
Strategic Triangle among Russia, China and India: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The notion of Strategic triangle comprising of Russia, China and India was used by former Premier of Russia Mr. Primakov, when he visited India in 1999. The strategic triangle is an inherently restricted triangle, with the degree of its restriction varying in different situations. The more restricted the strategic triangle is the less effective the triangulation and the pivot leverage would be, and the less restricted the strategic triangle is, the more effective the triangulation and the pivot leverage would be. So a countrys national role conception and triangular role conceptions vary from time to time. This was evident in the triad of Soviet Union, the US and the China during 60s and 70s of the last century. In this article attempt has been made to test the nature of strategic triangle of Russia, China and India on theoretical model. The article concludes the despite several challenges, there is a convergence of interests and common vision for these three states to work together towards the creation of the multipolar world. The emergence of such a triangle, if and whenever it takes place, would alter the global strategic balance in a strikingly significant manner.



The notion of a 'Strategic triangle' comprising of Russia, China and India was used by the former Premier of Russia Mr. Primakov, when he visited India in 1999. Vladivostok Trilateral Meet [2 June 2005] and Beijing conference [16th to 17th June 2005] and various

trilateral [ninth trilateral meeting held on 28 October, 2009 in Bangalore] and bilateral summits and meetings of other levels have furthered the process of crystallization of the potential triangularity of these powers. The three emerging economies, that together comprising 20% of the global landmass and

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represent 39% of the global population hold great strategic potential at regional and global levels. "The emergence of such a triangle, if and whenever it takes place, would alter the global strategic balance in a strikingly significant manner."¹

The basic concept of a strategic triangle was associated with the triadic relationship among the US, the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the 1960s and 70s of the 20th Century. "For a long period, the three major powers of the world — China, the United States, and the Soviet Union— have found themselves involved in such a relationship".² Whatever was its importance of such a triad at the international level, it attracted debate, discussion in the academic and in the political arena. Triangular relationship as a strategic tool assumed importance among various countries of the world.

Strategic triangle had regional dimensions too. Rivalry between the great powers prompted them to acquire regional spheres of influence; the regional powers also needed the support of the great powers in their quest for power and security at the regional level. This interdependent relationship was a mixed blessing for both the sides. By involving

themselves in regional conflicts that had little bearing on their national security, the great powers sought to establish their own spheres of influence, thus improving their strategic positions. While benefiting from the support of the great powers to advance their regional interests, the regional powers also had to support the global objectives of the great powers that were not their immediate concern. In the post-cold war years, when the US emerged as the pre-eminent global power in a world, that many thought would become unilateral, the triangular relationship among India, China and Russia assumed significance, it was referred to as a 'strategic triangle' to counter-balance the US and ensure the evolution of a multilateral world.

This article argues that for the evolving triangle of Russia, China and India, bilateral relations between India and China, India and Russia, and Russia and China will work as a conditional variable for the crystallization and consolidation of the triangle. Vibrant bilateralism among the three countries will provide the 'enabling condition' or 'catalytic condition' for achieving the objective of strategic triangularity.

Many scholars have written on the triangular relationship among great powers. Among the best of these are

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Michael Tatu, "*The great power Triangle: Washington - Moscow-Peking* (Paris: Atlantic Institute, 1970), Thomas M. Gottlieb, *Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic Triangle* ((Sante Monica: RAND R. 1902 NA, November 1977), John W. Graver *China's Rapprochement with the United States, 1969-71* unpub. (Ann Arbor Mich, 1979), Banning Garrett, "*China Policy and the Strategic Triangle*" in Kenneth A. Oye, Donald Rotchild, and Robert Lieber, ed. *Eagle Entangled: US Foreign Policy in the Complex World* (London and New York, Longman, 1979). To understand the dynamics of triangular relationship of great powers which could have strategic behavior at both the levels, i.e., global and regional, compound triangular model is of great help.

According to Martin Wight, the ideal characteristics of a triangle at the state level are three:

- The existence of a state system,
- Three great powers of about equal strength within the system, each of which possesses enough power to dominate the rest of the world in the absence of the other two, and
- A situation in which, because of mutual suspicion, tension, and hostility, no coalition, even a temporary one, can be formed

between any of the two of the three great powers.³

Three different systemic patterns of exchange of relationships are conceivable, i.e.,

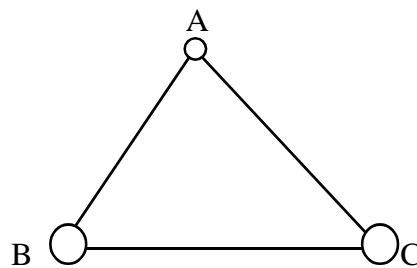
i. The *ménage a trios*" (household of three) consisting of symmetrical amities among all three players,

ii. The romantic triangle consisting of amity between one "pivot" player and two 'wing' players but enmity between each of the latter, and,

iii. And the "stable marriage", consisting of amity between two of the players and enmity between each and the third.⁴

The strategic triangle among the US, the Soviet Union and China provided enough *raison d'être* to formulate and test the model of triangularity of powers. For Theodore Caplow China was much weaker than either of the two superpowers, which were about equal in terms of strategic weight. This is the Type 3 of Caplow's eight types of triads.⁵

Where $B = C$ & $A < B$



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According to Caplow, State A can strengthen its position by forming a coalition with either B or C and will in turn be welcomed as an ally by either B or C. And if B forms a coalition with C, and B does not really improve its pre-coalition position in which it is equal to C and superior to A. B's only objective to join C is to prevent the formations of A-C coalition. On the other hand, C will have the same approach as that of B. C will prefer A for coalition than B. Therefore, there are only two likely coalitions — A-B and A-C. For A, B and C it is essential to make coalition, with either of the two to get success in the competition for power. With the passage of time, all possible coalitions are likely to occur. But in the terminal situation, the only likely coalition is between B and C which will lead to a dyadic equilibrium after partitioning A. A has little chance to form a coalition with either B or C because, A will easily fall prey to its partner after the triad becomes a dyad.

To understand the dynamics of triangular relationship, T. Caplow has evolved several propositions - his first proposition says that the tendency towards a coalition or collusion between two of the three poles and the fear of this tendency in each pole constitute the main dynamic of the triangle.⁶

In the triad, A [in the given diagram] is much weaker and more vulnerable. But its coalition with either of two superpowers can benefit far out of proportion to its real status. This benefit will be more which two great powers are in contention⁷ to each other. This proves that the weak pole's position in a triangular situation can be improved greatly through manipulations. This was applicable in the case of China's position in 60's and 70's, when the Soviet Union and United States were much more powerful.

When we apply this proposition to the proposed triad [i.e. of Russia, China and India], India becomes the weakest pole. But its coalition, either with China or Russia may make it powerful enough to enjoy some leverage. Here India's coalition with the former [China] is least possible, whereas with later it has had very good strategic relationship. According to T. Caplow there is also a negative aspect of a weak power of a triad— the weak pole in a triangle that contains two strong poles is not only the most susceptible to the impact of balance shift in the triangle, but also able to benefit far out of proportion to its real power through triangulation.⁸

Below are the various positions in which the weak pole may locate its

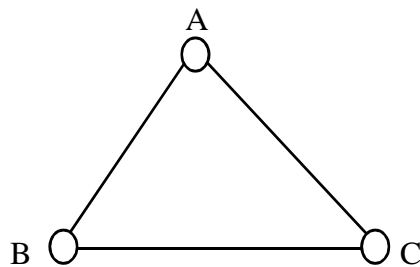
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positions, [based on Sheldon Stryker and George Psathas Pachisi triadic game series of Caplow's Type 3 triad]. Following could be different positions.⁹

First Series

Condition: Any coalition allowed

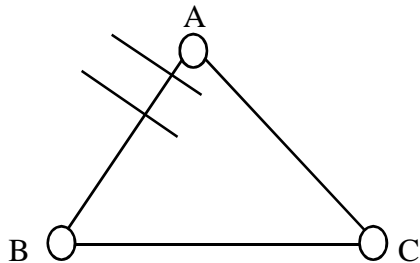
Outcome: Equal frequency of AB, BC and AC coalition.



Second Series

Condition: A B Prohibited

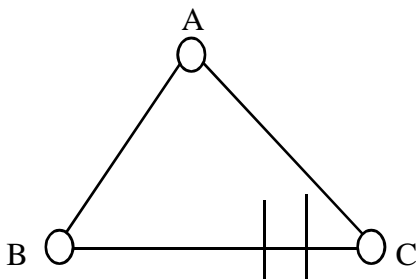
Outcome: AC Coalition, two out of three times.



Third Series

Condition: BC Prohibited

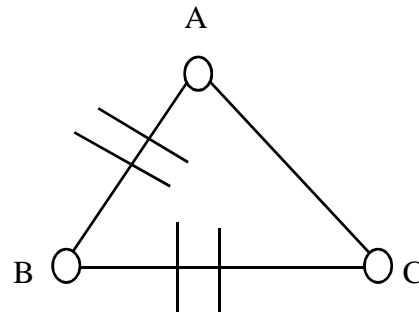
Outcome: AB and AC Coalitions



Fourth Series

Condition: AB and BC Prohibited

Outcome: AC coalition in every game



The Stryker-Psathas Game experiment, illustrates the relative strength of each pole, especially the weakest pole. Its significance can be influenced by the triangular position each pole assumes. This is the concept of a Pivot Power, which according to Gerald Segal, is one that has the most cooperative and least conflictive relations with the other two members of the triad and desires to retain it if not enhance its cooperative relationship¹⁰ The tertius gaudens, i.e., the most favourable possible position, in the triangle is not reserved only for the weak pole, because any of the three poles can achieve this position. The very concept highlights the leverage of manipulation within the triangle. That is why "each pole wants to triangulate itself into a better position and, whenever possible, tries to get and keep the leverage of the pivot, which is based on competitive wooing by the other two mutually

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conflicting poles".¹¹ This proposition is more relevant and important for the study of triangular relationship in general and weak pole's position in particular. This weak pole is more important in the sense that its position is more unstable than rest of the two poles. Further, it helps to understand "the China Card" argument that was advanced earlier which further helps in the understanding of strategic triangle of three big powers—China, Russia and US— and again how this understanding will help to comprehend the dynamics of proposed strategic triangle of Russia, India and China.

Taking the clue from this proposition it is important for the weak pole (here India) to protect itself and assume the pivotal role in the triangle. To achieve this objective it will have to form a coalition with either of the two poles. This formulation not only helps it, in turning unfavorable into the favorable, but also enhances its power equation. This strategic maneuvering was exhibited by China during the period 1944-1946. When the Communists took over power in 1949 in China, Zhou Enlai allegedly asked for US assistance so that China could function as an intermediary between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹²

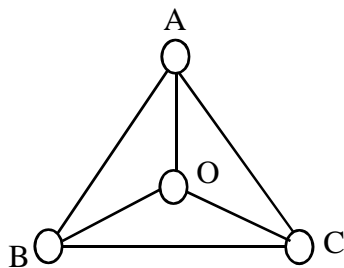
Of course the geopolitical setting was different compared to the prevailing situation today. However, the states should perform in a variety of geographic and issue settings.¹³ External orientation of states is determined by several factors. Accordingly to K.J. Holsti, "the more active a state is in international affairs the more national role conceptions its policy makers will perceive".¹⁴ This national role conception and other factors affect triadic relationship and thus there is restricted strategic triangle. This pattern of restricted strategic triangle was visible during the 1960s in China.

The strategic triangle is an inherently restricted triangle, with the degree of its restriction varying in different situations. The more restricted the strategic triangle is the less effective the triangulations and the pivot leverage would be, and the less restricted the strategic triangle is, the more effective the triangulation and the pivot leverage would be.¹⁵ So a country's national role conception and triangular role conceptions vary from time to time. This changing role of a pole in the triangle could be seen in the triad of Soviet Union, the US and the China during the 1960s and 70s of the last century. There are phases of sea-saw relations among the three great powers.

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These restrictions bring complexities into the strategic triangle. Therefore, there comes compoundness in the strategic triangle, where regional actors also play pivotal role. Man Chen explained the compoundness of the strategic triangle in the context of Vietnam War. Here, in this article, our focus is on strategic triangle of Russia, China and India. Regional actors could be Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia. Normally their position in the triangle would be in the middle of the triangle. Suppose:

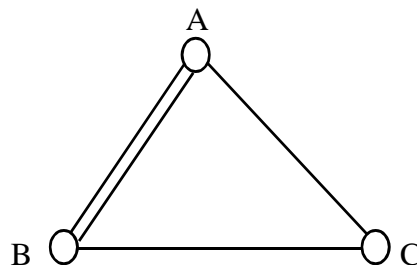
A= India, B= Russia, C= China, then,
O=Pakistan, Afghanistan or Central Asia (or anyone country of the Central Asia).



Regional factors Central Asia, Afghanistan, or Pakistan's leverage depends upon the nature of the strategic triangle. When the triangle ABC is more restricted, regional factors O enjoys more leverage and vice-versa. Big powers may sacrifice regional concerns. "When the chips are down and long-range interests of the highest importance are involved,

the great powers will not hesitate to sacrifice their weak allies.¹⁶ The position of the regional actor O is changeable and it may be like a 'protectorate' or 'client' to the big power. The presence of a large number of foreign troops on its soil may threaten the cultural integrity [manifested in latest revolutions [Orange and other revolutions] in Central Asian Countries, Ukraine, and Georgia] of the weak state.¹⁷

The above discussed propositions of triangulation, when applied to the proposed strategic triangle of Russia, China and India, we could get concrete picture of the triad. There are enough reasons for convergence between Russia and India. But a lot needs to be done on the Sino-Indo front. There were ups and down in the Sino-Soviet relationship in spite of ideological similarities. In the triad, we would first focus on Sino-Indian relationship. For this we would apply earlier mentioned propositions and triangular positions. Here, A= India, B=Russia, C= China.



A, is the weak pole of the triangle occupied by India. Obviously China and Russia occupying two other poles, i.e., B and C. Taking the help of Caplow's proposition, weak pole will enjoy maximum leverage if it makes coalition either with B or C. Different coalition propositions have been discussed earlier in this article. In the triangle there is already very good relationship of India ([A] the weak pole) with Russia [B], the most powerful pole of the triangle. Here our focus will be on, Sino-Indian relations (forming one of the three fronts [A-C] of the triangle).

Sino-Indian Relations

In spite of immense potential for growth their relationship has not developed well. India's faith in China was shattered in 1962. Nehru's idealism could not match Mao's realism. Nehru's moral approach to solve the problems facing the country and the world as a whole had little meaning for Mao/Zhou. However, despite this hiatus in the approaches, they have moved on since the mid 1980s and contributed a lot to each other and to the world. There is immense possibility of further improvement in their relationship. The proposed triangle (which was proposed by the former premier of Russia Primakov in 1999) of Russia-China-India would

certainly provide ideal platform to both these countries to forge a viable relationship.

The post liberation history of China-Indian relation has been that of friendship, setbacks and normalization.¹⁸ India was the first country in the non-communist bloc to recognize China and establish diplomatic relations in 1950. Both the countries in their initial years relationship expressed common concern and understanding on major international issues. They tried to cooperate and coordinate on various diplomatic fronts. However, the relationship was cordial only between 1949-59; turned hostile thereafter until the war in 1962 and has struggled ever since to regain the earlier warmth. The 1970s were characterized by a few faltering efforts to restore the relationship; the 1980s saw the establishment of a regular inter-governmental contacts; these began to bear fruit in the 1990's in the form of confidence building measures (CBMs).¹⁹ However, despite the fact that there has been a surge in economic relationship with bilateral trade expected to touch \$60 billion by the end of 2010, there has been a slump in bilateral relationship in recent

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years with China looking at India-US relations more suspiciously than ever.

Sino-Indian relations took a major forward step, when then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China in 1988. It was the first visit by the head of government from India in three decades. Deng Xiaoping the then Chairman of China's Central Military Commission in a meeting with Rajiv Gandhi remarked, "Let us forget the unpleasant phase in our past relations and do everything with an eye on the future."²⁰ In mid-1989 the Tiananmen Square incident took place, but India maintained a studied silence on the issue in regard to repression and human rights and further Indian reticence on Tibet improved Sino-Indian relationship. The Chinese Premier Mr. Li Peng in response to India's positive posture towards China, during his visit to South Asian countries of Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan resisted from passing anti-India remarks.²¹ The Joint Working Group (JWG), which was formed during the visit of Rajeev Gandhi to China to solve the border disputes, has since then met several times and worked rather smoothly. On a return visit to India in 1991, Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng said, "I consider his visit as a wise and bold step, I profoundly cherish his memories".²² The *People's Daily*

called the visit of Li Peng, a milestone in the development of Sino-Indian relations.²³

Jiang Zemin, the then Chinese President who visited India in 1996 remarked- "though we still have some outstanding problem leftover from history but I can say for sure that our common interests far outweigh our differences as neither of us poses a threat to the other".²⁴ During his visit many agreements were signed covering various issues, like - checking drug trafficking, efforts on confidence building measures (CBMS), improving maritime transport etc. But the most significant part of the agreement was contained in this agreement - "neither side shall use its military capabilities against the other side. This was like "a virtual no war pact."²⁵ The post-cold war context provided the context for better relationship between the two countries.

The two sides tried their best to dispel negative perceptions about each other for almost two decades. Nothing demonstrated the sea change in their attitude more dramatically than the then Defence Minister, George Fernandes' visit to China and the red carpet treatment accorded to him. A far cry from April 1998, when Mr. Fernandes became

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the symbol of unfriendliness or from May that year when India justified, in letters to the U.S. and others, the conduct of nuclear tests because of the China factor. The approach they advocated thereafter was “to de-emphasise differences and to stress – and to build upon – common views and positions generated through “consultation mechanisms on boundary, security, counter-terrorism and foreign policy planning and other issues”.²⁶ The then Chinese Vice-Premier Qian Qichen told the then Indian foreign secretary K. Raghunath “China and India can make important contribution in giving shape to a multi-polar system.”²⁷

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s visit (22 to 27 June, 2003) promised to take bilateral relations forward. It was noted that the sustained economic and social development in the two countries, representing one third of humanity is vital for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity not only in Asia but also in the whole world.”²⁸ Their friendship and cooperation meets the need to²⁹ :

- promote the socio-economic development and prosperity of both India and China;
- maintain peace and stability regionally and globally;
- strengthen multiplicity at the

international level; and

- enhance the positive factors of globalization.

Exchanging greetings on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the “Panchsheel”, the then Indian President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and their Chinese counterparts, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, noted that the five-point principles had promoted aspirations in the two countries to co-exist and prosper in peace and harmony.³⁰ Both reiterated their strong desire to strengthen bilateral ties. India has ever since expressed its commitment to address all outstanding issues with China in “fair, reasonable and mutually-acceptable manner” while Beijing said putting aside differences for mutual benefits was in the interest of both countries.³¹ The then Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar on the eve of his visit to China, had also expressed his optimism for further strengthening ties between the two countries – particularly in the field of hydrocarbon sector.³² In the spirit of the China-India Friendship Year, the two giant neighbours engaged each other intensively in “strategic dialogue”.³³ In the meetings of NSG on waiver on India following the Indo-US Nuclear Deal, China adopted “creative diplomacy” after a phase of little bit uncertainty

and ambiguity, which suggested that china wants to engage herself with India more positively and with an open mind."³⁴ However, since then (late 2008) China has upped its ante on India and has tried to provoke India on several occasions. It has revived its territorial claims on Arunachal Pradesh (since 2006 but has been more vocal since 2008) and even gone to extent of granting visa to people from Kashmir on stapled visa (July 2010).³⁵ This has triggered a major diplomatic row and clearly indicating China's increasing sensitivity to Indo-US relations. However, the top leadership has shown signs of maturity and are perhaps trying to normalize bilateral relations in spite of such diplomatic reverses. On October 30, 2010, for example, the two leaders met on the sidelines of the 13th ASEAN Plus Three Summit meeting in Hanoi and asked their officials to "work their way through" all difficult issues. They also instructed their Special Representatives to address the border issue with a "sense of urgency". The National Security Advisor pointedly referred to the volume of top level communication between the two countries and said that it was "their 10th meeting in six years" where they "took a broad view of the strategic significance of India-China ties". The Chinese media also said that both the countries were willing to work

together on 'major global issues'³⁶ to protect the interests of developing nations including reforms of the international financial system, climate change, energy, food security, prevention of natural disasters and relief efforts and counter-terrorism.³⁷ India-China relations hold great promise, and beckon both to rise to the challenges before them in a rapidly evolving world situation. While the scope for competition and cooperation exists side by side, the choice, of whether to make competition or cooperation the dominant theme of India-China discourse, depends on the leadership of the two countries. And as things suggest, it is too early to suggest that such Chinese pinpricking would aggravate their relations progressively.

Sino-Russian Relations

It is important to start this section with a question: Do Sino-Russo relations work as catalyst in the formulation of Russia-India-China strategic triangle? Sino-Russian/Soviet relations are characterized by ups and downs. In 1950 they signed the Treaty of Friendship and had a honeymoon period for a decade. However, by the late 1950s, the differences in national interests and ideologies emerged, leading to serious disputes in the early 1960s, which developed into acute

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conflicts and border clashes in 1969.³⁸ So during the 1960s, and till late 1970s, Soviet Union regarded China as one of its main rivals and stationed approximately one million troops and one-third of its SS-20 intermediate range ballistic missile along the Sino-Soviet border, threatening to make a surgical first strike on China's nuclear bases. In these circumstances China was forced to improve its military strength. Such face-to-face military threat between these two countries created lot of tension. But its futility was soon realized by them and they started the process of normalization immediately after the end of the cold war. Mikhail Gorbachev's historic visit to China in May 1989, symbolized the end of three decades of Sino-Soviet schism, normalized international relations between the former USSR and China and effectively restored party-to-party relations. China's calculative and favourable response to Soviet overtures represented a shift in policy from strategic cooperation with the US towards a posture of equidistance from both the superpowers.³⁹

Sino-Russian friendship underwent further changes in the new emerging world order. The April 1997 summit meeting highlighted the desire to demonstrate to the international community (primarily the US) the correlation between the geopolitical postures of the two

nations, as represented in the Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Emerging New International Order of 23 April 1997.⁴⁰ In the 1997 'Joint declaration on multipolar world and the formation of a new international order', then Russian president Boris Yeltsin and his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin announced their commitment to develop a 'partnership... for the purpose of strategic interaction in the twenty-first century'. The statement was widely seen not only as a challenge to American 'hegemonism', but also as confirmation of the qualitatively new relationship that had emerged between Moscow and Beijing after the end of the Cold War.⁴¹ The negative legacy of historical irredentism, civilization prejudices engagement and positive-sum cooperation, based on shared political, security and economic interests.

The development of the relationship with China is arguably the greatest Russian foreign policy success of the post-Soviet period. During the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, when Russia's international status and influence were in decline on nearly all fronts, the 'strategic partnership' with Beijing represented a notable exception to the rule.⁴² Under Vladimir Putin the gains of the

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1990s have been consolidated, and there is genuine substance to the official claim that relations are at an all-time high,⁴³ particularly after the signing of the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation in July 2001.⁴⁴ The positives are evident across the board. First, the two countries have near-identical views regarding the desired structure of the post-Cold War international order. Both emphasised the primacy of the UN in global decision-making and the precedence of national sovereignty over Western conceptions of 'humanitarian intervention' and 'limited sovereignty'. They aspire for a 'multipolar' world in which a few great powers — the United States, Russia, Western Europe, China, India, and Japan — make the big decision. This vision is the modern-day successor of the Concert of Europe in the early nineteenth century, and diametrically opposed to the unipolar order associated with a hegemonic America.

Moscow and Beijing also share many security interests and threat perceptions, from an attachment to geopolitical concepts such as spheres of influence and the balance of power to a common view of the post-9/11 international security agenda.⁴⁵ They have adopted similar positions on the war against terror, the non-

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and international conflict management in the context of Iraq and also Iran.⁴⁶ They are supportive of each other's security concerns; while Moscow has reciprocated Chinese efforts to suppress separatism in Xinjiang and Tibet and has given its unequivocal support to the 'One China' policy towards Taiwan. Both of them have a major stake in ensuring peace and stability in the Korean peninsula.

The Sino-Russian rapprochement is basically a function of the changing balance of power in world politics, enabling the two countries to act in parallel ways rather than as allies. Their efforts to develop a strategic partnership seek to counter the US line of preserving a unipolar international system and seek the establishment of multipolarity with both countries playing the most independent roles possible. "The objective action by China and Russia are concurrent self-determination, independent influence and separate bargaining positions rather than a close military and political alliance"⁴⁷ So there is every possibility to foresee a friendly relationship between Russia and China. However, there are areas where they do differ, and overall Russia's China policy also sometime reflects larger contradictions and paradoxes in

Moscow's approach to international affairs, particularly seeing China as a threat.

India-Russia relations

India-Russia relationship has always been special. Starting on a lack-lustre note with Stalin's policy of maintaining equidistance from India and Pakistan, the former USSR changed its policy towards India during the leadership of Khrushchev (1953-64). The relationship prospered significantly during the leadership of Brezhnev (1964-82). It became cold and frosty after the break-up of the Soviet Union. But not before long, Russia realised the importance of India in particular [and Third World in general]. In May 1992, the then Russian State Secretary, Gennady Burbulis, in an interview on the eve of a visit to India was forced to accept that Russia's relationship with India had to be different from its relations with other countries of the region and preferred to describe them as relations of spiritual pragmatism.⁴⁸ When Yevgeny Premakov was appointed as the Prime Minister of Russia, he also laid emphasis on his country's multi-faceted ties with India. The Indo-Russian Friendship Treaty of 1971 was renewed in 1998, when Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited India. During his visit two

countries signed a new 20-year Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.⁴⁹ Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India October 2-5, 2000 provided a great impetus to the bilateral ties. This treaty covers a whole gamut of issues from economy, environment and terrorism to global security concerns.

The then Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to India in December 2002 also reiterated Russian commitment to boost the bilateral relations. The statement of Andrei Belyaninov, head of the Rosoboronexport State Company, which handles 90 per cent of Russia's arms export, also indicated the importance of strategic partnership with India. He said that "India is, Russia's sole strategic partner in the region and we follow our President's strict guidelines to have no defense intervention with Pakistan whatsoever."⁵⁰ Joint production of Brahmos Missile and Kundankulam Nuclear Project symbolise techno-strategic cooperation both countries are enjoying.⁵¹ So there remains the immense possibility that Russian-Indian relations will go from strength to strength in the years and decades to come. This is more optimistic and also realistic keeping in mind the international order which is coming up after the end of the cold war.

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There are several factors that may push these three countries towards trilateral cooperation; there are at least four, according to a Chinese scholar.⁵² All of them advocate a multi-polar world and the establishment of just and fair new international order. Two, all the three countries need to develop their economy and develop close economic cooperation among themselves, because their economies are complementary to one another. Three, Russia has a special position among the three and can play an important role in converting trilateralism into triangularity, i.e., it is a traditional ally and partner of India and also has close ties with China. Four, the three countries have made efforts to come together and cooperation among them, even if it is in its infancy now, has gained strong momentum and is moving on right direction.

When Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Russia in March 2007, he and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in their joint declaration, called for expanding trilateral cooperation with India as such interaction would enhance “mutually beneficial economic cooperation among the

three nations, strengthen their coordination in facing new challenges and threats, especially that of international terrorism and contribute to the cause of promoting peace and stability in Asia and throughout the world.”⁵³

After examining the potentialities and possibilities of cooperation among the three players of the strategic triangle, one finds that there are a number of areas in which cooperation is realistic and easy. But there are some bilateral issues which could throw a spanner into the process of triangle-formation. Moreover, the evolving US grand strategy to contain and balance China may continue to create confusion in the minds of the leaders in these three countries and add to the mutual suspicions despite their desire for cooperation and friendship.

As strategic triangle consists of three poles, problems are required to be seen on all the fronts which may create obstacles in the formation of strategic triangle. Indo-Russian front is moving satisfactorily and is well-tested. It has stood the test of time. However, in recent years, especially after the improvement in Indo-US relationship and India's bid to diversify its defence acquisition process, there is a palpable strain in India-Russian relationship. Sino-

Russian front is manageable; however, there is a history of vicissitudes in their relationship due to border disputes, ideological clash, fight for dominance etc. But the biggest challenge could come from the mistrust prevailing on the Sino-Indian front. However efforts are on from both the sides to shed the previous differences and move forward to start a fresh beginning. The mutual suspicion between India and China, China's aversion to alliances, their desire for a close working relationship with the US separately, and the fact that Russia has little to offer in tangible, material terms to them beyond what they already receive, have impeded the formation of this triangle.⁵⁴

Conclusions

However, these are only small impediments in the broader political and strategic concerns all these three nations are having in the new emerging world order. Beijing conference during 16-17 June 2005 and subsequent summit level and high level meetings of these three countries have strengthened the concept of trilateralism. There are some of the recent developments which have infused new hopes into the process of the triangle-formation. They are together pushing for a multi-polar world. India, China

and Russia have decided to expand their cooperation on global issues ranging from combating international terrorism and restoring stability in the volatile Af-Pak region to climate change and reform.⁵⁵ Moreover, Sino-Indian bilateral relations have been there on the weaker side of the triangle. However, both the countries have now agreed to strengthen bilateral relations and this may provide a fillip to the process as well. Their cooperative approach at the regional level organization like SCO [Sanghai Cooperation Organisation] and BRIC [Brazil, Russia, India and China] have the potential to influence global political configuration too, hinting towards growing confidence in the trilateral cooperation of the three.

The purpose of the triangularity is to build a multi-polar world, a goal shared by all the three countries. They are also firm supporters of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. As Putin had said earlier, the three countries are united by their "desire to resolve regional problems in a way acceptable to all sides. We therefore think that there are good prospects for work together in a trilateral format."⁵⁶ They are united in their thinking that, "the strengthening of trilateral cooperation does not imply any diminution of national autonomy or

of the national identity. On the contrary, constructive interaction must become a guarantee for the full development of the most valuable qualities and genius of all three peoples.⁵⁷ Considering the magnitude of the resources [both- human and material] involved in this triangularity, it has the potential to significantly and dynamically influence the depth, direction and dimension of geo-politics and geo-strategy both at regional and global levels.

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