

China-led Trilateral Nexus

Mains Syllabus: GS II - Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

Why in the News?

Recently, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh held their first trilateral meeting in Kunming, China.

What is the China-led trilateral nexus?

- **Trilateral Nexus** - It is the strategy of China to isolate India from its neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.
- **Objective** - To weaken India's geopolitical and economic position and influence in the region and increase its iron clasp.
- **Previous Attempts** - In 1965, Pakistan flirted with the idea of using East Pakistan, China and Nepal to cut off India from its strategic Siliguri corridor.
- **Bangladesh Trilateral** - China, Pakistan and Bangladesh held discussions focused on furthering cooperation and exploring the possibilities of deeper engagement.
- **Afghanistan Trilateral** - This meeting closely follows another trilateral meeting between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, held in May, with the aim of extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and increasing cooperation.
- **Political Climate in the Region** - These trilaterals, led by China, come at a time of
 - Pakistan's little relevance to the region
 - India's increasing relations with Afghanistan
 - New Delhi's deteriorating ties with Bangladesh
- **Implications of the Trilateral** - The use of trilaterals underscores China's fresh attempts at making Pakistan a stakeholder in the region and keeping New Delhi preoccupied with immediate concerns.

What were the impacts of 1962 India China war?

- The 1962 war between India and China has largely shaped regional alignments and geopolitics.
- **Shaped Regional Alignments** - Following the war, China found Pakistan to be an ally that could keep India engaged with immediate threats and limit it from challenging Beijing's interests, security, and status.
- **China Dependency in the Region** - Pakistan deemed China to be a country that would unquestionably offer economic and military assistance to support its aggression against India.
- To date, Pakistan is highly dependent on China for assistance, investments and

infrastructure development.

- **Increased Economic Dependency on China** - By the end of 2024, Pakistan had a loan of over \$29 billion from China.
- **Arms Supply** - It is estimated that over 80% of Pakistan's arms imports are from China.
- **Growth of Terrorism** - China has also shielded Pakistan-backed terrorists at the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral platforms.
- **Strengthened Pakistan in Border Issues** - Pakistan deployed various Chinese-made hardware and weapons that ranged from surveillance radars, drones, missiles, guidance systems, and fighter jets.

Why is China reinitiating the trilateral nexus?

- **Rise of Strong India** - This idea of using South Asian countries seems to have resurfaced as both China and Pakistan face a confident India.
- **Strong Retaliations of India** - Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks in Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and Pahalgam have seen India retaliate in a befitting manner.
- India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, halted the trade, restricted port access, and targeted the military installations of Pakistan in response to the Pahalgam attack.
- **India's Increasing Geopolitical Prowess** - India has also used its diplomatic clout and growing economy to isolate Pakistan.
- **India's Response to Chinese Intrusion** - India's military and diplomatic responses to Chinese border intrusions in Doklam and Galwan have also likely taken Beijing by surprise.
- **Expanding Diplomacy of India** - New Delhi has also increased close cooperation with like-minded countries to limit Chinese aggressions.
- **Declining Influence of China** - India's pragmatic engagement and domestic politics of the region have slowed down China's momentum in South Asia.
- These increasing anxieties are likely to have motivated China to push for trilaterals with Afghanistan and Bangladesh.
- **Improving Pakistan Bangladesh Relationship** - With Bangladesh's regime change, It held military and economic engagement with Pakistan.
- Bangladeshi Navy participated in Aman 2025 in Karachi after a gap of 12 years and In a historic first since 1971, the two states started direct trade from March 2025.

GeoPolitical Climate in South Asian Region

- In the Maldives, Beijing appears reluctant to trust President Mohamed Muizzu and the country's economy, despite his initial anti-India rhetoric.
- In Nepal, despite signing the framework for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation, major differences in funding remain unresolved and the progress of projects has been slow.
- In Sri Lanka, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is developing close ties with India by respecting its redlines.
- In the case of Bangladesh, despite differences, India has not hindered the trilateral energy cooperation with Nepal.

What are the potential impacts of these nexuses?

- **Security Challenges** - Pakistan's influence, supported by China and its economic clout, could thus create new terror and security-related challenges.
- **Reduction in India's Influence** - The nexus will help Pakistan become a relevant country in the region, create rifts between India and its neighbours.
- **China Challenge** - With both Pakistan and China confronting a confident India, China sees an opportunity to challenge India through the trilateral nexus.
- **Increase in Chinese Stronghold** - By keep Delhi preoccupied with immediate security and terror-related challenges, China will make way for Chinese BRI projects, interests and investments in the region.
- **Undermines India's Security Efforts** - At a time when India is seeking support from South Asian countries to fight terrorism, Chinese efforts will create new setbacks.
- **Changes South Asian Politics** - South Asian countries will balance between India and China, as Beijing uses Islamabad to create new complexities in the region.

What lies ahead?

- The developments in the region demonstrate, once again, that China, and not Pakistan, is India's biggest challenge.
- As China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh inch closer to each other, India must explore feasible diplomatic options.
- India can strengthen bilateral talks with the countries and regional platforms such as SAARC, BIMSTEC.
- Delhi can express redlines and convey the point that any misadventures by its neighbours could have severe economic, military, and political costs.

Reference

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