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The Eurasian Triangle and the New World Order

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25
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On a humid September evening in Tianjin, Narendra Modi clasped hands with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit. The image ricocheted across global media: three leaders, each under pressure from the West, standing together in quiet defiance. It was not the unveiling of a new alliance, nor the formalization of a bloc. But the symbolism was unmistakable. The Russia-India-China triangle — long discussed but rarely materialized — is reasserting itself.

For the West, this was more than a symbolic gesture. The growing convergence of interests among these three powers highlights a deeper structural shift in global politics. Unlike NATO, this triangle is not bound by treaties or ideology. It is pragmatic, transactional and fluid. Yet it is consequential because it dilutes the West's leverage, offers alternatives to US-led institutions and accelerates the transition to a multipolar order. Together, Russia, India and China represent nearly 40 percent of the world's population and more than 25 percent of global gross domestic product — figures that underscore why their cooperation cannot be dismissed as symbolic.

The immediate catalyst for this convergence has been sanctions. Since 2022, Western governments have sought to isolate Russia, cutting it off from financial networks and commodity markets. The expectation was collapse. Instead, Moscow adapted. Energy flows were redirected eastward. Trade with Asia surged. In 2023 alone, Russia-China trade jumped 26 percent to \$240 billion, while Russia-India trade exceeded \$65 billion, up from just \$10 billion before the war in Ukraine. Far from being strangled, the Russian economy reoriented. What was intended as punishment for Moscow has instead bound the three powers closer together.

This is not a temporary arrangement but a structural shift. Sanctions work only if universally applied. When the world's most populous country and the world's largest democracy ignore them, their effectiveness evaporates. Russia's redirection of trade has created a sanctions-proof circuit across Eurasia. The irony is stark: Western attempts to isolate Moscow have instead helped crystallize an alternative economic geography.



Energy has been at the center of this realignment. The signing of the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline agreement between Russia and China was the most consequential outcome of their recent summit. Long in discussion but now finalized, the deal underscores Moscow's resilience and Beijing's trust in its partnership. Once operational, the pipeline will deliver more than 100 billion cubic meters of gas annually — almost double the volume of the original Power of Siberia pipeline.

For Beijing, this secures long-term energy stability; for Moscow, it represents not retreat but repositioning — away from dependence on Europe and toward the rising East. The broader numbers are equally telling: China now buys more than 2 million barrels of Russian oil per day, making Moscow its largest supplier, while India imports 1.9 million barrels per day, up more than tenfold since 2021.

India is the most complex player in this triangle. For decades, its foreign policy has been defined by “strategic autonomy.” It avoids binding alignments, hedges its bets and resists being drawn into another's orbit. Today, New Delhi deepens cooperation with the US through the Quad, while simultaneously buying Russian crude in unprecedented volumes. It conducts joint exercises with Western militaries, yet continues to rely on Moscow for 60 percent of its major arms imports. To Western analysts, this appears contradictory. To India, it is prudence. Its strategic geography demands maximum flexibility.

It is not difficult to see why New Delhi values its partnership with Moscow. Russia remains a reliable arms supplier, largely immune to the political volatility that colors Western defense ties. More subtly, Moscow provides a diplomatic bridge, able to engage both Beijing and New Delhi even during periods of heightened tension. Modi's presence alongside Putin and Xi in Tianjin was not a surrender to Eurasian unity but a reminder that India cannot be corralled into Western orthodoxy. In a world of shifting balances, it will remain a swing power.

For Beijing, the triangle dovetails with its broader vision: hastening the decline of US primacy and showcasing multipolarity. China casts itself as the architect of an alternative order, contrasting its rhetoric of “win-win cooperation” with Western conditionality. Through hosting summits, expanding trade with Russia and deepening Eurasian institutions, Beijing reinforces the perception that an Asian-led power hub is emerging. Russia's role here is indispensable. By absorbing sanctions and redirecting resources eastward, Moscow lends credibility to the idea that the West's writ is not universal.



The West sees three reasons for concern. First, sanctions no longer isolate. The Russia-India-China configuration provides Moscow with lifelines, reducing Western leverage. Second, new institutions are taking shape. Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the expanded BRICS, the grouping now accounts for nearly half of the world's population and about 36 percent of global GDP. The move toward local-currency settlements is still modest but symbolically significant: Russia and India now settle more than half their oil trade in nondollar currencies. Third, the narrative of multipolarity is proving attractive. For much of the Global South, the Tianjin handshake symbolized the possibility of standing outside Western tutelage.

This is why the West worries. Its dominance has rested not just on military and economic might, but on the ability to set rules and enforce compliance. The Eurasian triangle, however loose, undermines both. And the numbers suggest this is not a passing phase: China alone spends \$300 billion annually on defense, India nearly \$80 billion and Russia, despite sanctions, maintains spending of about \$110 billion. Together, their combined military budgets are already comparable to NATO's European members.

The deeper problem for the West is not the fragility of the triangle but its own rigidity. By framing global politics as a contest between democracy and autocracy, Washington blinds itself to nuance. Russia is not simply isolated, it has reconstituted itself as an Asian power. India is not a proxy for Western designs, it is pursuing autonomy on its own terms. China is not a temporary challenger, it is constructing institutions with growing legitimacy across the Global South. Yet Western policymakers often overlook these realities, preferring to rely on sanctions and lectures that drive others away.

It is worth asking whether the West's approach has been counterproductive. By cutting Russia out of European markets, Washington and Brussels created the very conditions for Moscow's pivot to Asia. By treating India primarily as a tool in balancing China, they underestimated its determination to act independently. And by seeking to isolate China through tariffs and technology restrictions, they accelerated its push to consolidate regional alternatives. In each case, coercion has produced resilience, not compliance.

The Tianjin summit did not inaugurate a new Cold War bloc. But it did reveal the persistence of an alternative Eurasian order: one that is pragmatic, fluid and grounded in the East's growing confidence. Russia, India and China do not need perfect alignment to matter. Their cooperation — however transactional — already constrains Western power and offers others a template of independence.



The real challenge for the West is not whether this triangle endures, but whether it can adjust to a world it no longer dominates. The rise of Eurasia is not an aberration, it is the natural rebalancing of global power after centuries of Western primacy. To treat it as illegitimate is to deny reality. The Russia-India-China triangle is not a passing arrangement but a signal of where history is moving. With their economic weight, demographic scale and growing institutional reach, these powers are not simply resisting the West — they are defining the terms of a new order. The future will not be dictated from Washington or Brussels alone. It will be negotiated in Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi as well. That is not defiance. It is the restoration of balance.

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