

THE 'NEW WARSAW PACT'

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Paper-II
(International Relation)

Last week, the air chiefs of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden agreed to integrate their air defences to counter the Russian threat. Together, they have nearly 300 fighter aircraft and the goal of the four countries is to eventually operate as one force. It is not often that a country seeks to combine its armed forces with that of another. The Nordic move is about coping with a heightened sense of insecurity in northern Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is only one of the many developments unfolding in Central Europe that promise to transform the continent's geopolitics. Together, the emerging security arrangements are being called the "New Warsaw Pact"; for most of them are centred on Poland.



New Warsaw Pact

During the Cold War, when Poland was part of the Soviet bloc of East European nations, it hosted the headquarters of the Warsaw Pact that was set up to counter the Western military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The arc of geopolitics, then, has turned full circle in Central Europe as the "New Warsaw Pact" trains its guns to the east to resist Russian revisionism. In many parts of the world, including India, the debate has framed the Ukraine war as a consequence of Russia's inevitable reaction to an avoidable NATO expansion. There is little room in this simple narrative for Central Europe's interests and concerns. Central Europe's historical memories of Russian expansionism are real; they are part of its lived history. Today, the central Europeans are eager to gain control of their own destiny and have signalled over the last year that they have the political will and agency to do so.

Resistance to Russian aggression and the old Warsaw Pact

Ukraine's surprising and costly resistance against the Russian invasion is certainly facilitated by the abundant supply of Western arms. But more deeply, the resistance is about nationalist Ukraine's political refusal to be absorbed into a Russian sphere of influence, formal or informal. Ukraine's deep distrust of Russia is shared widely if not by all Central European neighbours of Ukraine. Viktor Orban's Hungary is a clear exception. But Hungary was among the first nations of the old Warsaw Pact to challenge the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. The Hungarian uprising in 1956 was, of course, crushed by the Soviet Red Army.

Relations with India and Russia and its neighboring countries

Delhi once removed, geographically speaking, from Moscow has a benign view of Russian history. But Russia's immediate neighbours, which have had very intimate yet fraught relationships with Russia, have a very different perspective. Beijing, which today is a close ally of Moscow, had frequent periods of conflict with Czarist Russia as well as the Soviet Union. Understanding Central European perspectives is important for any Indian long-term strategy for dealing with the war in Ukraine and its geopolitical consequences for Europe and the world.

Where you stand, it is often said, depends on where you sit. Central European views on Moscow are not only different from those of India, but also from those in the Western flank of Europe such as France and Germany, that do not share borders with Russia.

The annexation of Crimea and the Russian threat

Central Europeans complain that the western Europeans ignored their repeated warnings of the Russian threat after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014. To be sure, Europe has rallied together after the attack on Ukraine in February 2022. But there are big differences between West and Central Europe on the terms of peace in Ukraine and the long-term role of Russia in European security architecture. Even as the

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

The siege of Berlin by the Soviet Union exposed the military weakness of the West, prompting them to make definite military preparations. As a result, in 1948 mainly the countries of Western Europe signed the Brussels Defense Treaty, promising military cooperation in case of war. Later, the US, Canada, Portugal, Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Norway also joined the Brussels Defense Pact and NATO was formed in April 1949. NATO countries agreed to view an attack on any one of these as an attack on all countries and to keep their military forces under a common command.

Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact, 1955, was signed between the Soviet Union and its dependent states soon after West Germany joined NATO. It was a mutual defense pact that was seen by the West as a Soviet response to West Germany's NATO membership. These countries participated in it – Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

central Europeans look to NATO for protection from Russia, they are unwilling to simply cede their future to potential compromises between West Europe and Russia. Central Europeans have long been a trampling ground for their larger European neighbours, especially Russia and Germany. Great power map-making in Central Europe repeatedly redefined the borders and identity of the nations in the heart of the continent.

Alliances Against Russian Threats

It is no surprise, then, that states in the region are now constructing local alliances to enhance deterrence against Russia. They are also looking to Britain and the US to back their sub-regional security efforts. As Timothy Less of the Cambridge University's Centre for Geopolitics puts it, "the combination of Russian threat, western European passivity and Anglo-American support has begun to change the dynamics in eastern Europe which are now coalescing into a coherent regional alliance, operating both within and outside NATO." This effort had begun soon after Russia gained control of the Crimean peninsula in 2014.

- In 2015, nine central European states got together in the Romanian capital to form the so-called **"Bucharest Nine"**. The nine countries are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. These countries were either part of the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact.
- In 2016, we saw the birth of a new regional forum called the **"Three Seas Initiative"** that added three states — Austria, Croatia and Slovenia — to the Bucharest Nine. The objective of the Three Seas Initiative is to consolidate political and economic cooperation in the Central European belt running from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.
- In 2020, a smaller group called the **"Lublin Triangle"** involving Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine was formed. It seeks to promote political, economic and security cooperation among the three states that have a shared history and cultural commonality.

Central role of Poland

At the nucleus of these new arrangements is Poland. The economic transformation of Poland has been quite rapid since the breakup of the eastern bloc during 1989-91. It is now becoming a major military power by doubling its armed forces, modernising its military, and leading the regional effort to support Ukraine's fight against Russia. Europe's centre of gravity is moving eastwards and is being anchored in Warsaw. On its own, Poland can't sustain a new strategy; it needs to work closely with its Central European neighbours in building sub-regional coalitions.

While Poland and central Europeans are wary of their West Europe counterparts, they are enthused by the strong support from the Anglo-American powers. London, presumably with US backing, has seized the Ukraine crisis to demonstrate Britain's continuing relevance to European security by signing several security agreements in North and Central Europe. The UK today is at the top of the most favoured countries in Central Europe.

United States and Europe

The US, which is eager to see its regional partners take larger responsibility for their own security, welcomes the creation of new political/military structures in Central Europe that both transcend and supplement NATO and the EU. Even more important, the rise of Central Europe balances the political hesitations in Paris and Berlin on dealing with the Russian challenge. Central Europe has no time for French ambitions for "strategic autonomy" and wants greater involvement of the Anglo-American powers in securing their region.

India and Europe

The Modi years have seen Delhi spend considerable diplomatic energy in engaging Europe, including the central Europeans and Nordics. The ruling BJP too has discovered some ideological affinity with the conservative parties in the region. But Russia's Ukraine war has complicated India's central European strategy. India, which has genuine compulsions arising from a long-standing strategic partnership with Russia, must necessarily find a way to reconnect with the central European states that are well on their way to rearranging the strategic map of Europe. De-hyphenating their relations from those with Moscow might open practical pathways for mutually-beneficial cooperation between central Europe and India.

Expected Question

Que. With reference to the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), consider the following statements –

1. 3SI is a regional effort to expand cross-border energy, transport and digital infrastructure in Europe and to promote economic development in the region between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.
2. Twelve countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) that are all members of the European Union participate in 3SI.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: In recent years a number of organizations have sprung up in Europe; these emerging security arrangements are being called the "New Warsaw Pact", as most of them are focused on Poland. analyze.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Discuss the organizations that have arisen in Europe in recent years.
- ❖ Discuss why these emerging security arrangements are being called the "New Warsaw Pact".
- ❖ State the central role of Poland.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.