

## THE BALLGAME OF RUSSIA-CHINA CONVERGENCE AND HOW THE UNITED STATES FIGURES IN

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### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary context, the Sino-Russian ties are considered to be at their pinnacle. This is attributed to their growing convergence based on the strong anti-West sentiment they harbour. However, their relationship is not devoid of historical mistrust. This paper traces the Russia-China relationship from the start of the Cold War to the present day, marking all the significant events that are key in sustaining their relationship. To understand the different elements of their relationship, this paper also explores their political and economic engagement along with their cultural, energy, and technical collaboration. This paper analyses the potential depth of their coordination, based on the complementary nature of their strengths and capabilities, and the implications it has for the United States. Additionally, it discusses the points of divergence in the Russia-China relationship and the potential opportunities for the United States to exploit them.

### TRACING THE SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIP FROM THE COLD WAR ERA TO THE PRESENT DAY

After the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, there developed a close relationship between the Soviet Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party. Their political and ideological alignment created a conducive environment for fostering an alliance between the two. During the Cold War, Russian economic and military supremacy along with the influence it wielded, caused Russia to emerge as the dominant player in their relationship – one that did not last long for the same reasons. How the relationship unfolded reduced China to Russia's second fiddle, a narrative that did not bode well with Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. Due to this power differential, fissures in their relationship emerged. To avoid being beaten around by Russia's command, China severed its ties with them in the 1960s and pursued an independent policy. To solidify the new status-quo, all Soviet advisors had been expelled from China and diplomatic engagement had been stalled. This marked their transition from allies to ones that were at odds with each other, as exemplified by their border clash of 1969. Since the end of the Cold War, the power dynamics across the globe have been drastically remodelled. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian power and influence have deteriorated, a reality that raises questions about its prominence as a world power in the modern context. Juxtaposed to this decline, China has invested in its economic and military capabilities thus raising its status to an emerging superpower and one that is likely to contend with the United States' supremacy.

In the present day, Russia and China may not agree upon a common philosophy and despite their growing differences, the invisible hand of geopolitics is driving the two together. The

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relationship between Russia and China, which is now claimed to be at its pinnacle<sup>1</sup>, is sustained by their common dislike of American preponderance in the international arena. Threat assessment reports suggest that “Russia and China are more aligned now than at any point since in the mid-1950s and their relationship is likely to strengthen in the coming years”<sup>2</sup> due to the convergence of interests, particularly regarding the opposition to the US-led liberal international order and its promotion of democratic values and human rights across the globe. That is to say, the Russia-China convergence is contingent on their mutual rejection of the criticism levied by the West on human rights abuses and their alternate vision of global governance<sup>3</sup>. Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and Chinese presence in the Asia-Pacific battle space have placed them at odds with the United States. Independently, they may not be able to take on the United States and its vast network of allies, but upon pooling their resources and aligning their strategies, they can present a formidable threat. The potential depth of their coordination has reignited concerns in Washington as their emerging partnership presents a threat that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The rationale guiding their alliance is the complementary nature of their strengths and capabilities. That is to say that the economic influence of China combined with the diplomatic and military weight of Russia could enable them to rival the West for global supremacy. Russia is a land power with natural resources, a nuclear arsenal, and a high-tech military sector. Whereas China is an economic powerhouse with an increasingly capable navy and military. China is using its relationship with Russia to fill the lacuna in its military capabilities, to augment and accelerate its technological innovations while undermining the position of the United States in the global landscape<sup>4</sup>. The Russian-made sophisticated military hardware also strengthens its air defence and submarine capabilities that make China an even more of a daunting threat to the United States in the currently contested Asia-Pacific Region. Further, by joining hands with Russia, China recognizes that the United States will be confronted with two adversaries that will require it to divide its resources, capabilities, and attention. This would detract the US attention from China and mitigate some of its measures giving China more room to strategically manoeuvre.

As for Russia, it hopes to secure economic benefits from its relationship with China. For long, Russia has been inflicted with sanctions from the United States and the European Union that have crippled its economy. Russia’s partnership with China helps Putin to strategically leverage his position to get the United States to lower tariffs and lift sanctions. In keeping with the debilitating impacts the western sanctions have had on its economy, Russia is working closely with China to undermine the US’s centrality to the global economic system and to weaken its

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<sup>1</sup> "Putin Says Russia-China Relations At Highest-Ever Level". [global.chinadaily.com.cn](http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/05/WS60bb0cbaa31024ad0bac3d34.html), 2021, <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/05/WS60bb0cbaa31024ad0bac3d34.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "U.S. Threat Assessment Report". [Nytimes.Com](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/04/13/us/annual-threat-assessment-report-pdf.html), 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/04/13/us/annual-threat-assessment-report-pdf.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ong, Russell. "China's Strategic Convergence with Russia". *Korean Journal Of Defense Analysis*, vol 21, no. 3, 2009, pp. 315-328. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.1080/10163270903087329.

<sup>4</sup> Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, and David Shullman. "China And Russia’s Dangerous Convergence". *Foreign Affairs*, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-05-03/china-and-russias-dangerous-convergence>.

economic tools. To diversify and sustain its economy, Russia has turned to China for foreign direct investment and as a market for defence equipment and arms export along with the motive to replace the dollar as the global reserve currency<sup>5</sup>. In its confrontation with China, the United States has downgraded Russia to a second-tier concern despite its highly capable military that it has not shied away from deploying. Russia is afraid of being relegated as an irrelevant power in the messy multipolar landscape<sup>6</sup>. By joining forces with Beijing, Moscow is strengthening its position and compelling the United States to deal with it and restore its relevance in the international system.

## **RUSSIA-CHINA TIES**

### *Political Collaborations*

The bonhomie between Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, and Xi Jinping, the President of China, has provided much of the impetus for their cooperation<sup>7</sup>. Both Russia and China are regimes with authoritarian undertones, leading them to adopt similar measures to consolidate political power on their respective domestic fronts. Under the tenure of these leaders, it can be argued that both Russia and China have transformed their foreign policy from assertive to aggressively expansionist. Further, Putin and Xi are both focused on national rejuvenation and remaking the image of their countries as one that is more aligned with that of their glorious past<sup>8</sup>. Further, Russia and China interact at all levels of the government inviting room for closer cooperation. They may not share a common authoritarian worldview but seek to garner legitimacy for their non-democratic rule. The Russian and Chinese regimes are increasingly resembling each other based on their learnings of authoritarian tactics from each other's playbooks. China has been known for amplifying positive narratives about the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through propaganda conducted by the state-owned media. But in recent times, China has coupled this with disinformation campaigns that it has picked from Russia's methods<sup>9</sup> thus driving its cause of challenging the western system even further. Having learnt to stifle freedom on online spheres and means to crack down on dissent from China, Russia has imposed strict measures on its population and has become increasingly intolerant of opposition.

Their political cooperation is also seen playing out on the international forums, where they are known to vote for and against the same agendas representing a convergence of interests. Their

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<sup>5</sup> Arundha Chenoy. Bypassing the Dollar: Rise of an Alternate Currency System. The Wire. 25th May 2020. <https://thewire.in/trade/dollar-currency-trade>.

<sup>6</sup> Gavin, Gabriel. "Russia's Romance With China Is All About Keeping Up Appearances". The Diplomat, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/russias-romance-with-china-is-all-about-keeping-up-appearances/>.

<sup>7</sup> Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, and David Shullman. "A Russian-Chinese Partnership Is A Threat To U.S. Interests". Foreign Affairs, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-05-14/russian-chinese-partnership-threat-us-interests>.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, Chris. "Russia And China: A Strange Case Of Convergence". Wilson Center, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/russia-and-china-strange-case-convergence>.

<sup>9</sup> EU Accuses Russia, Chia of COVID Disinformation. DW News. 28th April 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-accuses-russia-china-of-covid-vaccine-disinformation/a-57367812>

common dislike for the United States, its peddling of democratic values in their sphere of influence, and interference in their domestic affairs make Russia and China cooperate in multilateral forums. Russia and China have emerged as a bloc in the United Nations Security Council. They have a common interest to weaken the decades' long American unipolarity and reconfigure the tenets of the liberal international order to one that is more representative of and amenable to autocratic governments such as theirs. To that end, Russia and China are challenging the issues taken up in the Security Council that revolve around the core values of liberalism, democracy, free markets, individual rights, and such which are the interest of their regimes. By exercising their veto powers in the Security Council, they are actively fighting the principles that underpin the basis of this world order. They posit their collaboration as one that has a stabilizing effect on the global situation which is currently being periled by the unaccommodating principles furthered by the United States.

### *Economic Collaborations*

The growing base of Russia-China cooperation extends to their economic engagement. They are important trading partners, and their bilateral commercial exchange has been rising at an exponential rate. The nature of the two economies is highly different yet compatible. Russia is an export-oriented economy with regards to raw materials and natural resources – specifically crude oil, coal, and wood and China is an import-oriented economy for the same. Whereas Chinese sales to Russia are mostly consumer goods. In this manner, they fulfil each other's requirements thus creating a natural economic bond between the two. Even though trade relations have grown unprecedentedly over the past few years, and it appears to be a compelling case for validating the Russia-China partnership, closer inspection suggests otherwise. There is a remarkable structural difference between the economies of the two countries creating an overwhelming asymmetry like the trade<sup>10</sup>. China is Russia's second-largest trading partner (after the EU) and Russia's largest individual partner in both exports and imports. However, for China, the Russian market is at best second-rate. It ranks tenth in Chinese exports and does not make it into the top ten in either imports or total trade. Russia has become a raw-material appendage for Chinese goods which could potentially create a fault line in the long-term economic health of their relationship. Another friction point is Russia's limited integration in the world economy in contrast to China whose economy is heavily intertwined, causing it to have a greater stake in the present world economic order. Russia's penchant for wreaking havoc in democracies it opposed could endanger China's economic interests in those very countries. As a potential superpower whose economic growth depends on globalization, China is much more interested in stability than Russia, a country that sometimes benefits by openly challenging the West. In this regard, China is more vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions than Russia.

### *Defence Collaborations*

Russia and China's bilateral defence collaboration was the gateway for the establishment of Bilateral relations between two superpowers. After the incident at Tiananmen square in 1989, the western countries involving the United States and the United Kingdom imposed a ban on

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<sup>10</sup> Aron, Leon. "Are Russia And China Really Forming An Alliance?". Foreign Affairs, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-04-04/are-russia-and-china-really-forming-alliance>.

arms trade deals with China. Thereafter, Russia emerged as China's main arms supplier in the Asian subcontinent. Although then, Russia's interest in trade deals with China involved its vested interest in maintaining its expansionist policy against the U.S during the phase of the Cold war. The imposition of an arms embargo from the western world resulted in a high cost for China's military modernization plan. During the 1990s, China launched its modernization plan for its naval and air force capabilities and its arms industries, as its arm supplying industries were not capable of producing a set of advanced weapons that its rivals, including Taiwan, were procured from the west. For the Russian [former, Soviet Union] arm industry, the period of early 1990s, was the period of shrinking arm industries of Russia. Therefore, the orders of advanced armed weapons came from China and India and were accepted by Russian armed industries for their survival. The interdependence of Russia and China over the trading of armed weapons increased drastically. Between 1991 and 2010, more than 90 percent of China's imported major conventional weapons were supplied from Russia, and China accounted for nearly 40 percent of Russian export<sup>11</sup>.

China and Russia continue to increase their dependence on defence collaboration by establishing four mechanisms intending to demonstrate a consistent upwards trend of defence collaborations. The First mechanism of China- Russia, inter- military consultations is *the mechanism of regular meeting between defence ministers of China and Russia*, established in 1993, this mechanism takes place yearly in Moscow and Beijing, where Russia and China discuss shared perception of external threats. The Second mechanism of China- Russia, inter- military consultation is *the mechanism of Annual strategic consultations among chiefs of the General staff*- emerged in 1997. Through this mechanism, Russia and China discuss the practical issues involved in military corporations between the nations. The Third mechanism in *Russia- China consultation on national security issues*, launched in 2004, the mechanism focuses on Russia and China's national interest involving heads of the Security Council on Russia's side and the representative of the state council on China's side. The fourth and Emerging mechanism is *The China- Russia Northeast Asia security dialogue*, established in 2014, which resembles the responsiveness of the bilateral military consultation network to the contingencies of the international political environment. China and Russia's bilateral defence cooperation continues to expand through a spectrum of mechanisms and Joint military exercises in Air, Land, and Sea<sup>12</sup>. The expanding defence cooperation between Russia and China is becoming a threat for western leaders like the United States. The expanding defence sales of Russia and China and the intervention of two countries in the major disputes such as that in the South and East China Seas, can become a threat for U.S. allies in Asia like Japan and South Korea.

### ***Cultural Collaborations***

China and Russia do not have a history of strong cultural collaboration. Russia and China observed strong cultural relations during the period of the Cold War (1947- 91), where the erstwhile Soviet Union (today's Russia) used the regular deployment of experts and exchange

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<sup>11</sup> N Unnikrishnan, Nandan and Uma Purshothaman. Trends in Russia- China relations: implications for US. Research report. New Delhi: Observer research foundation, 2015. Document.

<sup>12</sup> Korolev, Alexander. Beyond the Nominal and the Ad Hoc: the substance and drivers of China- Russia military cooperation, SETA VAKFI [2018]: 25- 38. Journal Article.

of students in universities. Despite that, cultural differences continued to persist. However, in recent times, governments have been trying to promote cultural linkages between the two states. The two governments announced the year 2004, as the ‘Year of Friendship’ between Russian and Chinese Youth. The year 2006, simultaneously became the year of Russia in China, and 2007- the year of China in Russia. The years 2006 and 2007 were seen as major years of cultural linkages between the respective Russia and China. For further promotion of cultural affinity, the two states announced the year 2009, as the year of the Russian language in China, and 2010 as the year of the Chinese language in Russia. Such promotion of years was seen as a way of strengthening cultural collaborations between Russia and China<sup>13</sup>. Although the emphasis was to promote culture, these initiatives provided a framework for many joint activities for stimulating economic cooperation between provincial administration in Russia and China as well as business cooperation between the companies and establishment of a broader base for the future.

The cultural collaborations were expanded by a focus on the promotion of tourism. In February 2012, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree, which stated “the Year of Russian tourism in the People's Republic of China and the Year of Chinese tourism in the Russian Federation”. To date, 20 regions of Russian federations have direct business contacts in the tourism industry with Chinese government bodies, as well as between representation of tourism industry and their associations<sup>14</sup>. The efforts to promote Russia- China cultural collaborations by the governments of respective countries cannot be ignored. However, such promotion of Cultural linkages cannot be successful until the fall of a feeling of ‘nationalism’ within the respective states.

Another domain for the promotion of cultural linkages will be higher education. However, the young students living in Russia and China generally prefer universities in the United States and the United Kingdom rather than preferring the universities in Russia and China. The percentage of Chinese students in the U.S continues to increase over the past decade, but recently, the percentages of Chinese students visiting the U.S and the U.K for higher studies came down significantly due to the rising bilateral tensions with China and Russia to the western world [especially under trump administration of U.S [2016- 2020]<sup>15</sup>. With respect to Cultural collaborations, Russia and China stand far behind that of U.S. potentials of expansion of its cultural linkages, not just in the European continent but also in Asian Continent<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, China and Russia should focus on bolstering their cultural relations by promoting their traditions and languages to compete with U.S. cultural expansion.

### ***Energy Collaborations***

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<sup>13</sup> Solomentseva, Anastasia. "The "Rise" of China in the eyes of Russia: A source of threat or new opportunities?" partnership for peace consortium of defence academies and security studies institute (2014): 3-40. Document.

<sup>14</sup> "Year of Russian Tourism in China." 4 August 2014. Federal agency for tourism. Document.

<sup>15</sup> Svoboda, Sarah. Why do so many Chinese students choose US universities? 2 June 2015. Newspaper Article.

<sup>16</sup> N Unnikrishnan, Nandan and Uma Purshothaman. Trends in Russia- China relations: implications for US. Research report. New Delhi: Observer research foundation, 2015. Document.

China and Russia relations have a different and varied spectrum of bilateral collaborations. One such idiosyncratic field of collaborations includes the expanding energy collaborations of Russia- China relations. However, such collaborations expanded in the initial decades of the 21st century. Russia has abundant oil and natural gas resources in Siberia and its far eastern region. Although, such resources were irrelevant to China for a longer period. The expansion of Sino- Russia cooperation in the energy sector gained significant attention after the stabilization of Sino- Russia relations in the early 1990s. Sino- Russia ties involve energy cooperation on a diverse regional location across the Asian subcontinent:

1. The natural gas project at Kovyktin in Irkutsk, Eastern Siberia

Russia and China have completed the preliminary feasibility studies of this project, including the construction of a pipeline from Irkutsk to China. The research findings highlight that the project is economically and technically feasible, either in terms of the total volume of Kovyktin gas reserves or with a view of China's growing need for natural gas. The feasibility studies were undertaken by China's Petroleum and Natural Gas Cooperation and the Russian Petroleum Company<sup>17</sup>. Recently, China's President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin inaugurated the "The Power of Siberia " gas pipeline- a massive cross border undertaking not only central to China's energy security but also for bolstering special ties between Beijing and Moscow. The Siberia gas pipeline project is anchored by a \$400 billion gas deal. Under the contract, Russia will deliver 1 trillion cubic meters of natural gas to China over the next 30 years<sup>18</sup>. The natural gas project in eastern Siberia is projected to be one of the largest energy cooperation between Russia and China.

2. Energy cooperation in Central Asia

The region of Central Asia (defined as, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) is an area of relatively weak states but abundant energy reserves and is strategically located between Russia, China, and the Middle East. Moreover, the region of central Asia can also contribute to the regional stability of Afghanistan. The dominance of radical ideology in the country destabilises the security situation of the entire region, and therefore, Russia, China, Pakistan, India, the United States, Iran, and Turkey continue to seek influence over the region since the 2001 invasion in Afghanistan. Although Russia is too weak to dominate the region politically and lacks the economic prowess to develop the region, it continues to expand its economic interest within the region. Russia has attempted to control the energy infrastructure of Central Asia, purchasing energy at cheap prices, and then re-exporting to Europe at a profit.

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<sup>17</sup> Yishan, Xia. "China- Russia energy cooperation: Impetuses, prospects, and impacts." China Institute of international studies (2000): 2- 15. Document.

<sup>18</sup> Aneja, Atul. "Power of Siberia" gas pipeline cements China- Russia bond. 2 December 2019. Newspaper article. 3 July 2021.

China has three major interrelated goals in the region- to ensure stability in its north-western Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, China desires overall economic and infrastructure linkages with Central Asia, and China strives to increase its energy imports from central Asia by winning energy contracts and developing the infrastructure to deliver oil and gas to China. China remains an active participant in the infrastructural development in central Asia by constructing roads and actively participating in the Asian Development Banks [ADB] and Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation [CAREC]. The institutional body that involves Russia and China together over the issue of Central Asia is the Shanghai cooperation organization [SCO]. However, Russia- China have discrepancies over the SCO. Russia prefers collective security treaty organizations or the Eurasian economic community, both of which are dominated by Russia and do not include China<sup>19</sup>.

Russia-China energy collaborations also involve other cooperation such as crude oil- an exchange that is produced by China at Akchubinsk oil field in Kazakhstan and exported to Russia by its Yukos Company, and other countries in the region. Russia and China are also jointly building a nuclear power station at Lianyungang, Jiangsu province with an installed capacity of 2 million KW. This project began in September 1999 and continues to act as a major player in Sino- Russia energy cooperation<sup>20</sup>. The expanding Sino- Russia collaboration in the energy sector can be seen as an economic and political hurdle for the United States. Through the expansion of Sino- Russia trade relations in the energy sector in the region of Central Asia and Siberia, China and Russia are strengthening their economic and political sphere of influence in the region, which can become a challenge for the US to expand its influence and strategic economic partnerships in the region.

### *Technical Collaborations*

Technical collaborations have become another significant pillar of Russia- China relations. In recent times, Russia- China relations have attained an unprecedentedly high level. The recent execution of ‘Year of Scientific and Technological Innovation’, despite the impact of the COVID- 19 pandemic, by Russia and China, signifies the high level and distinctiveness of the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for the beginning of a new era for Russia and China relations<sup>21</sup>. The Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Russian President Vladimir Putin jointly implemented the plan with an aim of expansion of technical collaborations between the two nation-states. The current leaders of both the countries sent a congratulatory letter to each other after the successful implementation of the plan where Chinese President Xi Jinping said, ‘As major responsible countries with significant influence in the field of science and technology, China and Russia should promote extensive exchanges and cooperation between their researchers and contribute to the building of a community with the shared future

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<sup>19</sup> Bolt, Paul. "Sino- Russia relations in changing world order." Air university press (2014): 47- 69. Research paper.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, Andrea Kendall, and David Shullman. "Navigating the deepening Russia- China relations." Research Report. 2021. Document.



for mankind'<sup>22</sup>. Russia and China's increased focus on science and innovation are due in part to their increasingly antipathetic relationship with the United States and Europe- Russia continues to remain under European and U.S. economic sanctions as an outcome of its aggression in Ukraine, and Beijing faces trade tensions with the U.S. and growing Western concern about its technological industries. The implementation of the year of scientific and technological innovations by both states shall bolster each country's ability to compete with U.S. technological developments and alleviate the pressure of economic sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe, respectively.

Another domain of cooperation within technical collaborations will be that of space. The recent collaboration of Russia and China, to build an international scientific lunar station, will carry out a wide range of scientific research including exploration and utilization of the moon<sup>23</sup>. The two sides have also agreed to cooperate in the peaceful use of GLONASS and Bei Dou navigation, intending to promote interoperability of the two systems. The Russia-China collaborations have now expanded by including the domains of artificial intelligence [AI], big data, 5G, robotics, digital economy, biotechnology, and information and communication technology [ICT]. Beijing and Moscow pursue a similar goal to stand against western technological advancements in today's world, many actions were taken independently to reinforce each other's interests and a race for control over the organization and project is evident from the behaviour of the two respective states. The rapid technical collaborations between the two states can stand against U.S. advancements in technology. Although, such a notion of modernization of China and Russia could be possible only if the differences between the two nations are resolved at a higher level.

## **POINTS OF DIVERGENCE AND THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED FOR THE UNITED STATES**

There are striking differences between China and Russia and a strategic alliance between the two would lead to the former dwarfing the latter by enlargement. In time Russia would become subordinate to China, due to their economic, military, and demographic disparities, causing their national interests to diverge. Serving in the backseat of an alliance is not desirable for the policymakers in Moscow, causing the alliance to appear less lucrative. Their alliance between the two breaks apart in the Arctic, a region in which Russia has a legal claim over territorial waters and has been stepping up its military presence by reopening Soviet bases and conducting military exercises. Russia is seeking to limit the role of non-Arctic states, that is China, in regional governance. Whereas China has long-term strategic interests in the region and has been beefing up its diplomatic activity to gain a foothold in the region causing a drift in the national interest of the two. This presents itself as an opportunity for the United States to exploit the differences between Russia and China and counter their collaboration<sup>24</sup>. The United States

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<sup>22</sup> Xi Jinping, Putin send congratulatory letters for the opening of China- Russia year of scientific and technological innovation. 26 August 2020. News website article. 26 August 2020.

<sup>23</sup> China and Russia to build a lunar space station. 10 March 2021. Newspaper article- BBC World.

<sup>24</sup> Kapoor, Nivedita. Tech- Tonic Shift in Sino- Russian Cooperation. 12 May 2021. Research article.

can drive a wedge between them by supporting Moscow in its endeavour at the Arctic by restarting the Arctic Chief of Defence Forum (CHODS) and enabling dialogue with Russia<sup>25</sup>. Thus, The United States can capitalize on these tensions and impact the trajectory of the relationship between the two countries.

The Central Asian region historically lay within Russia's sphere of influence. Russia has maintained a stronghold in the region and Beijing's considerable economic – and growing military – presence in Central Asia poses a threat to their partnership. By exerting Chinese power in the former Soviet Central Asian republics, Russia and China and now vying for the same spheres of influence. China's economic and military prowess gives it an edge over Russia even in its backyard, hinting at the issue of a growing disparity of power and standing between the two. This coupled with Russia's increasing fear of an inferior status might inhibit future cooperation. Another source of tension is the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan which tilts the balance of power in China's favor. The rise of China's power disturbs regional multipolarity and reduces Russia's ambition of being a dominant power to make-believe. Further, the Russian supply of military equipment to India and Vietnam, countries that take an anti-China stance has also emerged as another factor that could shake the basis of their cooperation. While they are united in their vision for alternate global governance, both are keen to preserve some room to maneuver in the conduct of their respective policies which could dissuade them from acting together on all fronts<sup>26</sup>. Despite the expanding base of their cooperation, the fault lines in their relationship will push them to pursue an independent and sometimes competitive regional and foreign policy.

These are the areas of divergence that the United States should exploit. The United States must both prevent and prepare for a growing synergy between Russia and China. Any American effort to address either Russia's or China's destabilizing behavior must consider the two countries' deepening partnership. Washington must now calculate how its response to one adversary will shape the calculus of the other. America must direct its efforts to study the nexus of their combined capacities and capabilities, and consequently formulate comprehensive strategies to counter them. To ameliorate the combined threat posed by Russia and China, America can recalibrate its approach towards Russia and deepen its relationship based on areas of common concern. Washington can engage with Moscow to revive the Iran nuclear deal, as both are interested in preventing Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Further, the mutual support for a stable peace process in Afghanistan presents a possible arena for constructive interaction between Russian and American diplomats. The United States could achieve a dual purpose by waiving this clause of the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" passed by Congress in 2017 which is aimed at countering the aggressive actions of Iran, Russia, and North Korea. One of drawing Russia closer to itself by creating leeway for it to enhance its economic development and the other by emboldening the potential adversaries of China. If countries could be provided with the waiver to purchase

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<sup>25</sup> Femia, Caitlin. "America Must Reassert Its Leadership In The Arctic For 21st Century Security". The Center For Climate & Security, 2020, <https://climateandsecurity.org/2020/01/america-must-reassert-its-leadership-in-the-arctic-for-21st-century-security/>.

<sup>26</sup> Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, and David Shullman. "China And Russia'S Dangerous Convergence". Foreign Affairs, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-05-03/china-and-russias-dangerous-convergence>.

Russian weapons without the imposition of sanctions on either, a natural fissure between Moscow and Beijing would develop based on this area of contestation.

However, the possibility of a broader Russian-U.S. détente seems unlikely. Russia's relations with the United States have only progressively worsened since the end of the Cold War despite the multifold attempts to improve them. The United States' unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, support for pro-democracy movements, and regime change within Russia's borders have been some of the pressing areas of contestation. Further, the eastward expansion of NATO remains at the top of Russia's grievances and the root of many of its fears thus impeding their relationship. The lack of a robust relationship and the strained mutual trust foreshadow the possibility of developing collaboration despite their areas of common interest<sup>27</sup>. The United States is a less predictable and reliable partner to Russia due to their political incompatibilities. While courting a relationship with Russia would be in the strategic interest of the United States, it is impeded by its position as the leader of the rules-based liberal international order and Russia, its violator. For these reasons, Russia prefers to tackle the immediate threat posed by the United States than the long-term threat posed to its dominance by its collaboration with China.

## ANALYSIS

Although Russia and China do not share a common ideological perspective, they share a common interest in standing against the U.S.-led liberal international order. Currently, Russia and China are undergoing a major phase of strengthening their bilateral relations by expanding their bilateral relations from political and economic to cultural and energy and the rising new domain of technical cooperation. They have witnessed an increase in bilateral relations under the leadership of current Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping but rising collaboration does not define the acceptance of the ideology of respective nation, neither does it defines the settlement disputes like border conflicts or their non-acceptance of regional control in regional organizations like Russian controlled CSTO or China-controlled SCO. Russia- China collaborations have threatened the U.S.-led- liberal international order and its hegemonic status with China becoming a global economic power by 2030. For example, the ongoing South China sea dispute, China's aggressive maritime stake over the disputed international maritime borders, gained a neutral response from Russia by calling the intervention of western pow "detrimental and counterproductive" and has rejected the nine-dash line claim of China over the South China Sea dispute<sup>28</sup>. A set of differences is visible between Russia and China's claims in the South-China dispute. However, increasing bilateral collaborations between Russia and China are threatening U.S. hegemony across the globe as rising corporations are uplifting other sections of collaborations like technical and energy

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<sup>27</sup> Kaczmarek, Marcin. "Convergence Or Divergence? Visions Of World Order And The Russian-Chinese Relationship". *European Politics And Society*, vol 20, no. 2, 2018, pp. 207-224. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.1080/23745118.2018.1545185.

<sup>28</sup> Kuhrt, Natasha, and Marcin Kaczmarek. "Will The Biden Administration Push Russia And China Closer Together?". *The Diplomat*, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/will-the-biden-administration-push-russia-and-china-closer-together/>.

corporations to compete for the modernisation of the U.S. and its military capabilities. The U.S. should promote its trade relations with rival nations of China and Russia, supporting Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and India, and should also take strategic leverages of ongoing South China sea dispute by supporting regional affected states like the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Japan in the East China sea dispute. U.S. should promote its economic and political influence in disputed regions, where Russia and China are directly or indirectly involved in the disputed or politically insatiable regions like the region of Central Asia, where the ongoing troop withdrawal of U.S. forces in Afghanistan has resulted in the rise of Taliban forces yet again and where Russia and China are intervening through political or economic influences across the Central Asian region and should further promote its political and economic leverages with the region or the region of eastern Europe, where Belarus' internal political stability has gained global attention due to its geopolitical location. The western parts of Europe involve NATO allies and the eastern part of Europe involves CSTO allies. The growing instability and demand for a democratic state have threatened Russia's political influence and where the U.S. could take the leverage of strategically promoting policies of democracies through its NATO allies, to compete against Russia- China joint intervention. In respect to cultural collaborations, Russia and China have to adopt policies with an immediate effect to expand their cultural collaborations and to compete against U.S. cultural expansion through bilateral or multilateral platforms of collaborations.

## CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, Russia and China's expanding or evolving bilateral relations have opened a new chapter of global corporations within the eastern world. The bilateral relations with a new domain of technical, energy, and cultural corporations have raised hope for Russia to maintain its position as a global superpower after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1992, to counter U.S. diplomatic and economic influence across the globe with the support of the economic expansion of China's economy. On account of the strengthened political and economic collaboration between Russia and China, their differences have been dampened and focus has been shifted to weakening the U.S. dollar to enhance their political influence across the world. The energy and technical collaborations are the recent domains of explorations for Russia and China and a joint space explorations plan announced by China's President Xi Jinping has expressed chances of explorations of space programmes, jointly proposed by Russia and China. Russia and China should further expand their technical and energy corporations to compete with the U.S. technical and energy advanced project. Russia and China need to strengthen their cultural collaboration. Although, the recent meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden, has raised a hope for some commonality between U.S. and Russia, where they both acknowledged that U.S.- Russia relations are at their lowest point in decades and a will to rejuvenate bilateral relations was considered by the U.S. which has triggered fear in China<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Depetris, Daniel R. Biden- Putin summit comes as U.S.- Russia Share Something in Common: A fear of China. 17 June 2021. NBC News- opinion piece.