

Sino- Russian Convergence of Interest: What are the Implications for the International System?

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Introduction:

The Russia-Ukraine war has brought huge geopolitical shifts throughout the world. Sanctions have been imposed on Russia by the Western world. China has also been threatened with sanctions as they are supporting Russia. At the beginning of 2022, the first in-person meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin took place. Russia expressed its unprecedented ties with China. It showed its willingness to be on the Chinese side in the Chinese

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initiative of global development. Chinese President Xi Jinping has also shown his interest to maintain cooperation with Russia in the field of development, security and sovereignty.² They are successfully promoting bilateral cooperation on the Ukraine issue. China mentioned the security concern of Russia and tried to legitimize it by mentioning the security threat of Russia in Europe. It opposed the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and mentioned it as a triggering point for the new cold war. The strategic tie of these two major powers is strengthening significantly, as they are heading towards common strategic interests and drawing a significant footprint on the world map.³ The whole world is subject to this wave from different spectrums.

Brief Historical Background:

Since the end of the Cold War, relations between Russia and China have improved. The main strategic threat to their nations, according to Xi and Putin, is the United States. They believe that the moment is now to challenge the U.S-centric system of alliances and international law. Both anticipate Washington to exert every effort to maintain its status as a superpower. The complementarity of Russia and China's needs and capabilities, as well as their growing alignment since 2014, have driven expanding relations in all areas of their partnership. Russia will be the more eager partner, the same as in 2014.⁴ However, given the much more forceful Western response to Russian actions in Ukraine, Russia is now even more isolated from Europe and the United States than it was in 2014. As a result, Russia's economic prospects in the West are even bleaker going forward. In other words, with China as its only remaining choice, Russia will be all in and ready to accept whatever assistance Beijing can offer. Furthermore, A total defeat of Russia

² Yesmin, S. (2022, February 19). *China-Russia strategic alignment: Is international relations entering a new era?* Modern Diplomacy. Retrieved January 23, 2023, from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/18/china-russia-strategic-alignment-is-international-relations-entering-a-new-era/>

³ Times, G. (n.d.). *China-Russia ties move forward Amid Changing World, West's disruptions*. Global Times. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202212/1282979.shtml>

⁴ Kendall-Taylor, A., & Shullman, D. O. (n.d.). *Best and bosom friends: Why China-Russia ties will deepen after Russia's war on Ukraine*. CSIS. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/best-and-bosom-friends-why-china-russia-ties-will-deepen-after-russias-war-ukraine>

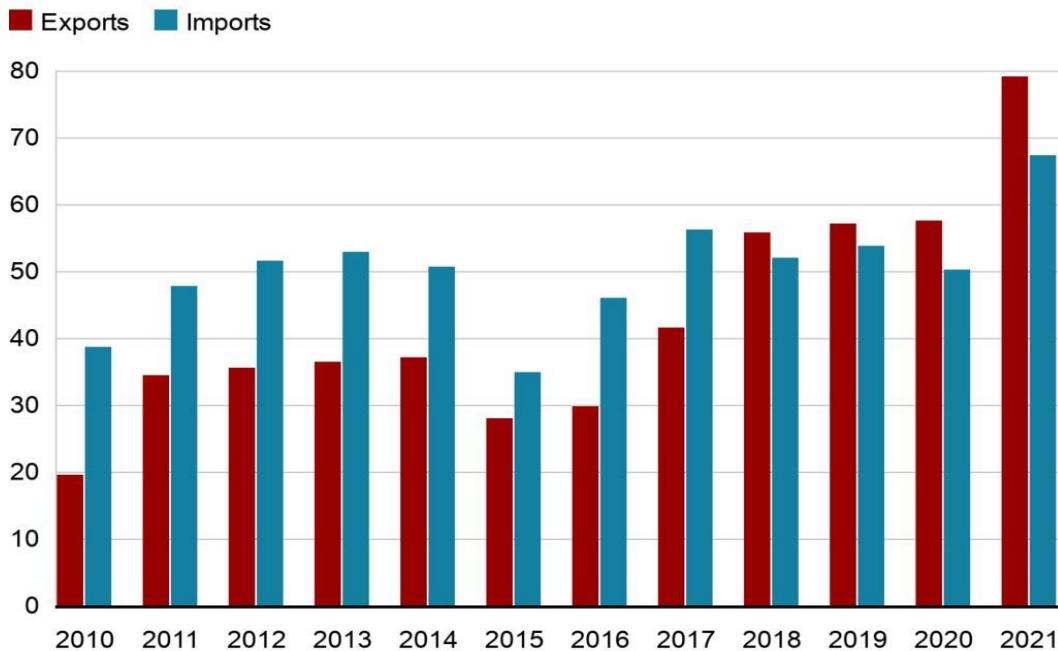
is not expected by China as it would result in the installation of a pro-Western democratic administration in Moscow.⁵

Sino- Russian Converging Interest:

The two Asian giants are considered a match made in heaven. The wave of the Russia- Ukraine war accelerated this tie in many contexts. The ongoing sanctions provided by the West over Russia have highly driven the relation between these two giant powers of this region.⁶ Russia and China are now significantly heading towards some common interest from significant spectrums.

Russia's growing trade with China

\$US billions



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Source: World Bank and China Official Customs Data

It has been already predicted that the Western sanctions would make Russia economically more dependent on China.⁷ The condition is turning China and Russia more closely in the thrust of the

⁵ ibid

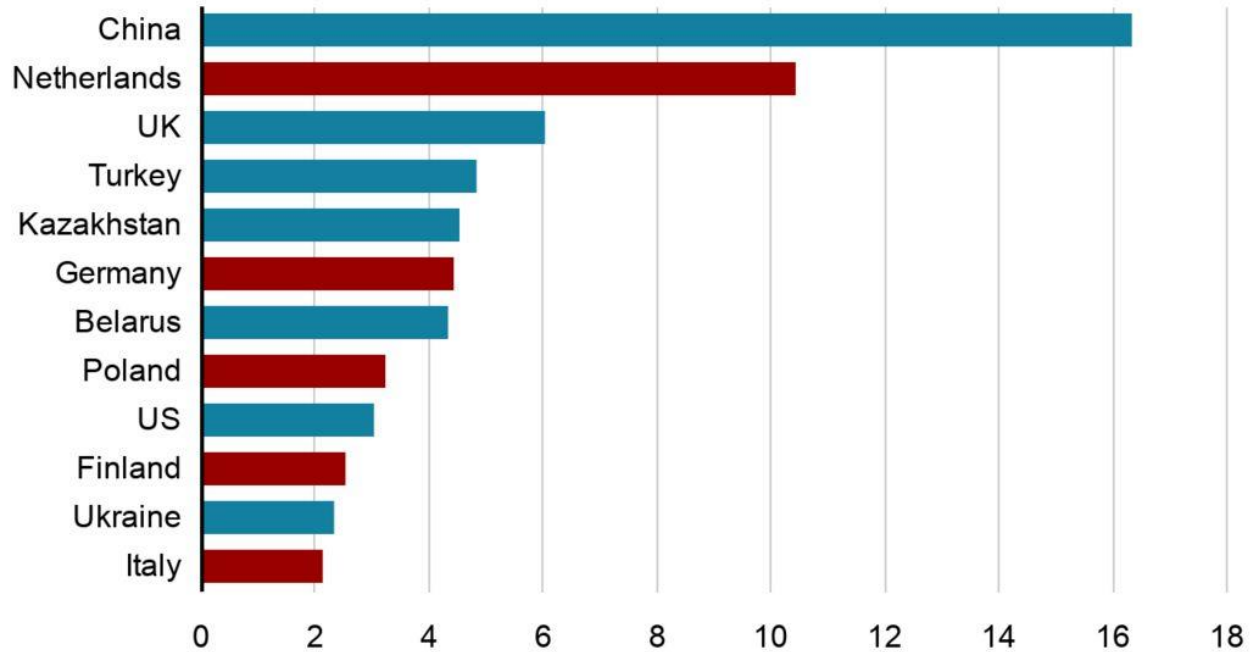
⁶ *China's strategic calculations in the Russia-Ukraine war*. Wilson Center. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/chinas-strategic-calculations-russia-ukraine-war>

⁷ Gunia, A. (2022, March 4). *Sanctions could increase Russia's dependence on China*. Time. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://time.com/6154189/russia-swift-china-usd-rmb-finance-trade/>

leadership to curtail the US global hegemonic dominance. The bilateral trade between Russia and China rose 28% more than the previous year.⁸

Russia's biggest export destinations

% in November 2021



*EU members in red

Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)

Around 18% of Russia's total trade was with China in 2021.⁹ According to the report of the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) in 2021, China is the biggest export destination of Russia. Besides that according to the World Bank and China official customs data, the export and import relation of Russia with China is higher than with other countries. China is highly dependent on Russia for the grain supply.¹⁰

China is one of the largest markets for Russian energy. Due to the Western sanction, the Chinese market has become a huge opportunity for the Russian oil, gas and coal reserve. In the future to

⁸ Song, K. W. and W. (2022, April 14). *Ukraine War: What support is China offering Russia?* BBC News. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/60571253>

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

cut down its dependency on coal, China may also increase its interest in the Russian gas supply. Russia and China are in a good commercial and financial commitment to counter the US-led global financial order. Both are dependent on each other for their strategic goal. These two partners are working hand in hand with projects like BRI, SCO, G20, BRICS and so on. Russia is considering China as one of its partners in this challenging term during the Ukraine crisis. The Ukraine war and the Sino-Russian tie have become an opportunity for China to increase its connection with Central Asia and in ensuring a stable position in this Asia-Pacific region.¹¹

China is heavily dependent on Russia for its military modernization. From 2017 to 2021, 80% of the Chinese total arms were dependent on Russian arms export.¹² China is the 2nd largest global customer of the Russian arms. It is estimated that Russia is also highly interested in the advanced drone mechanism of China.¹³

The strategic ties are not only seen from these contexts but many other contexts are present. However, these are the most important arena where a significant strategic tie is visible profoundly. The effect of this tie over the world map is also a matter of significant discussion.

The implication of the Sino-Russian converging interest over the international system:

In the international system, the Sino-Russian converging interest has significant implications. These implications cannot be seen from a one-sided view rather a discussion from several aspects is important here. The focal points of this discussion will be pointed out here:

Strategic Alliance against the US hegemonic status:

The strategic relation between Russia and China is a clear position against the US hegemony. A joint statement has been issued from Russia and China, which features the multipolarity and the end of the unipolar world order. They are proposing cooperation among world powers. This statement is opposing a unipolar world where interference in the domestic matter of the other state,

¹¹ Song, K. W. and W. (2022, April 14). *Ukraine War: What support is China offering Russia?* BBC News. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/60571253>

¹² ibid

¹³ ibid

and unilateral right of sanctioning is not expected.¹⁴ The strategic relation between these two countries is aiming to counter the hegemonic power politics and the tendency of a zero-sum game. Through the strategic relation, they are highlighting that the strategic tie of these two countries will ultimately not let the US hegemon win. According to the US National Intelligence Council's Global Trends 2040 reports, Sino-Russian strategic position is picturizing a counterbalancing against the Western influence worldwide¹⁵.

Economic Implications:

In the context of the global economy, Western influence is significantly hindered by the rising Sino-Russian strategic ties. In the era of global economic cooperation, China came up with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS and the New Development Bank (NDB). The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) idea of regional economic unification has been impacted by China's BRI.¹⁶

This new initiative in the era of the international economy is raising questions about the institutional leading position of the Bretton Woods Institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF).¹⁷

Implications for the Asia-Pacific Region:

In the Asia-Pacific Region, the two strategic allies Russia-China is trying to mitigate the US influence. They are significantly working against the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy. Russia is in full support of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹⁸

¹⁴ Times, G. (n.d.). *China-Russia ties move forward Amid Changing World, West's disruptions*. Global Times. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202212/1282979.shtml>

¹⁵ Yesmin, S. (2022, February 19). *China-Russia strategic alignment: Is international relations entering a new era?* Modern Diplomacy. Retrieved January 23, 2023, from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/18/china-russia-strategic-alignment-is-international-relations-entering-a-new-era/>

¹⁶ Fabienne, B. & Marcin, K. (2021) Russia and China between cooperation and competition at the regional and global level. *Introduction, Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 62 (5-6), 539-556, Retrieved January 23, 2023, from <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.2023363>

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Yesmin, S. (2022, February 19). *China-Russia strategic alignment: Is international relations entering a new era?* Modern Diplomacy. Retrieved January 23, 2023, from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/18/china-russia-strategic-alignment-is-international-relations-entering-a-new-era/>

This scenario has been initiated to promote the interconnectedness between the Asia Pacific and Eurasian regions. The Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union is also promoted and accelerated significantly by these two strategic allies.¹⁹

Military Domain:

Russia and China are strengthening military cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. They negotiated a large-scale joint military exercise in August 2021. They also raised their voice against the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. They conveyed to the international community that this retreat by the USA is indicating the deployment of intermediate-range and shorter-range ground-based missiles in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe.²⁰

Implication for the Maritime Security:

China and Russia have criticized the Australian, United Kingdom, and US (AUKUS) alliance with the allegation that this is disrupting the Asia Pacific maritime order. In October 2021, Russia and China participated in coordinated naval exercises for the first time in the Sea of Japan. The joint naval drill between China and Russia demonstrated a practical defiance of US power in the world's maritime realm and sparked a fresh discussion over the US unilateral operations on the international maritime border.²¹

The Key Understanding:

- Beijing's and Moscow's common belief is NATO and the United States will pose national security danger so the Sino-Russian relationship is heading towards a defensive approach.
- The developing world is seen by Russia and China as a place where they can increase their influence. By developing military and intelligence relationships with despotic nations in the Western Hemisphere, Moscow has diverted US attention.²² Putin is attempting to

¹⁹ Yesmin, S. (2022, February 19). *China-Russia strategic alignment: Is international relations entering a new era?* Modern Diplomacy. Retrieved January 23, 2023, from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/18/china-russia-strategic-alignment-is-international-relations-entering-a-new-era/>

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *ibid*

²² Brands, H. (2022, September 8). *China and Russia's lies are winning over the Global South*. Bloomberg.com. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-09-08/china-and-russia-s-lies-are-winning-over-the-global-south>

mobilize developing nations against the sanctions the US and its allies have imposed on Russia, in part by attributing the cause of the global economic crisis to those penalties rather than Moscow's aggression.

- Similar advantages are sought after by China. The principal recipients of China's Belt and Road Initiative's loans and infrastructure deals have ranged from Pakistan to Argentina. African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries play a significant role in Chinese policy as natural resource suppliers and consumers of Chinese technology.²³
- Ukraine war is not about Chinese interest but the tie with Russia will help China to counter the Western alliance. This changing connection is a source of worry for India as well. Imran Khan of Pakistan visited Moscow on February 24, demonstrating the development of their bilateral ties at a time when Sino-Pak relations are already very tight. It forewarns India of unwanted events.²⁴
- This changing connection is a source of worry for India as well. Imran Khan of Pakistan visited Moscow on February 24, demonstrating the development of their bilateral ties at a time when Sino-Pak relations are already very tight. It forewarns India of unwanted events. Despite India's expanded collaboration with the US, its allies, and partners over the past 20 years, Moscow remains India's oldest and most dependable defense ally. Although Sino-Indian relations are still at their lowest point in more than 40 years as a result of confrontations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers in 2020, Moscow has strengthened ties with China by establishing a "no-limits" alliance.²⁵ Additionally, Moscow has stepped up its engagement with Pakistan, which India sees as a significant security threat.
- As a result of this Sino-Russian tie, China will face increasing containment from the US and the West if it does not actively respond. Strategic containment will increasingly focus

²³ Brands, H. (2022, September 8). *China and Russia's lies are winning over the Global South*. Bloomberg.com. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-09-08/china-and-russia-s-lies-are-winning-over-the-global-south>

²⁴ *What a Russian nuclear escalation would mean for China and India*. United States Institute of Peace. (2022, November 14). Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/what-russian-nuclear-escalation-would-mean-china-and-india>

²⁵ *ibid*

on China, and Europe will further isolate itself from China. Japan is predicted to become the vanguard of the anti-China movement. Taiwan is predicted to join the anti-China chorus, and China will face challenges from Western values and systems in addition to the military encirclement of the United States and NATO, QUAD, and AUKUS.²⁶

- An adverse effect can also be seen as a conflict between democracy and despotism, which would have an impact on other nations. Japan and other nations would become even more dependent on the US, and the US Indo-Pacific strategy is predicted to be reinforced. The West will be more hegemonic in terms of military, values, and institutions, and its hard power and soft power will reach new heights- predicts the World Economic Forum. NATO and the United States' influence in the non-Western world will also grow, and more third-world countries will embrace the West. The two continents US and Europe predicted to establish a community of shared future.²⁷

These are the basic significant points from which the Sino-Russian converging interest will have implications for the international system. Starting from the domain of economy, trade, and military this tie will also have an impact on the maritime context. Most importantly the world order where the US has a significant hegemonic status would be shivered if this tie could maintain its strategies in the proper pathway.

Implications for Bangladesh:

Bangladesh draws the attention of both the United States and Russia because of its location between South and Southeast Asia. US is the third largest trading partner of Bangladesh, the largest market for the RMG sector, and a significant provider of foreign aid and foreign direct investment. Russia is also a huge financial partner of Bangladesh in some recent projects like the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant. China-Russia tie is also important for Bangladesh as a close connection is there in the economy and other sectors. The wave of the Ukraine war also affects Bangladesh. The

²⁶ *Russia-china: The unequal relationship and its implications*. Vivekananda International Foundation. (2022, May 19). Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/may/19/russia-china-the-unequal-relationship-and-its-implications>

²⁷ *ibid*

domestic economy and the energy sector of our country are significantly affected because of this war and ongoing sanctions from the West.²⁸ In this context, Bangladesh should be in a neutral stance where strategic autonomy should be maintained. Friendly and cooperative relations with both the part should be maintained. Taking any particular side will not be a wise decision here.

Conclusion:

In this world, major powers should be concerned about promoting peace, stability and cooperation. The Sino-Russian ties are a product of history. Both are fighting against the US's abusive hegemonic position. The wave of the Ukraine war makes the strategic partnership of these two Asian giants more significant. Though it is clear that China and Russia are heading towards an alliance but it is also assumed that some limits are still there. In many contexts, they are still not committed. Despite the odds, these two Asian giants are converging towards some common interests, which has a huge impact throughout the world. If the Russian invasion of Ukraine becomes successful in a complete range then there are significant possibilities that China will show a more aggressive attitude towards Taiwan. A clean divide between the West and the allies on one side, Russia and China with their allies on another side is visible. The world might experience a significant turning point because of this historic divide. It can be said that effective Sino-Russian ties can promote some constructive stability in this region and can result in prosperity and stability throughout the world though the question regarding the strategic limits of this no limit partnership is still at gunpoint.

²⁸ HA Shovon, M. H. R. (2023, January 16). *Cold War Redux in Dhaka*. The Daily Star. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/cold-war-redux-dhaka-3222666>