The Return of the Great Power Rivalries

Why in news?

There were constant references to the Franco-British Entente and Germany's growing concerns about it.

How has the security situation evolved in Europe?

- The security situation in Europe was undergoing massive changes.
- The Russian power had collapsed in its far east after the war with Japan in 1904-05.
- The erosion of Russian influence and the rise of Wilhelmine Germany threatened to alter Europe's balance of power.
- France, Britain and Russia reached an alliance that would later form the Triple Entente.
- This triggered a dangerous security competition in Europe with the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy), which eventually led to the First World War in 1914.

What are the similarities between events in Europe today and in the past?

- **Status of the country**- Bismarck became the Minister-President of Prussia in 1862 when Prussia was part of the loose, ineffective German Confederation.
- In the last 20 years of Bismarck's reign, Bismarck stayed focused on transforming Germany internally.
- Bismarck built the Wilhelmine Germany that turned to international politics in the early 20 century, seeking global domination.
- In 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin got a Russia that had lost huge swathes of territories, its economy was in a free fall, its currency had crashed, the living standards of millions of Russians had collapsed and the global stature had fallen.
- **Power expansion**- Bismarck spent his years in power expanding the borders of Germany and building a stronger state and economy.
- The post-Cold War Russia initially stayed focused on the restoration of the state and the economy, and then sought to expand its borders and challenge the continent's balance of power.
- **Power-** If Germany was seen as a revisionist power back then, Vladimir Putin's Russia is today's revisionist power in Europe.
- **Security challenge**- If the Entente countries looked at the rise of Germany as a threat to European power balance, the western alliance continued to see modern Russia as a security challenge.

What about the behaviour of Russia in the present century?

- The present behaviour of Russia can best be explained using "offensive realism" which argue that revisionist powers tend to use force to rewrite the balance of power if they find the

circumstances are favourable.

- The status quo powers, or the existing regional hegemons, would seek to prevent any new country attaining more power at their expense.
- The result of this type of competition is permanent rivalry and conflict.
- This can be seen from Mr. Putin's offensive moves.
    - He sent troops to Georgia, practically ending that country's NATO ambitions.
    - He took Crimea without fighting a war.
    - He sent troops to Syria not just to save the regime of Assad and protect Russia's Mediterranean naval base in Tartus but also to neutralise Turkey and Israel.
    - He reinforced Russia's primacy in Central Asia by bringing peace to the Nagorno-Karabakh and dispatching forces to restore order in Kazakhstan.
    - Then, Russia invaded Ukraine.
- Russia has been violating the sovereignty of a weaker power and flouted international laws in the "rules-based" order.

What about the security cooperation in Russia now?

- Russia apparently had two strategic objectives in Ukraine
    - to expand Russian borders and create a buffer
    - to reinforce Russia's deterrence against NATO
- While Russia has succeeded in expanding by capturing almost all of Ukraine's east, the war has backfired Russia's ability to clinch a quick outright victory in Ukraine.
- This has strengthened NATO, driving even Sweden and Finland into its arms and the economic sanctions would leave a long-term hole in Russia's economy.
- There will not be peace in Europe unless either Russia accepts its diminished role and goes into a spell of strategic retreat like it did after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.
- What makes the latest round of great power rivalry more dangerous is that there are nuclear weapons on both sides.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-return-of-the-great-power-rivalries/article65473564.ece