a stimulant in the enhancement of bilateral cooperation. The leading examples towards this end were the setting up of annual meetings between the leaders of the two countries in 1996 and the establishment of a direct phone link (hotline) between the State Council of the People's Republic of China and the Russian

State Duma. While commenting on this joint declaration on 'strategic partnership' Kissinger (1996) said—

the communiqué represents nothing less than a declaration of independence by both Moscow and Beijing from the strategic triangle that had evolved in the two decades since Richard Nixon's opening to China. A basic premise of that triangle was that the United States place itself closer to both Beijing and Moscow than either was to the other, achieving a strong bargaining position vis-a-vis each. This new Shanghai communiqué symbolizes the demise of that process and a deliberate effort by both China and Russia to reduce America's options in Asia (Kissinger, 1996: para. 2).

China and Russia also signed the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions with three Central Asian countries— Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan in April 1996, in China, thereby created the Shanghai Five grouping. The leaders on both the sides expeditiously found a common concern in opposition to their perceived domination of the emerging world order by the United States in the post-Cold War era. Against this backdrop, the two countries decided to strive together to devise a multipolar international order which would be a more inclusive one. However, both the countries affirmed that their strategic relationship would not take the form of an alliance directed against any other state. Both the sides believe that establishing an alliance would limit their freedom which no one among them wanted.

Chinese leadership in the first half of the decade of the 1990s, embarked on a vision of multipolarism so as to emerge from the shackles of diplomatic isolation due to the Tiananmen sanctions, the breakdown of the communist movement, and the United States administrations initial tough stance on the issues of human rights. The Moscow-Beijing partnership for Chinese analysts came at a time of Russia's increasing disappointment with the West and also its refusal to follow the dictates of the Pentagon i.e., is a rejection of the role of a junior partner. Therefore, the Moscow-Beijing partnership acts as a challenge to Washington and indeed gave an indication for the gradual emergence of a multipolar world order. As the officials in Moscow viewed the expansion of NATO as a means of containing Russia, so has Beijing viewed involvement of Washington in the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996, and tough debate over the Beijing's entry in the World Trade

Organisation in the U.S. Congress as an attempt to challenge the rising clout of Beijing. Both the sides raised their voice against America's military involvement in Iraq, the intervention of NATO in Kosovo crisis, and Washington's plans for developing Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) and National Missile Defence (NMD). Apart from this, both the countries joined hands in opposing what they considered the U.S. meddling in their domestic affairs on the grounds of human rights. China supported Russia in its handling of Chechnya military and the latter supported the former on Taiwan issue (Wishnick, 2001). Further, the May 1999, accidental bombing by the U.S. on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the bombing of Yugoslavia by the NATO (Operation Allied Force) was viewed as a challenge to Chinese sovereignty and as an infringement by Washington. The 1999 Washington-led NATO intervention in Kosovo was also seen with great concern and an exercise of the U.S. unilateralism by both China and Russia as the intervention lacked the authorisation from the UNSC. To Chinese officials, the main intention behind the U.S. plans of developing TMD and NMD system is to counter China thereby thwart it from occupying its deserving position in the world system. Therefore, like Russia, this bilateral partnership became handy for China in securing its national interests.

Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin the presidents of Russia and China respectively held seven summits from 1992 and 1999 with the aim of making the bilateral cooperation more and more progressive with each passing year (Norling, 2007). In the late 1990s, China and Russia made resolute efforts to address their border problems amicably and also made dogged attempts towards the harmonisation of their cross-border trade. It was in this backdrop, that the border between the two countries got registered legally and almost its entire length was identified, but the three islands on the Argun and Amur rivers were left as disputed territories (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006).

Although Sino-Russo political relations were moving on the progressive trend towards more closeness, the economic relations during the mid-1990s were stagnant and during this decade trade relations remained very low and even unstable. Both the sides pledged in 1996, to reach the bilateral trade volume of \$20 billion by 2000 (Dueben, 2013: 73). However, this aim got foreclosed due to

the continuous modifications in trade rules, infrastructure problems, and the expeditiously evolving markets (Wishnick, 2001). Therefore, in the post-Soviet period, the lack of development in the field of economic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing remained an apparent gap in the bilateral relationship. Further, the bilateral trade volume fluctuated in the period from 1992 to 2000 between \$3.8 and \$6.2 billion (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006: 9). However, in 2000, the bilateral trade between China and Russia reached \$8 billion, i.e., the highest figure since 1993 (Wishnick, 2001: 811), and from 2001 onwards the bilateral trade increased considerably.

On the other hand, military technology cooperation between Moscow and Beijing represented one of the key components of bilateral relations. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Russia's defence sales to China averaged \$1 billion per year, however, from 1999, the sales jumped to around \$2 billion a year (Rangsimaporn, 2006: 478). Beijing's interest in the initial years of the 1990s was only to procure military hardware. However, as the relations progressed gradually, China pressed for acquiring military technology with Moscow's assistance so as to facilitate the production of most of the modern weapon systems within China itself. Apart from obtaining weapons and equipment from Russia, China also began to acquire former's technology from the mid-1990s, with which the relations in this area took a new turn. The leading example towards this end is the securing of licenses by Beijing in 1996, to start the production of multi-role combat aircraft at a plant in Shenyang in North-East China. It is because of these licenses that China began to manufacture two kinds of combat aircraft by the end of the 1990s and since 1999, China has only been provided with the engines and radars by Russia for these combat aircraft (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006). Moscow and Beijing also signed a 15-year Military Cooperation Plan in January 2000 that envisions expanded provision for military equipment and licenses transfers and also the joint R & D—research and development (Rangsimaporn, 2006). Apart from this, China's arms procurements totalled \$1.7 billion during the same year and arms sales jumped to \$3 billion in 2001 (Schwartz, 2014).

The Sino-Russo bilateral ties became more pragmatic and continued to be on the track of rapid improvement in the year 2000. Both the sides began to pay more

heed towards improving their relations. Under Vladimir Putin, Russia began to view its close cooperation as a strategy for regaining its lost pride as far as its foreign policy standing in the international relations domain is concerned. On the other side of the spectrum, Beijing also saw its mounting cooperation with Moscow as a means to enhance its standing at both regional as well as at the global level.

In order to boost their relations, the two sides signed a treaty on “Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation” in Moscow 2001. The validity of this treaty would last for 20 years. The emphasis under this treaty was given to cooperation based on friendship, mutual respect for their social, political and economic systems, and mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs. Apart from this, under Article 5 of the treaty, Moscow reiterated its position on ‘One China’ policy and regarded Taiwan as an integral part of China. Article 8 of the treaty both the sides pledged to not to form any alliance or join any of such with any third country or a group of countries undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the other side, and also affirmed that they would not provide shelter to any organisation and groups whose activities would be detrimental to any of the two countries (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015). Furthermore, the Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation, is believed to have provided a legal basis for Sino-Russian strategic cooperation and trust in the Russian policy circles (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006). In order to enhance the geostrategic outreach of their strategic bonhomie, China and Russia with four other Central Asian countries formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001. The organisation provided a platform for the two sides to overcome their differences and thereby further boosted their strategic cooperation.

Therefore, the history of the China-Russia relations is a characteristic of ups and downs as the era of closer relations being interspersed by the periods of mutual antagonism. While giving a best description of the rising proximity between China and Russia Nye (2015) said–

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, that de facto US-China alliance ended and a China-Russia rapprochement began. In 1992, the two nations declared that they were pursuing a “constructive partnership”; in 1996, they progressed toward a

“strategic partnership”; and in 2001, they signed a treaty of “friendship and cooperation” (Nye, 2015: para. 4).

### **Post 9/11 Sino-Russo Entente: Rising above the Differences**

While having a brief overview of the historical background of Sino-Russian relations in the previous chapter, this chapter examines in detail how China and Russia are rising above their differences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter discusses their relations under the aegis of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Furthermore, the chapter presents a detailed account of Sino-Russian bilateral economic and defence cooperation and how they are exploring new horizons in these sectors, such as energy cooperation and joint military exercises.

#### **4.1: 9/11 Attacks and Response from Russia and China–**

The September 11 attacks in the United States had shaken the American administration from the core and even the world at large. The attacks challenged the advanced security setup of the United States. Apart from this, the magnitude of the attacks was such that it appeared as a shock to the entire world. No one had imagined that the terrorists would breach the well-advanced security system of Washington. The attacks were also described as a “new Pearl Harbour” in the United States because both the attacks surprised the country and in which many Americans got killed (Gordon, 2001). Indeed the consequences of the attacks were not only for Washington but also for the global community at large. The astounding human toll at the World Trade Centre alone was almost 3,000 people who comprise the nationals from different countries also (Wah, 2003). While commenting on these attacks the then Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld (2001) said, as reported in *the Washington Post* (01 November, 2001)–

These attacks were more than the first salvos of a new kind of war. They were a wake-up call, a warning that we are entering a dangerous new period in American history, one in which the United States' historical invulnerability has been replaced by a new era of vulnerability; one in which new enemies strike our cities and our people in novel and surprising ways; one in which more and more adversaries possess weapons of increasing range and power– weapons that will allow them to bring war to the American homeland (Rumsfeld, 2001: para. 2).

The September 11, attacks also changed the U.S. threat perceptions and it was held that the present menace for the US had shifted from being posed by a state

to a non-state actor. This, in turn, led to the shift in the focus of the U.S. being preoccupied with the overcoming of the challenge posed by a rising power. Paul Kennedy (2001), as cited in (Wah, 2003), “envisaged that not only such brutal attacks will become more extensive in the current century, but it will also be quite difficult to respond properly to threats challenging citizens of nations” (Wah, 2003: 7). The then President of the United States, George Bush in September 2001 at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance as reported by *the Washington Post* (14 September, 2001), said –

Our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. The conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing (“Bush remarks at”, 2001: para. 7-8).

The 9/11 attacks had traumatized the international community and thereby made it realise the gravity of danger posed by the terrorists. There seemed to appear a sense of insecurity among nations of the world, most prominently the allies. September 11, attacks made them fearful of their own immediate security interests. Most of them questioned that the terrorist didn't even spare the technologically advanced United States, so how come their nations be secured. It had dealt a serious blow across the globe. That is why there were widespread condemnations of the attacks throughout the world.

Soon after the attacks, terrorism was seen as a common threat to the international community. The impact of the attack was such that it took no time to form a consensus, that to eliminate terrorism, the international community must cooperate and thereby maintain international order. As it became clear that the attacks were carried by the Osama Bin Laden led Al-Qaida, having its roots in Afghanistan, the United States launched an attack on this terrorist outfit and the Taliban regime of Afghanistan. A coalition of willing was formed by Washington to attack Afghanistan to oust Taliban regime from power. In fact, prior to the military action in Afghanistan, President Bush while addressing to a joint session of Congress on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2001, declared to the nations of the world that they have a decision to make “either you are with us or with the terrorists.” By this statement,

President Bush seemed to make it clear that no country should come in the way of military action in Afghanistan thereby to halt necessary operations.

The 9/11 has changed the geo-political landscape of South and Central Asia, in fact, the entire Asia because of several factors. Therefore, the 11 September 2001, is considered as a significant event in the international relations. The attacks have marked a shift in international politics i.e., from post-Cold War to the post-9/11 period. The relations between different countries are even now defined from the prism of the post-9/11 world.

#### **4.1.1: Russian and Chinese Response–**

Like other countries, China and Russia also condemned the brutal attacks and shared their grief with the United States. In fact, the first foreign leader to speak to the U.S. President Bush was Russian President Vladimir Putin. While offering his condolences to the U.S. President, Putin also reassured Bush that beyond any doubt such inhuman perpetrators will have to bear the consequences and in any case would not be left unpunished. On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2001, while addressing to the people of the United States, Putin as cited in (Azizian 2003), said– “the event that occurred in the US today goes beyond national borders. It is a brazen challenge to the whole humanity, at least to civilized humanity” (Azizian, 2003: 151). Not only this, Putin also said that there is a need for the integrated efforts on part of the international community in the fight against terrorism and had termed it as the “plague of the twenty-first century” (Cooley, 2012: 53).

While sharing the grief with President Bush, Putin also saw in 9/11 an opportunity to improve Moscow’s relations with Washington. Putin used this opportune moment to realise his strategic objectives– he offered Russia’s assistance to the United States in its efforts to punish the culprits. Russia shared intelligence and provided the U.S. with flyover rights and support to the Northern Alliance against the Taliban. Russia further cooperated with the U.S. when it agreed to allow Washington to set up military bases in Central Asia which was quite impossible before September 11, attacks. This newly sought rapprochement materialized with President Bush’s visit to Moscow in 2002 which led to the signing of the Strategic

Offensive Reduction Treaty.<sup>1</sup> Russia was also accorded “market economy” status by the United States which in turn led to the improvement in trade relations and brought Moscow closer to the membership of the World Trade Organisation (W.T.O) (Kuchins, 2016). The moment was discussed by the experts as a “new beginning” in the realm of great power politics.

As far as China’s response to the attacks was concerned, the then Chinese President, Jiang Zemin was shocked by this horrifying attack. However, Beijing hesitated initially to respond to cooperative stance, because of its own concerns with the U.S. while simultaneously expressing solidarity with Washington.

China gradually supported the call of the United States for cooperation to crush the terrorist outfits operating from Afghanistan and consequently extended its support through the resolutions of UNSC. Beijing firmly believed that the fight against terrorism should be within the framework of the United Nations thereby indirectly calling out in support of multilateralism and rejecting unilateral military actions. This set up the tone for its future policy on the issue of global and rising powers. In the UNSC, it endorsed the efforts for dethroning Taliban regime in Afghanistan which had acted as an umbrella for Al-Qaida. It was only after the adoption 1368 resolution by the UNSC that Beijing showed its willingness of support in the war on terrorism. However, at the same time, China stressed that the UN should keep a check on the unilateralism of the U.S. In order to gain the U.S. confidence, and as a departure from the past, China also permitted America to open its first Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) office in Beijing (Feng, 2015).

The September 11 attacks led to the improvement in Sino-US relations. China’s relatively supportive response to America’s post-9/11 strategy came against the backdrop of the troubled relations between the two countries.<sup>2</sup> Beijing’s cooperative stance was particularly significant for the United States in the overall success of its strategy, because of the former being a veto-wielding member of the

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<sup>1</sup> This treaty places limits on operationally deployed nuclear warheads.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to the attacks the tensions between the two countries were on rise; China’s detention of a damaged US reconnaissance plane and its crew, President Bush’s proclamation that Washington would do “whatever it took to help Taiwan to defend itself, US criticism over intensifying attacks on religious freedom by China, friction over weapons issues including America’s planned missile shield and Beijing’s proliferation of missile technology.

UN Security Council. Another major consideration for Beijing to cooperate with the U.S. was the presence of extremist elements in Xinjiang which it, suspected are receiving aid from the Afghan Taliban (Tsunekawa, 2007).

The September-11 attacks had put China in an advantageous position because America's anti-terrorism driven policy had in one or the other way comprised its effectiveness in responding to the rising clout of the former. As the United States got deeply involved in the war on terror, China's rise with game-changing ascent remained un-noticed from the U.S. in several ways. In this line of thought, Jacques deLise (2011) argued that "Washington's post 9/11 preoccupation with terrorism and its pursuit of Beijing's cooperation in its anti-terrorism agenda had given China an extended respite from unwanted scrutiny and the nettlesome (or worse) US foreign policy initiatives such scrutiny might bring" (deLise, 2011, para. 9). It was due to their cooperation that the adoption of UNSC resolutions condemning the brutal attacks was possible. These resolutions aimed to call on all the nations to take necessary measures to combat and avert terrorist organisations and their activities generally and that of al-Qaeda and Taliban particularly and endorsed the international efforts to dethrone the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (deLise, 2011).

The United States in order to achieve its immediate goal of crushing the Taliban adopted a more China accommodative approach and was soon embroiled in militarily crushing Taliban thereby focussing its strategic attention to Afghanistan-Pakistan region. As China and Russia supported the U.S. call for cooperation at this crucial juncture, the U.S. too reciprocated. Former President George Bush in the State of the Union address in January 2002, said that "in this moment of opportunity, a common danger is erasing old rivalries" (BBC, 2002: para. 73). At a simultaneous level, Beijing and Moscow used this strategic vacuum to enhance their outreach in Asia by strengthening their respective relations to boost financial relations thereby interlinking the elements of geo-economics with geo-politics. This has been dealt in a greater depth in the next chapter.

However, the progress in Washington's relations with Beijing and Moscow was short-lived as differences once again emerged over the Iraq issue. Despite opposition from Russia, Germany, and France, the United States along with the

United Kingdom (U.K.) went ahead and launched attacks on Iraq. Both Russia and China criticised the U.S. move in Iraq and stirred the debate of just war. On the contrary, the Iraq invasion also led to the loss of confidence of both the countries in the United States who supported its action in Afghanistan. Both Russia and China started to criticise the U.S. presence in Central Asia.

Prior to the Iraq war, Moscow moved much closer to Washington than Beijing in the U.S. action in Afghanistan. Russia even agreed to the U.S. troop presence in the strategically vital Central Asia and didn't castigate the June 2002 unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the "Anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty" in the stronger manner as China did. This, in turn, had caused apprehensions in Chinese foreign as well as security policy circles, with many concerned that the Russian President is changing Moscow's balanced foreign policy in pursuance of its close cooperation with Washington (Kuchins, 2016). However, the Moscow changed its stance on the same and it joined Beijing to criticise the U.S. military presence in Central Asia and also in the Middle East which has been examined in the next chapter.

The relations between Moscow and Washington deteriorated to the extent that Russian President Vladimir Putin publically criticised the United States and stated that Washington's use of force against Iraq was a big political mistake (Tsunekawa, 2007). This provided an opportunity to China to strategically engage Moscow in order to play a big role in the strategic backyard of Russia. Both the powers came together under the aegis of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and jointly pressurized the U.S. to withdraw from the energy-rich Central Asia.

#### **4.2: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Sino-Russian Relations–**

In the post-9/11 period, there has been a major shift in the foreign policies of the major powers of the world and also the countries of the Asian continent. Drastic changes in foreign policy priorities were witnessed in the countries of the Middle-East, South, and Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. While responding to the changing security dynamics of Asia, China and Russia came much closer leaving behind the bilateral irritants to secure their strategic interests. In the

twenty-first century, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership reached new heights. Both the countries focussed on the converging interests in order to avoid any misunderstandings that might hamper the tight strategic embrace they have so far achieved. Being the members of various multilateral organisations such as APEC, BRICS, G20, SCO, and the UNSC, the two sides also found it easy to mend their differences. These platforms provided ample opportunities to both the sides to work towards greater cooperation thereby secure their respective as well as joint strategic interests.

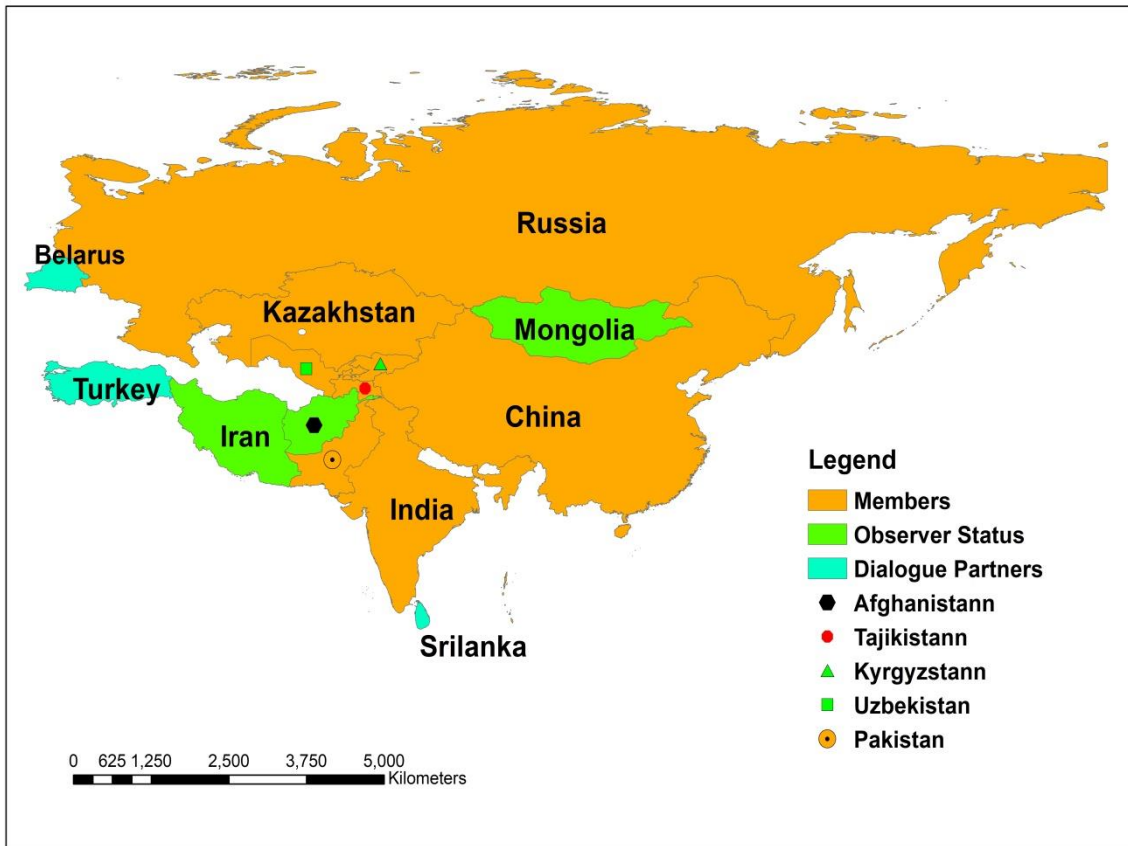
Among these key multilateral institutions, the most important ones are the S.C.O. and the U.N.S.C. Both these organisations have served as an important tool to materialize their strategic goals, the most important being to downplay the U.S. The presence of Moscow and Beijing in the above-mentioned organisations represents a significant pairing whose interests often coincide mostly. Eying on a multipolar world, both the sides have been actively cooperating with each other in these organisations.

Although the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation traces its origin to the early 1990s both were working towards the establishment of a framework for the peaceful settlement of border disputes.<sup>3</sup> As the cooperation between China and Russia along with the CARs grew under this framework, the scope of its aims and ambitions also got extended to promote multilateralism and to limit the sphere of influence of the U.S. In June 2017 Astana summit with the purpose of expanding SCO's influence to South Asia, India and Pakistan have been granted the full-member status of the organisation. The Figure 4.1, given below shows the spread of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which includes apart from the member countries, the observers and dialogue partners also.

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<sup>3</sup> The aim was to build confidence between China, Russia and the four Central Asian republics– Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Firstly, Shanghai Five came into being in 1996 and later it was transformed into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001. The Shanghai Five comprised of China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the SCO comprised of China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

**Figure 4.1: Map of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**



Source: Geographic Information System (GIS) Lab, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda

In the initial years of the establishment of the SCO, debates, discussions and various summits focussed on resolving the bilateral disputes of China, Russia and other CARs.<sup>4</sup> However, as the pace of changes accelerated, the members also began to discuss economic, humanitarian, and other issues including how to

<sup>4</sup> Since 1996, China, Russia and the three Central Asian countries started annual summit meetings known as the “Shanghai Five.” The member countries signed a “Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions,” at the first summit meeting on April 26, 1996, in Shanghai. This led to the establishment of a set of confidence-building measures in the military domain along the shared borders of these countries. In the subsequent summit that took place in Moscow on April 25, 1997, the five nations signed a “Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions.” The treaty restricted the member countries from conventional military activities and deployments within the radius of a hundred kilometre demilitarised zone along their shared borders (Weitz, 2008). Meanwhile, the member states by 2001, stressed the need for the establishment of a more enduring mechanism to address their diversifying agenda. Against this backdrop, the member countries with the aim of institutionalising the Shanghai Five interactions established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in June 2001 and declared the birth of a new regional security cooperation organisation. After the successful formation of the SCO, various senior level consultations has been sponsored by it on a number of issues encompassing economic development, narcotics trafficking, energy, transportation, communication, terrorism and the war in Afghanistan (Weitz, 2008).

overcome the challenges of terrorism, drug trafficking, and other transnational threats that act as a cause of concern for the member states. In continuation of their support to a multilateral world, the 'Shanghai Convention on Fight against Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism' was signed in 2001 (Wu, 2005).

Subsequently, SCO reaffirmed that it vowed to fight the "three evils"—terrorism, separatism, and extremism, and confront other emerging issues in the post-9/11 world such as the mounting presence of the United States in this region. The SCO in its annual summit conferences during its earlier stages mainly focussed on political and security issues confronting the region. However, the organisation has developed from a mere forum to a council by holding annual summit meetings and the Prime-minister-level meetings. While speaking about the expanding horizon of the SCO, Yun & Park (2012) stated—

The SCO is now expanding cooperation by institutionalising exchanges in economy, trading, culture, energy, education, and other areas. In the meantime, the SCO facilitates even allied military training, which leads to the expansion of power to neighbouring nations as well as in the region. It has also grown into a huge block that allows the SCO to cope with the US unilateralism, which is USA's strategy to rule the world. The SCO considers unity and cooperation among its members, including Russia and China, as its top priority because the existence and development of the SCO brings all the member countries together (Yun & Park, 2012: 81).

SCO further established linkages with other regional organisations like CSTO, CIS, ESCAP, BRICS, and with international organisations that included the United Nations also. This, in turn, enhanced the influence of China and Russia in these organisations. Apart from this, SCO created the "energy club" with the aim of improving energy security, rationalising energy strategies and coordinating efforts and strategies for future cooperation in diverse energy sectors thereby aiming to secure the energy (strategic and financial) interests of its member countries. This club as mentioned by Pisarev (2012), "supposed to be an open working platform not only for the members but also for other countries interested in energy cooperation" (Pisarev, 2012: 7).

During the early evolving years of the organisation there were speculations that SCO could become a potential military bloc. However, these speculations were addressed by both Russia and China. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in 2005, rejected any such idea and added that SCO does not even have any plan to set up a rapid deployment force. One year later the Executive Secretary Zhang Deguang downplayed the speculations that the organisation is going to be an Eastern equivalent of NATO and added that the organisation will never form a military bloc (Zyberk & Monaghan, 2014).

The development of SCO into a coherent organisation has been halted by the Sino-Russo divergences over the direction of the organisation. However, the organisation was able to show its metal on various issues as a potential regional organisation. The organisation has been largely successful in proving its solidarity on various occasions. For example, during 2005, Astana summit, a joint statement was issued by the SCO, calling for a “final timeline for the coalition forces to leave the region. Apart from this, it was also agreed that Washington would not be allowed to send observers to the Peace Missions of 2005 and 2007. Not only this, the organisation has also enhanced political and security cooperation among its members. The leading example towards this end can be the Peace Mission 2007 and 2009, where the members demonstrated military-to-military cooperation. Even SCO has passed an agreement in 2007 for holding military exercises known as “peace missions” on a regular basis (Aris, 2013). Subsequently, a series of exercises of different magnitudes with a different stratum of participation have been held regularly in the ensuing years.

Although the SCO is being dominated by China and Russia, it does not let the other smaller members feel like they are not being heard. In fact, for the first time, these countries saw themselves in a position where they can put forward their arguments and opinions which necessarily was not the case before the formation of SCO. Even, the Sino-Russian strategic cooperation and competition within the SCO provide these smaller members with opportunities to maximise their respective interests (Lo, 2008). At the Bishkek summit 16 August 2007, of the SCO, the member countries in order to further boost their cooperation signed the “Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighbourliness, Friendship, and Cooperation.” The

SCO has emerged as one of the important organisations of the world. Although its progressive trend has not met the expectations that many have predicted, the SCO was successful in carving out a role of being the bedrock for the coordination of distinguishing facets of security and economic strategy (Aris, 2013).

The SCO as a potential regional organisation is now assuming a greater role in shaping the region's political and security dynamics. In fact, SCO has become an important factor in representing the collective viewpoint of its members on international issues. This attribute of SCO is directly linked to the fact of having China and Russia as its key members. Consequently, the presence of two veto and nuclear powers i.e., Beijing and Moscow—the two chief architects of this organisation gives it a significant geopolitical weightage in the international politics. The up-gradation of India and Pakistan as full members (nuclear power countries) has further added the prestige of the organisation in international politics. The organisation has become one of the major actors in international politics as it is there not only to secure the dominance of Russia and China in Central Asia but also is a unique multilateral body which acts as an alternative to restrict U.S. strategic inroads in the region.

The energy-rich Central Asian region has been an area of competition among the major powers which also saw the 'great game' and now the 'new great game' among the leading powers of the world. The strategic vitality of the region is such that the major powers of the world could in no way let it be dominated by any single power. While keeping in view the strategic significance of this region, Russia and China have joined hands together to ensure closer cooperation with Central Asian republics. Moscow and Beijing are building trust in this significant region through different channels, thereby, securing their joint and individual interests. Given this backdrop, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was created to achieve the above-mentioned objectives. In order to enhance their strategic partnership in Central Asia, both countries became the fore-runner of the organisation. In fact, SCO is the institutional body that brings China and Russia together on Central Asian issues. SCO has been acting as a dialogue channel for the two dominant powers and other members of the organisation to discuss the security related issues. The two sides have also conducted joint military exercises

under the banner of SCO. "Peace Mission 2007" was the large scale joint military exercise conducted by China and Russia as SCO members for the first time (Yun & Park, 2012). In fact, the SCO sponsored joint military exercises continue to display the dominance of China and Russia where other members only have scanty contributions (Lo, 2008).

As far as the relations within SCO members are concerned, the Sino-Russian relations stood at the heart of the organisation. The long-term effectiveness and durability of the organisation is largely dependent on Beijing-Moscow strategic partnership. The development of SCO has taken place in tandem with the gradual development of China-Russia relationship since the end of the Cold War. In the post-Cold war era, the Sino-Russian relations have developed from mere Strategic rivals during the Cold War period to strategic partners in the current century. China and Russia's respective policies towards the resource-rich Central Asia, also known as the latter's backyard and formers near neighbourhood reflects their outlook towards each other and also to the outer world (Pisarev, 2012). The significance of Sino-Russo bilateral cooperation and their respective role is becoming crucial in averting the possible conflicts in Central Asia. Owing to their strategic interests, the two countries worked towards accommodating each other in Central Asia. Moscow and Beijing has been building trust in the energy-rich Central Asia under the aegis of SCO and towards which the organisation has been largely successful. Their cooperation has become significant in controlling situations that could have escalated into potential conflicts in Central Asia, as in the current century the region has become crucial than any other regions where the national interests of different countries interplay (Yun & Park, 2012). The two sides also agreed to work together to expunge international terrorism by taking necessary measures towards this end through SCO and also in cooperation with international organisations especially with UN.

Russia allowed China's strategic involvement in its strategic backyard to thwart the rising presence of West in the Central Asian affairs. Further, it has been working tirelessly to regain its lost pride of being a super-power state in world politics during the Cold War era and also to reinforce its leadership in Eurasia particularly in Central Asia. While speaking in this line Facon (2013), argued that–

From a Russian perspective, China has so far proved genuinely inclined to take into account Moscow's sensitivities regarding its former empire. Beijing has been acting more or less transparently in its dealings with Central Asian states— anyway, more transparently than the US, the other power that, in the Russian perception, is in a position to contest Moscow's pre-eminence in Central Asia (Facon, 2013: 469).

As far as China is concerned, Moscow is aware of the fact that the best way to balance Beijing's rising posture in the region is to engage it through a series of agreements and dialogues. SCO best serves this purpose of Russia. Moscow being another dominant actor in SCO enables it to keep a check on Beijing's rising clout in the region. Further while sharing the leading role of the organisation with China, enables it to have a say in latter's strategic designs in the region. In the absence of SCO, it would have become a tough task for Russia to preserve its strategic influence in Central Asia as it would have to compete with both the U.S. and China for influence in this vital region (Gonzalez, 2007). Therefore, SCO seems to be serving the purpose of a double-edged sword for Russia through which it contains the U.S. and also ties down the mounting influence of China in this region of strategic importance. However, Russia is more eyeing on to outfox the U.S. advances in the region than China. For the time being, Russia is more apprehensive about the U.S. influence in the region than that of China. Keeping this objective in mind it has been working towards this end by increasing its presence in the region through the different strategies of economic cooperation, energy cooperation and military expansion through SCO. In a nutshell, just as the U.S. chose to ignore China's rise in the South and Central Asia and was more focussed on Afghanistan and Iraq; so too is Russia ignoring the strategic depth of China in its immediate backyard. Consequently, there may arise a situation that in the years to come, a game change can happen and both Russia and the U.S. might come together to balance China. Although as of now, Sino-Russo entente is gaining strength and aforesaid scenario is a remote possibility.

On the other hand, China, which is a fast-growing economy, is in dire need of energy resources and markets find Russia's positive overtures quite significant in making strategic inroads in this vital region. Due to the economic linkages established overtime, China was wary of the NATO's expansion and was in fact quite vocal about it. Both China and the U.S. shared mutual suspicion towards

each other— both in Asia and beyond. It is against this backdrop that China in cooperation with Russia through the SCO framework made strategic inroads in Central Asia thereby strengthening its cooperation with the republics of the region. This acted as a breakthrough for China to prepare itself for its perceived encirclement strategy of US (Yun & Park, 2012).

Since China's energy demands increased manifold, SCO provided it with a strategic space towards this end. It is also against this backdrop that China is engaging itself with the CARs as it needs diverse energy supply sources to meet its demand. Keeping this objective in mind Beijing is using its economic might to lure the CARs so as to increase their dependency on China. Its trade with Central Asia in 2016 according to WITS figures was US \$30.04 billion as compared to Russia's US \$18.55 billion. More importantly, Beijing's increasing influence in this resource-rich region is because of its vision for regional connectivity. In this broad vision, Central Asia occupies a significant position and China while eyeing on Central Asian energy resources is providing commercial investments, loans, and also several other entities. It has been building roads, tunnels, bridges, pipelines, and rail networks throughout the region especially, to make its ambitious 'belt' and 'road' initiative a success (Stronski & Ng, 2018).<sup>5</sup> From the CARs perspective, these infrastructure projects are as Hashimova (2018) mentioned, "not merely grand investments, but also tickets to join a global trade and geographic reorientation toward market economies in Western Europe, South and East Asia, and beyond" (Hashimova, 2018: para. 5). Therefore, SCO provides China with such a platform from where it can secure its goals.

The most important factor that binds China and Russia together in Central Asia has been the presence of a third party (United States) in this region of strategic importance. The creation of SCO under the leadership of China and Russia seems

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<sup>5</sup> The first three lines of the Central Asia-China pipeline's that brings gas from Central Asia to Chinese market, and the work of which started in 2007 and were all completed in 2014, Beijing has promoted the China-Kazakhstan rail connection as a key BRI outpost (Stronski & Ng, 2018). So far, three railroad connections in the region have been completed under the banner of BRI: Pop-Angren in Uzbekistan (will become a part of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan rail link once completed), Uzen-Breket-Gorgan (traversing Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran), and Khorgos dry port in Kazakhstan connecting China and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, China, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan have recently launched a highway connecting three countries. Although Tajikistan is not a part of any proposed rail link, Beijing invested in Dushanbe-Chanak 350-km highway connecting the north of the country with the capital city (Hashimova, 2018).

to be a clear response to this challenge presented by the West. As far as the regional security is concerned both China and Russia agree upon a point that too much presence of West in Central Asia accompanied by the agenda of democratisation could undermine the security and stability of SCO members in Central Asia. Both the powers agree that while ensuring the security under the SCO space, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs should be the foremost principle (Facon, 2013). It is against this backdrop that Russia and China through SCO along with other Central Asian members in 2005, called on the foreign forces to give a final timeline to withdraw from Central Asia. Furthermore, the organisation acts as a framework for the member nations to continuously monitor their conflicting interests which often take place at several occasions.

China and Russia being the leading actors within the SCO have worked together with other members to expand the scope of the organisation since its formation in 2001. Both the powers were successful in enhancing their strategic influence while significantly maintaining the cooperative and competitive nature of their relationship. Under the banner of SCO, Moscow and Beijing sought to enhance their bilateral ties but still, their respective concerns and interests in relation to other members vary (Yun & Park, 2012).

As far as the direction of SCO is concerned here again their views differ. Since the establishment of SCO, it became apparent that Russia wanted SCO to act as an international security structure directed against West. On the other hand, China mainly favoured economic cooperation in order to gain access to the regions rich natural resources. Moscow has been accentuating international security in this region of strategic significance and pressed for joint action while responding to the international developments. The leading example in this respect can be Russia since 2003 had been the forerunner in pressing for the U.S. withdrawal from Central Asian bases. Beijing didn't fall in this line as it largely focused on natural resources and the Central Asian markets thereby keeping a low profile when coming to opposing the U.S. in this region.

Russia has been wary of China's economic expansion in this strategically vital region and has been working towards bringing the energy resources and its

delivery under its control. However, while doing so Moscow prefers not to display its exasperation, otherwise, it might undermine its own long-term interests by annoying China. On the other hand, Russia's counterpart China also prefers not to show its displeasure with Moscow on international and regional platforms. While coming on to the extension of SCO's membership, their views also differ. This largely happens in case of whether Iran to be given full member status or not. While Russia presses for the inclusion of Iran as a full member of the organisation, China has been not favouring Iran to be given this status because of Tehran's issues with the West. China fears that such inclusion will directly dent SCO's international image because of Tehran's violent image, especially in the West. The inclusion of Iran as China perceives might be viewed as an anti-West, particularly anti-US formation. Towards this end, Pisarev (2012), rightly said "unlike Russia, China is less inclined to use the SCO in arguing with the West and prefers politically to keep low profile" (Pisarev, 2012: 9).

However, both the sides were successful in managing their divergences/tensions and aimed to maintain the unity of SCO. The leading examples towards this end can be Russia's tilt towards the U.S. immediately after the post-9/11; Russia's intervention in Georgia; Moscow's insistence on closer CSTO-SCO cooperation that might give it an upper hand over its counterpart in the region (Facon, 2013). Although these developments irked China, however, it chose to side-line these issues. Both Moscow and Beijing realise that SCO has been a significant mechanism in managing the diverging interests and competitive dynamics both bilaterally as well as regionally in the resource-rich Central Asia (Aris, 2013). So far it has been quite successful in binding the two powers together on a cooperative set up.

The geo-strategic vitality of Central Asia is crucial for both China and Russia. Although Sino-Russian relations within the SCO is an amalgam of both cooperation and competition, the developments in the current security scenario are making them to focus more on cooperative areas. In the current security scenario, the major challenge to the members in general and the SCO, in particular, is how to cope-up with the changing international environment. The developments in Afghanistan along with its future prospects have immense

potential to aggravate the situation in its neighbouring areas that can have major challenges for SCO. All these developments have been increasing the responsibility of the SCO members particularly China and Russia to ensure security both at regional as well as the international level (Pisarev, 2012). Keeping this thing in mind, both have stepped up their engagement in Afghanistan in recent times like holding the tripartite and six-party talks.

As far as their strategic partnership is concerned it is mostly apparent in the SCO because it is mainly focussed with Central Asia. The energy-rich Central Asia is the area where the interests of these two powers largely converge. Given, the geo-strategic significance of the region and also the rise of the worldly most hated terrorist outfit ISIS, Central Asia has the potential for becoming a region of political uncertainty. This, in result, may create more space for the Sino-Russian strategic partnership to prosper. The developments towards this end are already unfolding in the region. Moscow and Beijing are working on linking Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) with China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative. China currently is stressing for the setting up a free trade area in order to boost regional economic cooperation among the members. Apart from this, China also proposed for the establishment of an SCO development bank that with other development banks and multilateral funds which would provide regional projects with necessary funds.<sup>6</sup> While coming to "one belt one road" (OBOR) project, China has made it clear that the project bears synergy with Eurasian Economic Union wherein the SCO bank may play a crucial role. As Moscow has already agreed to link the OBOR with the EEU, there is a great possibility that SCO Bank (if formed successfully) may evolve into a conduit for Sino-Russian endeavours to jointly assert their economic muscle in the EEU (Sukumar, 2016). Consequently, this development will definitely ring alarm bells in the West as it would undermine their interests.

#### **4.3: Economic Cooperation–**

Sino-Russian economic cooperation has increased notably in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although at a slower pace as compared to political cooperation. However, the

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<sup>6</sup> China proposes SCO development bank, The Nation News, October 23, 2016, Retrieved 15 December, 2017 from <https://nation.com.pk/23-Oct-2016/china-proposes-sco-development-bank>

leadership on both the sides clearly understand the vitality of the economic cooperation and are working towards enhancing their ties in this area also. With the dawn of the new millennium, the economic cooperation between the two neighbouring powers started to gain impetus as both the countries recorded rapid economic growth. The Figure 4.2, given below shows the annual percentage of the real GDP growth of the two countries. However, Russia's GDP growth lays way behind China. The figure clearly shows the impact of the global financial crisis on both the countries but Russia witnessed the brunt of the crisis to a great extent. The global financial crisis had shaken the Russian economy; however, the crisis had a minor impact on the Chinese economy. In 2009, the Russian GDP went into negative numbers i.e., -7.8 as compared to China's 9.2. The highest figure touched by the two countries in this new millennium was in 2007 that was 14.2 for China and 8.5 for Russia (International Monetary Fund, 2017).

**Figure: 4.2– China and Russia's Real GDP Annual Growth Rate**



Source: IMF 2017

While coming to the economic cooperation between the two countries the most apparent progress towards this end began in the middle of the first decade of the current century. Advancements were witnessed in resolving the border disputes, plans for increasing cooperation in the energy sector were (which have been examined in the later part of this subheading) also presented, and in both the

countries special years were celebrated i.e., year of China in Russia and year of Russia in China. The economic cooperation spurred as the bilateral trade increased rapidly. The trade between the two countries in 2008 had increased to \$56.8 billion from \$8 billion in 2000 just below the target of \$60 billion set for the year 2010. However, as said above the onslaught of the global financial crisis hit the Russian economy too hard that it also affected the bilateral trade between the two countries. In fact, the bilateral trade suffered to a greater extent due to the financial crisis. Subsequently, in the ensuing year of 2009, the trade declined by 31.8 percent to \$38.8 billion, where Beijing's exports to Moscow declined by 47.1 percent to \$17.5 billion and Moscow's exports to Beijing declined by 10.7 percent to \$21.3 billion (Portyakov, 2010: 3). With the declining of the trading figures Russia's position among the trading partners of China dropped to eleventh from its previous position of being the eighth largest. Portyako (2010) argued–

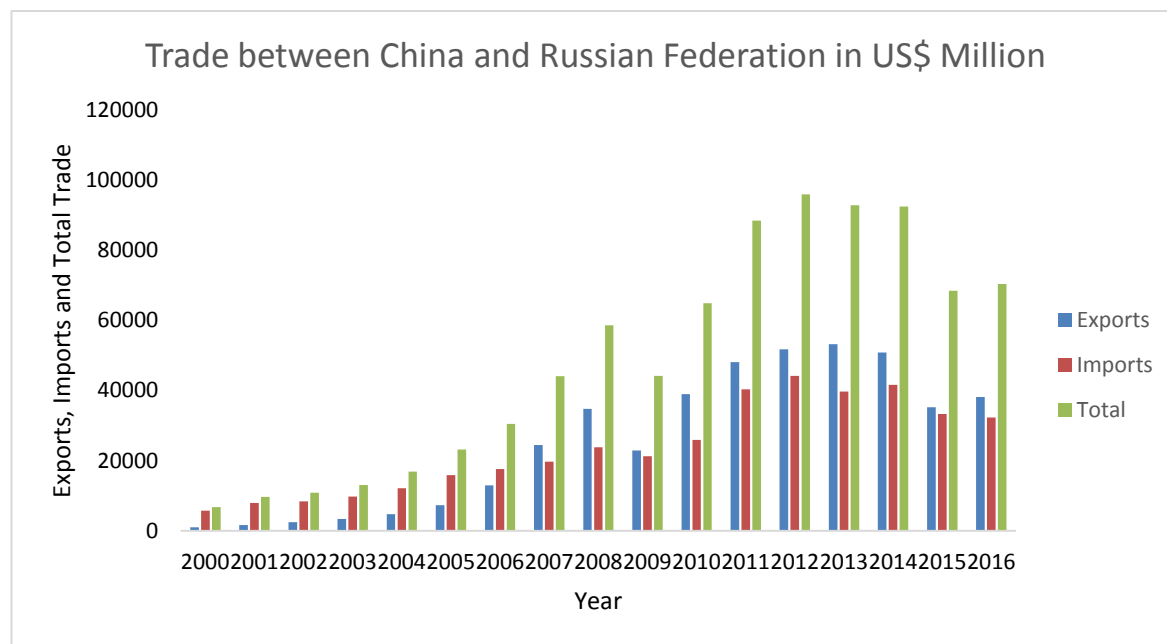
The decrease in Russian-Chinese trade turnover was caused by the deteriorating environment and declining investment and consumer demand in Russia, by the depreciation of the ruble, which resulted in the higher cost of imported goods from China and, finally, by lower world prices for oil and petroleum products, which provide over half of Russian exports to China by cost (Portyakov, 2010: 3).

However, the bilateral trade was able to break the shackles of economic crisis as it started to pick up later immediately after the crisis. The volume of bilateral trade in 2014 reached \$95.3 billion against \$15.8 billion in 2003, thereby, nearing the goal of \$100 billion figure to be achieved by 2015, announced by the respective presidents Dimitry Medvedev and Hu Jintao in 2011. Apart from this the two presidents also announced to attain the goal of \$200 billion by 2020 (Gabuev, 2016: 15). While looking on these figures it seemed that the set targets were quite achievable, but still, again, the economic environment was not favourable to the development of Sino-Russia trade and due to the economic slowdown after 2014 (Malle, 2017). The bilateral trade collapsed by 28.6 percent in 2015 to just \$68 billion (Gabuev, 2016: 15). It was not only China with whom Russia's trade declined but it was with other nations also because of falling demand accompanied by the falling prices for hydrocarbons (Malle, 2017). The key factor seems to have been Moscow's economic decline in 2015 as its GDP declined by 3.4 percent accompanied by the low purchasing power of Russia as clearly seen

in the sharp fall in imports from its counterpart. Only positive thing for Russia was a significant disappearance of imbalance that has existed in the trade (imports and exports) between China and Russia (Gabuev, 2016), as shown in Figure 4.3, below. The effect of the world economic crisis combined with the world-wide economic slowdown and economic sanctions on Russia occupied a significant position as far as Moscow’s turn towards the east is concerned. Upadhyay (2016) mentioned–

Since the Russian economy is primarily oil and arms export driven, sanctions along with worldwide decline in oil prices has affected Russian economy and these “twin shocks caused its real GDP to contract to -3.7 percent” in 2015 from 0.7 percent real GDP growth in 2014 as per the World Bank Report of April 2016. In countering the effects of sanctions on its economy Russia is drawing closer to China (Upadhyay, 2016: 2).

**Figure: 4.3– Russia-China Trade**



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS)

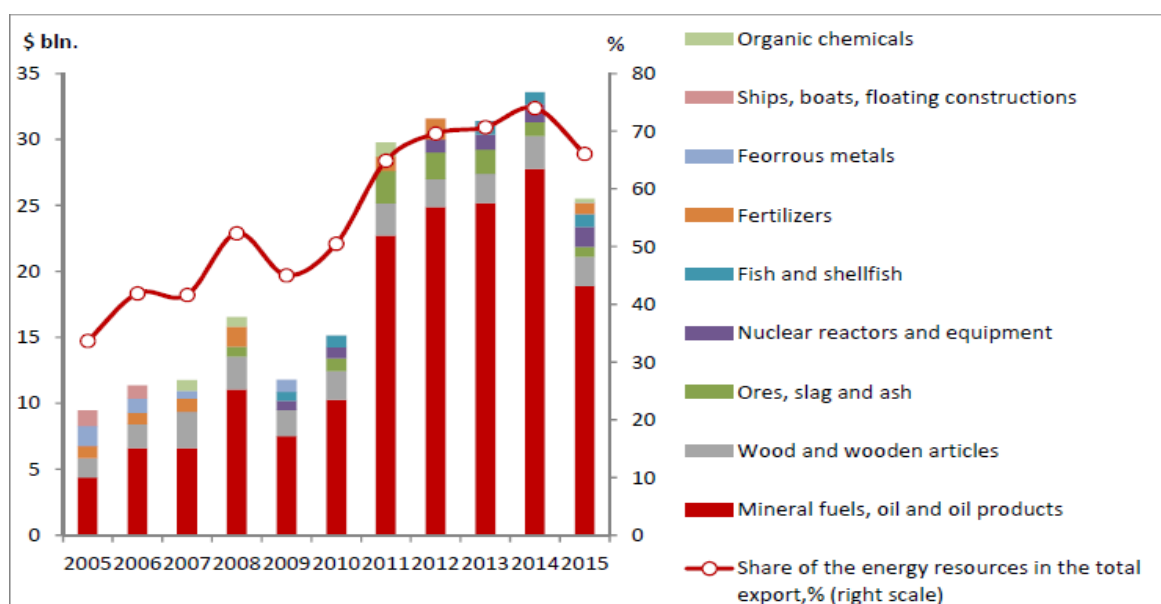
Another key factor in the Sino-Russian economic cooperation is that both the sides since 2010 are using their respective currencies in their bilateral trade, in order to overcome their dependence on the dollar.<sup>7</sup> China and Russia are also working to

<sup>7</sup>The Moscow Interbank Currency Exchange (MICEX) in December 2010 took up trading in the Chinese currency. Russia’s central bank had announced direct exchange transactions between the Yuan and the

enhance their economic cooperation through newly established financial institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS New Development Bank and the BRICS foreign exchange reserves pool.

The cooperation in the economic sphere continues to be an important area as the energy cooperation appeared to be a bright spot in the post-global financial crisis period. The cooperation in the energy sector constitutes the backbone of Moscow-Beijing trade. As Russia is rich in energy resources, therefore the energy exports are quite crucial for sustaining its overall economic prospects. The earnings from hydrocarbons account for roundabout seventy per cent of Moscow's budget revenue (Gabuev, 2016: 15), as shown in Figure 4.4, below. Therefore, Russia

**Figure: 4.4– Split of Russian Exports to China (2005-2015)**



Source: Henderson, j. & Mitrova, T. (2016). Energy Relations between Russia and China: Playing Chess with the Dragon.

needs markets and the necessary infrastructure to make more profits out of its vital energy resources. On the other hand, China being an energy-hungry economy emerged as the net importer of oil in 1994. Consequently, it has worked ardently to secure its access to vital energy resources destined in other countries to fuel its increasing economic might. Therefore, Russia is one such destination

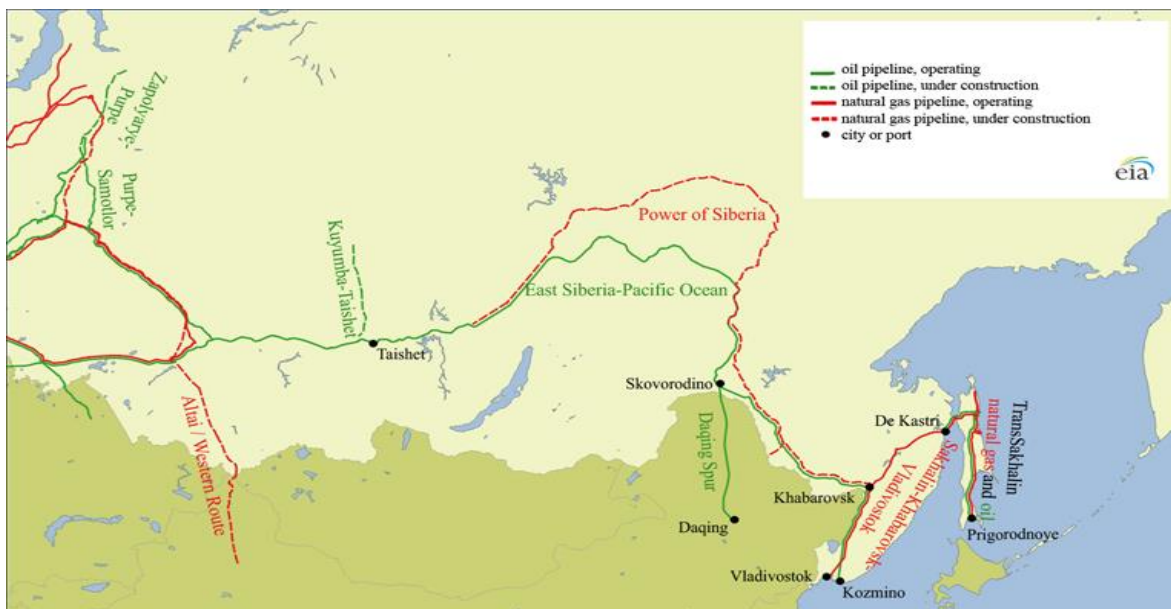
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Ruble in April 2010 (<https://www.dw.com/en/yuan-ruble-trading-challenges-dollars-predominance/a-6329616>). The sales were sluggish with the launch of rouble-yuan pair. “However, in 2014 the situation changed drastically: with trade in the currency pair growing eight times, reaching 395 billion roubles (48 billion yuan) over the year” (Russian International Affairs Council, Working Paper. (2015). Development of Russian-Chinese Trade, Economic, Financial and Cross-Border Relations, p: 26).

which has the potential for fulfilling China’s aims of sustaining its economic growth and in turn, China has the potential to provide Russia with the required infrastructure. However, the efforts aiming to increase the volume of bilateral trade in the energy sector over the past three years had been the witness of mixed results.

Although the negotiations for boosting the energy ties have been initiated since the late 1990s, it was only in post-global financial crisis that the ties in this sector got momentum. The two neighbours signed a formal agreement in 2009 on exchanging loans whereby Beijing provided Moscow with long-term loans amounting \$25 billion. Rosneft–Russian Oil Company got \$15 billion and Transneft–Russian oil Transportation Company got \$10 billion from the total amount of \$25 billion (Huasheng, 2010: 6). Beijing, in return, will be provided with 300 million tons of oil, from 2011 to 2030, with an annual average volume of 15 million tons (Sidorenko, 2013). Subsequently, the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean Oil Pipeline (ESPO), diversion linking Skovorodino with Daqing– a Chinese city (as shown in Figure 4.5, below), was inaugurated in 2010. The crude oil supply

**Figure: 4.5– Major Eastern Russian Oil and Natural Gas Pipelines**

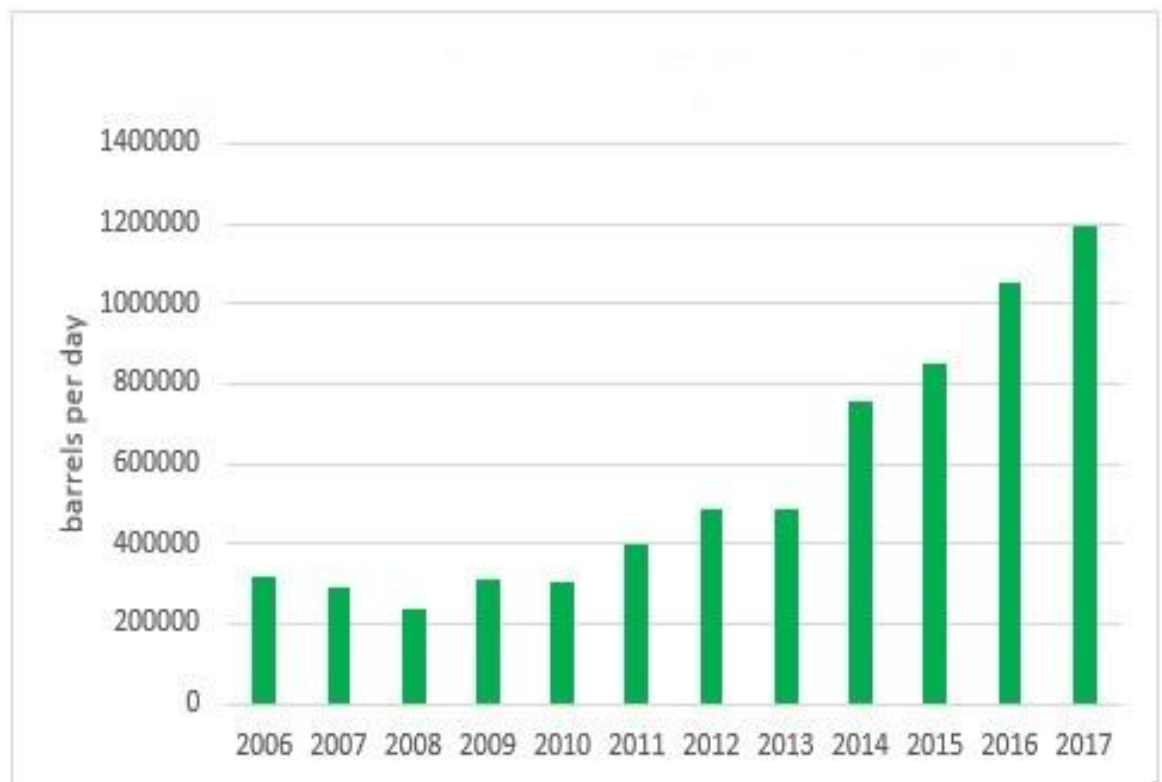


Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration and IHS EDIN

from Russia to China became operational in January 2011. The crucial pipeline is part of the 2009 ‘loan for oil’ agreement concluded between the two countries.

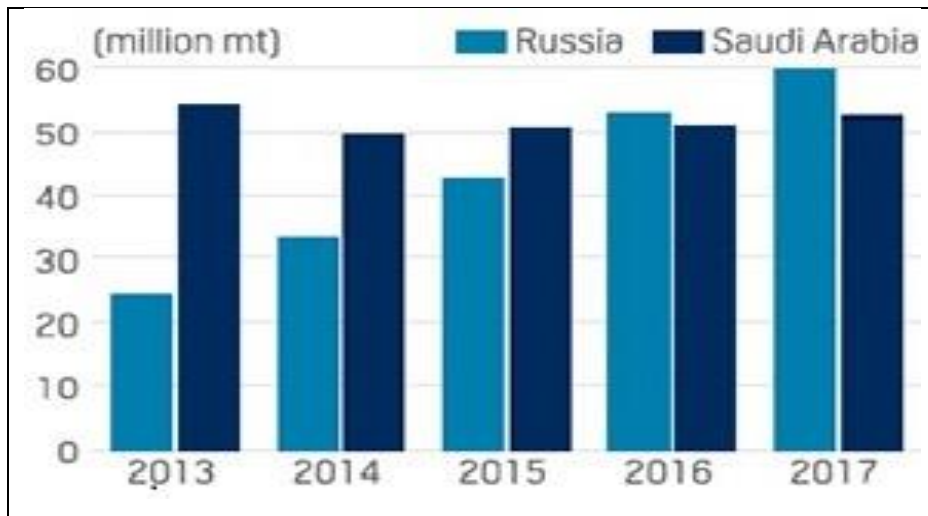
Outside Europe, Beijing in 2016 was the largest receiver of Moscow’s total crude oil exports as it received 953,000 b/d, or eighteen per cent of its total crude oil exports. Moscow’s crude oil exports to Beijing have almost quadrupled in less than a decade as it has increased to 1.2 million bpd in 2017 from 320,000 bpd in 2010 (Downs, 2018) as shown in Figure 4.6, below. Russia surpassed Saudi Arabia as the largest crude oil supplier to China in 2016 on an annual basis for the first time (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2017). Moscow has retained the position of being a top crude oil supplier to Beijing in 2017. The overall crude oil sales of Russia to China for the 2017 rose to 13.9 percent year on year to 59.8 million mt against Saudi Arabia’s 2.3 per cent to 52.18 million mt for the whole year as shown in Figure 4.7, below (S & P Global Platts, 2018). Furthermore, Moscow in 2018 continued to be the top supplier of Oil to Beijing as the Russian shipments to China in the first quarter rose to 1.34 million bpd per day in comparison to Saudi Arabia’s 1.09 million bpd (“Russia remains China’s”, 2018).

**Figure: 4.6– Russia’s Crude Oil Exports to China**



Source: Downs, E. (2018). Russia not Saudi Arabia is China’s main source of oil.

**Figure: 4.7– Crude Oil Imports of China from Russia and Saudi Arabia**



Source: S & P Global Platts (4 February 2018).

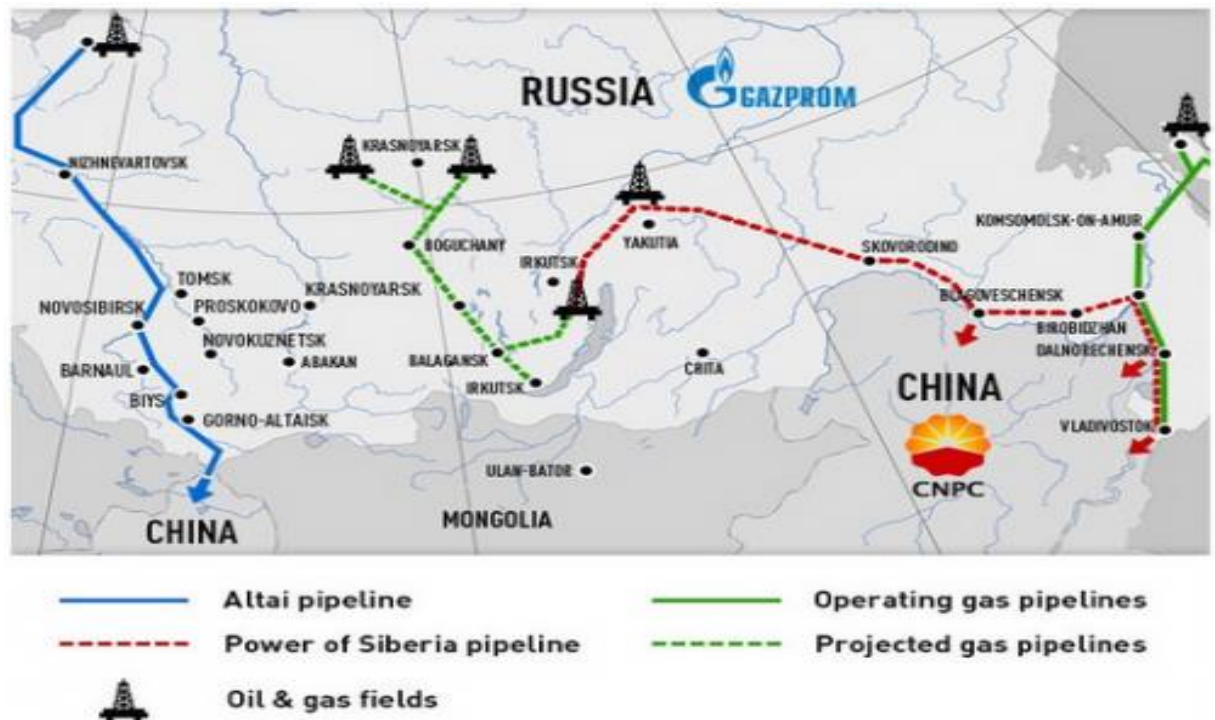
While coming to the cooperation in the gas sector, the negotiations for gas trade between the two sides continued since 2000. Towards this end, the Altai gas pipeline has been the prominent subject of intergovernmental negotiations since 2006. However, the developments in this sector couldn't flourish until recently. The development towards the proposed construction of the vital Altai gas pipeline (from Western Siberia in Russia to Xinjiang province in China) was hampered in 2008 due to the disputes over prices. The plans for a gas pipeline between the two sides remained stalled, as China was demanding a lower price from Russia (Blank, 2012).

The signs of progress towards this end were witnessed in 2014 when the two sides were successful in concluding the much-awaited \$400 billion gas deal during the president Putin's visit to China. Under this deal, China will be provided with 38 billion cubic meters of gas annually until 2030 starting from 2018 from the developments of two East Siberian deposits– Kovykta and Chayanda (Gabuev, 2016). The gas will be delivered to China via the Power of Siberia or Sila Sibiri pipeline. It was also assumed that once the pipeline becomes operational China will become Russia's biggest market for gas by replacing Germany. Although the work on the project has been inaugurated in 2015, a number of hindrances including the economic slowdown of China, funding, fall in oil prices (with which gas prices are linked) have been delaying the completion of drilling activities. Despite, these hurdles and delays, the project is on, as Beijing stepped in with a

\$2.2 billion loan to Russia’s Gazprom in 2016 to make the project success (Malle, 2017: 141).

With the signing of the \$400 billion ‘Power of Siberia’ project, the Altai pipeline project (also called the Power of Siberia II or the Western Route, see Figure 4.8 below) once again came on the agenda. Altai pipeline project if successful will help Moscow to lessen the impact of any further Western-led sanctions that can potentially cripple its energy exports.<sup>8</sup> The Figure 4.8 also gives a crisp overview of the Russian gas pipelines to China. The key feature of this project is that unlike the Sila Sibiri pipeline project, less construction work is required as the Altai pipeline could be constructed on the existing infrastructure. Power of Siberia-II would allow Russia to deliver gas to China from the existing gas fields in Western Siberia. Moscow through this pipeline seeks to pursue a policy from where it can successfully attract the potential customers from West and East against each other by supplying them gas from the same fields (Gabuev, 2016).

**Figure: 4.8– Gas Pipelines**



Source: Durden, T. (2015). Russia, China Delay “Holy Grail” Gas Pipeline Sequel as China’s Economy Swoons.

<sup>8</sup> “Russia-China new gas pipeline draws near”, *World Bulletin*, 30 September 2014, Retrieved 20 November 2017 from <http://www.worldbulletin.net/natural-gas/145424/russia-china-new-gas-pipeline-draws-near>

Both the sides signed a 'framework agreement' on Altai Pipeline or Power of Siberia-II, at the APEC Summit in Beijing in November 2014. The framework agreement envisages a supply of 30 billion cubic meters gas annually from Russia via a 'western route' (Altai pipeline) to China for a period of 30 years (Homeriki, 2014). Subsequently, the Alexey Miller chairman of the Gazprom and Wang Dongjin vice president of the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed the Heads of Agreement for the pipeline gas deliveries from Russia to China through Altai pipeline in May 2015 in Moscow. The agreement was signed in the presence of the heads of both sides and according to the Gazprom press release on May 08, 2015, it outlined "the main technical and commercial parameters of the future oil supplies" (Gazprom, 2015: para. 1). However, as mentioned by Gabuev (2016), "a commercial contract between Gazprom and the CNPC setting a price for the project's gas does not appear to be imminent" (Gabuev, 2016: 12). As mentioned earlier the reason behind the delay lies in the dissonance over the price in that both are using divergent bench marks. Gabuev (2016), stated–

Gazprom is basing its desired price on its existing contracts with Germany or possibly the Power of Siberia price it settled on with China. But for the CNPC, the preferred benchmark is far cheaper Turkmen gas pumped into Xinjiang through a pipeline commissioned in 2010 (Gabuev, 2016: 12).

The two sides continue to talk on the Altai Pipeline. Although Moscow and Beijing signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2017, however, no formal agreement on this has been reached so far ("The impact of", 2018).

Although both Russia and China are trading with each other more than what they traded in the past, yet, while looking at the current figures and the fluctuating trends in the bilateral trade, it will take a much longer time for Beijing and Russia to become robust commercial partners. However, both the countries are aware that the closer cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, is an objective need of their national economies. Faced with the Western sanctions, Russia was quick in response by boosting its own "Pivot to the East" policy in order to overcome the problems posed by these sanctions. Cooperation with the Asian countries, in particular with China, has been seen as a significant solution, which has provided Russia with some sort of financial and political ease. Therefore, by moving

towards China and other Asian countries Russia to some extent can overcome the problem of deepening technological gap (Grigorenko, Klyuchnikov, Gridchina, Litvinenko & Kolpak, 2016).

For China, if all goes well, Beijing will be able to gain access to more energy fields. Russia will provide China with much-needed energy in order to sustain its economic might. Energy cooperation with Moscow is also significant as it can also provide Beijing with incentives of enhancing its energy cooperation with the resource-rich CARs. More importantly, the post-Ukraine crisis/post-Western sanctions and the recent worldwide decline in oil prices strengthened the bargaining position of China vis-à-vis Russia. This seems to be the main reason behind the delays in the progress of bilateral projects. Energy cooperation with Russia will also lessen China's over-dependence on other import countries as was seen recently when Russia surpassed Saudi Arabia as the largest crude oil supplier to China. Apart from this, energy ties with Moscow have also enhanced China's bargaining position vis-à-vis other energy import countries. This is because the construction of pipelines connecting Russian energy fields with China's mainland will pump an increasing volume of deliveries to China. The success of these pipelines will largely decide the future trend of cooperation in this sector.

While looking on the overall trade between Moscow and Beijing, one can conclude that although the interdependency between the two countries has increased in the post-9/11 world, but it still remains very low. The two sides are more dependent on other nations than each other. As far as their dependence is concerned, Moscow is chiefly dependent on EU and, Beijing on Washington and other East Asian countries. However, both the sides are engaged in efforts to muster the bilateral economic cooperation. The volume of bilateral trade as shown above although has its own ups and downs but is gradually increasing. Looking at the current position of both the countries it seems that Russia desperately needs China especially in the backdrop of Western sanctions and the decline of oil prices. Realising the mounting significance of China and Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world economy, Moscow has come up with its 'pivot to east' policy. The work towards this end already commenced in 2012 with the development plans in Russia's much vital

energy sector. However, the policy gained momentum in the post-2014 period as Moscow’s relations with the West deteriorated over the Ukraine crisis. The policy from a geopolitical and balance of power perspective has been examined in the next chapter. Russia is largely coming closer to China especially in the energy sector.

More importantly, the Russian attitude towards China softened even more in the post-Ukraine crisis. The glaring example towards this end is Moscow’s support to Beijing’s initiatives like “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) and the new Maritime Silk Road as shown in Figure 4.9, below. Prior to the Western sanctions, Russia was reluctant in supporting China’s Silk Road Economic Belt strategy. The positive overtures over this economic initiative seem to be a welcome development for both sides. China and Russia signed agreements in May 2015, for joining the two projects—OBOR and EAEU. Kirill Dmitriev—the Russian Direct Investment Fund chief executive in January 2016, said, “the ‘One Belt and One Road’ initiative is very important for Russia, as it can provide sources of additional growth as it is strategically placed between China and Europe” (Liu, 2016: para. 3).

**Figure: 4.9– China’s Belt and Road Project**



Source: China’s One Belt-One Road Initiative/Silk Road Economic Belt, Maritime Silk Road (MSR), Retrieved 20 November 2017, from <http://www.fantasticfundas.com/2015/07/chinas-one-belt-one-road-initiative.html>

As the project involves the areas which Russia considers to be its sphere of influence, therefore, Russia's support for the initiative will definitely help in the development of the project. The interlinking of these two vital projects will benefit Beijing as it will provide it access to the EAEU market. On the other hand, the one belt-one road will help in expanding Moscow's own economy and will act as a supporting factor in the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Under the auspices of OBOR the infrastructure building by China in the EAEU zone will be of a great advantage for Russia (Upadhyay, 2016).

#### **4.4: Defence Cooperation–**

Defence cooperation has remained one of the most controversial aspects as far as the intensification of Sino-Russian bilateral trade is concerned. Earlier the former Soviet Union provided China with significant military hardware. However, strategic cooperation was halted due to their mutual hostility which started in the 1960s and led to the suspension of their military cooperation. The much significant military contacts were resumed after a long period of almost thirty years of enmity within the framework of the policy of rapprochement established at the much significant 1989 Sino-Soviet summit (Sergounin & Subbotin, 1999). Apart from the energy sector, defence sector constitutes an important place in the Russian exports, thereby contributing enormously to its economy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, defence sector appeared to be one of the key areas from where the remnant Russia could compete successfully for a share in the international market. Therefore, Russia with the aim of sustaining its economy and defence industry looked for export destinations for its defence procurements. Towards this end, China was seen as one of the significant partners or we can say one of the key export destinations for its arms export. On the other hand, in the backdrop of China's deteriorated relations with U.S. and arms embargo on China in the post-Taiwan crisis, it looked towards Russia for arms. In the post-Tiananmen crisis, neither the U.S. nor Europe was willing to supply arms to China any longer. Russia seemed to be the only significant option available for its arms imports. Subsequently, Moscow as shown in the Table: 4.1, below became the major source of arms supplier to Beijing in the following years.

**Table: 4.1– Value of the Transfers to China by the Leading Suppliers of Conventional Weapons, 1990-1997, Expressed in US \$m. at Constant (1990)**

Supplier	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	Total
USSR/Russia	86	125	1092	978	-	352	960	1749	5342
Israel	56	56	57	57	57	56	57	57	453
Ukraine	-	16	16	56	20	-	52	-	160
France <sup>9</sup>	25	24	11	3	26	17	33	10	149
Italy	10	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
Total	177	229	1176	1096	103	425	1102	1816	6124

Source: SIPRI Research Report No. 15, 1999, Russian Arms Transfers to East Asia in 1990s

Since the signing of the Sino-Russian military-technical cooperation agreement in 1992, Russia has become a major defence supplier for China as compared to other countries. Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, in 1995, confirmed that Russian arms transfers to China would remain a key element in the bilateral relations. During the decade of the 1990s, the transfers of defence items from Russia to China ranged up to roundabout \$1 billion annually (Weitz, 2008).

While coming to the security cooperation, Moscow’s military exports to its strategic partner constituted the most significant dimension towards this end. The defence cooperation proved to be fruitful for both the sides to a large extent. Defence supplies to China enabled the Russian defence industry to generate substantial revenue thereby helped in sustaining Moscow’s defence industry during the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> On the other side, arms supplies from Russia made the Chinese PLA to get hold of advanced conventional weapons. While having a glimpse of the 1991 Gulf War, Beijing realised the worth of both technology and the information warfare

<sup>9</sup>“While the EU’s June 1989 declaration on China is not legally binding, it represents a political commitment that all EU members are supposed to uphold and enforce. Each EU member, however, defines and implements the arms embargo differently; this has allowed some EU countries to continue to export certain types of military equipment to China despite the embargo. According to the EU, the embargo does not cover a large proportion of “sensitive items,” which are covered by other EU legal mechanisms. These on-going sales to China have raised questions about the effectiveness of the EU’s arms embargo on China and the EU’s wider defense export control policies” (CRS Report for Congress. (2005). European Union’s Arms Embargo on China: Implications and Options for U.S. Policy, p. 5.)

<sup>10</sup> With the collapse of Soviet Union, the newly formed Russian Federation lost out its defence industries especially because of financial problems and more importantly the defence industry being one of the most significant sources from where could generate income needs investment in this sector. Therefore, arms transfers to China came handy for Russia to sustain its defence industries.

and thereby embarked on the concept of Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)<sup>11</sup> (Panda, 2009). China's volume of military acquisition from Russia increased gradually, commencing as mentioned by Paramonov and Stokov (2006), with "combat aircraft, air defence systems, warships and submarines" (Paramonov & Stokov, 2006: 7-8). Thus, both Russia and China required each other in terms of strategic dealing and defence trade. In the late 1990s, Moscow to a large extent became willing to provide its counterpart with high-tech weaponry system which among others includes anti-ship missiles, Sukhoi (Su)-30 fighters, and also parts for enhancing Beijing's nuclear arms. Moscow was doing this to support its arms industry, as well as to boost its strategic partners' military power and also as a counterweight against the United States (Haas, 2013). Cohen (2001), mentioned,

Russia is already selling nuclear weapons blueprints, multiple warhead (MIRV) technology, Sukhoi-27 fighter jets, and, the \$1 billion worth of A-50 Beriev AWACS early warning planes to China that will make it possible for the People's Liberation Army to coordinate its air, surface, and naval operations in the areas like the Taiwan Strait (Cohen, 2001: para. 14).

Apart from these, the other variety of weapons supplied to China by its strategic partner include; Su-30 Flanker fighter aircraft, Sovremenny-class destroyers, Kilo-class Project 636 diesel submarines, transport aircraft, surface to air missile (SAM) systems, T-72 battle tanks, anti-ship missiles, Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters, jet engines, torpedoes and radars (Bolt, 2014). More importantly, under Russian license, Chinese manufactured more than hundred Su-27Sk warplanes between 1998 and 2005 by using Russian parts profusely (Weitz, 2008).

Arms industry of Russia survived largely during the decade of the 1990s and early 2000s because of Moscow's exports of newly formed armoured vehicles, warships and combat aircrafts (Wezeman, 2017). China played a key role as a significant

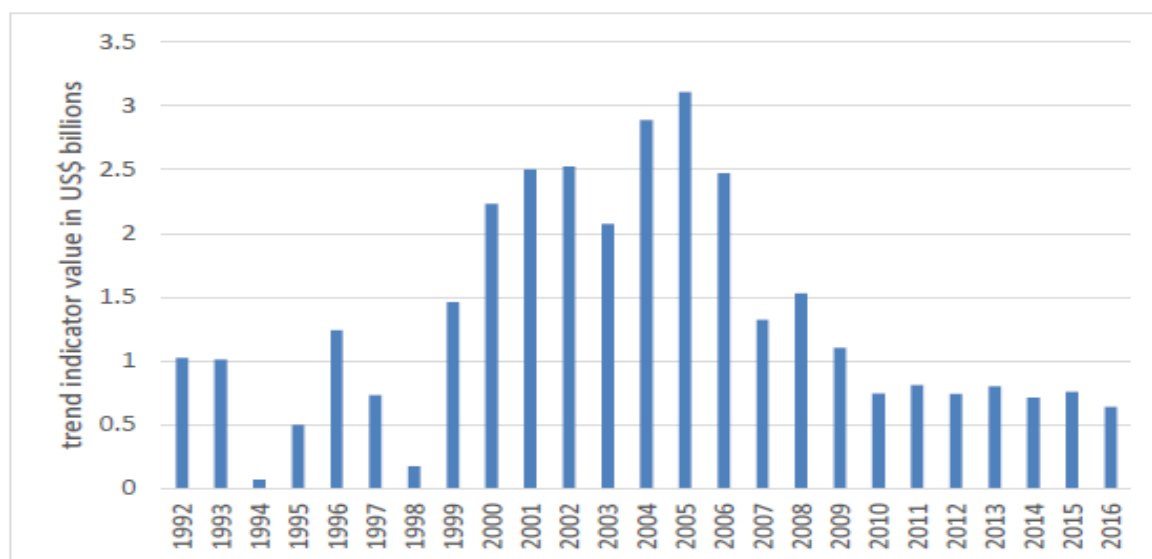
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<sup>11</sup>"Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) is a theory about the evolution of warfare over time. An RMA is based on the marriage of new technologies with organizational reforms and innovative concepts of operations. The result is often characterized as a new way of warfare. In the 1970s, the advent of information technologies and high-performance computing led to an on-going RMA based largely on improved intelligence and precision strike weapons. The 1991 Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 are considered to be quintessential examples of this RMA" (Goure, D. (2017). *The Next Revolution in Military Affairs: How America's Military will Dominate. The National Interest*. Retrieved 04 November 2018, from <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-next-revolution-military-affairs-how-americas-military-23833> ).

destination for Russia’s arms exports during this period. The period between 2001 and 2006 was the most significant period for Moscow’s arms exports to Beijing, amounting an average of \$2.7 billion per year (Haas, 2013: 19). Between 1999 and 2006, Beijing was the largest client of the volume of Moscow’s export of major weapons, accounting 34-60 per cent annually (Wezeman, 2017).

However, the situation changed as the Chinese defence industry became significantly well-versed to produce indigenously sophisticated armaments. There has been a substantial drop down in the volume of trade and technology transfers from Moscow to Beijing. The year 2005-2006, has been seen as a turning point as it marked the “beginning of the end of Chinese orders for complete systems from Russia” (Jakobson *et al.* 2011: 14). Since, 2007, Russian arms exports to China declined exponentially (see Figure: 4.10 below).

**Figure: 4.10: Trends in Russian Arms Exports Delivered to China, 1992-2016**



Source: Meick, E. (2017). *China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving Toward a Higher Level of Cooperation*. Washington DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

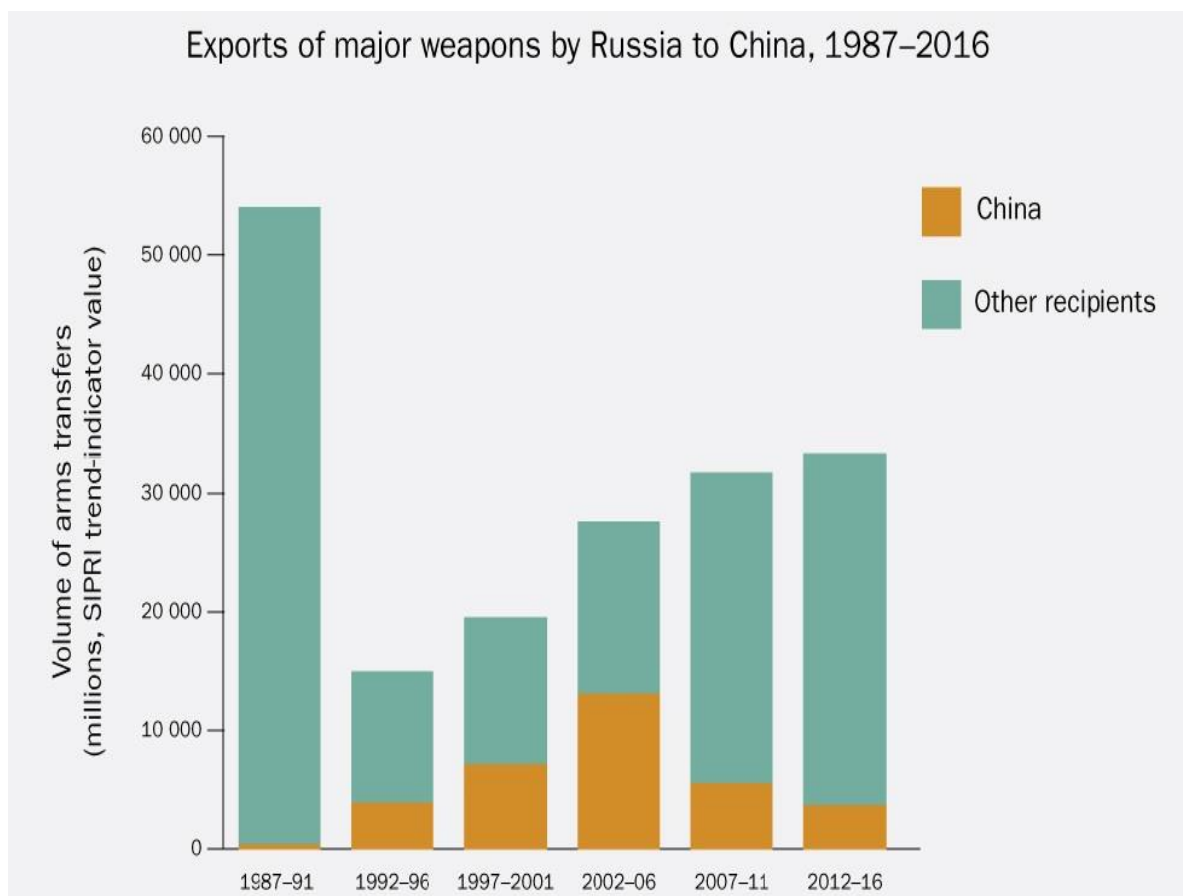
Meick (2017), while talking about this drop down has mentioned several explanations offered by experts from the U.S., Russia, and China for this sudden decline—

First, Chinese demand for Russian arms waned as most of Beijing’s orders had been fulfilled and China’s defence industry had become advanced enough to fulfil more PLA requirements domestically. Second, the Chinese side expressed concerns about quality control deficiencies and contract disagreements involving

the remaining orders. Third, Russia was unwilling to sell the higher-end systems that China was beginning to demand likely due to concerns that China's increasing military capabilities could pose a future threat to Russia and that China's practice of reverse-engineering Russian platforms would enable China to compete directly with Russia in the arms market. Finally, debate in Russian policy circles at that time raised China's military modernisation as a growing strategic concern, which may have been reflected in Moscow's decision to diversify its arms sales to new customers (Meick, 2017: 12-13).

The abrupt decline in the arms exports from Russia to China in 2006-2007 (see Figure: 4.11 below) marked the new phase of Sino-Russian military-technical cooperation. This phase is characterised by the diminished imports of Moscow's complete platforms by Beijing (as shown in Table 4.2, below) and also with the modest levels of their engagement. The share of Russia in the arms imported by its strategic partner—China was forty three per cent by 2012 that is far below percentage of eighty-seven achieved between 2000 and 2005 (SPRI, 2017).

**Figure: 4.11– Major Weapons Supplies to China by Russia**



Source: SIPRI (2017), *China, Russia and the Shifting Landscape of Arms Sales*.

**Table: 4.2– Major Russian Weapons Delivered to China 1987-2016**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Combat Aircraft</b>	<b>Helicopters</b>	<b>Warships</b>	<b>Long-range SAM Systems</b>	<b>Aircraft Engines</b>
2012-16	4	62			424
2007-11	11	106		16	202
2002-2006	145	72	8	4	70
1997-2001	79	55	4		4
1992-96	45	30	2	4	
1987-91	3	24			

Source: SIPRI (2017), *China, Russia and the Shifting Landscape of Arms Sales*.

In the twenty-first century the technological gap between China and Russia is gradually narrowing as both the sides have become second-tier producers of arms. However, still facing certain technological challenges China's Military Industrial Complex lags behind the technological efficiency level of its counterpart. Indeed, Moscow still enjoys the upper hand of being the world's number two arms exporter. In the backdrop of China's reverse engineering and outpacing the Chinese competitors, Moscow has limited the transfer of technology to Beijing to the extent possible. Therefore, in order to limit the pace of Chinese innovation in military technological knowhow, Russia has been reluctant to provide China with its most advanced weapons (Zhuravel, 2012).

One of the main issues behind the Russian reluctance of arming China with advanced technology/weaponry is the violation of intellectual property rights by China. Therefore, reverse engineering has become one of the major issues in the decline of arms transfers from Moscow to Beijing. The Chinese jet J-11B is believed to be a copy of the Russian Su-27SK fighter jet by Russian side. To Russian observers apart from Su-27 there are other items of Russian technology which China has reengineered. These include as reported by Sputnik (6 March 2012)–

the Shenyang J-11 is a replica of Russian Su-30 Flanker-C, and the Chinese/Pakistani Chengdu FC-1 uses Russian engines and other technology from the MiG-29, and the J-15 is a Chinese-built derivate of the Sukhoi T-10K-3, a carrier borne fighter (“Russia close to”, 2012: para. 7).<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the above-mentioned categories, China’s surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) are very much alike Russian S-300 platforms, Chinese submarines exhibited features of Kilo class submarines Project-877 and Project-636 supplied by Russia (Saalman, 2017: 88).

The copyright issue has been the major factor behind the stalemate over the Russian supply of advanced technologies to China as well as one of the reasons for the decline in arms transfer from the former to the latter. In order to enhance the cooperation in this sector after witnessing the decline, the two sides in 2008 signed an agreement on intellectual property rights. This was also the main reason behind the stalemate over the Su-35 deal. However, this impasse over Su-35 deal was overcome after the Russian economy was hit by western sanctions over the Ukraine crisis. These sanctions in one or the other manner have softened the Russian attitude towards its strategic partner.

The major tectonic shift in the post-Ukraine crisis is taking place in the most sensitive area of Moscow-Beijing technological cooperation in the military sector. It took almost five years of arduous negotiations that Moscow and Beijing, in 2015

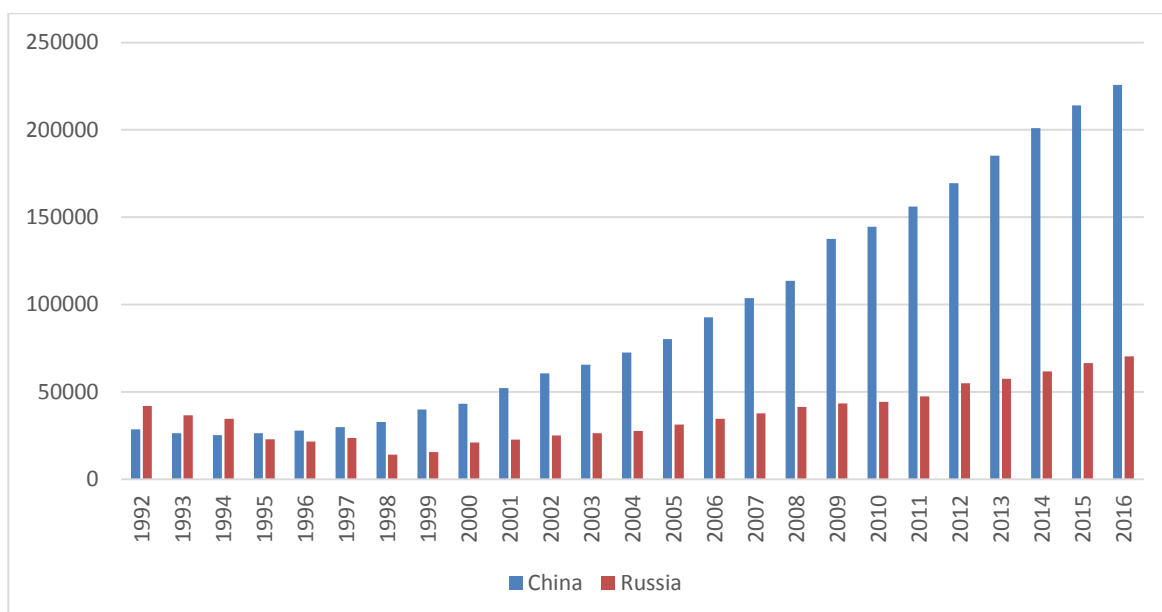
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<sup>12</sup> The J-15, China's first carrier-based fighter is said to be a Chinese copy of the Sukhoi Su-33. The Shenyang Aircraft Corporation (SAC) procured one of the first prototypes of the Soviet Su-33 carrier fighter T-10k-3 from Ukraine in 2001 (or by other reports, in 2005). Furthermore, beyond the diminished need for arms imports from Russia, China also rapidly turned into a major arms exporter. This, in turn, resulted in the Chinese entry into the markets where Moscow was an active player. These include “Algeria, Nigeria, Venezuela, Indonesia and even former Soviet State of Turkmenistan” (Wezeman, 2017: para. 10).

reached to a new level arms trade. Russia finally agreed to provide China with its advanced systems which include twenty-four Sukhoi-35 (Su-35) fighter jets and also four S-400 SAM defence systems— the technology transfer for which it was previously hesitant. This development marked a turning point in Sino-Russo defence ties, as since the mid-2000s it was the first momentous sale of major weapons by Russia to China (Wezeman, 2017). Selling of such advanced systems to China has in turn, helped Russia in providing a much-needed support for its defence industry and also to secure hard currency (Tass Russian News Agency, 2016). Chinese possession of S-400 (target range up to 400 kilometres) argued by Gabuev (2016) “will bring significant changes to the military balance in the skies over Taiwan and the Diaoyu (Senkaku) islands and the PLA now will be better-positioned to control airspace above these regions from mainland positions in Fujian and Shandong Provinces” (Gabuev, 2016: 24). China received the first consignments of S-400 in summer 2018 and the remaining deliveries will be received in the coming months. As far as the other advanced system i.e., Su-35 is concerned, China became the first foreign customer. Beijing received the first delivery of four Su-35s in 2016 and the second delivery of ten Su-35s in 2017 and the remaining ten are expected to be delivered in the coming months. The sale of Su-35 to China as argued by Gabuev (2016), “will also have military significance, reinforcing Chinese dominance in the skies over Taiwan as well as strengthening their combat positions in other potential hotspots” (Gabuev, 2016: 24). The major factor in reaching consensus on such deals has been the post-Ukraine crisis sanctions on Russia by the west.

The agreement could pave way for the new phase of considerable sales of most sophisticated weapons of Russia to China. Both the sides have the opportunity to overcome the issues relating to their defence ties. China on its part needs to comply with the intellectual property rights and Russia to provide China with advanced technologies. Amidst the western sanctions, it can be seen as an opportune time for Moscow to garner much-needed economic support by selling arms to Beijing before the latter attains self-sufficiency as it is spending huge amount in defence sector as shown in Figure 4.11, below.

**Figure: 4.12– Military Expenditure of Russia and China (in US \$m at constant 2015 prices and exchange rates, SIPRI estimates)**



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Data Base 2017

Another component in the closer Moscow-Beijing military-to-military relations in recent years has been the rising defence industry cooperation. Although the Sino-Russian defence research and development (R & D) co-production projects have been there since the early 2000s, however, the most advanced systems until recently were not included. In order to boost their military ties both the sides have signed several agreements in recent years for the joint production of systems of common interest. A joint venture was established in 2011 by China and Russia for overhauling all the Russian-manufactured helicopters operating in China (Sinkkonen, 2018). The Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) in 2015 signed a framework deal for the joint production of a next-generation heavy-lift helicopter (Advanced Heavy Lifter (AHL)) with Russian Helicopters. It was signed in the presence of the heads of both the sides (Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin) by AVIC president Lin Zuoming and Russian Helicopters CEO Alexander Mikheev (AVIC International, 2015). The two governments in 2016 signed a deal giving nod to the project. Technical specifications for the project have been finalised by the Chinese Avicopter and Russian Helicopter. The final phase of the joint project AHL was settled upon after negotiations between the representatives of the two sides during the China

Helicopter Exposition in 2017 (Russian Aviation Insider, 2017). China and Russia have also developed the LADA-class submarines through which the PLA gets help in improving its noisy submarine fleet. Not only this, the two countries have concluded several agreements on research and development on making of space components, satellite navigation systems and the aero-engine technology (Sinkkonen, 2018).

Another significant area of cooperation towards this end is the Sino-Russian joint military exercises. Both the countries have been participating in joint military exercises so as to demonstrate to the world their shared commitment toward the closer cooperation in the security domain. It is in this backdrop that China and Russia held vital military exercises both under the banner of SCO framework as well as bilaterally. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in September 2015 said, “the most important issue of the Russian-Chinese military cooperation are the joint military exercises. They contribute to improving of combat training of the Armed Forces of two countries, and demonstrate our readiness to counteract modern threats” (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2015: para. 3).

Moscow and Beijing in recent years has engaged themselves in a number of joint military exercises. Since 2003, Moscow and Beijing have conducted a number of exercises both bilaterally as well as under the banner of SCO (see Annexure 1). The Peace Missions were antiterrorism exercises because of their focus as such and were conducted at multilateral level.

Among these joint exercises the Joint Sea drills held in the post-Ukraine crisis are of significant importance. Both the sides in 2015 held their Joint Sea exercise in the Mediterranean Sea for the first time and consequently it caused a stir in the West. The two strategic partners were alleged of forming a new naval alliance as a counter against Washington and its allies. The uneasiness regarding the exercises was only because of the location where it was held. It was apprehended that China and Russia want to challenge the post-cold war domination of the fleets of the NATO countries by demonstrating their joint naval presence in the sea. Not only this, the Chinese warships in 2015 and 2016 visited the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, positioned near Crimea (Lukin, 2018). Furthermore, the 2016

Sino-Russian Joint Sea exercise was held in the contentious South China Sea and the July 2017, Joint Sea drill was held in Baltic Sea, followed by another exercise in September in the Sea of Japan and, for the first time Okhotsk Sea (Panda, 2017). Identifying such locations for their Joint Sea military exercises makes it quite apparent that they want to ensure their enhanced strategic presence in the maritime domain.

Moscow-Beijing joint military exercises have largely served important security purposes for both the sides. The joint exercises helped the armed forces of the two nations to enhance their operational and tactical capabilities and also raise their interoperability. These drills in turn also augment their capability of pursuing operations both of unilateral and joint nature. Facilitating Moscow's weapons sales to Beijing being one of the major aims, both the sides were successful to some extent in this manner as the deals of transferring some advanced systems to China were finally concluded. Russia used these exercises to demonstrate its military technologies so as to lure in the potential Chinese customers. The leading example towards this end can be the Peace Mission 2005 in which Russia displayed the Tu-95 strategic bombers and the long-range bombers Tu-22 which it was trying to sell to China. Having this motive in mind Russia following the joint exercises left the bombers and other military aircrafts on display for several days in China and subsequently Beijing placed a large order for the Il-78 aerial refuelling tanker– one of the participating warplanes (Weitz, 2015).

On the other hand, for PLA, these exercises have been very significant as the joint drills provide it with great experience and most importantly the useful information. It is because of these exercises that the PLA has got the opportunity as mentioned by Meick (2017) “to interact with the Russian military leadership; operate in unfamiliar environments outside China; address linguistic, cultural, and other barriers to effective communication with Russian troops; practice battlefield tactics and combat methods; and apply lessons learned to joint operations” (Meick, 2017: 6).

The aim behind conducting such exercises among others include deterring the potential threats posed by the extremists in Central Asia and reassuring their

friends and allies that both the countries will protect them to overcome these threats; to boost mutual confidence as the joint exercises involve mutual reassurance function because both the sides came to know each other's military capability, and more importantly to send message to the International community and especially the U.S. and countries in the Asia Pacific region about the strength of their defence ties as well as their rising proximity in the Asian security domain (Weitz, 2015).

While talking about the enhanced Sino-Russian military cooperation in the post-Western sanctions on Russia, the 2015 China's Military Strategy states that–

China's armed forces will further their exchanges and cooperation with the Russian military within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination between China and Russia, and foster a comprehensive, diverse and sustainable framework to promote military relations in more fields and at more levels (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015: 25).

While realising the worth of their military cooperation the two sides are working to further, boost their relations in this sector especially in the area of joint military exercises. Consequently, the defence ministers of the two strategic partners–Chang Wanquan from China and Sergei Shoigu from Russia on 7 June 2017 signed a roadmap on military cooperation for the years 2017-2020 (Lukin, 2018: 158). While confirming the signing of the roadmap China's Defence Ministry Spokesperson Wu Qian on 29 June 2017, during a regular news briefing introduced the roadmap and the planning for the next step–

The roadmap makes top-level design and general plan for the military cooperation between China and Russia in 2017-2020. It shows the high level mutual trust and strategic cooperation; it is conducive for both sides to face new threats and challenges in the security field and to jointly safeguard regional peace and stability. In the next step, the two sides will formulate a concrete plan to promote the military cooperation (Wu, 2017: para. 4).

Therefore, despite there was a decline in the arms exports from Russia to China because of the latter's advancements in domestic industry, the two sides have increased the scope of their military cooperation in other areas. The two countries

have enhanced the scope of their joint military exercises and Russia is presently considering the transfer of advanced military technologies to China and in fact, has concluded some agreements towards this end. Both sides as mentioned above are also working towards the establishment of joint ventures in the defence sector. The impetus towards this end can largely be associated with the western sanctions on Russia after the Ukraine crisis.

Russia is not constraining its options for arms trade with other countries. Asia, being the largest market for Russian military supplies it avoids becoming overly dependent on Beijing as it continues to sell arms to New Delhi and Hanoi. However, as mentioned by Sinkkonen (2018) “nonetheless, recent sales of military equipment to China combined with sophisticated military exercises taking a wider geographical scope than ever before serve as an efficient form of geopolitical signalling” (Sinkkonen, 2018: 8).

China and Russian relations have moved from being mere rivals to strategic partners. The strategic partnership is becoming increasingly interdependent in the twenty-first century as they have largely overcome the problems that used to undermine their strategic proximity. Bilateral relations have witnessed a new zeal in recent years because of both internal and external factors. The seriousness of strengthening the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is evident from the fact that the presidents of both sides have met each other so many times. Leaders on both the sides continuously reiterate that Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership is not going to take a shape of any sort of alliance and the partnership is not set up against any third party. However, while looking on nature of the Sino-Russian strategic entente, especially the increasing scope of their joint military exercises and institutional cooperation, it seems quite apparent that their rising strategic proximity is undermining the interests of other powers and is reshaping the Asian security dynamics.

### **Unfolding of the New Asian Security Architecture: Setting the Stage for the Future Conflict**

China-Russia relations are touching new heights in the Post-9/11 period as discussed in the previous chapter and are leaving behind the diversions that used to hinder the progress of their bilateral relations. This Chapter focuses on how Sino-Russian strategic partnership is reshaping the Asian Security dynamics. How these countries are challenging the U.S. hegemony in Asia as it is the main binding factor in the mounting proximity between the two neighbours'. The current century is widely seen as the Asian century because of the major shift in the focus of world from Euro-Atlantic to Asia. China occupies a centre-stage in this shift of world focus because of its economic rise accompanied by its growing military posture with assertive territorial claims. Both the sides are concerned about the U.S. dominance in the international affairs especially the Asian affairs. The rising strategic proximity between the two sides have provided the much-needed boost to their response towards the United States and also to their standing in both international as well as Asian affairs. Sino-Russian strategic entente is gaining momentum in the current century, more importantly after the Asia pivot policy of the United States and Western Sanctions on Russia.

While finding themselves on the same side the two sides are successfully challenging the U.S. dominance in Asia– the leading example towards this end is Central Asia under the banner of SCO. Therefore, by challenging the U.S. dominance, Sino-Russian strategic embrace is reshaping the Asian security dynamics more importantly in the Indo-Pacific region. On the other side, U.S. is also engaged in efforts to overcome the challenges posed by the Moscow-Beijing rising cooperation. In fact, the Trump administration has taken serious note of this newfound Sino-Russo strategic entente which is gradually becoming stronger. This, in turn, is reshaping the Asian security dynamics and thereby giving rise to the emergence of great-power competition.

#### **5.1: Factoring United States in Sino-Russian Relations–**

United States has emerged as the most dominant power in world in the post-cold war era. The collapse of the Soviet Union made the United States as the sole

power as no other country was in a position to challenge its power. Indeed, the American foreign policymakers had perceived Washington as the only hegemonic power of the world and thereby worked to use its unchallenged position to shape the world order (Layne, 2011). Sustaining the unipolar world order also became apparent in 1992, when the first draft of the Pentagon's Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) document for Fiscal Years 1994-99 was disclosed by the New York Times, according to which the U.S. Defense Department affirmed as mentioned by Tyler (1992) "America's political and military mission in the post-cold-war era will be to insure that no rival superpower is allowed to emerge in Western Europe, Asia or the territory of the former Soviet Union" (Tyler, 1992: para. 1). Apart from this the draft document as reported by the *New York Times* (March 8, 1992), more importantly also mentioned that in the non-defence areas—

we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order" and "we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role ("Excerpts from Pentagon's", 1992: para. 3).

Therefore, the world politics became to be viewed through the prism of the unipolar world order. Russia that emerged out of the ashes of the former Soviet Union was busy in its reconstruction process and even also adopted a pro-western approach in the initial years. However, it soon changed its policy after west's coldness towards Russia. China also preferred not to confront the United States as it was busy in developing its economy; overcoming the arms embargo imposed on it by the west and was in search of alternatives for the same.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the grand strategic concern confronting the American policymakers as mentioned by Layne (2006), is "whether the United States can escape the same fate that has befallen the other great powers that have contented for hegemony since the origin of the modern international system" (Layne, 2006: 7). Therefore, sustaining the hegemonic posture of the United States in the unipolar world remained the paramount grand strategic objective of the successive American administrations since the end of the Cold War (Hettiarachchi & Abeyrathne, 2016). However, such an attitude of the successive U.S.

administrations has cost the country very much. The leading examples towards this end are the U.S. engagement in the Afghan and Iraq wars in which it has lost both men and money. Various international scholars had opined that the unipolarity is going to backfire against Washington (Waltz, 1993; Layne, 2006).

Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan its position on the international stage loomed so large that even many scholars like Micheal Cox, Niall Ferguson, Stephen Rosen, Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay etc., called the United States an empire (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2008). Subsequently Washington enhanced its military ties with states in Central Asia and South Caucasus (Pipinashvili, 2011). Initially, the U.S. presence was not seen as threatening by both China and Russia. However, within the few years after the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, the two sides became concerned about their perceived long-term military presence of Washington in the energy-rich Central Asia. Russia seemed to be much more concerned by the U.S. presence in the region as it has got one more competitor apart from China in this area. Nonetheless, China also became concerned by the U.S. presence and especially by seeing the latter's high-tech warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, the establishment of the U.S. military bases in Central Asia has left the western flank of China exposed (Rozman, 2010). Previously, the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy was seen as a deliberate attempt by Washington to show its strategy of interventionism, thereby imperilling the sovereignty of nations while side-lining the UN (Rozman, 2010).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the relations of Washington with Moscow and Beijing are becoming increasingly fraught. The rising China has been emerging as a potential challenger to the U.S. dominance in Asia especially in the Indo-Pacific region within which the great-power clash between the two is becoming more apparent in the successive years (Carlson, 2016). It is in the backdrop of China's strategic designs that made the United States uncomfortable. In fact, America doesn't want any other dominant power or parallel power in Asia and even in the world. Amidst its rising economic and military might, China has been stretching its wings of strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region. While doing so its strategic interests mostly overlap with that of the United States and its allies and friends in Asia. Although the United States officially maintains that it has no problems with the

peaceful rise of China, however as actions speak louder, Washington did not want to compromise with its standing in Asia. On the contrary, although China proclaims that its rise is peaceful however on various occasions it has shown its assertiveness. Realizing its relative decline as far as the strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region is concerned, Washington became much more concerned about the changing security dynamics of Asia. A series of China's maritime disputes in its vicinity that includes Washington's allies have been seen as a threat to the regional stability. The United States is actively engaging itself to restrict the rising clout of China thereby to maintain the status quo. Washington is in no mood to let Asia fall under China's influence and is working to secure the America-dominated Asia.

China viewed U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific region as inimical to its interests. Time and again Washington has criticized Beijing's territorial claims in its vicinity which the later claims to be legal. U.S. has played a crucial role in highlighting the issue at the international level (Yahuda, 2013) so as to gain support from other countries to downplay China's behaviour in the region. The U.S. has further threatened China of taking tough stances on it for building military installations in the South China Sea. Apart from this, the United States is also directly or indirectly providing diplomatic and even military support to parties in dispute with China. The Washington-Beijing tussle over maritime issues has made the South China Sea a potential flashpoint and an arena of balancing and counter-balancing. Any strategic move by China is equally challenged by the United States (Thoker & Ramzan, 2018).

Washington's close maritime cooperation, especially with Japan, India, and Australia, has been viewed with a matter of great concern in China. It fears that in case of any eventuality these countries may join hands against it and will control the key sea lanes of communication. As the U.S. allies and friends in the Indo-Pacific region feel threatened by the rising clout of China, they have called the U.S.– the extra-regional power to engage itself more actively in the region. While realizing this scenario the United States in order to overcome the apprehensions of leaving its allies on their own fate and to counterweight the Chinese strategic designs have returned to Asia under the aegis of 'Asia pivot' policy which is largely

seen as a rebalancing strategy. Although the U.S. continuously reiterated that this strategy is not aimed against Chinese interests but it is largely seen both in the Chinese policy circles and by other international scholars of the world as a counterbalancing strategy against China. Indeed the policy has raised alarm bells in China as far as its security interests are concerned and therefore has made it more cautious against the U.S. strategic designs in the region. The Defence White Paper published by the Chinese Defence Ministry in April 2013 alluded to the Washington and its pivot to Asia (Emmers, 2015: 160). The White Paper (2013) mentioned, “some country has strengthened its Asia-Pacific military alliances, expanded its military presence in the region, and frequently makes the situation there tenser” (Information Office of the State Council, 2013: para. 5).

The United States ‘rebalance to Asia’ has brought extra pressure on China on the geopolitical and security front as it has intensified geo-strategic competition between these two powers in the region. Under this policy, Washington has encouraged the parties in dispute with China to assert their territorial and maritime claims which in turn has fuelled the tensions in the strategically vital South China Sea and East China Sea (Xinbo, 2012). Subsequently, Beijing saw the bolstering of the Washington-Tokyo exercises as China-centric and as a response to Sino-Russian joint military exercises in the Sea of Japan (“Commentary: Japan-U.S. joint”, 2013). Furthermore, the trilateral naval exercises between the U.S., Japan, and Australia and the U.S., Japan and India have been strengthened under the pivot (Scott, 2016). This has become a major cause of concern for China. Recently, in the summer 2018, Washington flew two B-52 Stratofortress nuclear-capable bombers over the islands claimed by Beijing. This development led China fuming which severely criticized the move and termed it as the militarization of the South China Sea. While reacting to this the Foreign Ministry spokesperson of China Hua Chunying as reported by Sputnik (7 June, 2018) said that “China won’t be scared by any so-called military ship or aircraft and we will only even more staunchly [take] all necessary steps to defend the country’s sovereignty and security, to protect the peace and stability of the South China Sea region” (“Beijing warns US”, 2018: para. 3). Both the countries have been blaming each other for

deteriorating the security of this region of strategic significance through militarization (Brennan, 2018).

The only reason that concerns China is that despite being an extra-regional actor the United States is actively engaging itself in this region. In May 2018, two American warships (the *Antietam* guided-missile cruiser and the *Higgins* guided-missile destroyer) (“Naval standoff in”, 2018) had conducted freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) in the disputed islands of the South China Sea claimed by China (“China views US”, 2018). Washington’s actions were condemned by the Chinese side which saw it as a violation of China’s sovereignty and has dented the mutual strategic trust, undermined the peace and security in the region. To Beijing, Washington is no one to meddle in the issues of the region.

Another important factor that has been affecting China’s relations with the United States or making it suspicious of Washington’s intentions is the latter’s strategic relations with Taipei. Although Washington in 1979 endorsed the “one China” policy after warming up to China in post-Sino-Soviet split, however, it maintains its close economic cooperation with Taiwan and also remains its leading supplier of weapons. Since coming into power, the U.S. President Donald Trump has approved \$1.4 billion worth sale of arms to Taiwan (“China warns Washington”, 2018). The National Defense Strategy (2018) of the United States has termed China as a ‘revisionist power’ and has further mentioned–

China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 2).

In July 2018, two warships of the United States navigated through the strategic Taiwan Strait which was not welcomed by China (Stewart, Ali & Yu, 2018). Actually, the plan for sending a warship to traverse through the Taiwan Strait was considered in June and even the plans for sending an aircraft carrier was also considered but such plans were not pursued by then because of fears of upsetting

China (Stewart, Ali & Yu, 2018). While responding to Chinese strategic designs (which the U.S. sees as provocations) in the region, the United States cancelled the invitation to Beijing to join the 2018 multinational Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC). These exercises are held every two years and previously the navy of China participated in 2014 and 2016 (“Can China, United States”, 2018). Such developments took place at a time when Washington and Beijing are involved in a trade war and has further aggravated the situation. Sending of warships through Taiwan Strait was seen in China as a deliberate attempt of provocation toward Beijing (“Beijing hits out”, 2018).

Amid the rising tensions with China in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States on 30 May 2018, has renamed its Pacific Command (PACOM) as the Indo-Pacific Command (George, 2018). In fact, earlier this year, the United States mentioned in its National Defense Strategy (announced in January 2018), that Washington will expand and strengthen its alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region so as to create security architecture capable of countering the aggression, maintaining peace and stability and ensuring that the common domains are free to access (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 9). Further, the U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis at Shangri-La Dialogue summit (1st-3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018) asserted that Washington will continue to enhance its strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and said that America is here to stay in this region of strategic significance (“US Defense Secretary”, 2018). It is against this backdrop that China has become all the more concerned of U.S. mounting engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. While talking about Chinese concerns Sutter (2018), mentioned—

China Shows particular worry about the leading world power (usually the United States) and how it will use its presence and influence along China’s periphery, broader international influence, and involvement in Chinese internal affairs to enhance its own power and influence at the expense of Chinese interests and influence. As China rises in international power and influence, the leading power (the United States) is seen to be inclined to constrain and thwart the rise in order to preserve its dominant position (Sutter, 2018: 7-8).

Meanwhile, U.S. relations with Russia witnessed a negative trend in the ongoing century, especially since the Iraq war. Despite being engaged in the Afghan and Iraq wars, the United States continued to be a kind of bedevil for Russia by not

letting down pressures on it. Under the aegis of the Afghan and Iraq wars, the United States established its military presence in the energy-rich Central Asia which Russia considers its sphere of influence. Installing of military bases and enhancing diplomatic ties with the former Soviet Republics was not received well in Russia. In fact, these developments raised concerns for Moscow. Presence of military bases in the Russian backyard was seen as a U.S. plot to establish its strategic influence in the region so as to wipe out the Russian standing and influence in this vital region. It was against this backdrop the Moscow tirelessly pitched for the vacation of military bases by the U.S. in Central Asia.

The United States, while ignoring the repeated protests of Russia, welcomed three Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) into NATO in 2004 thereby expanding the NATO into the areas of former Soviet Union. Moscow even felt more threatened with the Bush administration's plan for installing of anti-missile defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic (Jingie, 2013). Therefore NATO's expansion towards the east and its military configurations adoption in the Baltics has become a major cause of concern for Russia (Anderson, 2018). United States being the torchbearer for promoting democratic establishments throughout the world has left no stone unturned to promote the same in the former Soviet Republics. Washington and Western countries in 2003-2004 took the advantage of internal frictions in Georgia and Ukraine to give rise to "rose" and "orange" revolutions respectively, thereby established pro-Western regimes (Jingie, 2013). Russia considers these developments inimical to its interests as by doing this the United States is alienating Russia in the areas once part of the former USSR.

Tensions between the two sides (the United States and Russia) flared-up with the Georgian war in 2008. The relations got a serious jolt by the Ukraine crisis which plunged the bilateral relations to the lowest level since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Immediately, after the crisis sanctions were imposed on Russia and it was also suspended from the powerful G8 grouping. These sanctions dealt a serious blow to the Russian economy.

Furthermore, in 2017, NATO troops with the aim of deterring Russian aggression held a massive, defence drill, under the name of "Iron Wolf 2017", on the border

dividing Poland and Lithuania (Anderson, 2018). Therefore, as mentioned by Carlson (2016), that “under these circumstances, the possibility of an anti-Western, China-Russia alliance has re-emerged with new urgency” (Carlson, 2016: 213). For Russia, the strategic engagement of America in its backyard is to prevent Moscow from reviving its past glory of being a great power. Therefore, Washington has been working to make sure that Moscow no longer retains that position. The leading example towards this end can be the announcement of the 2018 National Defense Strategy by the U.S. Department of Defense, according to which the Trans-Atlantic NATO Alliance will be fortified and the alliance will check the Moscow’s adventurism (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 9). The 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States like China also called Russia a revisionist power. The strategy mentioned–

concurrently, Russia seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favour. The use of emerging technologies to discredit and subvert democratic process in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine is concern enough, but when coupled with its expanding and modernizing nuclear arsenal the challenge is clear (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 2).

While looking at these developments there seems to be no option available for China and Russia rather than to boost their strategic partnership short of an alliance. The interests of both the countries could be served best by shunning their differences. Being the veto-wielding powers the two sides can best exert their influence on the key decisions at the international level jointly and both had done this on several occasions in the past.

The United States time and again has acted against the interests of these powers and has exerted some sort of strategic pressure on China and Russia. Xuetong (2013) is of the opinion that by 2023, this strategic pressure on Moscow and Beijing is expected to rise (Xuetong, 2013). This is because that the United States is looking for ways to overcome its engagement in the Middle East so that it can enhance its strategic posture in Europe and more importantly in Asia. Therefore, to maintain the status quo the U.S. will try all the measures to restrict the Sino-Russian strategic designs both jointly as well as individually. On the other hand,

Russia and China will do whatever possible to drive out the United States from Asian affairs.

As the U.S. factor plays a key role in binding China and Russia together, therefore it can also prevent both the sides from forming any sort of alliance in the years to come through wise foreign policy. Kissinger (2001), while talking about the U.S. factor argued that, “only the unlikely prospect of relentless American bullying of both could drive them to a deeper partnership” (Kissinger, 2001: 117). This argument is becoming true as the twenty-first century progresses especially since the past few years American bullying of both the powers has brought them much closer. China and Russia have been boosting their ties in the twenty-first century. The relations between the two sides are touching new heights as the strategic trust between the two is becoming stronger day by day. This development got momentum especially after the U.S. “rebalancing” strategy aimed at counterbalancing the rising clout of China and Ukraine crisis and the subsequent sanctions on Russia. Both the sides took advantage of the U.S. involvement in the Afghan and Iraq wars to enhance their strategic outreach both individually as well as jointly.

## **5.2: Individual Responses of Russia and China to the U.S. Unilateralism–**

### **5.2.1: Russian Response–**

Immediately after the 9/11, Russia, as in the immediate post-cold war period tried to join hands with the United States but again in vain. Indeed, while attempting to gain American positive overtures Putin was advised by Moscow’s Foreign Policy Council to side-line the emphasis on multipolarity as a foreign policy goal and to accommodate Washington’s stand on missile defence. Balancing against the power of the United States, they believed would be too much costly and even unrealistic (Turner, 2009). While keeping aside the post-cold war grudges where Russia thought of being some sort of cheated by the U.S., Moscow again turned its position toward the U.S. Russia hoped that at least its inclusion in the war against terrorism might lead to the easing of some of its debts of Soviet era and may provide it with essential leverages to join hands with NATO (Turner, 2009). However, once again Russian differences with the U.S. surfaced and it reverted to its agenda of enhancing its ties with China and pressed for a multipolar world. The

reason behind this was the U.S. planning to attack Iraq and also the plan to establish Missile Defence Shield in Poland and the Czech Republic which irked Russia. While showing his renewed commitment towards multipolarity, President Putin strongly opposed the U.S. war on Iraq. Russian foreign minister along with the foreign ministers of France and Germany while meeting in Paris in 2003 issued a statement in which they said that they would not “let a proposed resolution pass that would authorize the use of force” (Tagliabue, 2003: para. 2). These developments also stirred the debate of the drifting away of the U.S.’s European allies.

While responding to the U.S. backed colour revolutions in its strategic backyard Moscow used the SCO framework to muster support from other members for asking the U.S. to vacate its military bases in Central Asia. Unlike other members, Russia seemed to be quite enthusiastic in pushing the U.S. out of Central Asia. Given the security scenario that prevailed, opposing the U.S. through multilateralism became one of the agendas of Russian foreign policy. It is in this backdrop that Moscow has been pressing for making SCO a security framework directed against the United States. However, China apparently did not want to present SCO as anti-US organization at-least openly. Furthermore, the 2008 Russia-Georgia war followed by the annexation of Crimea by Russia and purported military support by Moscow for autonomy/independence movements of Russophone in eastern Ukraine has raised serious concerns for NATO and the EU in the region. These actions by Russia have been termed as ‘*preclusive imperialism*’<sup>1</sup> aimed to check the expansion of NATO and the EU in the region (Gardner, 2016: 46).

As a result of its differences with the West and especially with the U.S, the Russian leadership realized the vital significance of enhancing Moscow’s relations with neighbouring countries in Asia (Lukin, 2016). China stood at the heart of Russian foreign policy towards Asia. As the relations with the West deteriorated

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<sup>1</sup> “Preclusive Imperialism” is a term coined by historian William Langer. According to Langer, preclusive imperialism is the final reason that the US needs to start to expand. He believes that we need to engage in imperialism and develop our US Empire so that other countries cannot. We need to expand to certain countries so our enemies cannot colonize them” (<https://quizlet.com/35924425/ib-history-expansion-in-19th-century-quiz-flash-cards/>). Here, the preclusive imperialism is used for Russia which is preventing the expansion of NATO and the US in the Eurasia.

gradually in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Russia enhanced its ties with the Indo-Pacific countries. While speaking at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in June 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his plans to boost the economic growth of Russia by looking towards the markets in the Asia-Pacific region to overcome the dependence on Europe— its traditional market (Lo & Hill, 2013). Under this shift, although Russia like the U.S. and other regional powers had started to display its military presence in this strategically vital region, however, unlike others Moscow emphasized that its pivot to Asia was mainly aimed to cooperate and not to compete with China (Lo & Hill, 2013). Indeed China occupies a significant position in Russia's shift towards Asia. Furthermore, the Ukraine crisis followed by Western sanctions on Russia had accelerated the Moscow's pivot to Asia as it has now seriously started to view Asian countries as possible alternatives to its existing economic partners in Europe. In order to overcome the sanctions and the strained relations with the United States and West in general, Moscow turned its attention towards the Asia-Pacific region in an attempt to “shine in the east” (Xiangyang, 2017). From the economic point of view, it tried to compensate for the effects of the Western sanctions by reconnoitring the markets in the Asia-Pacific. While reaching out to China and other Asian powers, Russia looked forward to supplant the West as a major market for its exports and also as a source of its capital and investment (Raghavan & Gabuev, 2016).

As far its political strategy is concerned it has further boosted its ties with China, India, and other countries in the region so as to avoid isolation. More importantly, as China occupies a key position in Russia's pivot to Asia, Moscow is currently strengthening its ties with Beijing so that it can overcome the Western pressures. As China also wants to limit the United States activism in Asia, Russia has found it easy to garner essential support of China in challenging the West.

Russia over the past decade has resorted to balancing against the United States. The Russian-Georgian war was the first example of Moscow's balancing that was aimed to halt the American plans for expansion of NATO. Here, Moscow rather than adopting soft balancing has used overt military measures against Georgia and thereby sent clear signals to the West. Indeed Russia under President Putin has demonstrated this attitude in the following years. Russian revisionism and

balancing has once again become apparent in recent years as it militarily intervened in Ukraine and Syria. In 2014, Moscow annexed Crimean peninsula and also provided the pro-Russian separatists clandestine military support in the Donbass province of Ukraine. Moscow also extended its military support to Assad's government in Syria in September 2015 through an air campaign to crush the Washington-backed rebel forces and ISIS militants (Sears, 2016). Kremlin even skipped Nuclear Security Summit– 2016 held in Washington, DC. Amidst the NATO's deployments in Russia's backyard and the construction of anti-missile shield in Poland and Romania, Putin seems committed to modernize its military capabilities including Russia's nuclear forces also. Russia has locked horns against the United States in Syria and currently, the United States and Russia are at loggerheads. As the United States continuously threaten of a military action against the Assad regime, Russia comes in support of the regime and is ready to defend Syria militarily.

Recently, Russia responded to the NATO's "Iron Wolf 2017" with conducting military drills "Zapad 2017"<sup>2</sup> with Belarus in the Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad– the area bordering Lithuania and Poland (Anderson, 2018). By conducting the Zapad-2017, Moscow reminded the West that it is not only responding to a perceived menace but is also in a position to deter the conventional U.S. and NATO forces. Apart from this, Russia demonstrated that it is conventionally too hard to breach its borders with the Eastern Europe (Boulègue, 2017). All these developments clearly show that Russia has resorted to hard balancing against the United States.

The recent U.S. policy documents NSS, NDS, and NPR, seems to have received mixed reactions in Russia. On the one side, Russian's seems to be happy as Russia has been considered as a great power (the status Moscow is working for since the collapse of USSR) along with China. However, on the other side, it is concerned because Washington according to these strategies is going to actively engage itself in Russia's backyard and will counter its strategic moves in Europe. While responding to Washington's NDS, Russia Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, as reported in *The Strait Times* (20 January, 2018) termed it as a confrontational approach and said, "it is regrettable that instead of having a normal dialogue,

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<sup>2</sup> Previous versions of Zapad were held in 2009 and 2013.

instead of using the basis of international law, the US is striving to prove their leadership through such confrontational strategies and concepts” (Liang, 2018: para. 15).

### **5.2.2: Chinese Response–**

China, on the other hand, has responded to the U.S. unilateralism quite cautiously. It used the U.S. involvement in the long-drawn conflicts of Afghanistan and Iraq to enhance its strategic posture in Asia. After the Cultural Revolution, Beijing has changed its image of being a dangerous revolutionary to a peaceful neighbour with a huge market. It enhanced its image in Southeast Asia by offering several benefits like the proposal for the China-ASEAN free trade agreement<sup>3</sup> without demanding the ASEAN nations to immediately lower their tariffs on imports (Denoon, 2017). This placed the ASEAN countries in an advantageous position as they get access to the growing market with no tariffs for their exports. China also successfully enhanced its strategic outreach in South and Central Asia. With this attitude, China in the initial years of the ongoing century was seen as the highly valued neighbour. However, as China started to flex its muscles by making assertive territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, an alarm was sounded in the Southeast Asian nations as they began to be more apprehensive of China’s intentions (Denoon, 2017). Denoon (2017), noted that these have only increased as China has–

(1) declared the Parcel Islands (also claimed by Vietnam) to be part of the Hainan Island Administrative District; (2) blockaded Philippine ship in the second Thomas Shoal; (3) expanded its military presence on various islands and atolls in the South China Sea; and (4) moved a massive oil rig HS981, into Vietnam’s Exclusive Economic Zone (the Chinese subsequently moved the rig back to an area near Hainan Island, but only after violent rioting against the Vietnamese) (Denoon, 2017: 3).

Washington’s engagement in the long-drawn Afghan and Iraq wars appeared to be quite beneficial for Beijing to focus on its rising strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific region as its rise remained unchecked until recently. Although China’s assertive territorial claims raised concerns for many countries in the Indo-Pacific region, it

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<sup>3</sup> China proposed first this idea in 2000 and in the following year the parties involved endorsed the proposal for establishing China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. In 2002 the framework agreement was signed.

has become successful to a large extent in enhancing its strategic outreach in the region. China has become the biggest trading partner of the ASEAN since 2009, (Grudgings, 2013) and in 2017 China's trade with ASEAN totalled \$514.8 billion ("China-ASEAN trade", 2018). Since 2011 Beijing has consolidated its position as the leading trading partner with most of the Asian nations and while doing this it has also enhanced its position in other areas (diplomatic, political and military) in this vital region (Grudgings, 2013). China undoubtedly now is the second biggest power, first being the United States, and by 2025, its economy is likely to surpass that of the U.S. (Shambaugh, 2013).

While coming to China's response to the U.S. pivot to Asia, Beijing has responded by developing its anti-access (A2) and area denial (AD) capabilities to thwart the U.S. forces within the first island chain,<sup>4</sup> its navy is frequently dispatching its naval ships in the area, and is engaging itself in extending the scope of its operations and the capabilities of its power projection (Scott, 2016: 117). Immediately after the announcement of the U.S. pivot to Asia in 2011, Hu Jintao— the then President of China while speaking at People's Liberation Army conference in December 2011, as mentioned by the Xiang (2012) publicly called on its military to "speed up naval transformation, deepen and widen the efforts to prepare for future military struggle and solidly push for modernization" (Xiang, 2012: 114). Amidst the fears of encirclement of China by the United States under the pivot policy, President Hu Jintao in 2012 again stressed the need for becoming a 'maritime power'. While speaking to delegates in Beijing in November 2012 President Jintao said, "we should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power" ("China should become", 2012: para. 3). The vision of modernizing the naval forces has been continued by the new President Xi Jinping. In the backdrop of the mounting presence of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region, the modernization of the PLA Navy (PLAN) stood at the heart of military modernization of China. In Defense White Paper 2013, China announced—

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<sup>4</sup> The first Island Chain refers to the first chain of major archipelagos out from the East Asian continental mainland coast. The first island chain is principally composed of the Japanese Archipelago, Kuril Islands, Ryuku Islands, Taiwan, the northern Philippines, an Borneo; from the Kamchatka Peninsula to the Malay Peninsula.

in line with the requirements of its offshore defense strategy, the PLAN endeavors to accelerate the modernization of its forces for comprehensive offshore operations, develop advanced submarines, destroyers and frigates, and improve integrated electronic and information systems. Furthermore, it develops blue-water capabilities of conducting mobile operations, carrying out international cooperation, and countering non-traditional security threats, and enhances its capabilities of strategic deterrence and counterattack (Information Office of the State Council, 2013: para. 15).

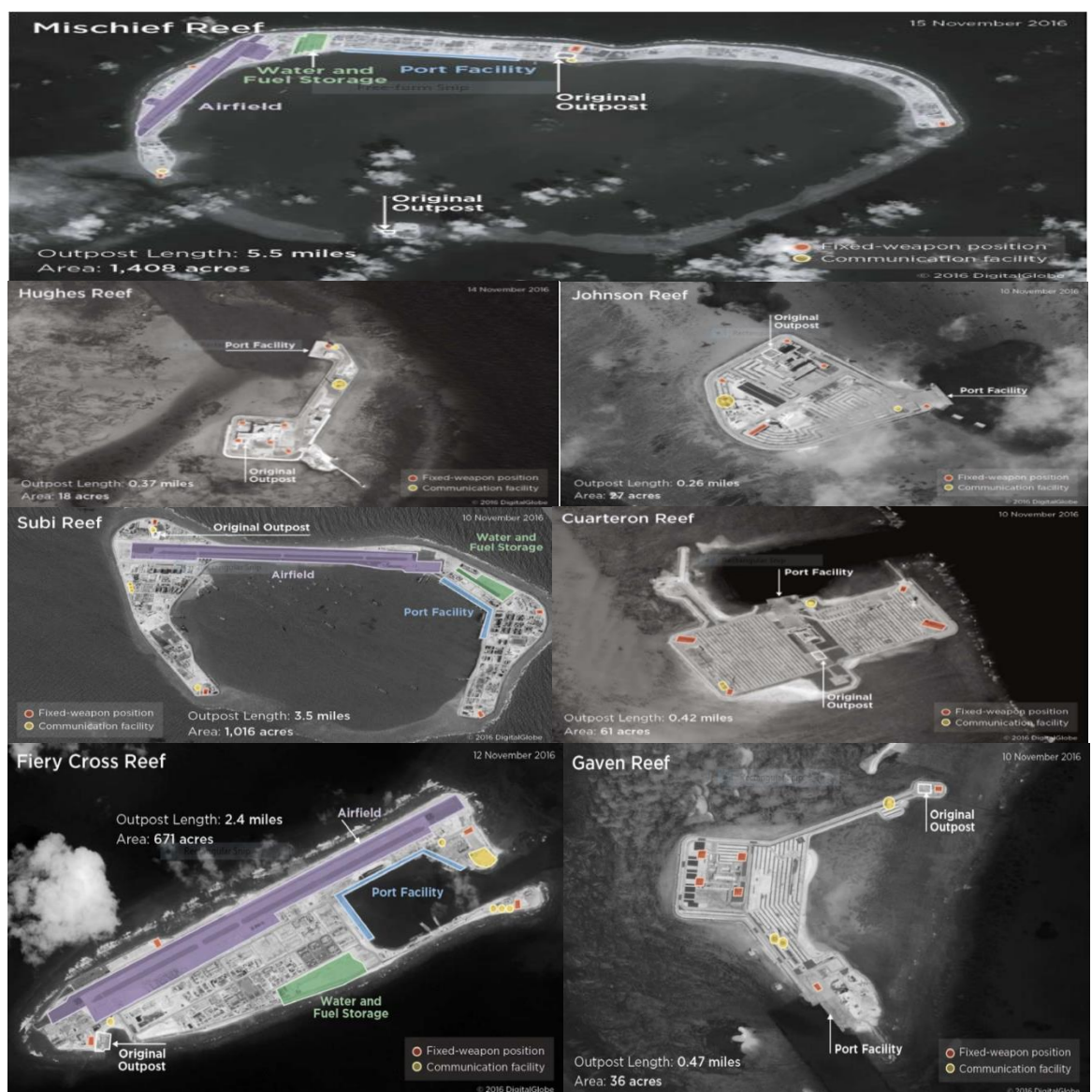
As the economy of the People's Republic of China has grown, it has effectively enhanced its political influence in the sub-continent especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Apart from this China has also translated its economic growth into advancing its military capability so as to secure its geostrategic interests. The main reason behind this is to do away with the U.S. dominance in the Indo-Pacific region that has time and again acted against the Chinese interests. China has been successful to a large extent in undermining the military primacy of the U.S. in Asia. Meanwhile, China is also working towards establishing alternative economic and political architectures to bypass the already established institutions (Denmark, 2018). The leading examples towards this end are SCO, BRICS, OBOR, CPEC, and AIIB.

The combined effect of PRC's rapid economic growth accompanied by the increase in its defence spending is that there is a shift in the balance of power. Unlike the past years, the United States can no longer conduct military manoeuvres throughout the world without considering the possible pushbacks from the regional powers. The U.S. navy for years has conducted the freedom of navigation operations to thwart the Chinese expansionism in the strategically vital East and the South China Sea. However, this has failed as a strategy to achieve desired results towards this end. Beijing, on the contrary, has hardened its territorial claims in this region by setting up military installations on its artificially created reefs that can harbour the entire navy of China (Saetren & Marston, 2018).

China by improving its civilian and military infrastructures in the disputed South China Sea is viewed as an attempt to strengthen its *de facto* control in the region. The berthing areas, airfields, and resupply facilities on its outposts (as shown in Figure 5.1, below), will enable Beijing to uphold a more flexible and determined

military presence in the South China Sea. Subsequently, this will enhance PRCs' efficiency to detect and thwart the strategic designs of other claimants and the third parties especially the United States (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Meanwhile, amidst the rising tensions in the South China Sea, Xi Jinping told the defense secretary of the U.S. Jim Mattis (while he was on a visit to Beijing in June 2018) that our stand on disputed waters (Figure 5.2) is firm and Beijing won't concede a single inch there ("China won't concede", 2018).

**Figure: 5.1– China's Shore-based Infrastructure Construction in the South China Sea**



Source: US Department of Defense. (2017). Annual Report to Congress.

Washington's, NSS and NDS have raised concerns in China as it wanted its mounting strategic posture to remain unnoticed. However, these documents have

increased the uncertainties for China because the Pentagon now seems to be more adamant to constrain Beijing's strategic manoeuvring which according to Washington has eroded its primacy. While responding to NDS announced by America in January 2018, the spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the United States termed it as a cold war mentality with 'zero-sum game mind-set' which can only bring 'conflict and confrontation' (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 2017). As China stands firm in its policies and found itself in a much better position in the current security environment, it seems to be in no mood to bend down to the U.S. pressures.

**Figure: 5.2: China's Territorial Claims in the South China Sea**



Stock Board Asset. (2018). U.S. Officials Plan "Significantly More" South China Sea War Drills To Counter "New Reality" Of China - Stock Board Asset. Retrieved 17 July 2018, from <https://stockboardasset.com/insights-and-research/u-s-officials-plan-significantly-more-south-china-sea-war-drills-to-counter-new-reality-of-china/>

### **5.3: Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership Amidst the Declining U.S. Hegemony: Return of the Great-Power Politics–**

China and Russia while feeling constrained by the hegemonic posture of the United States look for initiatives to overcome this problem or at least to limit the U.S. hegemonic designs. Immediately after the collapse of the communism the two sides given their political and financial overreach were not in a position to balance the U.S. Therefore, they aimed first to rebuild their economies and focus on their respective economic growth. Subsequently, the geo-political and geo-

economic conditions underwent changes and their respective economies saw rapid growth phases. Immediately after that, 9/11 took place and the developments that followed strategically brought Russia and China in a closer strategic embrace. The contentious Iraq invasion compelled both the sides to enhance their strategic entente. Moscow and Beijing since then became quite vocal for multilateralism and thereby to establish a multilateral world order. They have also established various regional organizations. The most popular among which is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO although attempted to portray itself as an organisation to be more focussed on the geo-economics, but as geopolitics and geo-economics are interrelated, soon China and Russia found themselves attempting to counter the U.S. hegemony through SCO.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century both China and Russia are working towards minimizing the American dominance in international politics especially in Asia– which is seen as a main focal point of the developments in this century world politics. Both, the sides are engaged in balancing the United States strategically and diplomatically by attempting towards countering the U.S. in the Asian region. To a large extent, both were successful in curbing the U.S. influence in Asia especially in the Indo-Pacific region under the aegis of the SCO and unilaterally as well as bilaterally. The reason for this success might be the U.S. being mired in the long-drawn Afghan and Iraq wars. The American factor has helped the two sides in building trust and coming strategically closer. The United States, on the other hand, has time and again acted against these countries whether it is on democratic front, human rights issues and so on and so forth. However, strategic balancing of the U.S. by the two countries got momentum after the U.S. has directly challenged the interests of these two nations under the aegis of Asia pivot policy and the Ukraine crisis. The two countries, while, finding themselves on the same side, responded by further boosting their relations. These two developments seem to be the forerunner in overcoming the hurdles in defence deals between the two. This is where Realism's Balance of Power theory fits quite well.

While talking about the balance of power theory, Brooks and Wohlforth (2008) opined that, “the stronger a state gets, the more powerful become the incentives for other states to balance it” (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2008: 7). While correlating on

the developments of Sino-Russian strategic entente and their joint responses to the U.S. actions Kenneth Waltz's (1993) argument, "Hegemony leads to balance, which is easy to see historically and understand theoretically" (Waltz, 1993: 77) seems to be quite relevant here. Even, the United States in order to maintain the status quo has engaged itself in counterbalancing against these two powers. More importantly, China is gradually assuming power particularly in the economic field, from where it is directly challenging the United States. Here, Realism's notion as mentioned by Brooks and Wohlforth (2008), "power begets countervailing power" clearly fits (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2008: 7).

Since the end of the Cold War, the grand strategy of the United States has been to preserve its hegemonic role in the international system (Layne, 2004). As the United States grand strategy of preserving unipolarity stretched into the 21st century, scholars continued to have a firm belief that the pace of counterbalancing was going to increase (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2008). Subsequently, the war on terror provided fresh momentum to the U.S. hegemonic ambitions (Layne, 2004).

The question that confronts many scholars and the U.S. policymakers is that whether the U.S. can be successful in maintaining its hegemony or it is going to meet the same fate that has befallen previous great powers contending for hegemony (Layne, 2006). Layne (2004), argued, "the Iraq War may come to be seen as a pivotal geopolitical event that heralded the beginning of serious counter-hegemonic balancing against the United States" (Layne, 2004: 119). Indeed, the invasion of Iraq has dispelled the illusion of the United States being a benevolent hegemon and as mentioned by Layne (2006), "for much of the world, the invasion shattered one of the most important foundations upon which the notion of benevolent U.S. hegemony is based: the perception that the United States is a status quo power" (Layne, 2006: 24). While speaking in this line Walt (2006) argued—

the United States is in a position of power that is historically unprecedented, and that it has used its power to mould a world that would be compatible with U.S. interests and values. The United States has not acted as a "status quo" power: rather, it has used its position of primacy to increase its influence, to enhance its

position vis-à-vis potential rivals, and to deal with specific security threats (Walt, 2006: 23).

The idea, that Washington prefers to act multilaterally than unilaterally is a mere myth than a fact. In reality, the U.S. acts multilaterally when it receives others support for its policies and acts contrary (unilaterally) most of the times when the Pentagon is determinant that it must (Layne, 2006). The leading example towards this end can be the President Bush's declaration while reacting to the brutal 9/11 attacks that rest countries of the world has two options either to support unquestionably or to oppose and face the wrath. Other examples in this manner can be the Iraq invasion despite opposition by many; and forcing other nations to limit their ties especially the commercial ones with countries acting contrary to its interests.

In the post-Cold War era, it was believed by many that the United States unipolar moment especially being the only superpower will remain unchallenged. However, the theory of neo-realism as mentioned by Sears (2016)–

predicted that the unbalanced power of a unipolar international system should catalyze the emergence of new great powers and a quick return to balance-of-power politics, in order to limit the power of the preeminent state and restore the system to its "natural" state of multipolarity (Sears, 2016: para. 1).

The realists predicted that following the end of the Cold War, there will be hard balancing against the U.S. that would quickly lead to the distribution of power in the international system from unipolarity to multipolarity (Layne, 2006). They believed that the days of Washington's primacy are soon going to be over and the other nations have valid reasons to be concerned of the unbalanced American power (Layne, 2006). Although balancing against the U.S. has started but not at the pace as realists predicted and also more than hard balancing Washington has been witnessing soft balancing. Other scholars are of the opinion that the counterbalancing against the United States has already taken place. While looking at the developments that unfolded in the post-9/11 period, this prophecy of the neo-realism seems to be coming true. There has been a relative decline of the United States because of the various factors encompassing the costs of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the global financial crisis, and as Zakaria (2009), mentioned

the rise of the rest especially China (Zakaria, 2009). These developments seem to have made it quite easy for other powers especially China and Russia to speed-up there balancing against the United States.

Layne (2004) opined “Russia and China, long-estranged, found common ground in a nascent alliance that opposed U.S. “rogue hegemonism” by promoting reestablishment of a multipolar world” (Layne, 2004: 119). The Sino-Russian strategic partnership of the current century is quite different from that of the 1950s Sino-Soviet alliance where there was a wider power gap between the two and China was accorded the status of a ‘junior partner’. Although currently the roles have been reversing as China is assuming the position of big brother in the strategic partnership, but Russia still is militarily superior to China which in turn makes the Sino-Russian relations some sort of an equal partnership. And also during the 1950s, the aim of the two sides was to spread the ideology of communism throughout the world but the new partnership is a sort of defensive in character. Its purpose is to thwart strategic pressures from outside and also to prevent the strategic environments of the two sides from becoming worse (Carlson, 2016).

While talking about the triangular dynamics between the United States, China, and Russia which started in the 1970s, Kissinger often reiterated in his works; *White House Years* (1979),<sup>5</sup> *Years of Upheaval* (1982),<sup>6</sup> *Diplomacy* (1994),<sup>7</sup> and *World Order* (2015),<sup>8</sup> that the ideal position in the triangular dynamics between the great powers is to maintain good relations with the other two powers than they have with each other. Washington enjoyed this key position of having better relations with other two powers than they had with each other during the last decades of the

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little Brown & Co, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. 1979, For the effective triangular diplomacy Kissinger explained that it ““must rely on the natural incentives and propensities of the players.” Kissinger explained that the opening to China and détente with the Soviet Union were pursued as parallel policies designed to enable the United States to “maintain closer relations with each side than they did with each other.”

<sup>6</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, in this book he wrote that for the US it was always better “to be closer to either Moscow or Peking than either was to the other.”

<sup>7</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994. The bargaining position of America in the triangular dynamics as reiterated by the Kissinger, “would be strongest when America was closer to *both* communist giants than either was to the other.”

<sup>8</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, Penguin Publishing Group, 2015. In this book he again is of the opinion that the design of triangular diplomacy according to US was to balance “China against the Soviet Union from a position in which America was closer to each Communist giant than they were to each other.”

Cold War and also during much of the 1990s. However, in the current century, this has not remained the same and this advantage of the U.S. has shifted towards China. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century triangular dynamics between the US, China and Russia, it is China and not the U.S. which is enjoying better relations with the other two powers than they have with each other (Trenin, 2015). Moscow and Beijing are enjoying much strategic trust with each other than they have with Washington in the 21<sup>st</sup> century triangular relations between these powers (Carlson, 2016). Both the sides are joined in containing the U.S. preponderance in the world affairs. In doing so, they hold similar viewpoints and have common interests. Not only this, while keeping the containment of the U.S. hegemony in mind, China and Russia have side-lined the ideological factor and the Cold War logic of establishing the alliance and indulging in an arms race. Therefore, according to this perspective the development level of Moscow-Beijing relations within the Sino-US-Russian triad surpasses that of the Washington-Moscow relations (Jingie, 2013).

Subsequently, there has been a rise in Sino-Russian military-to-military ties and the simultaneous engagement in a diplomatic offensive against the security policies of America in the Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere (Sempa, 2016). The leading examples towards this end can be the post-Ukraine crisis, holding of Sino-Russian joint military exercises in the Mediterranean Sea (2015), the strategically vital South China Sea (2016), Baltic Sea, Sea of Japan and Okhotsk Sea (2017) (Panda, 2017), and Russia's transfer of sophisticated technology, Su-35 fighter jets and also the S-400 SAM system to China (Wezeman, 2017). Sempa (2016), argued that "geographically, Russia and China occupy respectively what classical geo-politicians called the "heartland" and a significant portion of the East Asian "rimland" of the Eurasian landmass" (Sempa, 2016: para. 2). Sempa (2016), further concluded—

Eurasia is still the world's dominant landmass, home to most of the world's people and resources. The global balance of power still requires that no major power or alliance of powers control the key power centers of Eurasia. For the United States, having better relations with China and Russia than either has with each other still makes a sense in the post-Cold War world (Sempa, 2016: para. 8).

While quoting Gilpin (1981) that “no state has ever completely controlled an international system,” (Gilpin, 1981: 28), Layne (2006) argued that “hegemony is a relative, not an absolute concept” (Layne, 2006:11). He further opined, “implicit in Gilpin’s observation is a subtle, but important, point: although the United States is a hegemon, it is not omnipotent– there are limits to its ability to shape international outcomes” (Layne, 2006:11-12). This describes why Pentagon has been unable to stabilise Iraq and Afghanistan (which are mired in the continuous insurgency since the U.S. intervention), failed in the Vietnam War, and has largely failed in compelling Pyongyang and Tehran to close their nuclear programs.

In the twenty-first century the rise of the Sino-Russian entente is widely debated in international politics and has attracted much attention of the policymakers and the experts throughout the world. Russia and China being the major players in the international system, their strategic cooperation occupies a significant geopolitical weight in the international relations domain. The reason behind this is China’s dramatic rise and Russia’s military might. Sino-Russian relations have changed enormously since the last two decades.

Balancing essentially is a countervailing strategy and nations balance when the power by one nation is over-concentrated as power asymmetries run the risk of the domination of weaker states by the strongest one. Mostly, balancing is associated with the hard balancing (i.e., military balancing) against an existential danger of which weaker states fear that they might be attacked and conquered by the dominant power. However, in the era of the U.S. primacy where it enjoys the overwhelming military capabilities, it is quite difficult and even dangerous for other powers to engage in the traditional counterbalancing i.e., hard balancing manner. However, enjoying an unmatched power doesn’t mean that Washington can dictate or should enforce its values and policies on others (Walt, 2005). Therefore, notwithstanding the dearth of hard balancing against American dominance other states, more importantly, China and Russia also have been engaging themselves in seeking alternative methods (especially soft balancing) for balancing against the mighty United States (Layne, 2006). While talking in this line Pape (2005) is of the view that–

soft-balancing measures do not directly challenge a unipolar leader's military preponderance, but they can delay, complicate, or increase the costs of using that extraordinary power. Nonmilitary tools, such as international institutions, economic statecraft, and strict interpretations of neutrality, can have a real, if indirect, effect on the military prospects of a unipolar leader (Pape, 2005: 17).

Therefore, unipolarity has led to the emergence of new methods of balancing. States preferred to engage themselves in the new forms of balancing as for them the hegemon doesn't pose any existential threat, nevertheless, it may pose a more delicate sort of threat. It is in this backdrop, that the states which are concerned about the U.S. hegemony are looking for the strategies through which they can restrict it peacefully and alleviate the likely adverse impact of its dominance on them (Layne, 2006: 8). Although Washington still enjoys the dominant position in almost every aspect of capabilities, it does not mean that the balancing behaviour of other states against it is absent.

Since the dawn of the new century, as mentioned by Pape (2005), the U.S. has "unilaterally abandoned the Kyoto accords on global warming, rejected participation in the International Criminal Court, and withdrawn from the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, among other unilateralist foreign policies" (Pape, 2005: 7). The concerns expressed by the foreign leaders about the American unilateralism were occasionally made since the late 1990s onwards<sup>9</sup> however, the collective support for a multipolar world to restrict the United States unilateralism has been declared since the late 2002 and more importantly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Pape, 2005). The Iraq invasion has dealt a serious blow to the U.S. image of being a benign power. For many, this invasion showed the threat of an unchecked hegemon— a threat that Moscow and Beijing had continuously highlighted while pressing for a multipolar world (Turner, 2009).

Despite several leaders have openly pressed for a multipolar world, the world response to American dominance does not look like the coalitions which defeated

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<sup>9</sup> In 1999 French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine described the United States as a "hyper-power"; in the same year, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder warned that the danger of "unilateralism" by the United States was "undeniable." The January 2000 "National Security Blue-print" of the Russian Federation warned of "attempts to create an international relations structure... under U.S. leadership and designed for unilateral solutions (including the use of military force) to key issues in world politics." All quoted in Walt, S. M. (2002). Beyond bin Laden: Reshaping US foreign policy. *International Security*, 26(3), 56-78.

the powers like Germany or the USSR in both the world wars and the cold war respectively. The main reason behind, why other powers have not made a formal alliance against the U.S. is that it does not pose the same magnitude of threat. Nevertheless, other powers especially, China and Russia have joined forces in a subtle way to check American power. As noted by Walt (2005)–

rather than forming an anti-U.S. alliance, countries are “soft balancing”:  
coordinating their diplomatic positions to oppose U.S. policy and obtain more influence together. To name just few examples: France, Germany, and Russia pursued a unified strategy that helped prevent the United States from obtaining UN Security Council authorization for the invasion of Iraq, and their actions also allowed weaker states such as Mexico and Chile to resist U.S. pressure as well (Walt, 2005: 113).

Even the former U.S. President Bush could not persuade the UK, France, and Germany to take a tougher stand on Iran’s nuclear program (Walt, 2005). While responding to the developments Pape (2005), mentioned–

the dynamics of balancing are different in a unipolar system. Balancing against a unipolar leader cannot be done by any one state alone; it can only be done by several second-ranked states acting collectively. This means that buck-passing is not an option. Because no one state–by definition–is powerful enough to balance a sole superpower, no state is available to catch the buck (Pape, 2005: 16).

Realizing all this China and Russia with the aim of getting over the U.S. pressures and predominance joined hands together. Although the two countries are directly or indirectly using the other country as a hedge against the United States, however, the two sides have not reached up to the level of so-called “buck-passing”. China seems to be the dominant partner in the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. Therefore, Russia, as it is apparent while looking on their partnership wants China to catch the buck. Apart from this if we look at their strategic cooperation in the SCO, there also Russia wants SCO to catch the buck if we talk in terms of organizational balancing against the U.S. hegemony. However, China is wary of the consequences in case it falls in that line. Even within the SCO framework China doesn’t want the organisation to become an overt security structure directed against the west for which Russia is pressing for. Nonetheless, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership within the SCO has been successfully

checking the U.S. strategic inroads in Central Asia. In fact, SCO played a greater role in bridging the gap between the two strategic partners and has helped the two to counter the U.S. strategic designs in the region.

In the current century, there has been the rise of intermediary powers. The remarkable among which is China's rise. China seems to be the main driver of the shift in world focus from the Euro-Atlantic world to Asia (Zakaria, 2008). In other words, we can say that China stands at the heart of what has been termed as the Asian century. The rise of other powers like China, India, Brazil, ASEAN, etc., has dented the image of the United States. America's imperial overstretch more importantly in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars have cost it both men and money. The global financial crisis further crushed the U.S. standing as it was severely affected by the crisis. While coming to Asia, the United States has no longer remained the dominant power. It is going through the relative decline especially in the area of its strategic influence abroad.

Meanwhile, as the global primacy of Washington is declining Beijing is engaging itself vigorously to bring the countries especially across the Pacific and Eurasia into its orbit of influence. The leading example towards this end can be the China's initiatives like 'One Belt, One Road' and the Beijing backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The strategic 'one belt one road' (Figure 5.3) includes both the land connectivity (Silk Road Economic Belt that passes from China through the energy-rich Central Asia to Europe) and the maritime connectivity ('maritime silk route' traversing from China through vital areas of Southeast Asia, South Asia to Europe). Apart from this, linked with the OBOR, there is the \$46 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)<sup>10</sup> (as shown in Figure 5.4) which as mentioned by *The Economist*, (September 09, 2017) "has become the main plank of Xi's ambitious "belt-and-road" initiative" ("Massive Chinese investment", 2017: para. 6).

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<sup>10</sup> CPEC once completed, "would enlarge China's strategic footprints in the Indian Ocean and would Change the regional power matrix forever. One of the fallouts would be that China would then wield a much more powerful influence in the Indian Ocean even though geographically speaking China is not an Indian Ocean power" (Sharma, R. (2015). Here's why Indian strategists should worry about China's \$46 billion funding to Pakistan - Firstpost. Retrieved from <https://www.firstpost.com/world/heres-why-indian-strategists-should-worry-about-chinas-46-billion-offering-to-pakistan-2205216.html>).

**Figure: 5.3– China’s One Belt One Road**

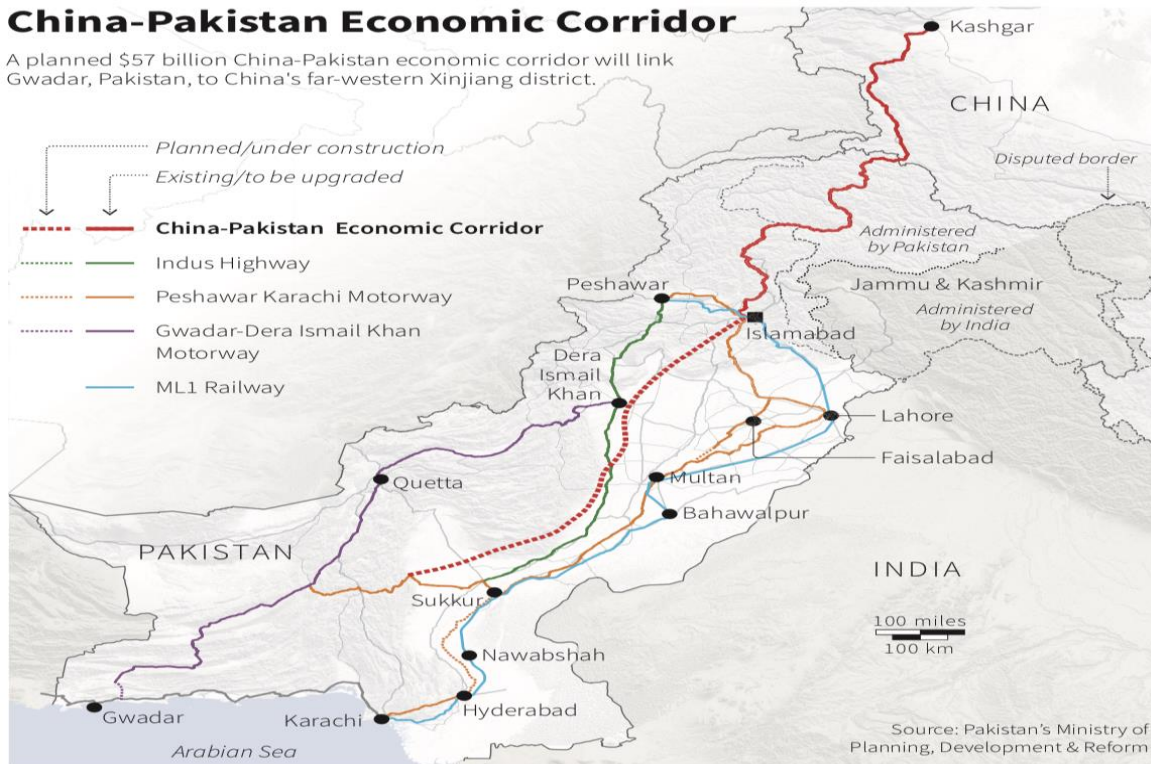


Source: Grabowski, R. (2017). For China, All Roads (and Belts) Lead to Europe - ET2C International. Retrieved from <https://www.et2c.com/for-china-all-roads-and-belts-lead-to-europe/>

**Figure: 5.4– China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**

**China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**

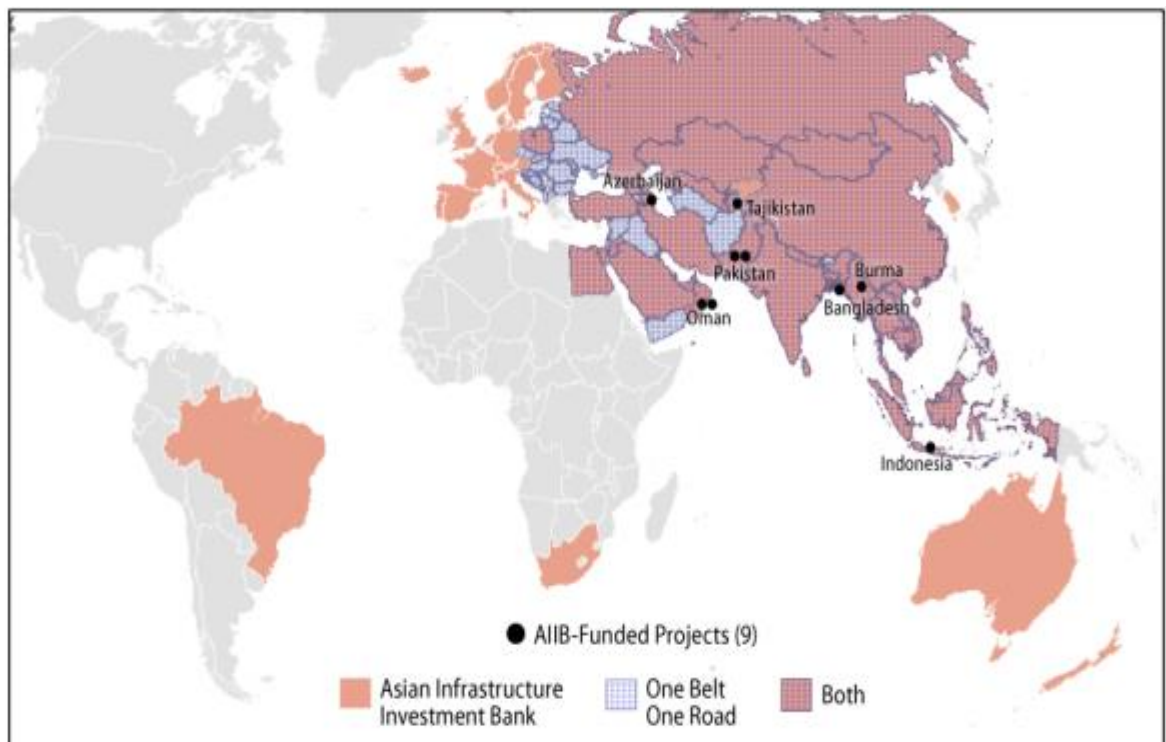
A planned \$57 billion China-Pakistan economic corridor will link Gwadar, Pakistan, to China's far-western Xinjiang district.



Source: World Economic Forum. (2018, July 03). Opportunities and Risks– the China-Pakistan Trade Corridor.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank proposed by China in 2013 was established formally on 25 December 2015 with 57 founding members and in mid-2016 it began its operations. The AIIB was initially seen as a financing mechanism for the China’s “One Belt, One Road” project. However, as the membership of the bank extended to include the developed nations (especially the UK), in Asia and Europe, Beijing has subsequently tried to distance the bank<sup>11</sup> from its OBOR project through co-financing measures for initial projects (Weiss, 2017). As the approved projects of AIIB largely overlap with the OBOR’s geographical area (Figure 5.5) it will be interesting to see how Beijing is going to balance the development of the Bank along with securing its own economic and security priorities in the region. However, Beijing being the major contributor i.e., \$50 billion which is half of the total initial capital i.e., \$100 billion of the bank has a greater say (voting share is 28.7 per cent) in the AIIB (Weiss, 2017).

**Figure: 5.5– OBOR and AIIB Countries/Projects**



Source: Martin A. Weiss, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Congressional Research Service, CRS Report, Feb. 3, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> The AIIB President Jin Liqun during a meeting in June 2016 with global executives while clarifying the Beijing’s position said that although AIIB would support the strategic OBOR projects, the bank was not exclusively created for this initiative. Further, he said “we would finance infrastructure projects in all emerging market economies even though they don’t belong to the Belt and Road Initiative” China Daily. (2016). AIIB leads support for Belt and Road infrastructure projects|Economy|chinadaily.com.cn. Retrieved from [http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-06/08/content\\_25645174.htm](http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-06/08/content_25645174.htm)

China, since the past few years seems to have largely become successful in balancing the strategic influence of the United States across different regions as its strategies have started to pay dividends. Beijing through its strategies is slowly chipping away America led world order which is in place since 1945 (Saetren & Marston, 2018). China is gradually becoming the economic pivot of Asia as Washington's global economic influence is declining. The closest ally of the United States, the United Kingdom shocked the world especially, Washington, when in March 2015 it decided to join as a founding member of the China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Subsequently, all major allies and strategic partners of the United States jumped on the economic bandwagon of China by joining the initiative and thereby turned down the U.S. call for a boycott of proposed Chinese initiative. This seems more or less a tactical '*coup de grace*'<sup>12</sup> highlighting the declining influence of the U.S. economy at the world stage (Heydarian, 2015: 1).

Further, the withdrawal of the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which was given a significant place in the U.S. rebalancing strategy has fundamentally minimized the ability of Washington to compete with Beijing as far as their strategic influence in the region is concerned (Denmark, 2018). Like the U.S. engagement in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, also the U.S. withdrawal from TPP– destined to become the largest free trade area, has created a vacuum for Chinese strategic manoeuvring in the Indo-Pacific. China, behaving realistically is filling in the vacuum created by the U.S. The Trump attitude may force these countries to further boost their cooperation with China and incur more advantages from the Beijing-led initiatives especially from the ambitious 'belt and road' project. In the current security scenario, the U.S. is surging for a comprehensive strategy to outclass the Chinese strategic designs which is flying in a much more progressive way as compared to other powers. China has adopted a sort of 'leapfrog' approach as it is eroding the U.S. hegemony in Asia. Currently, China has reached the position of becoming a confident power registering its own path in international relations.

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<sup>12</sup> A coup de grace is an action or event which finally destroys something, for example an institution, which has been gradually growing weaker.

China's joining hands with Russia has become a cakewalk for both the powers in countering the U.S. hegemony. Speaking in this line, Trenin (2015) argued that—

the West-East swing by Russia has coincided with China's foreign policy of becoming more active. Under President Xi, China has reached a platform from which it can be more assertive in promoting and defending its interests. China's relations with the United States are becoming increasingly competitive. The expansion of China's power in the East, toward the Pacific, is hampered by the US-led system of alliances. The road to the West, however, is free of US interference and promises to enhance Beijing's access to resources and markets and also to boost its influence in continental Asia. Closer ties with Russia fully fit into this strategy (Trenin, 2015:7).

The Moscow-Beijing strategic partnership has emboldened their balancing strategy against the U.S. Sino-Russian synergy has become a bugbear and a bedevil for the United States. As the twenty-first century progresses, the United States has been witnessing more challenges to its policies, especially from Russia and China. They have become the foremost challengers to the United States policies in Asia, more importantly in the Indo-Pacific region. In fact, these two powers figured at the top in America's National Security Strategy (December, 2017), as far as challenges to the United States are concerned. The National Security Strategy (2017) mentioned that, "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity" (The White House, 2017: 25). According to this strategy Beijing and Moscow are working towards the formation of a world contrary to the values and interests of the United States. The NSS (2017) further mentioned—

China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor. Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders (The White House, 2017: 2).

While talking about the relative decline of the United States, Washington seems to have accepted this reality as apart from the U.S. National Security Strategy (December 2017), it is also clearly stated in National Defense Strategy 2018, announced by the U.S. Department of Defense in January 2018—

today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order— creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-State strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 1).

The things didn't stop here, in one yet another Nuclear Posture Review (February, 2018), the United States again criticized China and Russia. The Nuclear Posture Review (2018) states—

while the United States has continued to reduce the number and salience of nuclear weapons, others, including Russia and China, have moved in the opposite direction. Russia has expanded and improved its strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces. China's military modernization has resulted in an expanded nuclear force, with little to no transparency into its intentions (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 2).

The current security environment with full of threats and future uncertainties has necessitated as mentioned by the Nuclear Posture Review (2018), a “national commitment to maintain modern and effective nuclear forces, as well as the infrastructure needed to support them” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 3). This is crucial for preserving the United States nuclear deterrence towards other nations (especially China and Russia) who seem to be hell-bent on undermining the U.S. standing in the world. From this view, it appears that both China and Russia have also resorted to hard balancing apart from the so-called soft balancing by advancing their military might.

The U.S. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis in May 2018 emphasized that the 2018 National Defense Strategy, “provides clear direction of America's military to restore its competitive edge in an era of re-emerging long-term great power competition” (Cronk, 2018: para. 4). The United States under President Donald Trump seems to be adjusting to new realities the world order is witnessing. The post-cold war era in which the U.S. gained hegemony has gone. The National Defense Strategy (2018) reads—

for decades the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain. We could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted. Today, every domain is contested— air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 1).

The time has come to focus on advancing in whatever way possible its national interests and global superiority rather than ensuring global leadership and regulation so as to become a sort of world policeman which indeed it has been doing so far. As the U.S. National Defense Strategy (2018) clearly mentions, “inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security”, (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 1) it seems that the U.S. is on the verge of foreign policy shift— from “war on terrorism” to “great power competition” (Hallinan, 2018: para. 1). Indeed, soon after announcing the National Security Strategy, Hua Chunying Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman urged Washington to “abandon its Cold War mentality and zero-sum game concept,” and warned that failing to do so will have adverse impact on U.S. as well as on others (Griffiths & Wang, 2017: para. 4).

All the three documents represent a fundamental shift of the U.S. foreign policy emphasis toward traditional great power rivalry. The emphasis on power (especially in military terms) stands at the heart of this transition as has been stated in all the three (NSS, NDS, and NPR) new American strategies (Lukyanov, 2018). These documents represent the realistic outlook towards the changing security scenario of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As power stands at the heart of realistic lexicon here again the theory of realism seems to be the guiding principle behind these strategies. In tandem with these strategies, the United States has already taken actions towards this end as it has hardened its nose against China and Russia. The leading examples towards this end can be the U.S.-led NATO conducted “Iron Wolf 2017” military exercise in June 2017 in Lithuania to thwart the Russian strategic designs in Europe, it flew B-52 bombers over the disputed islands in the South China Sea recently, its warships navigated through Taiwan Strait in summer 2018, cancelled Beijing’s participation in 2018 multinational Rim of the Pacific exercise and more importantly renamed its Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command. As Washington under the Trump administration is

prioritizing the military domain over diplomacy and on the other side Beijing and Moscow are also responding by flexing their muscles, the return of great power conflict has become the utmost possibility.

As far as the Sino-U.S. rivalry is concerned, there has emerged a situation of what is called as “Thucydides Trap”.<sup>13</sup> According to this notion, the rise of new power as a competitor to the established power of the world order likely leads to conflict and political tensions. Here, China is the rising power which is undermining the U.S. supremacy in the world and on the other side the United States— an existing superpower is working to maintain the status quo. Furthermore, China’s mounting strategic entente with Russia has emboldened its position in challenging the U.S. dominance and vice versa. The United States has accepted its eroding hegemony in all the three government documents; the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and the Nuclear Posture Review. Indeed China has been described as a ‘strategic competitor’ especially by the NSS and NDS. Under these documents, the United States has drawn a guideline for its future coursework so as to defend or in other words restore its supremacy. Here, the notion of ‘Thucydides trap’ clearly implies. Furthermore, U.S. relations with Russia and China, seems to be a good example in recent times of the Thucydides statement that ‘nations act out of fear, interest, and honour’. In case Pentagon clearly goes by these strategies (in which China and Russia are seen as main rivals) the already going antagonism will get worse. There will be an increase in the overlapping of strategic interests. Asia in general and the Indo-Pacific region, in particular, will be the main recipient of the impact of the great power competition.

While looking at this entire security scenario once again the great power conflict with the successive years seems to become a possibility. Previously, after the collapse of USSR, no power was capable enough to challenge the United States. However, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progressed a wide array of developments took place and the United States is witnessing the relative decline. On the contrary, China is

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<sup>13</sup> The term was coined by an American political scientist Graham T. Allison— the author of the book “Destined for War”, and is named after historian Thucydides. After analysing the 15 historical cases since 1500 in which the dominance was challenged by a new rising power, Allison came to this conclusion. Out of 15 cases war resulted in the 11 cases, as fear was caused by the rising power in the ranks of the established power. The Hindu, (June 15, 2017), “What is Thucydides Trap in International Relations?.

rising and is becoming the leading competitor of the U.S. Meanwhile, Russia is going through the process of resurgence to restore its lost pride of being a great power. China and Russia are challenging the U.S. dominance both individually as well as collectively especially since the past couple of years with the U.S. pivot to Asia and Ukraine crisis stimulating the developments. The leading examples towards this end can be the ever-increasing tensions in the strategically vital East and South China Seas, Sino-US trade war, and Russia's assertive involvement in Ukraine and Syria (Kumar, 2018). The two countries are shrinking the strategic influence and even the strategic outreach of the United States in Asia especially in the Indo-Pacific region. The leading examples towards this end can be the establishment of the SCO, expanding the scope of their joint military exercises, especially the naval exercises, Russia being a part of China's OBOR initiative also plans to link the Eurasian Economic Union with China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The success of these projects will determine how far China and Russia will undermine the U.S. hegemony. OBOR especially seems to be a grand strategic design of China which is going to dent the U.S. standing in Asia. Sino-Russo strategic manoeuvring in the region is yet another example of a classic zero-sum game where the loss of Washington is the gain of this new found partnership.

In their respective spheres of concern (Moscow in the Middle East and Europe and Beijing in Asia along its rim) China and Russia in the current security dynamics are posing serious challenges to the U.S. led international order. In the global diplomacy, both the sides support each other in their respective challenges to America, its allies, and partners in the world. The joint efforts of both include the economic, political and security measures in both multilateral forums as well as in their bilateral relations with the adversaries of the United States like Iran, Syria and North Korea (Stent, 2018: 6). In a great deviation to the West, they have cooperated on a number of occasions in the multilateral forums like opposing the sanctions on North Korea, Iran, and Sudan and recently Syria (Kuliani, 2012). Both countries are enhancing their strategic cooperation in the UNSC by supporting each other in the key decisions. In 2007 and 2008, China and Russia vetoed the UNSC resolution pressing for sanctions on Burma and Zimbabwe respectively.

Furthermore, China supported Russia in the UNSC and has refused to join the post-Ukraine crisis-related sanctions on Russia. Both the sides have joined hands in vetoing the UNSC resolutions demanding strict action against the Bashar-al-Assad regime in Syria. In fact, China's support to Russia on Syria came as a surprise to other veto members even for the world at large. By this Beijing seems to have sent a clear message to the West that it firmly stands by Moscow's side and both the strategic partners stand opposite to the West. The impact of Sino-Russian joint vetoes was striking as it has marked a vital shift in their foreign policy thinking. Pei (2012) has termed the Sino-Russian cooperation in the UNSC as the "axis of obstruction" (Pei, 2012: para. 5) which has become critical for the decision-making process of the UNSC. Although Moscow and Beijing do not hold similar views on many issues and affairs still they look towards each other for much-needed mutual support in order to evade isolation in the United Nations Security Council (Jovic, 2017). China and Russia since the past few years seem to have reached upon an understanding that they will act together to challenge the West so that neither of the two feels isolated (Pei, 2012).

While coming to Afghanistan, both China and Russia amassed their efforts to muster their strategic influence in this war-torn country especially since the U.S. decided to withdraw from the country. On the other side the U.S. notwithstanding the withdrawal is getting all the more involved in Afghanistan. Initially, the new U.S. government under Donald Trump pitched for the America-first policy according to which the U.S. was supposed to reduce its military engagement globally. However, realizing the geostrategic vitality of the country and the eagerness of its neighbouring powers especially China and Russia towards enhancing their strategic foothold in Afghanistan, Washington was forced to maintain its troop presence in Afghanistan. The leading example towards this end can be the President Trump's declaration for sending the additional 4000 troops to Afghanistan. The increasing engagement of Russia and China in Afghanistan has put the U.S. in a confusing situation of whether to exit or not from this vital country. In fact, China and Russia are luring other countries like Iran, Pakistan and lately India to play a decisive role in bringing normalcy in this war-torn country. Initially, Russia, China, and Pakistan held trilateral talks over Afghan problem and also

planned to include Iran and Afghanistan in the next meeting and not any plans for including India was mentioned. However, after Afghan resentment about its exclusion in the meetings, both Afghanistan and India were included in the next meeting.

There are also reports that China, Russia, and Iran apart from Pakistan are holding secret talks with the Taliban. In fact, it is believed that Russia is aiding Taliban with necessary arms in their fight against the Western forces in what can be said as the reverse of roles. During the 1980s it was the U.S. who supported Afghan guerrillas against the Soviet forces and now it is Russia who reportedly is helping the Taliban outfit against the U.S. forces. Indeed, Moscow and Beijing has created a labyrinth by their joint efforts that are going to create unending troubles for Washington. The two sides view Afghanistan as a chessboard wherein they can strategically 'check and mate' the United States apart from having other geo-political and geo-economic interests. Washington currently seems to be in a fix as its supremacy and prestige is at risk. In case Washington decides to de-link Kabul from its security imperatives and leave the 'heart of Asia' for the Asian's, it would give the impression of the U.S. withdrawal from the Asian affairs. Subsequently, this would strengthen the position of its adversaries like China, Russia, and Iran. In the meantime, the insecurity of its allies and friends in the Indo-Pacific region would be increased. More importantly, the U.S. isolationism from Asian affairs may also lead its allies and friends to strategically accommodate the rising China. Afghanistan once again has emerged as the fulcrum of great power politics. As Afghanistan is also called as the 'graveyard of empires', is the U.S. another empire which is going to witness the same fate? While looking at the developments it seems that the U.S. is heading in the same direction. Despite its objective of killing the mastermind Osama bin Laden has been achieved, it has no longer crushed the Taliban outfit in Afghanistan as they are still operating there. All these developments have been compelling the U.S. to maintain its troop presence in Afghanistan.

The two sides are engaged in doing away with the US-backed institutions, regional and global norms (Sutter, 2018) which China and Russia believe have treated them unfairly. Furthermore, for the Kremlin and PRC, the current international

order continues to treat them unequally while setting the agenda and deciding the institutional rules. Therefore, both the sides advocate the formation of a post-Western multilateral world order in which the rules of the game are no longer determined by the U.S. Under this new order the role of the multilateral organizations like SCO, BRICS, OBOR, Eurasian Economic Union and the AIIB will be highlighted and in which China and Russia will play significant roles (Stent, 2018). While looking at the current developments in the international arena, these organizations/initiatives especially SCO, OBOR, BRICS, and AIIB are enormously gaining the ground and thereby altering the balance of power in favour of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. These institutions, in particular, seem to have left the United States clueless which is now surging for a strategy that can prevent the status quo.

While responding to these developments and with the aim of restoring the U.S. hegemony, the Trump administration has recently published three documents—NSS, NDS, and NPR. As these documents are directly aimed at China and Russia they have added fuel to the already strained relations and in fact, these policy documents have signalled the return of great power rivalry. Washington being the key factor behind increasing Sino-Russo entente, its attitude towards these two powers is going to determine how far China-Russia strategic partnership can go. In case the United States pushes too hard on Ukraine, oil prices, NATO's expansion in Russia's backyard and if it rebalances too far in the Indo-Pacific region against China, Moscow and Beijing may certainly move towards the establishment of a formal alliance which both originally don't want (Feng, 2015). Indeed the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is gradually becoming much more than Bobo Lo's 'axis of convenience'.

While looking at the current security scenario with the growing rivalry between China and the U.S., Mearsheimer's (2001) prediction "China and the United States are destined to be adversaries as China's power grows" (Mearsheimer, 2001: 4) is gaining the ground. While speaking at the 2016 forum of the Valdai Discussion Club organised in Russia, John Mearsheimer criticised America's Russia policy severely and said that by alienating Russia the United States have foolishly pushed it into the arms of China (Xing, 2016: para. 1). To him, Moscow and Beijing

are the two main hindrances for Washington to ensure its domination in the world and therefore wants Russia to be on the U.S. side so as to counter the rising clout of China. While looking at the developments, the successive U.S. administrations are doing the reverse and the relations between the U.S. and Russia currently are at an all-time low since the end of the Cold War. While on the other hand Sino-Russian strategic partnership is becoming much stronger and is on the track to be so in the coming years. The mounting strategic entente between China and Russia means making it much tougher for the United States to restore its supremacy.

As China and Russia will continue their efforts to overcome the U.S. hegemony and its dominance in Asia, the United States as quite apparent from the U.S. documents will use all the overt and covert means to secure its dominance. The developments towards this end have already taken place and the stage for the great power rivalry is once again coming to the forefront. Therefore, Mearsheimer's 'tragedy of great power politics' which is inescapable seems to be becoming prominent once again. Furthermore, the apparent result of this great power competition is that the Asian security structure is witnessing striking changes. The balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region currently is tilting in China's favour with its strategic partnership with Russia providing a valuable contribution. Meanwhile, the great power competition in recent times has given rise to new power realignments. The Asian order is witnessing the emergence of two axis of power realignments; one is China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran led by China and on the other side we have the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India led by America. India being the other rising power occupies a significant position in the U.S. overall policy towards the region. As Russia, the all-weather friend of India is tremendously warming up to its arch rival China and now Pakistan also, it has unfolded a wide array of challenges for New Delhi's foreign policy which are going to increase in the coming years.

### **Locating India in the Emerging Great-Power Competition: Challenges and Options**

With the rise of various regional and international players, the Sino-Russo entente is gaining momentum. Their strategic bonhomie has directly challenged the U.S. apart from attempting to achieve other economic, political, as well as security objectives. Moscow-Beijing rising partnership has created a sense of insecurity for the West especially the U.S. and its allies. The United States has begun to take serious note of this growing partnership and has engaged itself to counter the same. The other strategic friends of the U.S. are attempting not to displease both China and Russia, thereby attempting to balance the two poles. Sino-Russo strategic proximity in the present century has marked an important development in the realm of international relations and hence has become an important balancing factor in the rapidly shifting strategic priorities of the countries where new alliances are taking place. Their strategic partnership will continue to play a key role in determining the course of the balance of power in years to come. Balancing and counterbalancing of these powers i.e. U.S. on the one side and China and Russia on the other side has led to the new power realignments in the Indo-Pacific region. Disappointed with the results of the U.S. hegemony in Iraq and Afghanistan, most of the states have strategically accepted the Sino-Russo bonhomie as the “other pole” in multipolarity, resulting in changing the Asian security dynamics which according to Barry Buzan, has led to the emergence of “Asian Super Complex” (Buzan, 2012). Thus, the changing security scenario has made noticeable changes in the foreign policy priorities of the major and regional powers. India being a rising power with vast markets is no exception to these changes. In fact, adjusting to these new realities has become a challenging task for India. Currently, India in one or the other way is showing its tilt towards the West especially the United States, but, is also giving due consideration to the fact that both China and Russia are important when it comes to balancing the U.S. priorities and strategic objectives in the South Asian region, especially Pakistan.

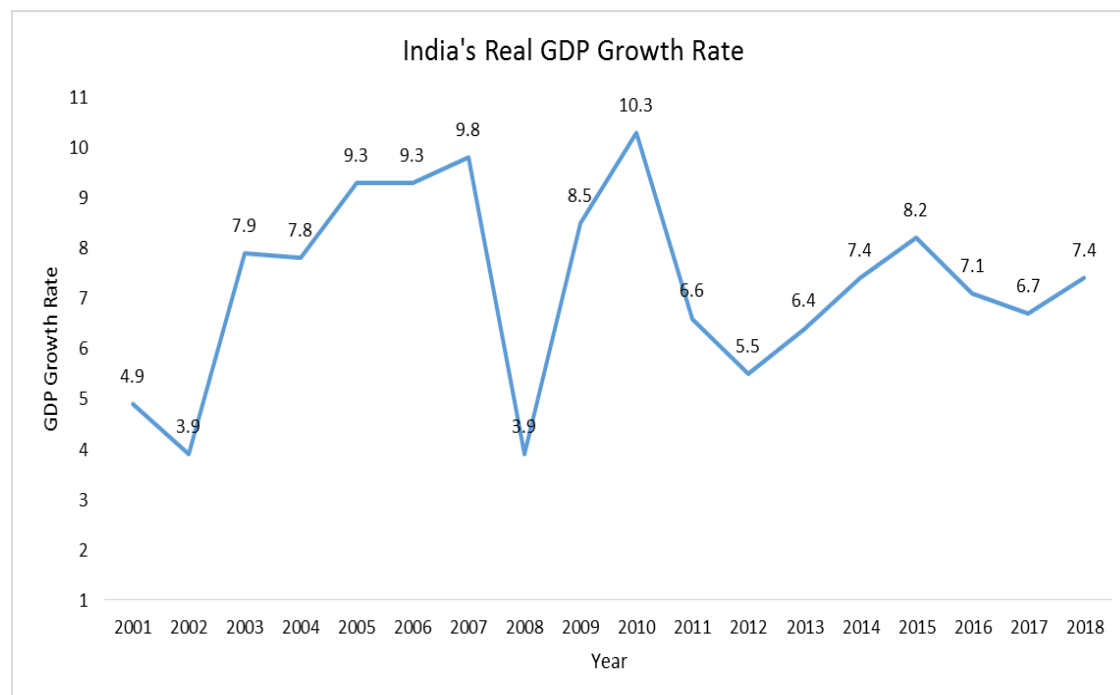
Realising its rising strategic influence at the international level, India in the twenty-first century is aspiring for a major power status and has gradually started to take

independent foreign policy decisions while responding to international developments. This, in turn, has made India a country of enhanced strategic attraction for the competing powers so as to secure their respective interests. On the other hand, India's economic and strategic inter-linkages with China, Russia and the U.S., has made it a challenging task for it to maintain its strategic autonomy. Thus, a situation has emerged whereby the U.S. is struggling to maintain its hegemony, the Chinese as well as Russians are counterbalancing the U.S. and relatively smaller powers like India is also trying to have a say in the larger game, thereby involving itself in the "great power competition". This has unfolded a plethora of challenges and opportunities for India. In brief, this chapter is an attempt to locate India in the changing Asian security dynamics unfolded by the Sino-Russian strategic embrace.

### 6.1: India Amidst the Changing Sino-Russian Relations–

The rising posture of India has positioned it favourably in boardrooms and has heightened its clout in global capitals. India over the past decade has witnessed enormous economic growth as shown in Figure 6.1 below and thereby broken into the ranks of the largest economies of the world. Consequently and also because

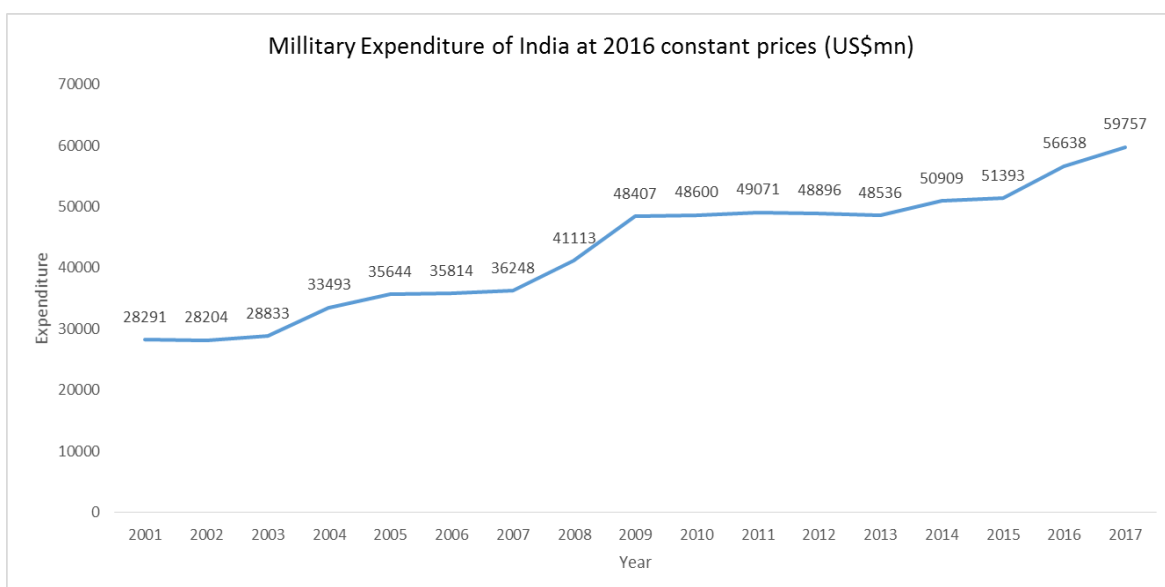
**Figure: 6.1– India's Real GDP Annual Growth Rate**



Source: IMF, 2018.

of the heightened defence potentials of its rivals, India has increased its defence expenditure. The economic growth provided it with necessary means to invest more in its defence spending as shown in Figure 6.2 below. India in 2013-17, became the world’s largest importer of major weapons and accounted for twelve per cent of the total global share and its percentage change was twenty-four per cent from 2008-12 to 2013-17 (SIPRI Fact Sheet, 2018). With the increased expenditure on defence, New Delhi has enhanced its efforts towards military modernisation and in the meantime has declared its ambition of becoming an Indian Ocean power and announced new security measures. For example, India’s new national maritime security policy proclaimed that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the “century of Seas”, and increased its defence expenditure for the up-gradation of its naval power (Ayres, 2018: 11). The maritime domain is the main area apart from other areas where India’s interests with the U.S. and allies and partners in Asia largely converge. India’s rising strategic posture, with an increasing defence spending has made it a centre of attraction for major powers which in turn has made its strategic choices a difficult task while responding to new geopolitical realities.

**Figure: 6.2– India’s Military Expenditure (2001-2017)**



Source: SIPRI, 2018

As far as India’s relations with China and Russia are concerned, it enjoys closer ties with Russia than China due to its strategic relations with Islamabad. It has to

be recalled that during the Cold War period, Soviet Union concluded a peace and friendship treaty with India in 1971, so as to help it strategically against the U.S. and Pakistan. In order to adjust to the economic inter-linkages formed as a result of globalisation, New Delhi had to establish amicable relations with the west and hence, tilted towards the west in particular to the United States. India's tilt towards the United States got momentum since the last one and a half decade especially with the signing of the civil nuclear deal. Lately, Washington became the more significant partner of New Delhi and experts often termed them as "natural allies". While realising the potential of India in the changing world order, America prioritised New Delhi in its Indo-Pacific policy.

Meanwhile, it seems that New Delhi has relegated its trusted partner— Moscow to the secondary position and the U.S. to the primary one as it is tilting towards America and its allies. The examples towards this end might be the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, US President Barrack Obama, France President Francois Hollande, UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and heads of ASEAN countries, being the chief guests of India's Republic Day celebrations in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. Not only this, India once again has sent invitation to the US President Donald Trump to be the chief guest for the 2019 republic day celebrations which the U.S. President has turned down. Apart from this, if we look at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign visits outside the South Asian region, he has prioritized Japan, Australia, United States, France, Germany, Canada over China, and in particular over Russia—the major defence partner of India. All this makes it apparent that New Delhi in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is directly or indirectly showing its tilt towards the U.S. and its allies and friends in Asia.

It is perhaps in this backdrop and due to its economic priorities, that Russia is making its strategic partnership with China stronger through various mechanisms, including extending its support to Pakistan— one of the strongest allies of China. In November 2014, it signed a "Military Cooperation Agreement" with Islamabad. Therefore, Kremlin has made significant revisions in its policy towards South Asia and thereby showed positive overtures to Pakistan. Simultaneously this military

cooperation agreement between Moscow and Islamabad seems to have raised concerns for India (Roy, 2014).

On the other side of the spectrum, India's relations with China are characterised by mutual distrust and fluctuations. The two rising giants of Asia (China & India) are involved in persistent border disputes. Apart from this China always stand on Pakistan's side in case of any unforeseen development between India and its arch rival Pakistan. Although both China and India belongs to the group of rising powers, yet, there is a significant difference in terms of their economic, strategic and political outreach. China without any doubt is rising with a more impressive ascent than that of India. As the rise of these two powers lead them to stretch their arms of influence in other regions, their interests overlap to a greater extent. This is witnessed in Central Asia, Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Africa, so on and so forth.

Given the prevailing circumstances, India finds it difficult to counter the Chinese strategic designs. Indeed its rise has been overshadowed by the ever-increasing strategic posture of China which has been due to the availability of more resources at its end. Chinese strategies like the 'string of pearls', 'one belt one road', AIIB, so on and so forth have become major benchmarks of Chinese strategic forays in the Indo-Pacific region. Among these, 'One Belt' 'One Road' which includes the land route, maritime silk route, and also the CPEC, is more crucial from the security perspective. Through these strategies, China seems to be winning away the Asian neighbours into its fold. Most of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region are jumping on the Chinese geostrategic 'bandwagon'. Meanwhile, the Chinese strategic designs have opened a plethora of challenges for India. Although China wanted India to join the OBOR<sup>1</sup> initiative, especially, the CPEC, India turned down the offer owing its concerns as well as the strategic dependence and sovereignty issues that it would have created in the future. On the contrary to the expectations of China, New Delhi raised its voice against the CPEC because of geographical reasons as it passes through the disputed territory of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. OBOR is indeed a 'game-changer' initiative. Its success will determine how far

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<sup>1</sup> Xi's signature foreign paradigm OBOR aims at linking China to Asia, Europe and Africa via an ambitious network of ports, roads, rail and other infrastructure projects.

China will be the 'pivot' in Asia on which the future balance of power will stand and to what extent it is going to wean away the Indo-Pacific countries from the U.S. ambit. Linked with OBOR, CPEC has become a major cause of concern for India as it gives Pakistan a significant position apart from the concern of it being traversing through the disputed territory. As most of the countries have participated in the OBOR negotiations, India by declining to participate in the project seems to have largely alienated itself from the Asian affairs.

## **6.2: India's Russia Conundrum: a Bugbear for India-**

As evident from above, China and Pakistan since the past few years have been successful in bringing India's cold war ally towards their side. From Moscow's perspective, the changing geopolitical and geo-economic scenario has led Russia to bolster closer ties with China and Pakistan. Apart from the Afghan issue, one of the primary reasons behind Moscow's policy shift has been India's enhanced strategic proximity with the United States.

Amidst the changing geopolitical scenario in Asia especially in the Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. and its allies in Asia are welcoming India's rising strategic posture in Asia. Washington is attaching a key position to India in its overall policy towards the Indo-Pacific region. India was seen as "linchpin" in the Obama's Asia Pivot policy. Although New Delhi has maintained the strategic ambiguity of its linchpin role by not endorsing the U.S. rebalancing strategy openly, however, it has welcomed the U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific and has shown overtures by gradually moving towards America and its allies (Ramzan, 2014). The growing importance of India for the U.S. and its allies is that its rise is largely seen as a counterweight to the China's rising clout. Apart from securing its own interests, India is also moving closer to the West because of the significance and prestige they are attaching to it. More importantly, unlike China, India's rise has been considered as a peaceful one.

On the other end, amidst the deteriorating relations with the West, India's trusted friend Russia is moving closer to China with the successive years and now lately towards Pakistan also. The changing geo-political realities have compelled both countries for looking new partners. More importantly, the changing foreign policy

priorities of both the countries can largely be associated to their pattern of balancing in the current security scenario. On the one side, Russia, in order to balance the United States, has found a friend in China with a common cause and thereby enhanced its strategic partnership with Beijing. On the other hand, India, in order to balance the rising clout of China, has moved closer to the United States and its allies which also share the same concerns about the rising strategic posture of Beijing. The main reason towards this end is that both India and Russia are quite aware that on their own they cannot balance these two powerful adversaries– China in the case of India and the U.S. in the case of Russia. Both of them need potential backing towards their balancing efforts, so India and Russia have switched to muster their cooperation with the U.S. and China respectively. However, the only hard-hitting reality is that the powers they chose to cooperate form the adversary of the other. In addition to it, both India and Russia have also attempted to resolve their strategic issues with the U.S. and China respectively through well-negotiated agreements and annual summits.

Amidst, this security scenario, the two sides are gradually drifting away from each other. Although both the sides maintain that their relations with each other's adversaries won't affect their historical bonding, but the fact is that they are gradually losing the track. In fact, the United States is pressurising India to limit its relations with Russia which is undergoing through the U.S. sanctions. Although India has turned down these pressures by maintaining that it will go ahead in buying the S-400 missile system from Russia however, if India moves further closer to the U.S. it might have to follow its dictates. The United States while realising the significance of India's rising geopolitical stature is strategically adamant to bring India under its strategic influence– to bring India up to the level from where it can follow its dictates like other allies of the U.S. in Asia are largely doing. The United States has designated India as a 'major defence partner' in 2016 aiming to enhance its defence ties (including trade and technology-sharing) with New Delhi to a level corresponding to its allies and partners that are closest to Washington ("India, US, hold", 2018).

Subsequently, India also signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the United States on August 29, 2016, in Washington

(Ministry of Defence Government of India, 2016). Under this agreement, the armed forces of India can access the U.S. military logistics at any of its bases throughout the world and the United States can also access the Indian military facilities. The Trump administration in August 2018 granted Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1)<sup>2</sup> status to India that is equivalent to its allies. The landmark decision made India the third only Asian country after Japan and South Korea to acquire such status and has paved the way for the sale of high-tech products from the U.S. to India especially in Space and defence sectors (“India third nation”, 2018). India has also signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) on September 6, 2018 on the side-lines of the inaugural Indo-US “2+2” dialogue. COMCASA represents the India-specific version of the general agreement signed by America called Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). This agreement as reported by *Business Standard* (September 6, 2018), “is meant to provide legal framework for the transfer of encrypted communication security equipment from the U.S. to India, which is said to be safer and more secure than the system that India uses right now” (“India-US sign COMCASA”, 2018). The agreement will enable New Delhi to acquire critical U.S. defence technologies and access to the critical communication network in order to ensure interoperability among the armed forces of the two sides and also reportedly with other countries operating on American-origin platforms (“India & US”, 2018). Furthermore, the agreement allows the Indian forces to operate on “high-end and encrypted communication equipment” installed on the U.S. platforms acquired by the armed forces of India such as C-17, C-130, P-8I aircraft, and also the Apache and Chinook helicopters (“India-US sign COMCASA”, 2018). All these developments make it apparent that New Delhi is gradually moving closer to the United States. Although an upward trend towards

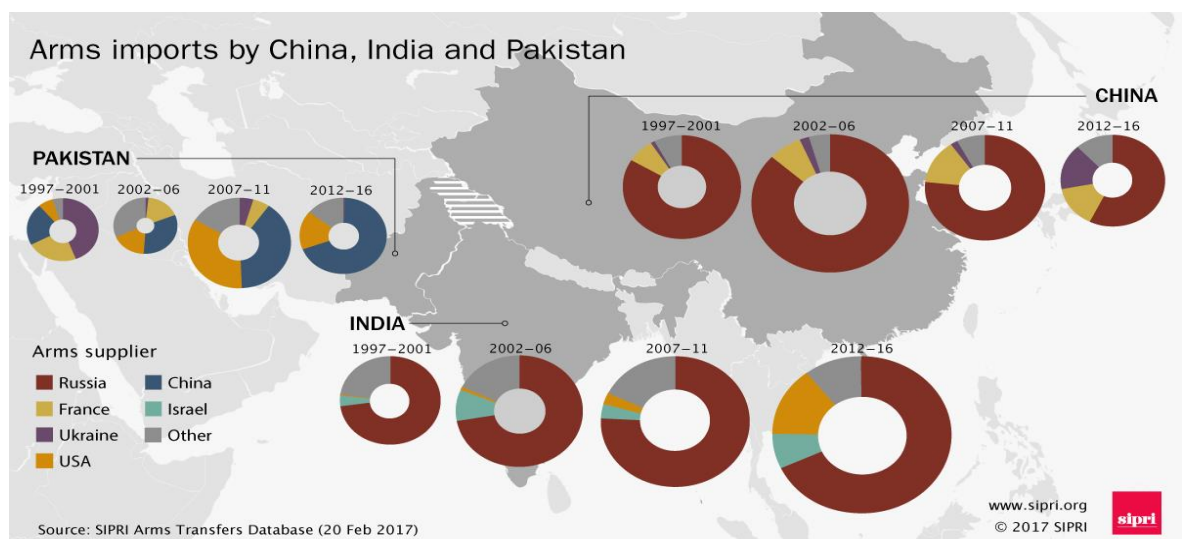
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<sup>2</sup>“STA is the licence exemption that allows a set of items on the Commerce Control List to be exported from the US under defined conditions without a transaction-specific licence, as per Descartes Customs Info. The STA exception is relevant to exports, re-exports and transfers for which a licence is required under the Export Administration Regulations – one of the two important US export control laws that affect the manufacturing, sales and distribution of technology. STA Tier 1 treatment, comparable with NATO allies, will expand the scope of exports subject to the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) that can be made to India without individual licences. This regulatory change will enhance the bilateral defence trade relationship and result in a greater volume of US exports to India.” (<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/us-gives-india-sta-1-status-heres-all-you-need-to-know-about-it-2790601.html>).

this end was first witnessed with the signing of landmark Indo-US nuclear deal, however the rising strategic proximity got momentum in the current decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since 2008, India has successfully purchased several high-end platforms from the United States which include P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, M777 howitzers, C-17 and C-130 transport aircraft, and Apache and Chinook helicopters (Abercrombie, 2018).

Russia on the other side has also not hesitated or stopped itself to arm India with sensitive strategic weapons despite the latter’s mounting defence ties with the former’s adversary– the United States. In fact, Russia could have also virtually affected the Indian defence system by discontinuing its supply of arms including spares to India. However, the fears of losing India to the U.S., continues to linger on Russia. These concerns are only increasing with the successive years. India’s joining of the ‘Quadrilateral’ talks with the U.S., Japan, and Australia since 2017, has miffed Moscow according to which New Delhi has relinquished the strategic balance. Indeed, the joining of India to this block-type U.S. dominated security architecture in the strategically vital Indo-Pacific has clearly annoyed Moscow. Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister strongly advised New Delhi to remain stick to the “non-bloc principle” (Stobdan, 2018). Amidst the rising Indo-US defence ties Russia fears that it will definitely undermine its defence ties with India, and the developments towards this end has already taken place as shown in Figure 6.3 below.

**Figure: 6.3– Arms Imports by India, China, and Pakistan**



Source: SIPRI. (2017). The State of Major Arms Transfers in 8 Graphics.

President Putin, indirectly reminded the Indian counterpart (PM Modi) in Sochi meet in May 2018, to respect the obligations that two sides share under their “special and privileged partnership” in different fields like security, military and nuclear energy and the most significant among which is the defence cooperation (Stobdan, 2018). This development comes in the backdrop of India’s shelving of its few joint defence projects with Russia. These projects include the Indo-Russian Multirole Transport Aircraft (MTA), the work of which according to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited officials has stopped from Indian side (Indian Defence Research Wing, 2017) and the proposal for jointly developing the advanced fighters i.e., Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) also known as T-50, or Su-57– its new production name, has been put on the back-burner and the decision of which has been conveyed to the Russian delegation by the Indian Security Advisor Ajit Doval at a “Defence Acquisition Meeting” held in February 2018 (“India puts FGFA”, 2018). Although the Indian side has justified such decisions by bringing in the issues of technical competence, however, for Russia it is all because of India’s increasing defence ties with the U.S. In fact, in the past decade New Delhi has procured more than \$15 billion in the American defence equipment and plans to spend roundabout \$150 billion in the coming ten to fifteen years and therefore is keenly considering the U.S. options (Abercrombie, 2018). These developments are only widening the suspicions between the two sides and more importantly pushing Russia closer to China and Pakistan.

### **6.2.1: Russia’s Warming up to China–**

Ever-since the end of the cold war, Sino-Russian strategic proximity has been keenly observed by think tanks and analysts throughout the world from different aspects like economic, political, strategic and military. The interactions between China, Russia and India, are crucial not only for their relations with each other but also for the strategically vital Indo-Pacific region (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015). Towards this end, India is no exception as the country’s security also depends on its time-tested partnership with Moscow which is currently tilting towards China. Already discussed in the previous chapters Russia and China have come together to a great extent. China being the arch rival of India and Russia its traditional ally, it is quite natural for India to be concerned about rising strategic

proximity between the two countries. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses a wide array of developments are unfolding and the prominent among which is the great power competition once again appearing on the international stage. Moscow and Beijing while realising these realities have side-lined their divergences to a large extent and are moving forward towards greater cooperation. India on the other hand responded by moving closer to the west especially the United States. In fact, India being a rising power has been dragged in the game of balancing and counterbalancing between the U.S. on one side and China and Russia on the other side. Amidst the strained relations between Washington and Moscow which are at loggerheads currently, it becomes difficult for India to maintain closer ties with both the powers simultaneously. Indeed in Russia's case, it has become more difficult for New Delhi to maintain closer cooperation with its traditional ally as it used to be previously. Russia's warming ties with Pakistan has added further concerns in already declining ties between Moscow and New Delhi.

The growing Sino-Russian strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific region has become a matter of great concern for India. It seems that China and Russia are viewing the Indo-Pacific as a grand chessboard where they can check and mate the U.S. and its allies, and friends. Russia in the current century is largely falling in China's line. Although it apparently, time and again maintains that its relations with China will not hamper its historical relations with India, however, its actions tell a different story. India wonders the extent to which Russia is willing to or being forced to accommodate China's strategic interests (Shukla, 2017). The accommodation of Chinese interests by Russia is having great consequences for India's interests which in future might increase depending on how far Moscow is going to put its eggs in Beijing's basket. Russia currently has joined hands with China in supporting Pakistan in multilateral forums and it seems that Moscow is no longer going to take sides between China and India. China has been successful in wooing Russia to its side.

China occupies a key position in Russia's pivot to Asia. The ever-increasing strategic partnership between the two is changing the balance of power in Asia which in turn is constraining Indian strategic interests. Although Russia has not yet joined the CPEC, however, it has shown its support for the project and has

recently shown willingness to link its Eurasian Economic Union with the CPEC which is largely seen as a game-changer. The rising Sino-Russian entente is overshadowing the Indo-Russian relations which in future might get more intense in case the disputes between New Delhi and Beijing remain unresolved depending upon the magnitude of the Moscow-Beijing strategic proximity. United States being the main reason behind Russia's rising strategic embrace with China also seems to be the main reason behind the declining bonhomie between India and Russia as New Delhi is increasingly engaging itself with the west especially with the United States. As the great power rivalry is once again coming to the forefront where Russia and China find themselves on the same page, both see each other as a potential backing force against the west. Against this backdrop, as pointed out by Unnikrishnan and Purushothaman (2015)–

If China and Russia become a bloc on their own, India's strategic options will be limited. It will either have to bandwagon with the Sino-Russian bloc or align with the US to counter the bloc. Given the current balance of forces in the world, balancing against China will only worsen ties between Russia and India, pushing Russia further towards China (Unnikrishnan & Purushothoman, 2015: 99).

Amidst such developments, if India engages itself extensively with the U.S., its allies and the West, Russia under China's influence might respond accordingly and may further drift away from India. In such a security scenario it will be quite difficult for India to maintain its strategic autonomy while responding to the developments.

### **6.2.2: Russia's Warming up to Pakistan–**

While responding to the changing Asian security dynamics Russia has made revisions in its South Asia policy. It has made positive overtures towards Pakistan which in turn lead to the gradual rapprochement between Moscow and Islamabad since the last decade. Previously, Moscow, while respecting Indian concerns was not having any military cooperation with Islamabad. However, the changing geopolitical realities have forced Russia to explore new horizons. As the American influence in Pakistan is waning, Russia the former adversary of Pakistan has entered the scene and is building diplomatic, military, and economic ties with Islamabad. These developments are leading in the direction of ending formal

alliances and bringing in new strategic partnerships. More importantly, Russia's recent shift in its policy might have wider consequences for South Asia especially under the aegis of Russia's pivot to East (Roy, 2014).

Amidst the active diplomatic engagement between the two sides since Russian PM Mikhail Fradkov's April 2007 visit to Pakistan, the Moscow-Islamabad ties gained momentum as between 2008 and 2012, the heads of the two states i.e., President Dmitry Medvedev and President Zardari met six times (Blank, 2012). Furthermore, the Quadripartite Summit between Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan in 2010 at Sochi was an important development as it provided Russia and Pakistan an opportunity to turn a page on their bilateral relations.<sup>3</sup>

The relations between the two sides got momentum in the backdrop of the deteriorating US-Pakistan relations, plans for NATO withdrawal, and Russia's realization of Pakistan's worth as a crucial player in the war-torn Afghanistan. Apart from this, Russian political analyst Andrew Korybko (2015) sees Pakistan as "the "zipper" of the pan-Eurasian integration" in that he believed that because of its geostrategic location Islamabad has the potential to zip together the massive economic blocs of the Eurasian Union, Iran, CPEC, and the SAARC (Korybko, 2015). The developments towards this end are under process as both China and Russia in 2015 have agreed to integrate the Eurasian Economic Union and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor thereby linking it with South Asia (Joshi & Sharma, 2017).

Meanwhile, the inhuman terrorist outfit ISIS's inroads in Afghanistan have also become a cause of concern for Islamabad and Moscow. Kremlin fears of the spill-over effect of ISIS into the Central Asian republics which in turn will undermine its security as Russia considers Central Asia its sphere of influence. Against this backdrop, Russia also seems to be holding talks with the Taliban as it wants to thwart the rise of Islamic State (ISIS) in Afghanistan by pitting Taliban against it. Pakistan having a quite significant influence over Taliban has also prompted Russia to improve its ties with Islamabad which is seen as a vital stakeholder on the Afghan issue. Another reason for Islamabad to engage Taliban is also to

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<sup>3</sup> The focus of the summit was on Afghanistan situation.

circumvent the strategic influence of the U.S. in the Afghan peace process. Islamabad is tactically using the Taliban factor in Afghanistan to secure its strategic interests and receive more strategic leverages from the contending powers.

While attempting to engage Pakistan on the side-lines of the U.S.- Pakistan issues and the growing differences between Russia and India, Moscow has lifted its arms embargo on Islamabad and signed a landmark agreement with Pakistan on 'military cooperation' in November 2014. In the following year, Russia agreed to provide Pakistan with four Mi-35 helicopters and also welcomed Islamabad to join the SCO, something which it had not supported a few years back. Further, Russia has sold engines to Pakistan for use in JF-17 fighter jets and also held joint military exercises with Pakistan. There are also reports that Moscow and Islamabad are negotiating the sale of Su-35 fighter aircraft among other things. Not only this both the sides also signed a \$2 billion deal for developing a gas pipeline from Karachi to Lahore (Yunus, 2018). It seems that Moscow apart from considering the geostrategic vitality of Pakistan in Afghan dilemma also uses "Pakistan card" thereby to force New Delhi to respect strategic commitment towards Russia (Frolovskiy, 2016). This comes in the backdrop of the declining Russian monopoly of arms transfers to India as latter's defence ties with the West especially the United States are on the rise.

In the changing geo-political realities Russia has left behind Indian concerns and has opened its doors to Pakistan. Although Russia earlier used to support India against Pakistan over terrorism issues, but now it wants to engage with Islamabad and jointly tackle the issue of terrorism. Dmitry Peskov– the Kremlin spokesman in February 2016 said "Russia highly values counter-terrorist cooperation with Pakistan as a key player in the field" ("Russia values Anti-Terror", 2016: para. 1). Peskov further said, "Pakistan is one of the key countries in the fight against terrorism. In this regard, Russia of course attaches great importance to cooperation with Pakistan" ("Russia values Anti-Terror", 2016: para. 2). For example, in case of unexpected terrorist attacks perpetuated by Pakistan, Russia has lately urged both to "resolve the issue through bilateral talks".

Recently, Russia demonstrated its strategic changes in its policy towards India when it opposed New Delhi's move in anti-terror financing meet in Brisbane— June 2015, demanding censure against Islamabad for its inaction against the terrorist organisations Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) & Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) (Chaudhury, 2018). Russia's changing attitude towards India can also be seen by its conducting of joint military exercises with Pakistan in September-October 2016, at the time when India and Pakistan were at the brink of a possible war on the issue of Uri attack carried out by the terrorist outfits in Pakistan. After this incident, India pitched for the diplomatic isolation of Pakistan but the fact is that its "traditional ally" left behind New Delhi's apprehensions and participated in its first ever joint exercises with Pakistan. Moscow's changed position on Islamabad continues to irk New Delhi's policymakers who are engaged in the efforts to diplomatically isolate Pakistan for being the terrorist sponsored country.

All these developments have raised the concerns of New Delhi. In fact, in the current strategic scenario, both the traditional friends— Russia and India are losing trustworthy partners and are gradually moving in different directions. Their relations are slowly moving towards a trust deficit. While looking at the developments especially since the beginning of the second decade of this century it seems that this mutual distrust is going to increase as both the sides are increasingly mustering their relations with each other's adversaries i.e., India with the U.S., and Russia with China and Pakistan.

### **6.3: Emerging Sino-Pak-Russo Axis—**

In the current security scenario what we are witnessing is the emergence of Sino-Pak-Russo axis. The main reason behind this is that the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, China and Russia and the increasing strategic proximity between Russia and Pakistan are coinciding with each other in changing power realignments in Asia. Apart from this, all the three powers China, Russia and Pakistan are witnessing deteriorating relations with the United States. Russia is facing the U.S. heat in Europe and China in the South China Sea and Pakistan over terrorism-related issues. In such a scenario both China and Russia are looking for allies and this is the area in which their mounting strategic cooperation is coming handy. Their rising strategic proximity gives a clear description of the

saying “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” in recent times. For these three countries coming together is the need of the hour in order to respond firmly to the U.S. strategic pressures.

As Russia seems to be the junior partner in the Sino-Russo strategic entente, China is dominating their bilateral relations. It is quite apparent that Russia because of its own interests in China is falling in the line. Chinese dominance of the bilateral relations between Beijing and Moscow is in no way amicable for New Delhi’s interests. Pakistan is gradually occupying an important position in Sino-Russian relations. Moscow’s strategic engagement of Islamabad with Beijing’s assistance is changing the South Asian status quo. As China and Pakistan are ‘all-weather friends’, both are engaging Russia to thwart the rise of Indo-US strategic embrace. China seems to be wooing Russia to adopt goodwill policies towards Pakistan. All this is constraining strategic options for India and the magnitude of which seems to be increasing as China and Russia are continuously boosting their strategic partnership.

Despite India being the close friend/“traditional ally” and the assurances given by it, Russia’s positive overtures towards Pakistan is changing the balance of power in South Asia (Kaushiki & Ramzan, 2015). Mitra (2015) argued’ “the mutual overtures between Russia and Pakistan are part of a greater shift in international relations” (Mitra, 2015: para.3). It is in the backdrop of their shared concerns that is setting the tune for the emerging axis between China, Pakistan and Russia.

Though, Russia officially denounced the reports of its intentions of joining China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it has not only announced its backing for the project but is also looking forward to connect CPEC with its Eurasian Economic Union project (“Russia throws its”, 2016). The project appears to be a main bugbear for New Delhi’s foreign policy as it also brings the Pakistan occupied Kashmir into its ambit. Amidst the mixed signals from Russia the longstanding bilateral relationship between New Delhi and Moscow is now running into the direction of uncertainty. Brahma Chellaney (2016)– strategic affairs expert, as reported in *International Business Times* (19 December 2016) said–

It is as if Moscow no longer sees India as a reliable friend or partner. Indeed, by seeking common cause with India's regional adversaries— including by supporting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor through internationally disputed territory and engaging with the Pakistan-backed Taliban— Russia is challenging India's core interests (Sarkar, 2016: para. 4).

Apart from this, the emerging Sino-Pak-Russo nexus is also raising its head in Afghanistan. A high level meeting was held on 27 December 2016, in which representatives from Beijing, Moscow and Islamabad took a serious note of rising clout of Islamic State (ISIS) in Afghanistan thereby undermining the regional security (Kaura, 2017). These countries are engaged in efforts aimed at facilitating a peaceful and meaningful dialogue between the Taliban and Kabul with the aim of settling the Afghan imbroglio. However, contrary to the world expectations, Afghanistan was not included thereby reducing its stakes drastically. Apart from this, the exclusion of India from the talks was a matter of shock for New Delhi as Russia was leading the talks. After sensing the criticism from Afghanistan for being excluded from the negotiations the members finally decided to incorporate Kabul, Tehran, and New Delhi also in the next meeting. As Kaura (2017), mentioned, “much to India's disappointment, the emerging axis between Moscow, Islamabad and Beijing seems to have put Pakistan in the driver's seat, according it greater control over the future of Afghanistan” (Kaura, 2017: para. 4).

In the current security scenario, Islamabad is having a win-win situation because Tehran and Beijing– Moscow's major partners in the region have also augmented their engagement with the Taliban. There are also reports that the current U.S. administration is also engaged in efforts to bring Taliban on the talking table, which is not a welcome sign for New Delhi as the later has always stood against holding any talks with the Taliban. India's future engagement with Afghanistan will be largely dependent on how Trump administration is going to deal with Afghanistan. If it continues with the previous policies, it will let New Delhi to go on with its policy of deeper strategic partnership and engagement with Kabul. These developments have given Pakistan an edge over its arch rival India, and have led the former into a more advantageous position than the latter. Islamabad, having a significant influence over the Taliban makes it a significant external determining factor of future Afghan scenario. This, in turn, enhances the vitality of Islamabad for extra-

regional powers engaged in enhancing their strategic foothold in this beleaguered country.

Apart from this, the incumbent U.S. President Donald Trump is looking forward to reduce the U.S. military involvement globally. Although the Trump administration initial instinct was to pull out from the war-torn country but he ended up in ordering the deployment of additional 4000 troops to Afghanistan in 2017. However, in the emerging security scenario, India's options would be constrained if America's new dispensation decides to reduce its focus on Afghanistan in the coming years (Kaura, 2017).

Notwithstanding with Russia's potential sales of weapons to Islamabad, New Delhi needs to take a serious note of the rising convergence of Moscow, Beijing, and Islamabad's interests over Afghanistan's evolving security situation (Roy, 2014) having regional implications. The Afghan imbroglio is having a significant impact on its neighbouring countries. Amidst, such a scenario, Russia is all praise of Pakistan (as made quite apparent by the statements of Russian officials like the Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in November 2014,<sup>4</sup> and the Dmitry Peskov– the Kremlin spokesman in February 2016<sup>5</sup>) for its counter-terrorism efforts and pledged to work with it ("Pakistan, Russia sign", 2014). All these developments prove an important shift in Moscow's Af-Pak policy that used to be the same as New Delhi's policy of condemning Islamabad for harbouring global terrorism. Such a shift in Russia's Pakistan policy can have a significant impact for the Indian subcontinent especially under the auspices of Russia's pivot to Asia (Roy, 2014). Russia's positive overtures towards Pakistan, is boosting its morale which has China (a greater contender in South Asian influence) already in its favour. The shift in Moscow's South Asia policy is denting the South Asian strategic and

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<sup>4</sup> "The Russian defence minister appreciated the skill and expertise demonstrated by the Pakistani armed forces in fighting against terrorism, saying the international community not only praised but wanted to do business with Pakistan now" Business Standard. (November 20, 2014). Pakistan, Russia Sign Defence Cooperation Agreement. Retrieved 18 September 2018, from [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/pakistan-russia-sign-defence-cooperation-agreement-114112001256\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/pakistan-russia-sign-defence-cooperation-agreement-114112001256_1.html)

<sup>5</sup> "Pakistan is one of the key countries in the fight against terrorism. In this regard, Russia of course attaches great importance to cooperation with Pakistan." Sputnik. (10 February, 2016). Russia Values Anti-Terror Cooperation with Pakistan– Moscow. Retrieved 18 September, 2018 from <https://sputniknews.com/world/201602101034506251-russia-pakistan-anti-terror-cooperation/>

military balance as it is putting Islamabad in a significant position vis-a-vis India. This has the potential to affect other countries too. Although the Indo-Russian ties are *sui generis*, New Delhi should be wary of the emerging axis that is partly driven by the security challenges following the NATO's draw-down from turbulent Afghanistan and partly by the Moscow's efforts at expanding its defence market (Gupta, 2017).

#### **6.4: Indian Dilemma and Response–**

The changing geopolitical power realignments have put India into a dilemma. New Delhi has become a country of great significance for the West especially for the United States. Washington sees New Delhi as a hedge against the rising clout of Beijing and pitches for using India to counter the challenge China is posing to its hegemony. Meanwhile, the U.S. relations with Russia are currently at all-time low since the end of the Cold War and both the sides are at loggerheads in Europe and Syria and in fact their rivalry is once again gaining ground in Afghanistan.

The vitality of India is such that both Russia and the United States want it to be on their respective side, but are also simultaneously choosing to ignore the vital strategic objectives of New Delhi. Amidst the strained relations of the United States with China, Pakistan and more importantly India's cold war ally Russia, New Delhi is facing it harder to respond to these developments. In the post Ukraine crisis it has become difficult for India to maintain balanced relations with Russia and the U.S. simultaneously.

Apart from this, China with its innovative strategies is wooing in the Asian neighbours especially the Indo-Pacific countries to its sphere of influence. Although, most of these nations are concerned about the rising clout of China and even are suspicious of China's hegemonic designs in the region, these nations are wary of their economic interdependency with China since it can negatively affect their exports as well as imports. India's South Asian neighbours are also falling in the line. China is increasingly involving itself in these countries through various strategies like the string of pearls, OBOR, maritime silk route, etc. Nepal, while responding to the new geo-political realities is leaving behind India and is increasing its strategic proximity to PRC. For instance, Kathmandu has recently

withdrawn from the first military exercise of BIMSTEC also known as MILEX-18, held in India (Sen, 2018). This development came as a shock to India. More importantly, Nepal is engaging itself in efforts to overcome its dependence on India and is, therefore, tilting towards China. With the aim to bring Nepal into its orbit of influence, China has opened its several ports<sup>6</sup> for Kathmandu to bypass New Delhi in its international trade (“China opens seven”, 2018). As far as other South Asian countries excepting Bhutan (where India still has upper-hand) are concerned, the People’s Republic of China has already gained ground in these countries. More importantly, the emerging Sino-Russo-Pak axis is affecting the South Asian balance of power.

While coming to India’s look-east now act-east policy, it was the then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who in 2011, during her visit to India said that India should not only look-east but should also ‘act’ and ‘engage’ east (Sajjanhar, 2016: 2). Subsequently, in 2014, the Narendra Modi-led government outlined the Act East policy. Now the problem is that the United States under Trump administration is taking some striking steps which are undermining the U.S. commitment towards the region. The leading example towards this end is the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). On the other hand, China under the aegis of belt and road initiative is enhancing its strategic outreach in this region. Amidst these developments, the success of India’s act-east policy has to face enormous challenges as it will need more resources from India in the absence of the U.S. active engagement in the region. China, on the other hand, is not leaving any stone unturned to fill in the vacuum the United States has created. All these developments have put India in a challenging situation.

The major dilemma for India in the current security scenario seems to be in its increasing ties with the United States. India fears that if the strategic embrace is taken further to a higher level, the U.S. might put India into a quagmire. As India is a rising power the United States is eager to entice New Delhi so as to secure its interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Washington wants to be on the top priority of Indian foreign policy options. Trump’s “America first” policy need not be associated

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<sup>6</sup> These ports include; Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang and Zhanjiang open seaports and Lanzhou, Lhasa and Xigatse dry ports

only with the notion that his administration wants to focus only on America at home but also that the American interests should reign supreme in the foreign policy priorities of other powers. America's India policy is a glaring example towards this end. The United States seems to be engaging India vigorously with the aim to limit Russia's sphere of influence in the context of India's foreign policy apart from seeing it as a large market and as a hedge against China's rising strategic posture. Like its other allies, the United States seems to be aiming to bring India to such a stature from where New Delhi can be successfully forced to dance on its tunes. India has been already given the 'major defence partner' and STA-1 status by the United States. This is despite the fact that India is a signatory of only three of the four control regimes<sup>7</sup> i.e., a pre-condition set by the Obama administration for granting India the STA-1 status (Samanta, 2018). Therefore, Trump administration has relaxed this key condition by granting New Delhi such status. New Delhi has also concluded two of the three foundational agreements i.e., LEMOA in 2016 and COMCASA in 2018 and is also expected to sign the third one i.e., BECA which stands for Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation in the coming years (Singh, 2018). The rising proximity of the two sides becomes evident from the signing of the series of key agreements in the past few years and thereby depicts the intensity of seriousness towards the closer cooperation. Through all these agreements the United States is gradually bringing India at par with its allies (but without formal assurances of security and safety) i.e., the position from where Washington could dictate terms for New Delhi.

Although coming closer to the United States has brought advantages for India in many respects but amidst the current geopolitical flux it has also put India into a sort of dilemma. As the U.S. has imposed sanctions on Russia it also wanted India to respect these sanctions and pressed New Delhi to not to purchase S-400 missile system from Russia. The Indo-US rising strategic proximity has already affected the Indo-Russian relations and now these developments are further alienating Moscow from India. Although India went ahead with the signing of S-400

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<sup>7</sup> Except the NSG, India is the member of the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Australia Group. The Trump administration relaxed a key condition by setting aside the Obama administration's decision that the STA-1 status to India will be granted only after New Delhi will secure the membership of all the above mentioned four control regimes (Samanta, 2018).

deal with Russia but it has adopted different mechanisms to bring U.S. in confidence. These include the invitation to the U.S. President Donald Trump to be the chief guest for India's Republic Day celebrations 2019 (which he has turned down); agreed to the implementation of Helicopter Operations from Ships other Than Aircraft Carriers (HOSTAC); cleared purchase of worth about \$2 billion 24 MH-70 Multi-role Ship-Borne Helicopters; expressed its desire to import a \$1 billion worth U.S. "missile shield" for safeguarding New Delhi against the 9/11-type terrorist attacks; and signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)<sup>8</sup> on September 6, 2018 during the "2+2" dialogue in New Delhi (Singh, 2018).

India currently seems to be in a fix as the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that on the purchase of S-400, no decision had been taken during the 2+2 dialogue between Washington and New Delhi ("India & US", 2018). Consequently, India went ahead in signing the deal, which in turn, irked the Trump administration and thereby led to the U.S. President turning down the Indian invitation to be the chief guest of 2019 Republic Day celebrations. Therefore, amidst the strained relations between the Pentagon and the Kremlin, New Delhi finds it difficult to maintain a balance in its relations with the two powers. Too close relations with the United States might lead to compromises in the Indian strategic autonomy.

On the other side of the spectrum, Russia won't be like a mere spectator and let its trusted friend and a cold war ally to fall in America's basket. As Washington and Moscow's relations blow hot and cold, Russia also pitches for LEMOA with India (Dutta, 2018) and for strategic reasons may also push for other agreements like COMCOSA and BECA in the future. While doing so, Russia has a strong case to make as it contributes more than 60 per cent of New Delhi's military hardware and it is the only supplier of long-range SAMs like SA-400, nuclear subs (SSNs), nuclear power plants to India and also assists in its space exploration (Singh,

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<sup>8</sup> The general agreement signed by the US is called the CISMOA that stands for Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement, however, the name was changed to COMCASA to reflect India-specific nature. COMCASA is the India-specific version of the CISMOA. COMCASA is meant to provide a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India that would facilitate "interoperability" between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secured data links. COMCASA allows India to procure transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for US origin military platforms like the C-17, C-130 and P-8Is. Currently, these platforms use commercially available communication systems.

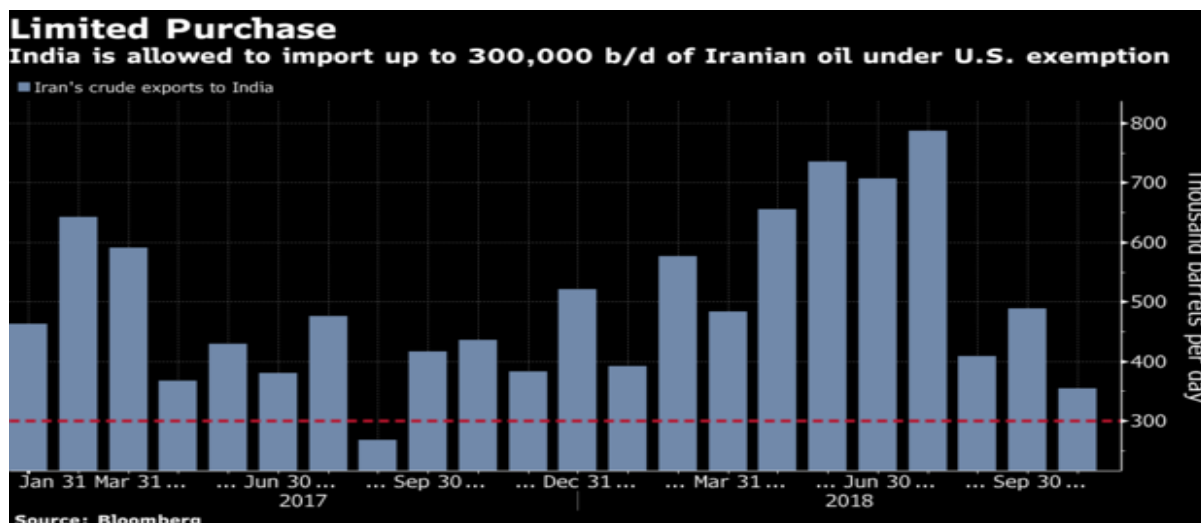
2018). Here, India seems to have become a balancing and counterbalancing field for the U.S. and Russia and this might become intense depending on how Washington-Moscow relations develop in the coming years. In the backdrop of India's rising strategic proximity with the United States which has provided India with over \$17 billion worth of arms in the last decade but hasn't yet done any transfer of technology, Indian diplomacy is witnessing a serious challenge in managing its strategic ties with its long-term partner Russia. Kremlin on the other hand, is still not only the largest arms supplier to India but also the only strategic platforms supplier like nuclear subs and the only power engaged in transfer of technology (Singh, 2018).

In the backdrop of above developments, the dilemma for the India is how far New Delhi will put aside Russian concerns of the growing strategic synergy between India and the United States? How far India can trust that the United States will not affect its strategic autonomy? To what extent the United States will substantiate military technology India receives from Russia?

Iran, which is also undergoing through the U.S. sanctions, has also become a major cause of concern for India. United States under Trump administration in May 2018, has withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal so as to pursue an assertive campaign to bring pressure against its atomic program. Washington had earlier asked New Delhi to cut down its oil imports from Tehran to zero by November 4, this year. While realising the ramifications of the U.S. sanctions on Iran, India actively engaged itself to receive a waiver from the U.S. so that the sanctions won't affect the Indian imports of Iranian oil. Initially, the United States reiterated that no waivers would to be given to anyone ("US says no", 2018). The Indian leadership which is currently facing protests at domestic level over the continuous rise of fuel prices finally got a sigh of relief as it was granted a waiver along with seven other countries for 180 days. India being the second biggest customer of Iran's oil will be one of the most affected country of a forced drop in oil supply because of New Delhi's relative proximity to Tehran ("the knowns and", 2018). Prior to sanctions India's average daily oil imports from Iran were 450,000 bpd in 2017 which has risen up to 560,000 bpd in January-October 2018, and under the

US exemptions, New Delhi will be allowed to import up to 300,000 bpd (see Figure 6.4) (Lee & Chakraborty, 2018).

**Figure: 6.4– Impact of Sanctions on Indian Oil Imports from Iran**



Source: Bloomberg. (06 November 2018). Iran oil waivers: how buyers are lining up after U.S. exemptions

Following the U.S. dictates on Iran issue, one would witness serious implications for India as New Delhi imports a large amount of oil from this energy-rich country. Apart from this, Iran is the only source that links India with the resource-rich Central Asian region. Iran is the destination of more than twenty three per cent of India’s energy imports and is prepared to take over the strategic Chabahar port’s management shortly, therefore, to get access to Afghanistan and the strategically vital Central Asia (Singh, 2018).

Therefore, the U.S. sanctions on Russia and Iran are going to have serious implications for the Indian geo-strategic interests in case India fully accepts the U.S. dictates and reduces its import of critical defence systems and oil to a large extent from these two countries respectively. Both Moscow and Tehran might respond to these developments by further drifting away from India and will look for partners and boost their strategic ties not only with each other but also with India’s adversaries China and Pakistan. Consequently, India might lose its long-term partner Russia and might also lose the strategic connectivity to Central Asian region as Iran may change its stance on Chabahar port for India.

Beijing and Islamabad's relations with Washington are already strained, which in turn, will only strengthen the emerging axis between China, Pakistan, Russia, and also Iran. The grouping of these powers will have a great impact on South Asian balance of power also. The signs towards this end have already started to take place. As the United States has turned its back towards its cold war ally Pakistan by moving closer to India, the Bear and the Dragon hugged Islamabad thereby providing it a much-needed support. All these countries are currently going through the strained relations with the United States which in turn is providing greater incentives to these powers to cooperate with each other. Therefore, the dilemma here for India is how far it can afford to let Russia and Iran fall in the Sino-Pak basket by moving closer to the United States? How far New Delhi can trust Washington as it has already some past experiences especially in relation to Afghanistan. The leading examples towards this end can be India's exclusion from Doha Peace talks on Afghanistan, and also from the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghan Peace and Reconciliation<sup>9</sup> involving the U.S., Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan. Apart from this, Washington's push for talks with the Taliban and also the U.S. recognition that without negotiating with the Taliban the Afghan issue cannot be solved has also raised uncertainty for India. The Trump administration has also pitched for direct talks with the Taliban so as to end the seventeen-year war (Mashal & Schmitt, 2018). In fact, it has been reported that a senior U.S. diplomat has held a meeting with the Taliban representatives in July 2018 in Doha (Ahmad & Sediqi, 2018). As any sort of negotiation with the Taliban will bring with itself the rising vitality of Pakistan– the development which India always opposed. Given the extension of Indo-Pak rivalry to Afghanistan, these developments have always haunted India.

Stabilising Afghanistan has become a major cause of concern for big powers U.S., Russia and China and all of these powers have realised the worth of Pakistan in bringing stability in this war-torn country. In fact, Pakistan has always been treated as a significant entity in most of the Afghan related talks which time and again has made New Delhi upset. Therefore, America's Pakistan policy in the handling of Afghan issue by giving significance to Islamabad has also created a dilemma for

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<sup>9</sup> The main objective of the QCG was to bring all the Taliban to negotiate or at least reconcilable elements (<https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/the-afghan-peace-talks-qcg-and-china-pakistan-role/>)

India over Washington's strategic commitments. It will be interesting to see from the Indian perspective that how far the U.S. will let Pakistan fall in the arms of China and Russia? As long as Afghan issue persists, Islamabad's vitality for the U.S., Russia, apart from China will be there. This is evident from the fact that all the three countries are holding talks with the Taliban for which Pakistan has a significant role to play. Although, US-Pakistan relations have strained, but Washington has to take Islamabad into confidence in case it wants any peaceful negotiations with the Taliban so as to relieve itself from Afghan burden. Pakistan having porous borders with Afghanistan accompanied by its influence over Taliban makes it an important external player in determining the future of Afghanistan which in turn makes it compulsory for the major powers China, U.S., and Russia to engage Pakistan in case they are to secure their interests (Ramzan, 2014).

Although, India needs the U.S. as an external balancer against China as on its own it cannot balance the rising clout of China but on the other hand, it didn't want to sacrifice its economic ties with Beijing. New Delhi also fears that the closer it moves to the U.S. the more assertive and vigorous policies Beijing would adopt against Indian interests. In fact, China has already engaged itself towards this end, like it has criticised the Indo-US civil nuclear deal<sup>10</sup> (Ramana, 2011), has engaged itself vigorously in India's strategic backyard, and is alienating India from Russia by strengthening its ties with the latter. Washington seems to be trying too hard to use India as a pawn in its China containment strategy as it is clear from the fact that India has been seen as a linchpin in America's rebalancing to Asia strategy (Panetta, 2012) and the current administrations increasing outreach to New Delhi.

Against the above backdrop, the prominent question that emerges is— in case of any eventuality between China and India how far the United States will support New Delhi by putting its economic interests in China at stake? India being weaker power in the triangular dynamics between the U.S., China, and India, is quite aware that amidst the shifts in Washington-Beijing relations New Delhi is going to be more vulnerable. Apart from this, the relatively declining America might be

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<sup>10</sup>China actively criticised the Indo-US nuclear deal especially from the prism of its regional implications for Beijing's strategic partner Islamabad, and opposed the agreement on the grounds that it is not equitable and pressed for a similar NSG exemption for Pakistan (IPCS Special Report 109, August 2011).

tempted to accommodate the rising clout of China so as to avoid the burden of balancing China's rise (Ramzan, 2014).

Another, dilemma for India seems to be coming from Russia's mounting strategic proximity with China and Pakistan. Here, the major challenge for India seems to be how far it can ignore Moscow's increasing cooperation with these two rivals? How far India can gain strategic assurances from Russia that by limiting its ties with the U.S., Moscow will reciprocate by limiting its ties with China and Pakistan? Although India is supposed to receive the Russian S-400 missile system, however, it will make no difference in its security against China as Russia has already delivered this missile system to Beijing. Previously, Moscow was reluctant to provide China with such defence systems but now the case is not the same. This dilemma has further increased with budding Russo-Pak defence ties and Russia's reluctance to take a tougher stance against Pakistan and more importantly by Moscow's increasing cooperation with China and Pakistan in war-torn Afghanistan. In fact, Islamabad has been recognized as a critical ally by Moscow for restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan (Kaura, 2018). Amidst the deteriorating US-Pakistan relations, resulting in the closure of all military exchange programs between the two sides thereby creating a void, Russia has stepped in to fill this vacuum. Indeed Moscow's rising proximity with China and Pakistan and the subsequent emergence of Sino-Russo-Pak axis seems to have lost the credibility of Kremlin's strategic commitments towards New Delhi. The reason towards this end is that Moscow has no longer remained that much vocal for Indian concerns as it used to be in the past. The changing geo-political realities have drawn India into a dilemma and have made it to think more cautiously about the pros and cons of its tight embrace with the United States.

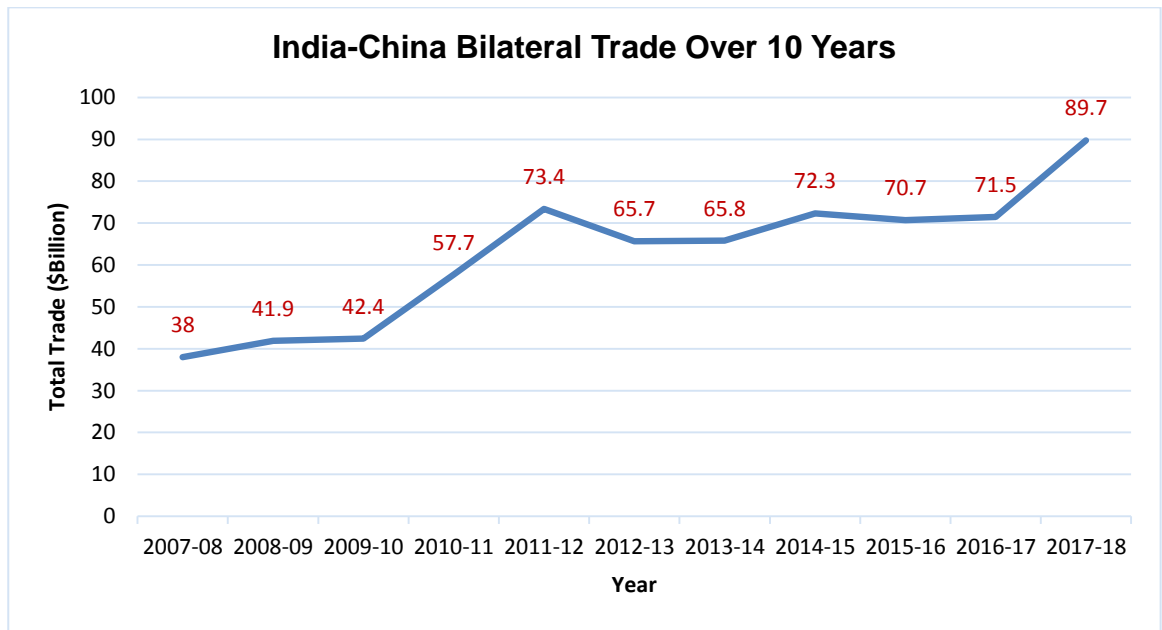
#### **6.4.1: Indian Response–**

The changing geo-political realities have made striking changes in the Indian foreign policy. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, India is cautiously playing its diplomatic cards so as to secure its interests. While responding to the changing Asian security dynamics, New Delhi has been maintaining its strategic autonomy, however; it is gradually becoming difficult as the great-power competition is becoming intense. Maintaining strategic autonomy has become an utmost necessity for India amidst

the changing contours of power relations and the re-emergence of the great-power competition. However, realising its increasing strength and the rising strategic posture, India while responding to the changing Asian geopolitical realities, wants to play the game according to its own strategic objectives. India's response to the emerging security dynamics especially the strategic designs of the big-three i.e., U.S., China, and Russia has been summarised in the following paragraphs.

India's rising strategic posture has made it a centre of attention alongside China for foreign policy priorities of many countries especially the U.S. and its allies and friends in Asia. Unlike the rise of China, India's rise has been considered as a peaceful and non-threatening one (Malone, 2011). More importantly, the West and other countries fearing the Chinese dominance of the Asian affairs support India's rise and see it as a counterweight to China's rise. New Delhi is also concerned about China's rise and its bullying which is evident through a series of increased border skirmishes between the two sides since the past few years. However, India never wanted to and in the future also will not want to catch the buck and thereby invite Chinese aggression. China from an Indian perspective is first a neighbour and relatively a strong one that the foreign policy establishment of India is loath to provoke (Curtis et al., 2013). Therefore, New Delhi has been cautiously responding to America's China containment strategy. In fact, it has increased its economic cooperation with Beijing which has become the largest trading partner of India. Notwithstanding the bilateral tensions over a series of issues like the CPEC, Beijing's blocking of New Delhi's bid to bring about a United Nations ban on J-e-M chief Masood Azhar, China's blocking of India's entry into the NSG, and the Doklam standoff, the Sino-Indian bilateral trade in the year 2017-18 has reached a historic high of \$89.7 billion (Figure 6.5 below) as per the data of Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2018. Apart from this, India is also involving itself diplomatically both bilaterally as well as multilaterally (like SCO, RIC, and BRICS, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS Development Bank now the New Development Bank) to overcome the bilateral disputes with China peacefully.

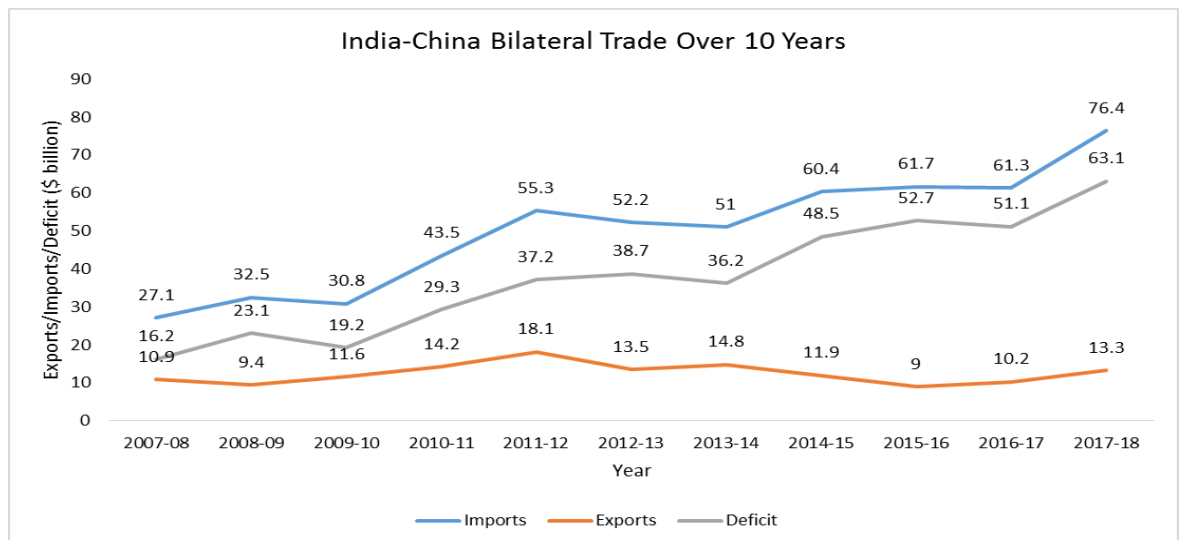
**Figure: 6.5– India-China Trade**



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India

On the other side, while responding to the trade deficit, which as per the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s 2018 figures have increased from \$16.2 billion in 2007-08 to \$63.1 billion in 2017-18 as shown in Figure 6.6 below. The two countries in September 2014, developed a Five-Year Development Programme for Economic and Trade Cooperation<sup>11</sup> aiming to promote Indian exports and thereby

**Figure: 6.6–Trade Deficit of India with China**



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India

<sup>11</sup> The programme aims to strengthen cooperation and achieve trade balance over the next five years by focusing on services, especially in information technology and related services.

reduce its trade deficit with China (Mallapur, 2018). Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Wuhan Summit on 28 April 2018 told his Chinese counterpart President Xi Jinping that Beijing should take steps towards opening its market starting with importing drugs, sugar and rice produced in India.

India seems to be responding cleverly by realising that it is the opportune time to pressurise China for bringing the trade deficit to lower levels as the latter is currently going through a trade war with the United States. In fact, the development towards this end seems to have taken place as China for the first time in May 2018 has removed tariffs on a number of anti-cancer drugs (“China agrees to”, 2018). Furthermore, New Delhi in July 2018 has imposed a 25 per cent safeguard duty on the import of Chinese solar cells for two years (Raghwan, 2018). More importantly, Sino-US trade war has raised a ray of hope for New Delhi’s exports like cotton, maize, and soya bean to China. The exports from India are expected to increase as China imposed tariff barriers on the U.S. products. Beijing has imposed a twenty-five per cent tax on American imports of cotton, which means that the Indian shipments are expected to increase (Mallapur, 2018).

As New Delhi cannot balance China internally, therefore the U.S. support as an external balancer became quite handy. The leading example towards this end can be the increasing defence cooperation between the United States and India, more importantly, the increasing naval cooperation. Naval cooperation stood at the heart of Indo-US defence ties as the triangular dynamics between India, U.S. and China is largely apparent in the maritime domain. In this triumvirate, New Delhi and Washington are enjoying closer ties with each other than they have with China and indeed their cooperation is becoming stronger day by day. The militaries of the two sides have held a number of bilateral exercises and multinational drills in the past decade. The senior defence officials of the two sides have been engaged in regular consultations. Security relations with India were seen as a stronger pillar of the Obama administrations Asia pivot policy. Ashton Carter– the former U.S. Secretary of the State viewed New Delhi as a natural partner of the vital “principled

security network”<sup>12</sup> that Washington has been building in the Asia-Pacific region (Weitz, 2017: 1). China factor has made the path easy for India’s rapprochement with the United States and in fact, for both the sides. India’s signing of the LEMOA with the U.S. from the Chinese perspective stood for an implicit military alliance of the two against Beijing in which New Delhi is explicitly playing the role of hedging (Aziz, 2017). Furthermore, the concluding of the COMCASA between India and the United States has further increased the anxieties of China.

India has also been boosting its cooperation with Japan, Australia, and France so as to secure its maritime interests and balance the Chinese hegemonic designs in the Indian Ocean region. New Delhi has also engaged itself in bilateral military exercises with these countries with the aim of countering Chinese strategic designs in the Indian Ocean. By engaging in bilateral and multilateral exercises, New Delhi is indirectly sending strong signals to China about its rising posture and influence. Here, also the China factor makes it easy for New Delhi to muster the much-needed support from these countries and the cooperation among these countries acts as a hedge against rising China.

As far as India’s response to the OBOR (which seems to be a game-changer in the twenty-first century) is concerned, it is still holding its head back over the joining in this initiative. China, while realising the worth of India, is pressing hard to bring the lateral on the OBOR bandwagon. In fact, Russia has also entered the scene by advising India to join the geo-strategically vital project OBOR (“Russia pitches for”, 2018). New Delhi’s criticism towards strategic Belt and Road initiative goes beyond the CPEC and indeed targeted the hidden objectives of China behind this project. In this regard, the recent statement of spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (05 April 2018) in which he reiterated the India’s stated position on the Chinese initiative is worth noticing. The statement goes as “connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognised international norms, good

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<sup>12</sup> The U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter in June 2016 called for the creation of a “principled Security network” in the Asia-Pacific, aimed at building an inclusive, stable, rules-based order in the region. Washington is encouraging the Asia-Pacific militaries to train, exercise, plan, and eventually operate together, with the goal of connecting Southeast Asia, East Asia, from Australia to Japan, into a self-reliant, regional network not dependent on American power— turning what right now a star network into a distribute mesh (Slaughter, 2017: 15). Slaughter, A. M. (2017). *The chessboard and the web: Strategies of connection in a networked world*. Yale University Press.

governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality, and must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018: para. 3). Furthermore, India has also been engaged in its own set of connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multimodal Project,<sup>13</sup> India, Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway,<sup>14</sup> Chabahar port project with Iran, and the proposed International North-South Transportation Corridor<sup>15</sup> (see Figure 6.7) (Pant, 2017). Apart from these initiatives, India has also adopted policies like the connect Central Asia, Act East policy, and port development projects such as Chabahar port in Iran, Trincomalee in Srilanka and at Paira in Bangladesh (Shepard, 2017).

**Figure: 6.7– North-South Transport Corridor**



Source: Boris Volkhonsky, North-South Transport Corridor Begins Functioning, Dec. 12 2016, [https://www.rbth.com/blogs/the\\_outsiders\\_insight/2016/12/12/long-awaited-north-south-corridor-close-to-launch\\_655489](https://www.rbth.com/blogs/the_outsiders_insight/2016/12/12/long-awaited-north-south-corridor-close-to-launch_655489)

Recently, in the backdrop of the growing voices against the exploitative nature of the Beijing’s projects, New Delhi apart from not joining the OBOR is also engaged in generating goodwill for alternative connectivity project “Asia-Africa growth

<sup>13</sup> Kaladan Multimodal project seeks to link India and Myanmar. The project envisages connecting Kolkata to Sittwe port in Myanmar, and then Mizoram by river and road. India and Myanmar had signed a framework agreement in 2008 for the implementation of this project. It’s yet to be finished

<sup>14</sup> The IMT highway will connect Moreh in India’s Manipur state to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar.

<sup>15</sup> The corridor is a ship, rail and road transportation system connecting the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran to Russia and North Europe.

corridor” (AAGC) that it floated with Japan. The outline of this project was formulated during the PM Modi’s visit to Japan in 2016. The Indo-Japan co-envisioned AAGC was announced on May 22-26, 2017 at the African Development Bank’s (AfDB) 52<sup>nd</sup> annual summit meeting in Gandhinagar, India. Interestingly, the announcement was made a few days after the May 14-15, 2017 China’s Belt and Road Forum meeting held in Beijing (Panda, 2017). Projected as an inclusive initiative with the objectives apparently directed against the Chinese projects, the AAGC is likely to receive \$200 billion worth of funding from Tokyo (Rajagopalan, 2017). The proposed corridor will link Africa with India and other nations of Southeast Asia and Oceania by reviving the ancient sea routes and developing new sea corridors. Indeed, New Delhi has founded a trusted partner in Tokyo, which is also concerned with Beijing’s strategic designs and is working on strategies to counter China’s Belt and Road initiative. The two heads while meeting in New Delhi in December 2015, issued a statement at the end of the talks in which they pointed towards “the synergy between India’s ‘Act East’ policy and Japan’s ‘Partnership for Quality Infrastructure” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2015).

While responding to America’s strained relations with Moscow, New Delhi is still maintaining closer ties with its long-term partner Russia. India’s stand on S-400 supply from Russia made it clear that New Delhi would not jeopardise its trusted partnership with Moscow. Washington after declaring India as a major defence partner in 2016 seems to be pressurising it to snap its traditional defence cooperation with Moscow by replacing it with the United States and thereby purchase more weapons from America. Furthermore, instead of buying failed U.S. PAC-3 interceptors,<sup>16</sup> India preferred to go ahead with Russia’s S-400 missile system and this seems to be one of the reasons that the U.S. wants to bring India under Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act 2017 (CAATSA)<sup>17</sup> (“India-U.S. relations”, 2018). Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in June 2018, during a press conference said–

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<sup>16</sup> Recently Turkey rejected US PAC-3 interceptor and opted for S-400

<sup>17</sup> CAATSA is a U.S. federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, Russia, and North Korea. It aims to counter the aggression by Iran, Russia and North Korea through punitive measures. CAATSA was enacted to punish Russia by sanctioning persons engaging in business transactions with Russian defence sector (Batachandran, G. 2018. CAATSA Sanctions and India. *IDS*)

in all our engagements with the US, we have clearly explained how India and Russia's defence cooperation has been going on for a long time and that it is a time-tested relationship. We have mentioned that CAATSA cannot impact the India-Russia defence cooperation ("In a snub", 2018: para. 4).

Finally, India once again proved its strategic autonomy by leaving behind U.S. sanctions threat and went ahead in signing the \$5.43 billion deal to buy five S-400 Triumf missile shield systems during the Russian President Vladimir Putin's India visit to attend the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Indo-Russian bilateral summit. Despite America's bid to capture the arms market of India, Moscow still is the largest arms supplier to New Delhi, accounting sixty-two per cent of India's arms imports over the past five years ("India-U.S. relations", 2018).

While coming to India's response to Russia's strategic proximity with China and Pakistan which led to the emergence of Sino-Russo-Pak axis, India has responded by strengthening its strategic cooperation with the United States. More importantly by diversifying its defence cooperation so as to overcome the over-reliance on Russia, India is boosting its defence ties with the United States, Israel and West European countries especially Britain, France, and Germany (Kaushiki & Ramzan, 2015). The quite significant fact is that New Delhi has become a "major defence partner" of the United States, a distinction which brings India to a level commensurate to Washington's allies and partners whereby it can have an access to a range of dual-use technologies. The annual defence trade which was around US \$1 billion in 2008 has by 2016 reached to more than \$15 billion (Topden, 2018). On the other hand, Russia although been the largest arms supplier to India, its share in India's arms imports is gradually declining. Russia's share has dropped from 79 per cent in 2008-12 to 62 per cent in 2013-17 (Topden, 2018) and by contrast, arms deliveries from Washington to New Delhi has increased "by 557 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17" (SIPRI Fact Sheet, 2018: 3). Apart from signing key agreements with the United States, New Delhi is supposed to carry out a Tri-Services Joint exercise with Washington off the eastern coast of India in 2019 and will be the only second such exercise India conducted with any other country after Russia (Gurung, 2018).

Apart from this, while responding to the Sino-Pak encirclement and their increasing proximity with Russia, New Delhi has been confidently finding allies elsewhere. While responding to the Sino-Russo-Pak axis, India has found a relief in the form of Japan, U.S., and Australia. India has engaged itself in strengthening its cooperation with Japan and the strategic convergence has brought it closer to the US. The two sides have recently concluded COMCASA (a military-information sharing pact) which will give New Delhi access to the American technology to keep a vigil on Beijing<sup>18</sup> and the neighbourhood, more importantly on the military deployments by Beijing and Islamabad. Apart from bilateral cooperation, India has also been engaged with these powers on trilateral formats like India-US-Japan and India-Australia-Japan (Eisentraut & Gaens, 2018). Recently, Australia has joined India, U.S., and Japan in a much-touted quadrilateral grouping—initially created in 2007 was revived in 2017<sup>19</sup> ahead of ASEAN and East Asia summits in Manila (Mohan, 2017). The main purpose of the Quad is to cooperate in exercising and enhancing the strategic outreach of the member countries across Asia— from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean (Soami, 2018). The revitalisation of the Quad came amidst the tectonic shifts in the geo-politics of the region as well as in the Asia policies of the member countries (Gale & Shearer, 2018). The main objective of the Quad seems to be maintaining the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region as China with its OBOR seems to be replacing the existing security architecture with a new one. New Delhi sees the reviving of the quadrilateral as an opportunity for the members to work for securing “a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region” (Panda, 2017). Therefore, New Delhi in the current security scenario is moving closer to these powers so as to get a strategic backing while responding to the mounting Sino-Russian proximity.

### **6.5: Challenges for India—**

As India is tilting towards the United States, Russia is also reforming its foreign policy priorities. The main reason for this is the United States which is bringing the

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<sup>18</sup> “For example, a US ship that would have picked up a Chinese submarine movement near the Malacca Strait would be able to transfer information like its speed, location and direction to the Indian Navy in real time” (The Economic Times, Sep. 07, 2018, India, US Ink COMCASA Deal at 2+2 Dialogue)

<sup>19</sup> The Quad demised in 2008 after Australia withdrew from it citing the increasing tensions between the US and China. However, the four powers re-launched the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2017 after a ten-year hiatus.

two former adversaries together. So, it is quite natural that this is also having a subsequent impact on the foreign policies of the U.S. allies and strategic partners and such impact might get more intense in the coming years depending on the magnitude of the great power competition. Therefore, India in one or the other way is also witnessing the brunt of this shift as it seems to be at the receiving end. Consequently, the mounting Sino-Russian strategic proximity has raised a wide array of challenges for India—

- The major challenge for India in the current security scenario is balancing its ties with the United States and Russia, which are currently at loggerheads. While looking at India's foreign policy towards these powers at a time of global flux, New Delhi seems to be attempting to sail in two boats simultaneously. And the fact is that India doesn't want to lose any of these strategic partners.
- Moscow's decision to provide Beijing with latest military technology S-400, SU-35 fighter jets and inviting China to participate in its largest military exercises— Vostok-2018 held in September 2018 underlines that Russia no longer sees China as a threat (Pant, 2018). This is not a welcome development for India, as Russia is greatly falling in China's line. Although India has signed a deal for the purchase for S-400 missile system, it is not going to have any great deal of impact in India's security concerns vis-à-vis China as the latter has already got the deliveries of S-400 to its stock. India's diversification in its arms imports seems to be one of the reasons behind Russia's selling of such technologies to China.
- Amidst the changing geopolitical realities there has emerged a divide between Moscow and Beijing on the one side and Washington on the other. The root cause of the problem for India is that it has important stakes in all the three countries. Washington since the past few years has been taking serious note of the increasing Sino-Russian strategic manoeuvring. It has indeed highlighted its concern over the Sino-Russian strategic designs in its recently published strategic documents (NSS, NDS, and NPR), and has vowed for a firm response. Washington has already

taken steps towards this end like sanctions on Russia, sending its bombers in the disputed South China Sea, holding Quadrilateral dialogue so on and so forth. All this has made the return of great-power rivalry much more possibility. Therefore, India's strategic autonomy under such a scenario will bear the brunt because it will be tested to a greater extent.

- Unlike the cold war era, currently Russia seems to be a junior partner of China in their bilateral relations. China's position vis-à-vis Russia further got strengthened as the latter is going through the Western sanctions and has pushed Moscow further towards Beijing. Against this backdrop, China's bargaining position in the Sino-Russian bilateral cooperation has increased many fold. This clearly relegated China to a dominating position in the bilateral relations, which is not a goodwill sign for India as China has time and again stood against Indian interests.

China's mounting strategic posture at the global stage may lead Russia to follow its lead. Beijing may woo Moscow in various dealings and agreements which may act against Indian interests. If in any case the rising proximity between China and Russia lead to the dependency of latter on the former, then their close cooperation in multilateral organisations like SCO, BRICS, and RIC would restrain India's strategic manoeuvring (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015).

- As India is pressing for a permanent seat in the UNSC, if in any case China and Russia come together to oppose its candidature it will mount to deadlock and New Delhi's chances for a permanent seat in the UNSC will be further blocked (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015).
- Russian reforms in its South Asia policy by warming up to Islamabad has also emerged as a cause of concern for India. As China is already deeply engaged in India's backyard, the emergence of Beijing-Moscow-Islamabad axis is also adding fuel to New Delhi's strategic ambiguities. Assigning Pakistan a key position by China and Russia in the emerging security setup of the subcontinent especially in Afghanistan is giving India a tough competition for its strategic manoeuvring in the region. Most importantly,

the emerging nexus between Beijing, Moscow and Islamabad have become a major bugbear for New Delhi and has become a major challenge for its policymakers.

- As the Asian security dynamics is undergoing tectonic shifts, New Delhi in the long-run will be “sucked in” the great power games of Washington, Moscow, and Beijing which it has been avoiding ever since its independence. Further, the joining of Russia in the Sino-Pak strategic grouping would require New Delhi an external balancer against the newly emerged China-Russia-Pakistan nexus. Amidst the soared relations of the United States with Russia and China and the emergence of great power rivalry, India being a rising power with its significant geo-strategic location will make it a fulcrum of the security dilemma. Any politico-strategic shifts in case of the great-power rivalry becomes intense, would set the stage for the division of South Asia into a system of alliances. The developments towards this end seem to be unfolding as we have the emergence of Sino-Pak-Russo axis. In such a situation India eventually would become a formal ‘linchpin’ of the US as it was stated in Obama’s rebalancing strategy (Nishtha & Ramzan, 2015).
- Moscow’s indulgence in diplomatic efforts aimed to accommodate the Taliban as a hedge against the dreadful ISIS that too in tandem with Beijing and Islamabad also might have unforeseen consequences for Moscow-New Delhi relations. Although Indian leadership is trying hard both publically and behind the diplomatic scenes to persuade Russian leadership that Pakistan is a terrorist sponsored country and the main source of spreading terrorism in the region, its traditional ally seems to be not convinced (Kaura, 2017). In fact, the Trump administration is also pressing for talks with Taliban and any sort of development towards this end means a positive fortune for Islamabad, the development which India doesn’t like. Although Washington has shown coldness towards Pakistan, however, its diplomatic efforts to bring Taliban on the table will require the support of Islamabad, which in turn might soften the U.S. attitude towards

Pakistan. Here, Pakistan seems to be in a win-win situation, it might get leverages from all the major powers i.e., U.S., Russia, and China.

- More importantly, the deteriorating relations of Russia with the United States has made India's balancing against the People's Republic of China difficult as Russia has tilted towards China to a greater extent and unlike previously it will be more difficult for India to bank-upon America against China, otherwise it will affect its ties with its long-term partner Russia. On the other side also, as New Delhi shines on the world stage, it needs to realise that the strategic component of its long-term relations with Russia is gradually deteriorating. Moscow in the current security scenario can only provide New Delhi with arms and can no more sustain its importance as a strategic counterweight to Beijing (Topden, 2018).

#### **6.6: Options for India–**

Although the Sino-Russian strategic entente has unfolded the plethora of challenges for India, it has also created a range of opportunities for it. As India is shining at the world stage, no power whether it is the U.S., China or Russia, can ignore India. In fact, these powers eagerly want to enhance their ties with New Delhi. Although China stood at the heart of the shift in the world focus from Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific, however, one cannot ignore the significance of India in the changing security architecture as it is also rising simultaneously. While realising the worth of India in making the Asian century a success China is enthusiastically calling India to join Xi Jinping's OBOR signature initiative. On the other side, with the aim of protecting the status quo, the United States and its allies are seeing India as a vital actor in restoring the status quo. Meanwhile, as New Delhi embarked on the diversification of its arms imports, Washington and Moscow are intensely competing with each other to grab the deals. While America is increasingly engaging itself with India which led to the concluding of some critical agreements, Russia can no longer afford to lose its historical partner. The options available for India to overcome the menace of Sino-Russo strategic embrace can be explained here:

- As the great power rivalry is once again gaining the ground, there are better chances of enhancing New Delhi's relations with Beijing. While responding

to Indian concerns on the trade deficit, China amidst its trade war with the U.S. is taking a serious note of Indian demands. Therefore, India needs to engage itself in developing a mutually-amicable trilateral cooperation among New Delhi, Beijing and Moscow so as to overcome the mutual distrust and uncertainty prevailing in its relations with China. It should put in place active policies that would lead to China's increasing dependence on India.

- The changing geo-political realities have put India into a better bargaining position especially with the diversification of its defence ties. Amidst such diversification New Delhi being the largest market and largest arms importer can make Russia respect its concerns while transferring any military technology to China. Therefore, under the auspices of its excellent military ties with Russia, India needs to look upon the policies through which it can persuade Russia not to equip China with such technology that would undermine its security.
- While coming to the multilateralism principle at the international level, India also sides with China and Russia for restoring multilateralism in the international domain. India clearly stands against the dominance of international affairs whether at the regional or the international level by a single power. Apart from this, in the current security scenario, most of the countries in the world especially in Asia are responding to the U.S. relative decline by jumping on China's bandwagon. India which is also making a significant impact at the international level because of its rising strategic posture can have better lucrative by joining the Sino-Russian grouping as both Moscow and Beijing want New Delhi to be on their side in the changing Asian geo-political scenario. Therefore, another option available for India is to join hands with Russia and China to foster the Russia-India-China axis as envisioned by the former Russian PM Primakov in 1990s, wherein he called upon the three countries to reshape the world order (Simha, 2015).

- Being seen as a counterweight to China's mounting strategic posture; India can have better leverages from the U.S. and its allies. India has already been given the major defence partner status by the U.S. and the latter has also signed critical defence agreements with New Delhi. Reviving of the Quadrilateral dialogue and the increasing cooperation with Japan provided an ease to India in counterbalancing the Chinese strategic forays in the Indo-Pacific region. However, with the help of the United States and its allies, India should deliberately make cautious efforts to balance the rising dragon as it is having economic stakes in China. India should use its closer cooperation with America only to enhance its capabilities without raising the eyebrows of China and should not lose its strategic autonomy (Mohan, 2013). Therefore, New Delhi should not catch the buck while balancing Beijing rather it should cooperate with these powers cautiously i.e., not in the manner that could invite China's wrath.
  
- Given India's rising significance for the major powers especially for the U.S., China and Russia which apart from drawing India into a challenging position, has also created opportunities for it. Under this rising importance, New Delhi will get more strategic leverages as the competition between these powers becomes intense. The developments in this respect have already begun as the competition between these powers has increased the bargaining position of India like in the defence deals with the U.S. and Russia, over trade deficit with China. However, the changing security scenario has put India into a position from where it cannot move too closer to either the U.S. led grouping or the Sino-Russian grouping. Therefore, in the current security scenario, India's interests can be best served by maintaining equidistant relations with Moscow and Beijing on the one end and Washington and its allies on the other (Kaushiki & Ramzan, 2015). While responding to the changing contours of power re-alignments, India needs to put in place active diplomacy, thereby secure its strategic interests. The need of the time is to press for multi-layered and diversified relations with China, Russia, and the U.S. As suggested by Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman (2015)–

India needs to follow a policy of multiple alignments and multiple partnerships, engaging Russia and China both bilaterally and multilaterally, but also engaging the West, ASEAN and other countries equally (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015: 103).

- The rising strategic posture of India and its closer cooperation with the United States seems to be one of the reasons for incorporating it along with Islamabad as a full-fledged member of the SCO. While becoming a member of SCO, India's connect-Central Asia policy can become much more effective and through this organisation, it can enhance its strategic forays in the resource-rich region. Furthermore, with its long-term partner Russia, India through the SCO framework can also check China's rising posture in this region. However, doing this is not a cakewalk for India. As far as India's strategic engagement with the energy-rich Central Asian region is concerned, a thorough understanding of Chinese and Russian strategies toward the region is required. In the backdrop of China's deeper engagement with Central Asia and Russia, India's strategic manoeuvring is getting more constrained. Therefore, an engagement with both the powers on part of New Delhi is needed that too at all levels— bilateral, trilateral and multilateral (Unnikrishnan & Purushothaman, 2015). Towards this end by getting the full-member status in the SCO, New Delhi seems to have jumped on the Sino-Russian bandwagon in the Central Asian region.
- Coming to the Chinese ambitious OBOR project, it has become a challenge for India and the like-minded countries and is seen as an attempt to change the Asian security architecture. CPEC is the most controversial part of the OBOR from an Indian perspective. In the backdrop of the rising concerns about the Xi Jinping's signature initiative, India found other partners in the shape of the U.S., Japan, Australia and other countries also who share the concerns regarding this game-changing project. This, in turn, has provided some ease to New Delhi and has enhanced its strategic proximity with these countries that are currently looking into new connectivity projects in response to the OBOR. Further, as Beijing is continuously urging India to join the initiative and recently Russia has also advised it to partner in the OBOR, joining the project might bring significant leverages to New Delhi

and might also enhance its strategic outreach among the OBOR countries, especially the Central Asian countries by banking upon its soft power. While coming to the success of CPEC as the geo-political game changer, time will tell how far it will serve the interests of Pakistan and China and how far it is going to benefit the participating countries. As its membership is open Indian think tanks should also see the options for joining the hands and enjoy the benefits. India's joining of the CPEC may to a large extent lead India and China to overcome the mutual distrust.

Thus, amidst the geopolitical flux, New Delhi finds itself in a challenging position while responding to the developments. Aspiring, for the major power status, India has gradually started to act as such because of its rising influence at the international level. The worth of India becomes clear from the fact of its rising significance for major powers in the changing geopolitical scenario. India, in order to secure its interests while responding to the emerging great-power rivalry needs to walk the tight rope well and while looking at the developments; the great-power competition is going to become more intense in the coming years.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The twenty-first century has been described as the Asian century because the continent is finding itself in a whirlpool of new strategic developments that is rapidly changing the existing Asian security architecture. The major actors like the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France, Japan, India, Australia, etc., are making striking changes in their Asian policies.

There have been important developments simultaneously. These are the relative decline of the U.S.; China's financial and strategic rise; Russian resurgence in South and Central Asia and Indian attempts to re-gain its position in South Asia and beyond. In the context of the Asian region, Beijing stood at the center of the changing contours of foreign policies of the respective countries within the region. On the other hand, India which is also rising simultaneously is rapidly becoming a center of attraction for these powers. China while taking the advantage of its rise is gradually changing the security architecture of Asia. Although the Chinese leadership and think tanks time and again reiterate that Beijing's rise is peaceful, however, its military buildup and assertive territorial claims in the South China Sea and the downplaying of the UNCLOS is widely seen as contrary to its claims of peaceful rise. Apart from this, its economic initiatives especially the "Belt" and "Road" initiative and the AIIB, is seen as an inherent hegemonic design of China. Indeed, Beijing's strategic designs under the aegis of these projects apart from its territorial claims have created a sense of insecurity among many countries. America's engagement in the long-drawn wars has made it easy for the People's Republic of China to stretch its arms of influence across the regions, as its rise remained unnoticed until recently. Furthermore, the relative decline of the United States because of its imperial overstretch, global financial crisis, and more importantly, the rise of the rest has enhanced China's position vis-à-vis America. Amidst such a scenario, the United States was called upon by its allies and friends in Asia to take a serious note of China's rising posture as they became suspicious of the U.S. security commitments. Against this backdrop, Washington started to take counter strategic moves to counter China's rise. This led to the Obama administration announcing its Asia rebalancing strategy. The current U.S.

government under Trump administration is also embarking upon the policies to counter Chinese strategic designs. In fact, it has gone ahead from the previous administration in being more blunt and hawkish towards China. In its recently published National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, the Trump administration has described China as a strategic competitor and both the sides are currently engaged in a trade war with each other wherein the U.S. has imposed tariffs on Chinese goods amounting \$250 billion and China in response has imposed tariffs on the U.S. goods amounting \$110 billion. Not only this, the United States in order to tie down China's rising clout is strengthening its ties with its allies and friends as was made clear in its recently published strategic documents. India occupies a key position towards this end. All these developments have raised the Chinese concerns.

Russia's strategic partnership with China has further enhanced the latter's strategic outreach especially in Central Asia and has boosted its morale. Russia after going through the several failed attempts to improve its ties with the United States has tilted towards China which is also having problem with the American hegemony. The pace in Russia's tilt towards China gained momentum in the post 9/11 period, with the establishment of the U.S. bases in Central Asia, the American based color revolutions, which finally, with the help of China led to the SCO asking the U.S. for vacating the Central Asian bases and the Georgian conflict. Finally, the Ukraine crisis dealt a serious blow to the already strained relations between the U.S. and Russia amidst the U.S. imposition of sanctions on Moscow and its suspension from the G8. It was in this backdrop that Russia boosted its 'pivot to east policy' in which China occupies a significant position. From the Russian perspective, America no longer wants to see Moscow revive its past glory and therefore is applying all means to contain Russia.

While concerned about the U.S. hegemonic designs and its dominance of international affairs, Moscow and Beijing apart from their respective issues with the U.S. found each other at the same end. Therefore, both sides joined hands to press for the multilateral world order and in the meantime, multilateralism became a slogan for both the sides while coming to the settling of international issues. China and Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has largely overcome the divergences that

use to hamper their relations and has moved from adversaries to strategic partners. The major factor in bringing the two sides together is the United States. The successive U.S. administration's policies towards China and Russia have boosted the Sino-Russian Strategic cooperation. Moscow-Beijing cooperation, especially since the second term of Obama's presidency has got strengthened. Presently, with the Trump administration at the helm of affairs, the strategic partnership between the two Asian giants has reached its zenith. Trump administration as mentioned in the recently published U.S. policy documents NSS, NDS, and the NPR, has taken a serious note of Russian and Chinese policies and their mounting strategic cooperation aiming to change the security architecture by changing the status quo.

As Russia is going through the process of resurgence, China is engaged in extending its sphere of influence in Asia and the United States is working to secure its hegemony amidst the rise of other powers, their interests largely overlap. This, in turn, has led to the emergence of intense balancing and counterbalancing among these powers. While coming to the balancing traits of these powers, it has resulted in the emergence of a new triangular dynamics between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. Russia, which is relatively weak vis-a-vis the U.S. and China in this triad, its strategic cooperation with China is proving to be a double-edged sword for it. From Moscow's perspective, by joining hands with China it is balancing the United States as well as simultaneously keeping a check on China's strategic designs in its backyard. Most important, among these developments is Sino-Russia balancing against the United States which is occurring both at the individual level as well as in cooperation. Not only this, the two sides have engaged the United States on two different fronts like China has engaged it in the South China Sea and Russia in Europe. Apart from this, both China and Russia are largely taking a joint stand as far as the decision-making process of the UNSC is concerned. The Syrian crisis is the recent example in this regard. While looking at the developments in the Sino-Russian strategic entente it seems that their cooperation has moved beyond the axis of convenience as the two sides have increased their cooperation in almost all spheres like economic, political, strategic, military etc.

The current U.S. administration under Trump's leadership seems to have accepted its relative decline under its newly published national strategic documents wherein it has talked about its 'strategic atrophy' in international domain. It is against this backdrop that Washington has vowed to take necessary steps towards countering Chinese and Russian strategic designs. The revival of the Quadrilateral grouping (comprising the U.S., Japan, Australia and India) and signing of critical military agreements with India can be cited in this manner. U.S. along with NATO is flexing its muscles in the Eastern Europe by conducting military exercises so as to thwart Russian strategic designs and has also tightened sanctions on Russia. On the other end, Trump administration is coming tough on China by sending its warships in the disputed territories and has also launched a trade war against China. Therefore, the mounting China-Russia strategic proximity, which is gradually reshaping the security architecture by replacing the old one in which Washington enjoys a dominant position has become a major cause of concern for the West especially the United States.

The rising synergy that China and Russia is displaying in the international politics was unforeseen completely. In fact it was believed that their strategic partnership is not going to last long, because of inherent problems, however, their partnership is becoming stronger in the ensuing years. This partnership has put the United States on tenterhooks since the past few years. Washington is responding to the Moscow-Beijing entente by locking its horns against these powers whose partnership has now extended to South Asia also as India and Pakistan has been accorded full-fledged status in the SCO. Apart from this, the two sides are also increasingly engaging themselves in Afghanistan. In order to show their strength and commitment towards their strategic partnership to the U.S. and its allies, both the powers have been conducting joint military exercises. Amidst the balancing and counterbalancing traits of the U.S. on the one side and Russia and China on the other side, the Indo-Pacific has become a grand chessboard for these powers. This, in turn, has resulted in the emergence of great-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region. Both the sides in order to enhance their position against the other are in search of partners. Towards this end, Sino-Russian strategic partnership seems to be cashing-in quite tactically by warming up to the countries with which

the United States relations are getting strained. Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are the recent examples in this respect as China and Russia are enhancing their cooperation with these powers and currently, Russia especially is working towards getting a strategic foothold in Saudi Arabia. All this is changing the Asian security dynamics.

Amidst the changing Asian security scenario, the foreign policies of the major powers are witnessing striking changes and are adjusting their foreign policies accordingly. Against this backdrop, India, which is also a rising power with great strategic significance, is not an exception as its foreign policy has also undergone significant changes. While responding to the changing geopolitical realities, India has also been cautious in order not to get entrapped between the great power rivalries which have already unfolded serious challenges for its strategic interests.

As Sino-Russian strategic entente has also expanded its wings of influence towards South Asia it has created a sense of uncertainty for India. Russia being the long-standing partner of India and China its rival, it is quite natural for New Delhi to be concerned about the rising Sino-Russian proximity. India cannot afford to lose its well trusted and time-tested strategic partner. The mounting Moscow-Beijing synergy is gradually overshadowing the Moscow-New Delhi relations. India is also skeptical about the Russian accommodation of China and now Pakistan, the neighbors with which India is fighting a two-front war. Furthermore, the emerging Sino-Russo-Pak axis has relegated Islamabad to a central position. India has responded by enhancing its ties with the U.S. and its allies, especially with Japan.

Amidst the changing geopolitical realities both India and Russia has diversified their relations. The only problem is that the powers they have decided to strengthen their ties form the adversary of the other like the U.S. is the adversary of Russia and China of India in the emerging geopolitics. This, in turn, has led to the increased skepticism in their bilateral relations. The changing geo-political realities have forced both the sides, to strengthen their strategic partnerships with each other's adversaries. In case the great-power competition becomes intense the Indo-Russian long-term partnership will be tested to a great extent.

While realizing its rising strategic posture, New Delhi has started to respond accordingly. Adjusting to the changing realities has become a challenging task for India. In the backdrop of China's rising strategic outreach in Asia and its mounting strategic entente with Russia, and Washington's strained relations with Russia which are becoming worse with the passing years, India is lately finding it difficult to maintain a balance in its relations with the U.S. and Russia simultaneously. As the developments in the grand chessboard undergo change, New Delhi would no longer be able to just sit on the periphery and carry out its policies that probably please the strategic ego of all the contenders. In the current scenario, it has different tasks ahead as it has not only to manage Beijing's rising power but an ever-increasing China-Russia strategic alliance; America which is going through a relative decline though working to contain both Russia and China and their rising strategic proximity. Not only this, it also has to carve out policies carefully in the wake of Moscow-Islamabad rapprochement and its neighbors who are drifting away from it under the rising strategic inroads of China in its backyard.

While coming to India's position in the emerging security scenario, its rising strategic posture is welcomed by the west and almost by all the Asian countries with some exceptions, and has become an effective power. As India's response to the changing geo-political realities is concerned, it is gradually moving from a swing state to a major power. New Delhi, on the one side has been strengthening its defense ties with the U.S. at the cost of its relationship with its trusted friend Russia and on the other hand it has downplayed the U.S. sanctions threat by going ahead with the signing of S-400 missile system deal with Russia, and had also responded quite enthusiastically over the Doklam standoff with China. India seems to have sent a clear message to these powers that when it comes to core strategic issues, New Delhi will no longer be dictated by the terms of other countries. India is also enhancing its relations with these major actors of the grand strategic chessboard. Furthermore, while responding to the developments especially the emerging great-power competition, India has embarked on multiple alignments as it is enhancing its relations with the U.S., Russia, and China simultaneously but short of balance between these relations.

While coming to India's strategic autonomy and the geo-political opportunities, it has been a tough task for it to respond to the emerging developments by walking on the tight rope in securing both. So far New Delhi has walked the tight rope very carefully however, the developments that are unfolding since the past few years are going to make it more difficult for India to secure its interests. In case the relations of the United States with China and Russia become more adverse, India cannot stay away from the developments and will be dragged into the game of power politics between these powers.

### **7.1: Main Findings–**

- ❖ China and Russia have risen above the differences and have moved from strategic adversaries to strategic partners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ❖ The rising Sino-Russian proximity is challenging the U.S. dominance and is reshaping the Asian security dynamics.
- ❖ As the U.S. factor stood at the heart of the mounting Sino-Russian strategic entente, therefore, Washington can lessen the strength of their partnership. However, as China and Russia are increasing their political, military, energy and economic relations, it might be difficult for America to negatively affect the Sino-Russian partnership after a decade, because by that time their relation will be much stronger in case the U.S. continues to bully these powers.
- ❖ The United States has engaged itself in countering the Russian and Chinese strategic designs which in turn has resulted in the gradual emergence of the great-power competition.
- ❖ The Changing geopolitical realities especially Russia's increasing partnership with China and also its cozying up to Pakistan has become a major cause of concern for India.
- ❖ America's strained relations with Russia have also put India into a tough situation from where it has become difficult for it to simultaneously balance its relations with both.
- ❖ Amidst the gradual emergence of great-power rivalry, India can no longer remain aloof from the developments as it is having significant relations with

Russia, America, and China. This, in turn, is making it a challenging task for New Delhi to maintain its strategic autonomy.

- ❖ India because of its rising posture with wider global acceptance has gradually started to act as such. While responding to the changing security dynamics, in which the U.S. is becoming tough on Russia and China so as to prevent them from undermining its strategic dominance, New Delhi is gradually shifting from a swing state to a major power state as it has started to embark on multi-alignments by boosting its ties with all the three powers.
- ❖ Amidst the geopolitical flux which is gradually becoming more complex, New Delhi has so far walked the tightrope so carefully between the strategic autonomy and geopolitical opportunities. While looking at the developments in the U.S. relations with China and Russia, it will become a more challenging task for India prevent itself from being exclusively dragged into the great-power politics in the coming years.

## **7.2: Recommendations–**

### ***Maintain a strategic balance between the United States, Russia, and China–***

As the U.S. relations with Russia and China are becoming worse, these powers are engaged in balancing and counterbalancing traits, which, in turn, have resulted in the changing power realignments. Amidst such a scenario the two sides (i.e., Washington on the one side and China and Russia on the other side) are searching for partners and India seems to be the most important option for both the sides. Therefore, in such a scenario India needs to boost its relations with all the three powers to secure its strategic interests. However, maintaining a balance in relations doesn't mean that it should bring its relations with the U.S. and China at par with Russia rather it should work towards enhancing its ties with these powers in a manner so that it won't hamper its relations with any of these powers.

### ***Utilize the emerging great power competition to its advantages–***

As International Politics is witnessing the gradual emergence of great power rivalry and the Trump administration is adding fuel towards this end by coming harder on both China and Russia, options for India are narrowing down. On the contrary, Moscow and Beijing are responding by their own strategies both individually as

well as jointly. In such a scenario New Delhi enjoys a significant position because of its rising posture as both the sides want it to be on their side. This, in turn, has enhanced the bargaining position of India against these powers. Therefore, New Delhi needs to embark on a more realist policy by actively managing the great-power competition to its advantage.

***Strengthen its position in the subcontinent–***

As the Indian sub-continent and its neighboring regions are greatly falling in China's basket, India needs to make revisions in its policies especially its South Asian policy so as to strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific region. India needs to engage itself more actively towards enhancing its position in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, apart from countering the China's ambitious "one belt one road" initiative by joining hands with Japan, U.S., and Australia, it should also consider its options for joining the OBOR on terms and conditions that would be acceptable to both, as it can bargain more from China which is currently at loggerheads with the United States. Joining the Belt and Road initiative might open the roads for India to engage more actively in the Indo-Pacific region.

***Avoid steps to become too entangled with either of the emerging bloc i.e., the U.S. on the one side and China and Russia on the other side–***

Amidst the changing power re-alignments, India's interests can be best served by avoiding steps to become too much entangled with either of the two sides. More importantly, New Delhi should avoid steps of becoming a pawn in the White House's China containment policy otherwise; it will antagonize its assertive neighbor and will jeopardize its relations with it. On the other hand, India though became the full-fledged member of the SCO; it should avoid steps to become too much engaged with this Sino-Russian dominated grouping thereby taking any steps that might antagonize the U.S. core interests.

***To maintain its strategic autonomy–***

The most challenging task for New Delhi in the current security scenario is to maintain its strategic autonomy. India since the past few years has been managing the strategic pressures from China, Russia, and the United States as both Moscow's and Beijing's ties with Washington has strained and on the other hand,

their strategic partnership has become stronger. Any initiative of New Delhi towards anyone of these powers is seen with great uncertainty by the others, for example, India's signing of defense agreements with the United States has been viewed as inimical to the interests of both China and Russia for their respective concerns. Likewise, India's concluding of S-400 missile system deal with Russia has irked Washington. So far, New Delhi has secured its strategic autonomy. However, as the great-power competition is becoming intense, India will face intense challenges in maintaining the same. Therefore, New Delhi needs to be extra cautious while responding to the strategic moves of these powers on the grand chessboard that has unfolded in the Indo-Pacific region.

### ***Revisit its long-term partnership with Russia–***

The Indo-Russian relations in the twenty-first century are under a cloud and are on decline amidst India's mounting relations with the west. A sense of anxiety is gradually increasing in the "all-weather" friendship as both the sides while responding to the changing security dynamics are moving in different directions. Under such a scenario Russia's increasing partnership with China and now also with Pakistan has become a major cause of concern for India. Therefore, Indian policymakers need to explore new areas of cooperation with Russia so as to regain its strategic leverage. While looking at the developments that are unfolding since the past few years, re-articulating India's foreign policy has become an utmost necessity in case India wants to prevent Russia from falling in the Sino-Pak grouping. The signing of S-400 deal is not enough; more is needed as the current geopolitical flux is going to become more complicated.

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