
Russia-China relationship in the context of the war in Ukraine: Bonding Over Shared Ideology or Western Sanctions

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Abstract

In the face of the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia's trade and economic potentials have been limited and restricted mostly due to the imposition of sanctions. Consequently, a bond between Russia and China has developed, putting aside their former disagreements and disputes. This goes together with the fact that both countries face a shared adversary from the US and the West, which has worked in pulling them closer to each other. Amidst the dynamic environment of worldwide trade, the economic collaboration and strategic alignment between China and Russia stand out as a crucial axis. This article investigates the interdependency and asymmetries of their bilateral partnership and how they have shaped their global trade relation. Furthermore, it also analyzes the historical background of Sino-Russian connections, emphasizing significant milestones and policy changes that have influenced their present economic interconnection. It analyses the problem areas of their relation and whether this bonding will withstand future changes in the global order.

Keywords:

Russia; China; sanctions; trade; economy; politics; Ukraine; ideology.

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Russia and Ukraine share cultural heritage, ethnic background, borders, and political history. Despite tense relations since the end of the Soviet era, Russia has been a major commercial partner for Ukraine. However, since the 1990s, Ukraine has sought membership in NATO and the EU. Putin believes Ukraine's unfriendly nature and Western alignment pose a threat to Russia's security (Hall 2023, 112-113, 116). Russia opposes this Western integration thus leading to Ukraine's invasion in February 2022 (Hall 2023, 113-115). As a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine US and its partner nations are using Western institutions like the EU, NATO and G-7 to counter and punish Russia for the conflict in Ukraine (Hall 2023). Sanctions are policies implemented by nations to restrict interactions with a specific country, aiming to force it to modify its policies or address potential international regulations and convention breaches (Morgan, Bapat and Krustev 2009; Syropoulos *et al.* 2022). The impact of sanctions varies significantly, based on nature and the imposer country. They include unique circumstances like trade and finances and can be complete, partial, and imposed by a single country or multiple countries (e.g. UN versus US sanctions) (Morgan, Syropoulos and Yotov 2023, 13). Sanctions pressure governments to change policies, discourage aggressive behaviour, penalize transgressions, and demonstrate resolve against military actions. However, Putin's incursion into Ukraine is unlikely to be halted. Still, only in the case of a military overthrow or forced ousting, this is possible (Schott 2023, 2,8). Russian coal exports faced challenges in Europe on account of the energy revolution and sanctions related to the war in Ukraine, prompting Russia to increase coal shipments to China along with other Asian nations.

China and Russia have a long history spanning from eras of diplomatic and security cooperation to periods of competition, crises, and even a border war in the 1960s. The modern ties between the two nations started with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. According to several analysts, the present state of affairs can be traced back to 2014, when sanctions imposed by the US, the EU, and other nations in response to Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine prompted Moscow to seek out closer connections with China and other nations (Barrios and Bowen 2023). The historical dynamics of China-Russia relations have always been marked by rivalry. However, due to China's increasing influence in global affairs and Russia's military conflict with Ukraine, the two countries have now formed a bond based on a shared adversary: the United States and NATO.

Relations have strengthened between Russia and China since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, as Russia has grown more reliant on China due to significant international sanctions. Moscow also uses BRICS and SCO initiatives to strengthen relationships, feeling betrayed by Ukraine's post-Cold War "tilt" towards the West (Hall 2023, 113-114). Even though Russia has expressed irritation with China's focus on its economic interests, Beijing has increased its attempts to strengthen bilateral relations since the war started (Chimits and Hmaidid 2022). China is also a major Russian oil and gas export destination. Russia seeks advanced technological imports from China

for military capabilities. Putin chose China for strategic cooperation. President Xi Jinping supports Moscow's incursion into Ukraine by helping Russia financially to evade sanctions. The Chinese government, in turn, has characterized the relationship as a "no-limits" friendship ([AP News 2024](#)). The crisis has bonded them.

Russia-China-US dynamics

The US views China and Russia as strategic allies, challenging the rule-based international order, its economic interests and American global dominance. China opposes economic sanctions on Russia, which are aiming to isolate and put a blockade on the nation ([Bo 2023](#); [Chang-Liao 2023](#); [Trush 2022](#)). The relationship between Russia and China is characterized by mutual support. Typically, this is the way Russia and China portray themselves in relation to Ukraine ([Hall 2023](#), 117). The US-Russian relationship is expected to remain strained due to disagreements over ballistic missiles, Russian interference in elections, espionage, and ongoing sanctions against Russia ([Eran and Magen 2022](#), 2). China's perception of threats from Russia differs significantly from its relationship with the US. Both Russia and China refrain from labelling each other as a threat in their formal engagements with other nations and the US respectively ([Korolev 2021](#), 25). China is identified as the top threat in the US global strategy, with Russia ranking second. China and Russia's autocratic continental powers and Western democratic states, led by America, are creating tension, as the increasing nuclear capabilities of the US are bolstering a Russia-China alliance to maintain negotiating power on key matters ([Dibb 2019](#), 11; [Yoder 2022](#), 290). The Security Council's structure perpetuates the "East-West divide" among Permanent Five, while Beijing criticizes US and NATO expansion as a provocation against Russia and unhelpful to global peace and stability ([Hall 2023](#), 119).

Despite US sanctions on Russia's economy and prominent figures, non-Western countries like China will continue business with Russia, potentially intensifying the conflict beyond Ukraine's boundaries. Washington is isolating Russia and asking other major powers, including China, to join it ([Hall 2023](#), 17-117). Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin are expected to improve relations due to shared goals, perceived dangers, increasing hostility from the West and the US, and the potential for power gain against US leaders' declining leadership. There are certain drivers in their relationship like reversing US military advancements in regions crucial to both nations, cooperating in commerce and investment, and countering US influence globally ([Sutter 2018](#), 40-41). Western dominance is driving China and Russia together.

Key Milestones in the China-Russia relationship

The Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with China in the 1950s, fostering robust connections through the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance establishing a security alliance, substantial economic, military,

and technological support and collaboration ([China Power 2022](#)). In the late 1980s, China's pragmatic foreign policy thwarted tensions with the Soviet Union, culminating in the 1989 Sino-Soviet Summit, marking the restoration of normal diplomatic relations ([China Power 2022](#)). In 1992, President Yeltsin visited Beijing and withdrew Russian troops from Mongolia, declaring a balance between East and West. President Jiang Zemin's historic visit in 1993 marked a significant shift forming a "constructive partnership" by 1994 ([Norling 2007, 34-35](#)).

The US-led NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, conducted without a mandate from the UN Security Council, caused China and Russia to become more apprehensive about the unilateral actions of the United States. During this period, the rise of Islamic extremism in Central Asia and Chechnya strengthened the relationship between Beijing and Moscow, with the West criticizing Moscow's tactics in Chechnya and China relating it to its Tiananmen Square incident. Putin's approval of NATO expansion into the Baltics, US withdrawal from the ABM treaty, and US forces' presence in Georgia sparked Chinese concerns, but the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation in 2001 alleviated these ([Norling 2007, 36](#)).

Sino-Russian relations have become unpredictable in the 21st century due to Putin's pro-Western policies, China's dissatisfaction with Russia's involvement in the 'war on terror', and US military presence in Central Asia ([Norling 2007](#)). Russian foreign policy shifted towards a Russo-Chinese equilibrium between 2003-2004, influenced by Operation Iraqi Freedom and the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization ([Norling 2007, 38](#)). The year 2004 marked a significant period in strengthening Russian-Chinese friendship, with 2006 designated as the 'Year of Russia in China' and 2007 being the 'Year of China in Russia' ([Solomentseva 2014, 6](#)).

In 2011, China and Russia reached a comprehensive strategic partnership, influenced by their close relationship ([Bolt 2014, 48](#)). The year 2019 was marked by "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era", highlighting political trust and cooperation ([Barrios and Bowen 2023](#)). On 4 February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping visited China, marking the first in-person meeting since the Covid-19 pandemic. The visit marked a shared declaration underscoring the strength of the Russia-China bond and the unrestricted nature of cooperation, asserting no limits to their friendship ([President of Russia 2022](#); [China Power 2022](#)). Over the years, they have come closer.

Political regimes of Russia and China

Moscow and Beijing's governments view the Western-led US as a challenge to their political structures, with their state-centred autocracies serving as a foundation for their strategic alliance, with governance ideologies converging and fostering stronger support to withstand Western pressures ([Lukin 2020, 375](#)). China and Russia are both authoritarian regimes, with China as a one-party state and Russia as a multi-

party system, with Putin's United Russia party dominating. Both countries have weak political institutions, a dominant ruling party, and a legislature that approves decisions without opposition. Key sectors are influenced by political elites, and the media is controlled by the government. Public demonstrations against leadership are illegal, and criticism of the leader is suppressed (Duben 2022, 15). Russia and China emphasize democracy as a fundamental right with citizen involvement in governance. They acknowledge diverse approaches to democracy not limiting to certain nations and believe that the determination of a country's democratic status lies with its people (Eran and Magen 2022, 4). Their democratic ideologies are congruent to an extent.

China challenges US power and liberal democratic order, accusing the US of provoking Russia's aggression to oppose NATO expansion. Despite neutrality, the Chinese government abstains from UN involvement (Li 2024, 26). China and Russia have demonstrated diplomatic cooperation by uniting against Western efforts to use military force or impose economic sanctions on countries accused of human rights abuses. They vetoed four resolutions on Syria, thwarting the US's efforts to destabilize the Assad administration (Korolev 2021, 23). China and Russia, as permanent members with veto power, have consistently supported each other at the UN Security Council since 2004, ensuring their veto power is used without each other's backing. Russia and China, despite differing interests in Central Asia, have managed to avoid conflicts and collaborate through the SCO to maintain regional security. Maria Repnikova reveals that Russia exhibits a more aggressive approach in global competition with the West, while China adopts a more deliberate and strategic approach (Fong and Maizland 2024).

Russia, influenced by European culture, is associated with the Western world, while China has a unique cultural and political identity independent of Western influence (Yakhshilikov 2023, 197). Therefore, it can be said that there are certain resemblances in their political ideologies; while Russia exhibits an authoritarian capitalist system, China, on the other hand, follows a pragmatic approach in its political dealings. Their similarities lie in the fact that both countries oppose the Western-led rule of order as well as the idea of a unilateral world order while supporting multi-polarity. Moscow and Beijing are also advocates for the advancement of developing and third-world nations.

Russia-China trade and economic relations: Inter-dependent, Diverse or Asymmetrical

Scholars argue that Sino-Russian relations are based on trade partnerships, with China and Russia being 'mutual gain economic partners' (Yakhshilikov 2023; Xia 2018). Moscow aims to reduce US influence in Europe and the Middle East, while Beijing focuses on its Asia-Pacific presence (Yakhshilikov 2023, 196). China's relationship with Russia focuses on three main objectives: supplying Russia with

energy resources to support its growing industrial sector, enhancing its influence in Central and North East Asia, and modernizing its military (Saraswati and Nasrum 2023, 91-92). China and Russia's strong ties in the Asia-Pacific region are due to mutual security interests and shared adversaries (the US) (Yakhshilikov 2023, 201). Putin's 2012 "pivot to Asia" shifted to a "pivot to China" following the Ukraine crisis. Russia's government deemed it necessary to accommodate China in the onslaught of Western sanctions, potentially assuming a subordinate role in the partnership (Gabuev 2015, 3). Russia and China's relationship has been centred around oil, with hydrocarbon sales accounting for 70% of Russia's budget revenue. A gas agreement was finalized in May 2012, involving Gazprom and CNPC to sell Eastern Siberia gas of about 38 billion cubic metres by 2030 to China (Gabuev 2015, 4). Also, recent events, such as Russia's border with NATO, sanctions, and Skripal poisoning, highlight the US's contentious relationship with Russia and its closer ties to China. Western sanctions have deepened ties with Russia since 2017 (Lidder 2021). The Russia-China relationship is influenced by US attempts to undermine global order. In short, Russia's strained relationship with the West continues.

A US intelligence report indicates China is supporting Russia's military operations in Ukraine, bypassing sanctions and providing essential technologies. China has increased Russian oil, gas, and energy exports following Ukraine's invasion (Luce 2023). This expansion was facilitated by China's financial system, which enabled Russia to carry out transactions without interference from Western powers. China has become a crucial economic ally for Russia and is actively implementing various economic support measures to help Russia deal with the negative effects of Western sanctions and export bans. The Chinese Embassy in Washington defends Beijing's stance on Russia and Ukraine, claiming transparent commercial contacts and no arms sales. China surpasses pre-war trade levels with Western states and is Russia's most important commercial partner (Luce 2023). China provides Russia with machine tools, drones, turbojet engines, cruise missile technology, microelectronics, and nitrocellulose, aiding in space-based capabilities enhancement for Ukraine deployment and providing imagery for military campaigns (Atwood 2024). Russia and China are enhancing their strategic collaboration by selling advanced military weapons to China and organizing joint drills in the Baltic and East China seas, demonstrating a growing political-military force beyond their own boundaries (Dibb 2019, 13). Russia and China engage in joint drills to demonstrate readiness and support each other. These exercises improve armies' operations and tactics, benefiting Chinese officers. Both countries prioritize regional stability and apprehension about potential terrorism spillovers. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments in Central Asia require security, including collaboration with Russia. The convergence of their security objectives and perception of the US as a threat will drive future defence collaboration (Taylor and Shullman 2021, 7). Thus, their trade relationship is driven by a shared enmity to a large extent.

In May 2014, Russian officials visited China to explore Western credit substitution with Chinese financial institutions. The team supported Beijing and proposed measures to reduce reliance on the euro and dollar in bilateral trade (Gabuev 2015, 5). Russian businesses may leverage China's prospects more, while China is leveraging Russia's dissociation from Western markets for Chinese-negotiated deals and financial experiments, enhancing Beijing's financial system (Gabuev 2015, 6). The Chinese currency is appealing to Russia due to its protection against inflation and Western sanctions. Economic ties between Russia and China have deepened, but Chinese businesses have refrained from long-term commitments. Russia's reliance on China could impact political relationships, but China's use of economic influence for political purposes remains uncertain (Kluge 2024, 27). It is unclear what specific demands the Chinese government may present. Russian President Vladimir Putin is unlikely to back down in the conflict with Ukraine, even if it means facing further economic isolation. Meanwhile, Beijing is interested in ensuring Putin's political survival (Kluge 2024, 34). China is very cautious in its attempts towards supporting Russia.

China and Russia have re-evaluated their strategic partnership to address security concerns, uphold regional peace, and promote a new security paradigm through multilateral cooperation frameworks like the "Shanghai Five" and trilateral dialogues with other nations (Guan In 2001, China and Russia formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, promoting mutual trust, mutual benefit, and common development) (Guan 2022, 25). The BRICS mechanism, involving emerging economies like Brazil, Russia, India, and China, was initiated in 2009 to mitigate the 2007-2008 US financial crisis and steer global governance towards fairness, with the G20 mechanism serving as a crucial platform (Guan 2022, 26). Thus, through such multi-lateral mechanisms too, Moscow and Beijing strengthen its cooperation.

Chinese and Russian leaders, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin see each other as allies in a contest against the U.S.-dominated international system while maintaining a strategic focus in a dynamic and uncertain environment. They emphasize the importance of viewing each other as opportunities for development and global partnership (Barrios and Bowen 2023). To be precise, the Russia-China partnership focuses on challenging the US-led world order.

In 2023, Russia and China's trade volume reached 241 billion dollars, with Russia importing 36.5 per cent of goods from China. Trade reached a historic high of \$240 billion, a 64% increase since 2021 (Kluge 2024). Russia imports equipment, machinery, vehicles, and electronics, while China imports fossil fuels, metals, ores, and wood (Kluge 2024, 10). Russia faces challenges in exploring and developing fresh oil reserves due to technology-intensive processes as Chinese energy businesses cannot compete with Western service companies that are leaving Russia due to sanctions (Kluge 2024, 19). In 2023, China has established itself as Russia's primary trade partner, while Russia holds the position of being China's sixth-largest trade

partner (Ng and Ma 2024). So, from the trade point of view, their relationship has definitely grown.

Diversification

Chinese enterprises and the Chinese authorities are extremely cautious in order to avoid facing repercussions from the U.S. and EU in the form of international sanctions (Yang 2024). The diplomatic engagements between the two countries are set to continue, with Beijing focusing on the cautious regulation of commercial endeavours involving China and Russia. The European Union recommend sanctions against Chinese companies for their involvement in supporting the Russian military. The sanctions are intended to support the EU's initiative to eliminate any potential loopholes that could enable Russia to acquire the necessary military know-how for its weapons production. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has expressed its disapproval of the sanctions imposed by the EU, deeming them as unacceptable. China firmly rejects the imposition of unlawful sanctions or extraterritorial jurisdiction on China in light of the collaboration between China and Russia.

However, the level of energy cooperation between China and Russia is not substantial when compared to that of Middle Eastern nations. China is working towards diversifying its energy sources by incorporating oil, natural gas, coal, and nuclear power (Sarawati and Nasrum 2023, 92). Also, Russia prefers not to be involved in territorial disputes in the East or South China Sea, while China perceives the Kremlin as easily swayed into unneeded conflicts. China's stance on Ukraine reflects this, while a "soft alliance" between Russia and China is possible (Gabuev 2015, 7). Trade and economic dependency are there, but not exclusively.

Asymmetries

The economic connections between China and Russia are characterised by asymmetry, with China's economy being significantly larger and more dynamic. China is the second largest market for Russian exports, following the European Union. Conversely, Russia ranks as the ninth-largest market for Chinese exports. The bilateral relationship between Russia and the People's Republic of China is characterised by Russia's significant role as a major supplier of energy imports to China (Reuters 2024).

Beijing has not officially sanctioned Ukraine's invasion, while it has also stubbornly refrained from denouncing it. China did not cast a vote in either the late February or late March UN Security Council or General Assembly resolutions denouncing Russia's incursion (Duben 2022). Despite the friendly language used to describe their collaboration, the agreements that China is ready to negotiate with Russia are expected to be far less profitable for Moscow compared to the arrangements it had previously made with Western Europe. This places Russia at an over-time structural disadvantage (Duben 2022, 7).

In the case of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), there also seems to be some asymmetry in their relations. During his State of the Nation speech in February 2019, Putin emphasised the importance of Russia's relations with China for domestic stability and economic growth. He specifically mentioned the "harmonising" of Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) initiative with China's enormous Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Taylor and Shullman 2021, 5). The China-Kazakhstan railway if connected to Iran, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan via the China-Central Asia-West Asia line, will reduce Russia's influence in Central Asia while allowing Central Asian countries to adopt a multi-vector foreign policy approach and counter Moscow's efforts to involve them in the Eurasian Economic Union or expand their economic integration (Zhang, Alon and Lattemann 2018, 137). Russia's economic decline, caused by the drop in oil prices and Western sanctions, is currently hindering Moscow's ability to fulfil its economic obligations to carry out hydroelectric power plant projects in Kyrgyzstan and provide military aid to Tajikistan. This has weakened Russia's international standing in the post-Soviet region (Zhang, Alon and Lattemann 2018, 138). Nevertheless, right now the focus remains on maintaining a friendly demeanour.

The Road ahead

China and Russia criticize US democratic rule initiatives as disruptive and used for geopolitical expansion, highlighting common ground in their belief in interference in their own affairs. China and Russia are collaborating to develop domestic alternatives to foreign technologies, for reduced dependence on the West. They are focusing on issues of mutual interest, such as Iran and North Korea, and international organizations. Despite their animosity, they are forming a stronger alliance through frequent contact and increasing technological exchanges. This collaboration is aimed at reducing dependence on the West and improving their chances of overcoming long-standing animosity (Taylor and Shullman 2021). A 2020 Ipsos poll revealed that over 80% of Russians believe China will positively impact world affairs in the next decade. Russia supplied China with modern fighter aircraft, air defence systems, and missiles from 2014-2018, contributing to the Chinese People's Liberation Army's efforts (Taylor and Shullman 2021, 5-6). Since 2014, Russia and China have partnered more closely in defence industries, seeking alternative supplies like electrical parts and naval diesel engines including missile defence drills and exercises. This has helped mitigate Western embargo effects. Russia's strategic command-staff exercises (Vostok 2018; Tsentr 2019), including China's participation, have become more intense (Taylor and Shullman 2021, 6).

China has become the sole non-Western state with the ability to significantly counterbalance the collective sanctions imposed by Western countries. Putin certainly took into account the economic assistance from China when initially strategizing the invasion of Ukraine. In the medium to long term, China will

probably be able to provide Russia with considerable economic relief, helping it to mitigate the effects of sanctions in the trade, finance and technology spheres (Duben 2022, 10). Nearly 14% of Russia's foreign exchange reserves had been converted to the Chinese yuan by the time the conflict in Ukraine broke out in 2014. China's UnionPay system has declined to collaborate with Sberbank, Russia's leading financial institution, and has halted discussions with other Russian banks that are under sanctions in order to avoid potential secondary sanctions. China has established its own Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) to facilitate the settlement of foreign transactions using a distinct global yuan payment and clearing mechanism. When the SWIFT ban was imposed in early March, some Chinese media proposed that CIPS could be used to counter these restrictions, but it has since become evident that this will provide very little short-term relief for Moscow (Duben 2022, 11). China faces an increased risk of reliance on open global markets due to US and European caution, and deteriorating trade relations. Therefore, Russia is collaborating to build a de-dollarized financial system, limiting US power (Taylor and Shullman 2021, 20). Russian natural gas along with other reserves may find a new long-term client in China if they are unable to sell them to Western nations (Duben 2022, 12). The ensuing conflict in Ukraine will further strengthen the existing bond between China and Russia in terms of their structural relationship. In addition to capitalizing on the commercial void created by the departure of Western goods and brands from Russia, Beijing likely views it as a political necessity to support Putin's government, as long as it can do so discreetly and circumvent US retaliatory actions (Duben 2022, 14).

As of 2023, Beijing is showing less enthusiasm for openly endorsing Russia's ongoing conflict with Ukraine, which marks a departure from its aggressive diplomatic approach. Instead, there is a renewed willingness to rebuild relationships with the international community and former trading partners, in order to address the distrust and accusations that have strained China's ties with Western countries (Peters 2023, 1669). China has refrained from providing military support to Russia and, such as other BRIC countries, has chosen not to condemn the war in Ukraine. However, certain critics contend that the battle has revealed the limitations of the China-Russia relationship, prompting China to downplay its ties with Russia and reconcile its conflicting foreign policy objectives (Peters 2023, 1668). China does not have any desire to establish a formal partnership with Russia, nor does it intend to create an anti-U.S. or anti-Western coalition of any sort. Beijing desires that China and Russia can sustain their relationship in a manner that ensures a secure setting for both nations to accomplish their development objectives and mutually assist each other through advantageous cooperation. This would serve as an exemplar of how significant countries can effectively handle their disparities and collaborate in a manner that fortifies the global system.

Problem areas in China-Russia ties

Russia and China, vying for central Asia control, held conflicting views on their border, possibly due to resentment towards a diminishing authority ([Eran and Magen 2022](#), 3). China's growing power surpasses Russia's in Central Asia, introducing new dynamics in the China-Russia relationship, with China expanding economic aid to strengthen its influence ([Saraswati and Nasrum 2023](#), 91). Russia and China's trade and energy dependence increases, while the US escalates the "New Cold War" ([Quadri, et al. 2023](#)). European leaders are cautious about confronting China as they consider it inadequately empowered to resist the US ([Quadri, et al. 2023](#), 162). Russian President Putin emphasizes the importance of Russian-Chinese collaboration in establishing a multipolar world order, contrasting it with a unipolar system dominated by a single centre ([Lukin 2020](#)). China's economic and technological asymmetry could impact the military equilibrium between Russia and China. The upcoming Chinese leaders may view Russia as a subordinate ally, potentially leading to a shift in perception of Russia as a more potent force ([Lukin 2020](#), 377). The US's nuclear expansion is fostering a strategic partnership between China and Russia to counter the US and maintain bargaining power, despite disputes over Central Asia influence, highlighting the decline of American influence ([Yoder 2022](#), 290-293). Russia's leadership acknowledges the possibility of becoming a subordinate partner due to China's increasing influence in its "near abroad" sphere. Moscow's strategy is to secure the highest status and influence over Beijing through infrastructure projects and energy access ([Ozawa 2019](#), 4). China and Russia have no formal treaty alliance, meaning they are not obligated to provide defence assistance. Russia's cordial relationship with India during the Cold War is a problem since China has border disputes (1962 war) and standoffs with India ([Fong and Maizland 2024](#)). However, this does not imply a lack of strong military collaboration ([Korolev 2021](#), 6). Russia and China are collaborating globally to counterbalance the US, significantly deepening their military cooperation. Chinese Minister Wei Fenghe emphasized this during a visit to Moscow, highlighting the strong bond between their armed forces ([Dibb 2019](#), 12). Russia's economic alliance with China is seen as a short-term strategy to increase leverage on the US amid the Ukrainian crisis ([Kaczmarek and Kuhrt 2023](#); [Eran and Magen 2022](#), 5). Whether temporary or permanent, it challenges the US-led world order.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Russia-China relations have seen an upsurge in recent times following the Russia-Ukraine war. However, to describe the relationship as a 'limitless partnership' or a 'relation of convenience' needs to be further investigated. It is also true that there is a common factor in their relation: the Western ruled based order. As of now, their relationship seems asymmetric with Russia accepting being a subordinate partner. At present, the leadership in China appears to be not taking

advantage of its influential status in relation to Moscow. The future course of relations will depend much on the ever-evolving politics in Russia and China. Russia can depend on China for trade and economy but in political terms, it is difficult to assess if it can help Russia defy the pressure of the Western-led order as they have not signed any formal alliance to protect each other in case of an invasion. Another very important aspect of their relationship is that both countries stay away from getting involved in each other's disputes or affairs. Their existing connection illustrates a friendship defined by the present situation. There are promising prospects for amicable relations ahead. In my opinion, the perception of their shared adversaries constitutes a more compelling argument than a connection founded on analogous ideologies.

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