Russia-China Closeness: Putin's Beijing Visit and India's Security Challenge

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After the summit meeting of President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping in Beijing on 20 May 2026, Russia and China issued a joint declaration on a "multipolar world and a new type of international relations" . Putin arrived in Beijing on 19 May, less than a week after US President Donald Trump's three-day Beijing visit ended; back-to-back visits by both top leaders within the same week are rare . In the talks the two sides agreed on extending the 2001 treaty of friendship and signed several agreements, but the much-discussed "Power of Siberia-2" gas pipeline contract could not be concluded .

The Summit's Outcomes: What Came, What Did Not

In the joint declaration the two countries repeated basic principles for an equal and orderly multipolar world: open and inclusive cooperation, "indivisible and equal security" (one state's security not at the cost of another's), and opposition to alliance expansion and "proxy wars" . The joint documents criticised Trump's "Golden Dome" missile-defence plan and expressed regret at America for not maintaining the nuclear-arms-limit treaty (New START) that expired in February as voluntary limits . The declaration mentions the danger of the international community returning to the "law of the jungle" .

According to the Russian account, the two sides extended the 2001 treaty of "good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation" (extended once earlier in 2021) and spoke of a "joint response to various challenges and threats" . On the number of agreements signed there is a difference: the Diplomat says 20 agreements, while the Indian Express says "more than 40"; both figures are as per their respective sources . On the gas agreement: the Kremlin spoke of an "understanding on the main parameters" of Siberia-2, but no contract or timeline; talks are stalled over differences on pricing, financing terms and delivery time .

The Frame of Dependence: Why Russia Leaned Towards China

Russia's heavy reliance on China after the Western sanctions that followed 2022: in 2025 Russia's total trade was about $700 billion, of which nearly $228 billion (32%) was with China alone; crude oil, coal, gas and copper in exports, and cars, computers, machinery and electronics in imports . In the technology sector, Chinese auto, telecom and electronics companies have taken a large share of the Russian market; Russia depends on China for semiconductors and industrial electronics; bilateral trade is in yuan and roubles, a sign of de-dollarisation . Power of Siberia-1 (3,000 km) ran at full capacity in 2025; Siberia-

2 (2,600 km, from Yamal through Mongolia to China, 50 billion cubic metres a year proposed) is still in talks .

The History of the Relationship: Three Phases

The relations of the two civilisations are centuries old and full of ups and downs: China counts the 19th century as an "era of humiliation"; through the treaties of Aigun (1858), Peking (1860) and Tarbagatai (1864) some territories went to Russia; after 1949 came the friendship treaty of 1950, then the Sino-Soviet split of 1960 over ideological differences and the armed clashes of 1969; America took advantage of this with Kissinger's "ping-pong diplomacy" (1971) and Nixon's Beijing visit (1972); after the strategic partnership treaty of 1992, Putin and Xi declared a "no-limits" partnership in February 2022 .

Towards a Military Alliance?

According to the analysis, a formal military alliance is unlikely in the near future: with an alliance are tied the twin fears of "entrapment" and "abandonment"; China does not want to be trapped in Russia's western conflict, nor Russia in a China-America clash over Taiwan . Trump's Beijing visit further reduced such a possibility in the short term .

The Effect on India

India and Russia have a "special and privileged strategic partnership" and India depends on Russian military equipment and spares; so Russia-China closeness is a worry for New Delhi: India would want Russia to remain on its side in any crisis with China . The language in the friendship declaration about "traditional friendship" between the two countries' armed forces, mutual trust in the military field and a "joint response to challenges" increases India's concern .

Siberia-2 not being concluded is an opportunity for India as well: according to Srikanth Kondapalli (JNU), India can meet its requirement (about 88% of crude oil and about 51% of gas imported) from Russia amid the Iran war and the Hormuz crisis; but increasing purchases of Russian oil and gas carries the risk of punitive American tariffs (reference to the 2025 event) . The declaration of multipolarity is welcome in India, but Kondapalli warns that if America-China closeness grows, China's commitment to multipolarity can fall, a risk of BRICS getting less importance . Anuradha Chenoy (former professor, JNU): "I do not see this as a zero-sum game" . Rajan Kumar's (JNU) conclusion: the options of India's dual strategy running for two decades (security partnership with America, strong ties with Russia) are narrowing, because both Trump and Putin are engaged in courting Xi .

From the Exam's Point of View

- **GS-2 (international relations):** the structure of the Russia-China "no-limits" partnership (2022); the extension of the 2001 friendship treaty; multipolarity versus alliance (entrapment/abandonment) .

- **GS-3 (security/energy):** the Siberia-1/2 pipelines, India's energy-import dependence (about 88% oil, about 51% gas), de-dollarisation .
- **Prelims/current:** the multipolarity declaration of 20 May 2026; Putin and Xi have met 40+ times; 32% of Russian trade was with China in 2025 .

Mains Practice Question

"How does Russia-China closeness affect India's security calculus? Analyse India's strategic options in the changing geopolitical landscape." (General Studies-II; 250 words)

Sources

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