

Research article

The Role of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership in the Transformation of the International System

Mohammed Ahmed Majeed¹, Aram Ahmad Wso²

¹Salahaddin University-Erbil, Department of International Relations & Diplomacy, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq.

²University of Raparin, Department of Law, Raparin University, Rania, Kurdistan Region, Iraq.

Article Information

Abstract

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address:

Mohammed.Majeed1@su.edu.krd

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This research examines the strategic alliance between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in the post-Cold War era and the role of this partnership in transforming the international system. The study is premised on the proposition that the Sino-Russian strategic alliance constitutes a pivotal factor in generating fundamental changes in the global balance of power and facilitating the transition of the international system from the United States of America (US)-led unipolarity to a multipolar configuration. The central research question addresses whether the strategic alliance between China and Russia can serve as an effective alternative to American hegemony and how this partnership influences the reshaping of the emerging global order. The primary hypothesis posits that the deepening of strategic cooperation between both states across political, economic, and military domains results in the formation of a new power pole capable of altering the equilibrium of the international system. The research methodology employs a descriptive-analytical approach to examine bilateral relations and their regional and international implications. Furthermore, the study identifies four principal phases in the evolution of this alliance: from the normalization of relations to the achievement of comprehensive strategic partnership. The findings reveal that cooperation between both states within the framework of international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS group, alongside coordination within the UN Security Council and the establishment of alternative financial systems, has collectively created an effective mechanism for countering Western hegemony and constructing a new global order founded upon the principles of multipolarity and balance of power.

Keywords: Sino-Russian; Strategic Alliance; Multipolarity; SCO and BRICS.

1. Introduction

In 1991, the Cold War ended, and as a consequence, the international community witnessed a radical transformation in interstate relations. This development led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rise of the United States as the sole global superpower through establishing a unipolar international system. Although this system dominated the world throughout the 1990s, it did not last long, as an alternative bloc, led by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, re-emerged. The two states began a gradual rapprochement which finally evolved into a deep strategic and multifaceted alliance.

This research endeavors to fill an apparent void in Kurdish academic scholarship concerning the dynamics of China-Russia relations. Kurdish researchers have traditionally emphasized regional security concerns, yet have devoted minimal attention to the strategic, governmental, and economic aspects of Chinese-Russian cooperation. Moreover, this research endeavors to provide a

theoretical framework for understanding changes in the international system. It also aims to contribute to understanding new equilibria in the international system and predicting future trends. Additionally, the research may play a role in examining the impact of these changes on the Middle East region in general, and Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in particular, which underscores the significance of this study.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the role of the Sino-Russian strategic alliance in transforming the international system and creating a new multipolar arrangement. Within this general framework, the research identifies several specific objectives, most notably: determining the developmental phases of the alliance between 1991-2025, analyzing the foundations of relations across various domains, evaluating the role of both states in regional and international organizations, and identifying impacts on the balance of power and the reconfiguration of the international system.

The central problem of this research is encapsulated in a fundamental question: How does the strategic alliance between China and Russia impact the transformation of the international system from unipolarity

to multipolarity? The main hypothesis of this research is that the deepening strategic alliance between China and Russia in political, economic, and military spheres creates a new power center capable of transforming the international system from unipolarity to multipolarity. Furthermore, it hypothesizes that as Western pressures on both states intensify, their bilateral relations become deeper and stronger.

Within the framework of our research topic, several related studies have been conducted. Bosworth and Kaczmarek (2022) in their study "Russia and China Between Cooperation and Competition" examine China-Russia relations within a theoretical realist framework. The research encompasses historical characteristics, economic, geopolitical, and regional analysis dimensions. Shaza Latif Abdul-Rasoul (2025) in her study "China-Russia Cooperation and Future Prospects" examines the development from cooperative relations to strategic partnership, highlighting both countries' pursuit of opposing Western dominance, energy trade, and Eurasian security. Additionally, she considers future scenarios under a multipolar system. Ben Youssef and Belarbi (2024) in their research "China-Russia Relations and Their Impact on the International System 2012-2022" provide an assessment of relations in military, energy, and multilateral institutional domains (BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization). The researchers argue that these relations, by combining China's economic strength with Russia's military and diplomatic resources, strengthen the multipolar system. Degterev (2019) in his study titled "The Multipolar Global System: Old Myths and New Realities" provides a detailed analysis of the concept of multipolarity and concludes that the world is in a transitional state toward a "new bipolarity" between America and China, while maintaining Russia's leading role in global security. The distinction of our research from others lies in its detailed historical periodization starting from 1991 through 2025. This historical approach is absent in other studies. It also highlights the role of regional and international organizations as instruments for changing the balance of power and establishing alternative financial systems.

The theoretical framework of this research is constituted by Power Transition Theory, developed by American scholar of Italian origin Kenneth Organski. This theory explains international competition for global dominance among great powers (Al-Sayed, 2019: 119). The theory presents three assumptions: First, the international system is anarchical and hierarchical (Organski, 1985: 36-40). Second, the laws and norms governing international and domestic (local) politics are similar. States engage in intense competition to gain power in the international system (Abdul-Salam & Younes, 2021: 889). Third, what drives competition among states is the ultimate outcome of potential gains from cooperation or competition. It maintains that states' goal is to maximize gains according to their capabilities (Abdul-Salam & Younes, 2021: 889).

The theory classifies powers as follows: hegemonic power (satisfied), great powers (satisfied and dissatisfied), middle powers (satisfied and dissatisfied), and small powers (satisfied and dissatisfied) (Hadhfani, 2020: 125). Power transition theorists believe there are two conditions for the dominant power to engage in violent behavior with its potential competitors: "power parity" and "dissatisfaction." The highest probability of war occurs when a dissatisfied rising rival power and the dominant hegemonic power become increasingly equal in terms of laws and power resources in the international system (Qasum, 2018: 148). Power Transition Theory views the international system as encompassing different levels of cooperation and competition. Differences in growth rates of overall power

components cause changes in relative power among states, which leads to the creation of new international relations and the formation of new political and economic institutions (Muzaffar, 2020: 266).

According to this theory, the Russian-Chinese alliance falls into the category of "dissatisfied great powers" seeking to change the current hierarchical arrangement of the international system, particularly when the two conditions of "power parity" and "dissatisfaction" converge. This research analyzes how this alliance attempts to increase its "relative gains" in confronting American hegemony through the creation of "new international relations and new political-economic institutions."

2. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, given its suitability for examining the geopolitical complexities of Sino-Russian relations. The descriptive component traces the evolution of these relations from 1991 to 2025, thereby establishing a solid empirical foundation. The analytical component, in turn, is employed to examine the underlying drivers of the partnership and the mechanisms through which both states respond to American hegemony. Together, these components facilitate a comprehensive assessment of the strategic implications for the international system. To support this analysis, the study relies on a carefully selected body of primary sources, including joint declarations and treaties, alongside secondary sources such as peer-reviewed scholarship and strategic reports, ensuring both empirical rigor and analytical depth.

3. Historical Background of the Emergence of the Strategic Partnership between China and Russia

The international transformations following the end of the Cold War led to the emergence of the US as the sole hegemonic power over the components of the international system. However, this situation of unchallenged dominance did not persist without resistance and opposition from international powers. China and Russia, with a new rationality to confront common threats and to achieve their mutual interests within the framework of the "Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership", took steps to address the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The strategic partnership was formally introduced into bilateral relations between China and Russia through their joint declaration establishing what they termed "constructive partnership" in 1994. Subsequently, the declaration establishing "strategic partnership" in 1996 became the foundation for the strategic alliance between both countries (Marcus and Sangsari, 2015: 4). A proper image and understanding of a specific phenomenon cannot be established without knowing the various frameworks and circumstances within which it emerged, whose persistence and development depend on the conditions of these frameworks. Based on this principle, this research examines the frameworks within which China and Russia established their strategic partnership.

3.1. International Frameworks

The strategic partnership between China and Russia emerged within the framework of international challenges resulting from the end of the Cold War between the Eastern and Western blocs, capitalizing on available opportunities. This was one of the most prominent characteristics of this phase, alongside the retreat of military force's role in states' strategic arrangements for managing international affairs. The increase in barriers to globalization affecting all sectors. All these changes occurred within the framework of American hegemony over international affairs, which Washington gradually and

persistently sought to consolidate. Furthermore, the perceptions and understanding of Russian and Chinese leaders regarding the nature of the phase through which international relations were passing after the Cold War played an important role in transforming the nature of their bilateral relations (Burkani, 2024: 103-104).

3.2. Domestic Frameworks

The process of normalizing relations and building friendly relations between both countries began immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its formal announcement on December 27, 1991. In this context, a high-level Chinese diplomatic delegation arrived in Moscow to discuss with the Russian side the issue of preserving achievements obtained from the normalization process of relations between the (former) Soviet Union and China from the mid-1980s onwards and their enhancement. This was evident in the statements of both deputy foreign ministers of China and Russia at that time, indicating that their countries would continue working according to the 1989 agreement, such as the border demarcation agreements between them that had been signed by the Supreme Soviet Council (during the Soviet Union era) in March 1991 (Rozman, 1997: 6).

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the rise of pro-Western forces to power caused Sino-Russian relations to cool and experience a setback under the general influence of the West, particularly America. This was manifested in Russia's complete orientation toward the West, hoping to become a member of the Western community. In this situation, from the second half of 1992 onwards, Russia began to lean more toward Western countries to obtain support and technical assistance in various fields to emerge from the unfavorable situation the country had fallen into after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Burkani, 2024: 104).

The outcome of this orientation was ultimately disappointing for Russia's aspirations. To compensate for this, a Chinese diplomatic delegation visited Moscow to prepare for President Boris Yeltsin's visit to Beijing, with the aim of strengthening relations between both countries and subsequently developing and consolidating them. Thus, the summit meeting between the presidents of China and Russia, held between December 17-19, 1992, is considered a turning point or major progress in the nature of relations between both countries. This visit, particularly occurring during difficult circumstances that both countries were experiencing, yielded greater results than expected (Rozman, 1997: 6). This is manifested through the following orientations:

3.2.1. Russia's New Orientation Toward China

This new orientation in Russia's foreign policy toward opening to the Asian continent, particularly major countries and above all China, emerged after the major failure that befell the Russian economy due to "Shock Therapy" policies and the emergence of a Russian political elite with a vision based on giving great importance to the economic aspect in the process of rebuilding state power. This was achieved by valuing the natural resources the country possessed and giving them a defined role in this new political orientation. This elite believed that Russia's economic recovery was the primary condition for returning as a major power on the international stage, thereby strengthening Russian society and enabling it to confront external challenges (Trenin, 2012: 3).

After the end of the Cold War, Russian leaders became disappointed in their attempts to establish partnership with the West and unite with the European Union. In this situation, Russia changed its view toward China and saw it as a "natural ally" that could provide balance

against the US. Within this paradigm, in the mid-2000s, for the purpose of confronting American power in the Asian continent, some Russians called "Russia Hawks" demanded the establishment of a political-military alliance with China. They also proposed transforming the SCO into a geopolitical equivalent of NATO (Trenin, 2012: 4).

After Russian political discourse regarding China became dominant over the pro-Western trend, the balance began to shift in favor of proponents of establishing close relations with China, known as "China's friends". This trend favored Russia's relations being based on the country's advantages in both security and economic fields. The perspective of proponents of this orientation was based on Russia's geographical position between Europe and China, which exposed it to various challenges at regional and global levels, particularly given the cold reception the West gave to Russia's demands to someday become part of Greater Europe, while Russians had paid a heavy price due to subordination policies toward Europeans, pursued by advocates of the pro-Western trend. Hence, China's importance increased in Russia's official political discourse, as well as in government work and general political dialogue within various Russian centers, including academic centers (Tsygankov, 2009: 4).

3.2.2. China's New Orientation toward Russia

From the early 1990s, China began following a "good neighborliness policy" in which border issues held a central position, aimed at building good relations with neighboring countries and neutralizing them in case of conflicts between itself and other parties, particularly the US. In this orientation, the emergence of "strategic partnership" is observed, which was announced on April 23, 1996, and later this partnership resulted in the "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between China and Russia." This treaty was signed between both parties on July 16, 2001. From this standpoint, to consolidate this orientation in bilateral relations between both countries, a joint Sino-Russian committee was formed to address the coordination of cooperation policies in eight areas: economy, trade, energy, transportation, finance, military technology, science, information technology, and communications (Sebastien, 2003: 6).

3.3. Phases of Development of the Strategic Partnership between China and Russia

The strategic partnership between China and Russia has undergone diverse and multifaceted transformations throughout its developmental process, corresponding to the complexity of bilateral relations between both countries within the framework of the international environment. The examination of the strategic partnership between China and Russia and understanding its characteristics can be divided into several phases. From this perspective, we can describe this division as "periodization," which refers to the segmentation of a phenomenon's lifespan into distinct phases (Huniye, 2016: 202-224).

The strategic partnership between China and Russia encompasses a specific temporal framework for division in This study. Therefore, we divide this strategic partnership between the two states into four distinct phases, as follows:

First Phase: From "Normalization" to "Constructive Partnership" (1994)

China formally recognized Russia in December 1991, following the formal announcement of the Soviet Union's dissolution, marked the beginning of this phase. Both Russian and Chinese sides announced their commitment to all agreements and treaties that had previously

been signed between the Soviet Union and China. In this Context, in September 1994, during the summit meeting between Russian President (Yeltsin) and Chinese President (Jiang Zemin) in Moscow, both sides issued a joint declaration announcing "Constructive Partnership," which encompassed cooperation in four areas: political, economic, military, and international affairs (both regional and global levels) (Yung, 2015: 19-20).

Among the most important objectives of the constructive partnership between Russia and China was the reduction of old fears and suspicions that existed between both countries. Regarding China, this partnership emerged as a strategic response to internal needs. China had begun the process of reform and economic development since the late 1980s. For the success of this project, it required a stable environment and regional stability. Particularly, China had faced severe economic and political sanctions imposed by Western countries following the Tiananmen Square incidents (Barkani, 2024: 111).

Regarding Russia, this strategic partnership came after Moscow's failed attempts to integrate with the Western bloc. Russia at that time faced a major economic crisis stemming from several factors. First, the heavy legacy of the Soviet era, which had left significant economic and social problems. Second, the "shock therapy" policy implemented during President Yeltsin's era and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev's tenure, which worsened the country's economic situation. In this context, Russia decided to establish friendly relations with China. "This strategy was designed to provide Russia the time needed to implement its national reconstruction process (Yung, 2015: 21).

Second Phase: Transition from "Constructive Partnership" to "Strategic Partnership" (1996)

Following the establishment of constructive partnership between Russia and China, a significant change occurred in the security situation of both states. Russia faced multifaceted strategic pressure characterized by two main factors: first, the NATO expansion process toward Russia's western borders, particularly the integration of the three Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) into NATO, which had previously been part of the Soviet Union; second, Russia's involvement in the First Chechen War, which had adverse effects on internal security. Regarding China, this state faced the Third Taiwan Crisis from June 1995 to March 1996. Consequently, the security dispute between China and the US reached a level where it nearly escalated to direct military confrontation (Yung, 2015: 21-23).

In this situation, due to the common threats facing both countries regarding their national security, Russia and China chose the path of deeper cooperation between them and established this new direction in their foreign policy through the creation of "Strategic Partnership." The strategic partnership between Russia and China was based on equality and bilateral trust, and was oriented toward the twenty-first century. The announcement of this strategic partnership occurred during the summit meeting between Presidents Zemin and Yeltsin in Beijing on April 25, 1996, one month after the end of the Third Taiwan Crisis (March 1996) and one week after the issuance of the US-Japan joint declaration regarding the strengthening of their alliance. This level of Russian-Chinese strategic partnership reflected the shared understanding of both countries' leaders regarding the nature and magnitude of threats to their national security. On the other hand, it indicated the level of bilateral trust between both sides within the framework of their bilateral relations (Barkani, 2024: 112).

Third Phase: From Strategic Partnership to the 2001 Treaty

The deepening of the strategic partnership between Russia and China was formalized through the signing of the "Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Cooperation and Friendship" during the summit meeting in Moscow on July 16, 2001, convened by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin. The primary condition for building and establishing this strategic partnership was resolving three obstacles that hindered achieving this goal: reducing the number of Russian military forces on the border between both countries, Russia's request to Vietnam for the withdrawal of its military forces from Cambodia, and deepening negotiations between Russia and China regarding their suspended border disputes (Rajan, 2009: 13).

Russians and Chinese characterize the "Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Cooperation and Friendship" as "An Equal Strategic Partnership" based on bilateral trust and aimed at achieving strategic cooperation on regional and global issues. In this context, the establishment of the SCO for cooperation in some aspects was an indication of the new atmosphere of both countries' relations, which was developing positively (Barkani, 2024: 114).

A few weeks after signing this treaty, the events of September 11, 2001, occurred, which increased the danger to the international strategic situation, particularly with the increased American presence in Central Asia - which was considered by Russians and Chinese as a threat to both their security environments. In this complex situation, the events of September 11, 2001, American intervention in Afghanistan, increased military cooperation between the US and Uzbekistan, and obtaining rights to use the Karshi-Khanabad airbase on one hand, and on the other hand, increased military cooperation with Kyrgyzstan through the use of Manas airbase, and other facilities from Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan for the US, all increased Russian and Chinese concerns about the expansion of American presence in the region, particularly if this presence became long-term (Fabio, 2010: 3).

Although initially Russia and China were tolerant regarding American presence in the region due to the convergence of their interests with American interests at that time, as both hoped to achieve strategic and political gains from this situation, particularly due to the unrest affecting their western regions (Xinjiang for China and Tajikistan, Caucasus and Chechnya for Russia), this nonetheless reduced their influence and hegemony in Central Asia and harmed their strategic role in the region. However, the situation soon changed, and both Russia and China began working to alter the situation, such that from 2003 onwards, they began cooperating to restore their dominance in Central Asia (Fabio, 2010: 3-4).

Fourth Phase: From "Strategic Partnership" to "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (2010)

The Georgia War in 2008 for Russia, on one hand, and on the other hand, the diplomatic offensive launched by Western countries against China in criticizing China's new foreign policy direction became more intense and harsher. Additionally, China's rejection of American demands regarding changing its national currency value and the Obama administration's decision to sell weapons to Taiwan and meet with the spiritual leader of the Tibetan opposition strained their relations. These factors provided an opportunity for Russia and China to strengthen their relations and achieve greater rapprochement at all regional and global levels. Consequently, in September 2010, Russia and China issued a joint declaration announcing their partnership's transition from "Strategic Partnership" to "Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership" (Yung, 2015: 30-32).

Subsequently, in 2016, the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" reached a higher level and was renamed "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Equality, Bilateral Trust, Bilateral Support, Common Development and Friendship." This relationship demonstrates the extent of strength that this strategic partnership between both countries has achieved throughout its developmental phases (Korolev, 2018: 1-2).

4. Sino-Russian Relations: An Analysis of Foundations

Sino-Russian relations are considered one of the most prominent topics in international relations, due to the position that both countries hold in the international political system. The foundation of these relations, as a new trajectory, began in the post-Cold War period with the aim of unifying perspectives and overcoming disagreements. Relations between Moscow and Beijing begin from a shared perspective on security issues. Following Yeltsin's visit to Beijing in 1992, an agreement was signed between the two countries, emphasizing non-participation in military alliances that threaten the security of either party. The shared perspective and the necessity of rapprochement and cooperation for a new international system can be clarified within the framework of the following foundations:

4.1. Political Relations

China and Russia have endeavored and continue to strive for the formation of a regional alliance to serve as a barrier against the expansion of American hegemony in their spheres of influence, particularly in regions that were previously under Soviet control. For this purpose, both countries have attempted to establish some regional organizations and activate others, with one of the most important institutions being the SCO (Akbar, 2006: 23).

Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin, in April 1996 at the summit meeting held in Moscow, made a historic call in which they expressed their desire for "creating a multipolar world" to confront America's increasing hegemony in the international system. In that meeting, they announced the establishment of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership. Building on this partnership, on April 25, 2001, the Shanghai Group was established between Russia, China, and four Central Asian republics (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan) (Mohamed, 2010: 126).

The purpose of this organization is to strengthen cooperation among member states and engage in dialogue on a number of important topics on a rotating basis (Al-Sheikh, 2011: 36). The establishment of this organization came at a time when Russia needed China's support in its position against NATO expansion, while China needed Russia's support regarding Taiwan, as China feared the strengthening of Taiwan's relations with the US within the framework of these objectives, China announced its full support for Russia's anti-NATO expansion position, while Russia defined its relationship with Taiwan and recognized it as an inseparable part of Chinese territory (Al-Imara, 2005: 327).

As a result of their political relations, the "Cooperation and Good Neighborliness" treaty between the two countries was implemented on December 21-23, 2002, in a manner that assured the realization and strengthening of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership objective. Under the same construct, in September 2004, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made an official visit to Russia and met with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Yefimovich Fradkov in October 2004. In return, President Putin made an official visit to China in 2005 (Brzezinski, 2006: 197). As a result of the meeting, a joint statement between the Russian and Chinese sides was issued in June

2005, which defined the unified position of both sides regarding a number of international issues, including reform of the United Nations, globalization, North-South cooperation, and global economy and trade (Al-Dasouqi, 2007: 77).

Reflecting this commitment, President Putin, in an interview with Xinhua News Agency on August 18, 2006, stated "The establishment of the Year of Russia in China will help strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries, and Russia hopes to expand bilateral cooperation in science, technology, and culture. The holding of the Year of China in Russia in 2007 is fully compatible with the requirements of strengthening bilateral relations." He also indicated that both peoples, in enriching creative cooperation with new ideas and activities, contribute to elevating the strategic partnership between the two countries, which is not merely a positive element in the international system, but also assists in achieving the objectives of both countries and is an important stabilizing factor in international affairs. He also referred to the joint statement on the global system in the twenty-first century, which he signed with Chinese President Hu Jintao in June 2005, describing it as a very important foundational document (Al-Jabbouri, 2024: 10-11).

The strengthening of multifaceted bilateral relations had a significant impact on deepening their strategic alliance. In the continuation of relations, on November 18, 2009, the "China-Russia Friendship, Peace and Development Committee" convened at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. The committee played an important role in supporting the development of the "peaceful" strategic partnership between China and Russia. It also expressed hope that this committee would expand relations and strengthen cooperation between the two countries (China Central Television, 2022).

China's interests with Russia converge in confronting American policies aimed at (according to their claims) "spreading democracy," "strengthening freedoms," "human rights," changing systems, and using force to resolve conflicts. China, like Russia, believes that respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity is paramount. The best example of this is the bilateral use of veto power by China and Russia. In this context, bilateral veto use occurred 12 times in 2011 and twice in 2012 to prevent the US from resorting to military solutions in Syria, as they believed that what was happening in Syria was an internal matter that could only be resolved through internal dialogue among all parties to the Syrian crisis. They believe that the US is not committed to spreading democracy and human rights, but uses them as a pretext to change opposing systems (Al-Jabbouri, 2024: 11-12).

On June 7, 2015, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared: "Sino-Russian relations are at an unprecedented high level, and cooperation between the two countries has become the most important stabilizing factor in today's world." He also said that "Russia has strongly supported China's efforts to support fundamental interests." He mentioned that "Putin has pledged to strengthen comprehensive cooperation with China and maintain close coordination in international affairs and jointly confront the challenges that face the development of both countries and global peace and security" (Boksi, 2022).

On June 25, 2016, both presidents agreed on deepening comprehensive strategic partnership. Chinese President Xi Jinping indicated during the talks that "Russia and China are two of the world's largest economies and must strengthen regional cooperation and overcome difficulties and challenges through deepening practical cooperation, expanding common interests, and protecting their common security." He also said that Sino-Russian relations are

currently witnessing rapid development (China Central Television, 2022).

In contrast, to emphasize the Russian-Chinese alliance through Putin's visit to China on May 20-21, 2017, both sides reaffirmed their will to preserve their capabilities and influence, particularly their influence over their surrounding regions. Additionally, the necessity of ending unipolar control and reconstructing alliances were central themes of Putin's visit (Al-Mufti, 2019: 33).

Within the framework of political analysis, it becomes evident that China and Russia are attempting to strengthen their position at the global level. This effort consists of establishing a multipolar international system that confronts the unipolar system. The result of this strategy is that both countries have modified their foreign policy and positions in the Security Council toward establishing a new alliance that supports their political and economic interests and increases their influence in various regions under their sphere of influence.

4.2. Economic Relations

The common goals and interchangeable mutual interests between China and Russia have prompted each party to develop and strengthen their relations with the other, particularly given that their economies are characterized by complementarity. This necessitates efforts to establish joint economic cooperation between both countries across various sectors (Al-Azzawi, 2012: 3).

Russia is considered China's strong trading partner. In recent years, China's need for Russian energy resources has increased, while Russia's need for Chinese investment and technology has also grown. In 2000, bilateral trade reached approximately \$7 billion, making China Russia's third-largest trading partner after the US and Germany. Subsequently, after China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the end of 2001, this became an important factor in activating trade movement between China and Russia. Therefore, both China and Russia are committed to strengthening and expanding their economic relations with each other. The result was a sevenfold increase in bilateral trade volume between 2001-2010, from \$7 billion to \$60 billion (Lozianin, 2012: 318).

One factor that contributed to the rapprochement between China and Russia in the economic sphere was the US pressure on China's growth and development through the imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods, as well as attempts to weaken China's economic progress. This situation helped strengthen relations with Russia. Conversely, Russia also has incentives for closer ties with China, as the pressures imposed by the US through international loans and economic assistance that Russia needed led Russia to develop and strengthen its economic relations with China (Al-Abdali, 2007: 86).

Sino-Russian cooperation in the economic and energy sectors is an important factor for both sides, as both states enter each other's domestic markets. For example, Russia's reliance on oil exports and arms sales puts China in a better position to approach Russia. This can be attributed to two factors (Nimah, 2012: 290):

First: A shared vision toward a world free from hegemony and unipolarity.

Second: China is considered the world's second-largest oil consumer after America. Meanwhile, Moscow needs economic revitalization through investment and oil and gas export sectors.

On another front, the development of cooperation between China and Russia in the BRICS group stems from achieving several common objectives, such as (Shahmmat, 2017: 55):

- Eliminating unipolarity by rejecting American hegemony over the

- Controlling Western forces over global economic system instruments: the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.
- Technological and military advancement to protect their strategic interests.
- Achieving an effective role in global economic management.
- Liberating the world from the influence of institutions controlled by Western powers.

The economic relations between China and Russia are considered among the most important strategic partnerships of the contemporary era. In the energy sector, statistics reveal that between 2015 and 2023, Russian oil exports to the Chinese market increased by 60%, enabling Russia to replace Saudi Arabia as China's primary crude oil supplier. In terms of energy infrastructure, the commencement of operations of the "Eastern Siberia" pipeline in January 2019 is considered a fundamental step in the process of supplying natural gas to the Chinese market. Regarding trade statistics, despite the economic obstacles of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, trade relations continued, and in 2021 the total bilateral trade volume reached \$146 billion USD. Despite the impact of international sanctions related to the Ukraine war, the trade level between both countries in 2022 reached approximately \$185 billion (Pant, 2023: 25-26).

This rate increased further in 2023, reaching an unprecedented level where their total trade transactions amounted to \$241 billion USD, recording a new milestone in the history of economic relations between both countries. Regarding imports, statistics reveal that China, by participating in 36.5% of Russia's total imports, has consolidated its position as Russia's most important trading partner. Similarly, in the export sector, China plays a fundamental role, comprising 30.5% of Russia's total exported goods in 2023 (Kluge, 2024: 10).

In terms of trade composition, Russian exports to China primarily consist of oil and natural gas, coal, timber, agricultural products, and minerals. Conversely, imports from China comprise advanced industrial products such as technological goods, industrial equipment, textile manufacturing, and transportation equipment (Pant, 2023: 26). According to 2024 data, in Russia's exports to China, fuel comprises 73%, minerals and raw materials 11%, and timber 4% of total exports. Russia's imports are primarily composed of three important sectors: machinery and equipment at 23%, automobiles and parts at 21%, and electronics and advanced equipment at 15% (Kluge, 2024: 10).

One of the new trade mechanisms is the increased use of national currencies in trade transactions, which has provided China with an opportunity to strengthen the position of the Chinese yuan. Statistics show that the rate of yuan usage in Russia's imports rose from 4% in 2021 to 23% in 2022, which is considered a step toward reducing dependence on the US dollar in international transactions (Pant, 2023: 27).

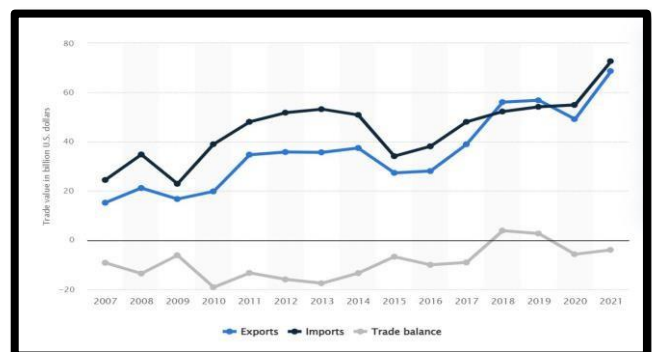


Figure 1: Indicate the trade value between both states from 2007 to 2021.

Source: statistic

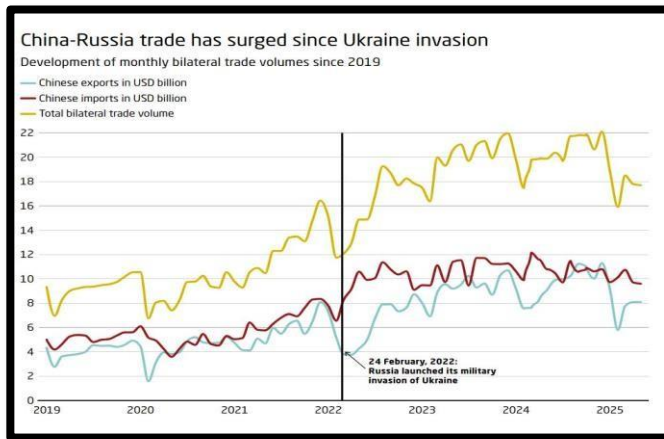


Figure 2: Indicate the trade value between both states from 2019 to 2025.

Source: Mercator Institute for China Studies

4.3. Military/Security Relations

Military cooperation between China and Russia holds significant importance. China imports substantial amounts of equipment, technical assistance, and expertise from Russian military industries. The volume of Russian arms sales to China increased after President Putin came to power in 2000. His visit concluded with the signing of a strategic agreement on "cooperation in military-related technology through the deep strategic partnership between Sino-Russian relations and their development" (Al-Amara, 2006: 74). Given the nature of the situation, Russia benefits greatly from China's demand for advanced weaponry with Russia's high technology. However, China benefits more through acquiring Russia's advanced military technologies that it requires, particularly submarines (Ghail, 2015: 93).

Generally, a common threat emerged between Moscow and Beijing regarding the American missile defense system when both China and Russia presented a proposal on June 7, 2002, to the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, aimed at establishing an international agreement prohibiting the deployment of missile weapons in outer space, as a response to America's decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) (Na'ma, 2012: 272). On a separate issue, in China's military development, after India, it became the second-largest importer of Russian weapons in 2005, with Beijing acquiring 50% of Russia's weapons exports. President Putin visited China in October 2005 to provide the S-300 missile defense system to China (Al-Jabouri, 2024: 19-20).

The military relations between China and Russia are manifested in conducting joint Maneuvers in maritime and land domains during 2007-2009-2010-2012-2014, presenting terrorist attack scenarios. Since 2009, Chinese and Russian naval fleets have conducted joint maritime Maneuvers called "Maritime Cooperation" once or twice annually. A prominent example of this, Russia's Defense Minister announced that the spring 2015 Maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea and Pacific Ocean, which included bilateral training Maneuvers and joint tactical operations, developed both sides' capabilities in military operations (O'Hanlon, 2015: 56).

Through the development of strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing, according to statistics from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Beijing became the second-largest buyer of

Russian weapons between 2019-2023 at a rate of 21%. Meanwhile, China still relies on Russian engines to operate its fighter jets, tanks, and submarines (Holtom et al., 2015: 357). The military factor for both countries is a cause for economic improvement. China was the largest importer of Russian weapons in 2015, ranking fourth in Russian arms purchases worth \$208 billion (Al-Sheikh, 2015: 57). The development of Chinese-Russian partnership aims to achieve the goal of confronting military capabilities within a simplified framework that provides the supreme interests of both sides, protecting each nation's security at a relatively affordable cost (Al-Jabouri, 2024: 20).

Chinese President Xi Jinping stated in 2015 during his visit to Russia's Ministry of Defense: "We hope China and Russia will work to strengthen exchange and cooperation between the armed forces of both countries, as bilateral military cooperation holds an important and special position in the comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership between Russia and China" (Ibrahim, 2015: 95).

Apart from the constant concern of China and Russia regarding Washington's technical and military support for Japan and the initiation of advanced military programs for Japan, consequently, the strategic military base between China and Russia provides an opportunity for enhanced coordination and cooperation to become a strategic alliance in confronting the presence of American military bases in the Sea of Japan (Qal'ajiya, 2018: 178).

In the scope of these military relations, President Putin announced the development of the S-500 missile defense system, on one hand as a response to America's technical and military assistance to Japan and military presence in the Sea of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. On the other hand, the system can perform air defense and anti-missile defense tasks (Qal'ajiya, 2018: 178). This came after the cooperation that established the strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing, strengthening military relations through Maneuver near Italian waters (Furqani, 2018: 56).

For example, an unprecedented exercise between Chinese and Russian armies was conducted in 2018 in the Siberian region, which was the largest in Russian history and was named "Vostok-2018." This exercise involved more than 1,000 Russian aircraft and 30,000 soldiers from various regions. China participated with 3,200 soldiers and 900 pieces of military equipment, including fighter jets and helicopters. Through the convergence of views between China and Russia, we can observe that both are committed to rapprochement and strengthening cooperation regarding military aspects and developing military Maneuver (Sharabtiya, 2022: 9).

Regarding security cooperation, Sino-Russian relations have witnessed significant progress through a compatible security perspective that governs the reality of both countries. This is based on an agreement both signed not to join any military alliance that threatens their security. In this context, through developing relations, Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited Beijing in April 1996, emphasizing the development and advancement of common relations in security and military fields. The establishment of fighter jet production projects, among the agreements, building Chinese nuclear stations with Russian expertise and providing advanced fighter jets by Russia to China, represents the best evidence of their strong relations (Fahmi, 2009: 249).

Both signed an agreement in April 1996, known as the Shanghai Five, which included five countries: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The agreement focused on maintaining security and military protocols on borders and not conducting any hostile actions against forces or territories of neighboring countries that signed the agreement, or conducting any military Maneuver

targeting other countries (Fahmi, 2009: 250).

The strategic partnership between China and Russia in the security-strategic aspect attempts to establish a new international system based on peaceful coexistence and respect for all countries' interests, preventing the continuation of an international system dominated by the US. Therefore, within the framework of security coordination and cooperation between both countries, a desire emerged to establish strategic balance equivalent to NATO policy aimed at NATO's expansion toward Eastern Europe (Furqani, 2018: 91-92).

The foundation of these efforts brought about Russian-Chinese understanding to encompass important strategic issues, with each respecting the other's common interests and spheres of influence. Russia supported China's desire to consider "Taiwan Region" as the Republic of China. In return, China supported Russia's entry into the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization, comprising 21 countries to facilitate economic cooperation and liberalize trade and investment, aimed at achieving development and prosperity (Shar'ati, 2019: 103).

Therefore, Sino-Russian relations have witnessed significant progress in the security-strategic field within a close perspective framework that has resulted in several close positions regarding international situations, particularly after 2010 and its implications on the international system. Both countries have endeavored to improve and develop their strategic partnership through Chinese-Russian strategic security dialogues (Saifi, 2017: 94).

From the perspective of both countries' efforts to build a new strategy compatible with their regional and international objectives, the leaders of both countries placed new choices before themselves. Primarily, Russia's orientation toward the Asia-Pacific region to support hegemony and protect its interests in this region, benefiting from the nature of the region's environmental character. Through activating this orientation, Russia began developing relations with China and improving relations with neighbors in East Asia, removing threats and obstacles between them, reducing the number of forces in this region, as well as increasing confidence-building measures on borders with China and preventing any future crisis (Fahmi, 2009: 264).

In summary, the new global situation has been helpful in the strategic partnership between China and Russia after the Cold War in limiting external threats and strengthening economic interests and developing political relations between them. This was clearly demonstrated in a joint statement on February 4, 2022, following the Beijing talks, reference was made to both sides' opposition to NATO expansion and rejection of establishing blocs and closed alliances in Asia and the Pacific region. Here, China supported Russia against Europe and NATO in the conflict and war with Ukraine for protecting national security. Similarly, Russia reciprocated by supporting China in the conflict with the US in the East Asian region (Al-Jabouri, 2024: 25).

5. The Impact of Chinese-Russian Alliance on Shaping the Multipolar System

"Relations between Russia and China have undergone fundamental transformations over the past two decades, evolving from conventional bilateral cooperation into a comprehensive strategic alliance that actively restructures the international system. This restructuring is manifested through a shift from Western-centric unipolarity toward a fragmented, multipolar framework. Specifically, the alliance challenges the international order from two key angles: **institutionally**, by strengthening alternative frameworks like the

SCO and BRICS to bypass Western-led governance; and **geopolitically**, by eroding the dominance of the U.S. dollar and Western security architecture through enhanced military and financial integration. Consequently, this partnership does not merely challenge U.S. hegemony but actively constructs a parallel global infrastructure, aiming to redistribute power and decision-making authority within the international arena, as detailed in the following sections."

5.1. Chinese-Russian Cooperation within Regional and International Organizations

The strategic foundation of Sino-Russian partnership was formally established through the joint declaration of China and Russia regarding the establishment of a multipolar world and a new international order in 1997 (Degterev, 2019, 407). This declaration effectively demonstrated clear opposition to the unipolar international system led by the US, while expressing both nations' commitment and dedication to establishing a multipolar system (Sharyshev, 2016, 113). Although Russia and China previously had border disputes, the resolution of these concerns after 1997 created opportunities for enhanced relations in the post-Cold War era, thereby providing necessary conditions for political stability and security essential for sustained diplomatic development (Sagild & Hsiung, 2024, 6).

Regarding the international and regional organizations, notable coordination has emerged between both countries, particularly within the United Nations Security Council. This cooperation manifests specifically through the exercise of veto power, demonstrating strategic unity against Western resolutions (Security Council Report, 2025, 1-3). Between 2007 and 2025, Russia and China employed joint vetoes on 16 occasions. The most significant issues on which they aligned included Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, climate change, and security matters (Security Council Report, 2025, 1-3).

Beyond joint vetoes, both Russia and China have individually exercised unilateral vetoes. Since 1992, Russia has specifically employed unilateral vetoes 23 times, with 21 instances occurring after Putin's ascension to power in 2000. Meanwhile, China, apart from the 16 joint vetoes with Russia, has used unilateral vetoes twice and unilateral abstentions 20 times. Totally, Russia employed veto 39 times and China 18 times (Security Council Report, 2025, 1-5). These positions indicate an anti-Western orientation that stands in opposition to American hegemony within the international system.

Table 1: an illustration of Russia and China's vetoes during the period 1991-2025.

No.	Vetoing Country	Subject	Date	Year
1	Russia	Cyprus	May 11	1993
2	Russia	Bosnia-Herzegovina	December 2	1994
3	China	Guatemala	January 10	1997
4	China	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	February 25	1999
5	Russia	Cyprus	April 21	2004
6	China and Russia	Myanmar	January 12	2007
7	China and Russia	Zimbabwe	July 11	2008
8	Russia	Georgia	June 15	2009
9	China and Russia	Syria	October 4	2011

10	China and Russia	Syria	February 4	2012
11	China and Russia	Syria	July 19	2012
12	Russia	Ukraine: Crimea Referendum	March 15	2014
13	China and Russia	Syria: Referral to ICC	May 22	2014
14	Russia	Bosnia	July 8	2015
15	Russia	MH17 Tribunal	July 29	2015
16	Russia	Syria	October 8	2016
17	China and Russia	Syria	December 5	2016
18	China and Russia	Syria	February 28	2017
19	Russia	Syria	April 12	2017
20	Russia	Syria	October 24	2017
21	Russia	Syria	November 16	2017
22	Russia	Syria	November 17	2017
23	Russia	Yemen: Sanctions Regime	February 26	2018
24	Russia	Syria	April 10	2018
25	China and Russia	Venezuela	February 28	2019
26	China and Russia	Syria	September 19	2019
27	China and Russia	Syria	December 20	2019
28	China and Russia	Syria	July 7	2020
29	China and Russia	Syria	July 10	2020
30	Russia	Climate and Security	December 13	2021
31	Russia	Ukraine	February 25	2022
32	China and Russia	North Korea	May 26	2022
33	Russia	Syria	July 8	2022
34	Russia	Ukraine	September 30	2022
35	Russia	Syria	July 11	2023
36	Russia	Mali	August 30	2023
37	China and Russia	Middle East (Palestine)	October 25	2023
38	China and Russia	Middle East (Palestine)	March 22	2024
39	Russia	North Korea	March 28	2024
40	Russia	Non-proliferation/WMDs in orbit	April 24	2024
41	Russia	Sudan	November 18	2024

Source: Security Council

Sino-Russian collaboration beyond the United Nations Security Council. This organization was initially founded in 1996 under the name "Shanghai Five" by China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, following agreements reached at Shanghai and Moscow meetings in 1996 and 1997 regarding military confidence-building measures and force reductions in border regions (Ozel Ozcan, 2023, 81).

A fundamental transformation occurred in 2001 when China and Russia converted the "Shanghai Dialogue Mechanism" into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with Uzbekistan joining as the sixth member. In explaining this transformation, Chinese international relations experts identify two primary strategic motivations for its establishment: stabilizing the Sino-Russian border regions and controlling American presence and influence in Central Asia (Yu & Sui, 2024, 49).

The Shanghai Charter defines the organization's objectives as strengthening mutual trust, friendship, and good neighborliness among member states, while promoting collective defense as fundamental goals (MacHaffie, 2011, 30). This organization holds particular geostrategic significance as it encompasses a region with 1.5 billion inhabitants, comprising three-fifths of Eurasian territory and approximately 25% of the world's population. Currently, both India and Pakistan have become organizational members alongside four observer states and six dialogue partners, further enhancing the organization's significance (Ozel Ozcan, 2023, 81).

Practically, China has collaborated with Russia within the SCO framework to manage an unstable security environment and weaken radical Islamic movements in Central Asia (Kirchberger, Sinjen and Wörmer, 2022, 47). Security cooperation between both states within the SCO has witnessed notable development during 2019-2023. This progress manifests through joint military Maneuver in terms of scale and complexity, demonstrating high levels of trust and cooperation between both countries' armed forces. In this context, expanded intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism activities hold particular significance, as both states have unified their approaches to addressing regional security threats. The organization's Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) has played a more active role, facilitating coordinated responses against terrorism and separatism. Thus, the SCO has become a recognized comprehensive alliance emphasizing regional achievements (Saber, 2024, 94-98). Consequently, both states cooperate through the SCO framework to achieve their shared objectives: promoting regional economic development, supporting political stability, confronting terrorism and separatist groups.

Furthermore, the establishment of BRIC in 2006 is seen as a notable strategic initiative by Russia. This Russian proposal aimed to create an annual meeting mechanism where Brazil, Russia, India, and China would cooperate to coordinate their foreign policies on major international issues. This intergovernmental organization was enlarged when South Africa joined as the fifth member in 2010, changing the name to BRICS and elevating annual meetings to summit level (Yu & Sui, 2024, 49-50). This development indicates the increased role these states play on establishing international frameworks operating outside Western influence, particularly that of the US.

China and Russia employ BRICS as a strategic instrument to create alternatives to Western institutions and alter global power balance. Both countries present BRICS as a platform for amplifying developing nations' voices against the G7 and other Western institutions, particularly in economic and climate affairs. They endeavor to establish a new international system through BRICS that operates under reduced Western hegemony. Despite Russia's greater efforts to

utilize BRICS as a tool for transforming its international image following the Ukraine war, China has maintained a more moderate role while notably supporting organizational expansion. Both states understand that BRICS cannot become a direct anti-Western alliance but must function as a platform for coordinating and unifying developing nations against Western policies across various domains. This strategy manifests in their summit document expansion from 74 articles in 2021 to 131 in 2024, revealing the attempt to comprehensively formulate policies across all sectors to create a new pole in the international system (Roshchin, 2025).

In financial and economic intervention and cooperation, each of these countries has established their own specialized systems. After the Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia following Crimea's annexation in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia sought for alternatives to Western financial systems. Sanctions excluded Russian banks from using the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) and froze Russian assets in Western countries (Eichengreen, 2022, 1). Consequently, Russia developed the System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) in 2014 as a strategic alternative to SWIFT. By 2023, the SPFS had connected 23 foreign banks from 20 countries and 70 foreign financial institutions from 12 countries as financial centers (INTFIBA, 2023). In 2024, total participants reached 177 institutions across 24 different countries (Ijeoma, 2025).

Russia and other countries concerned about future sanctions have now turned to China, which created its own international payment system in 2015 called the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), supporting the use of its own currency (renminbi) (Eichengreen, 2022, 1). However, China's alternative system remains considerably smaller than Western systems. While the American Clearing House Interbank Payments System (CHIPS) serves 11,000 financial institutions globally, China's CIPS serves only 1,300 institutions. Additionally, CHIPS processes 40 times more daily transactions than CIPS (Eichengreen, 2022, 4-5).

Despite unilateral efforts, Russia has been designing a payment system among BRICS countries since the beginning of the Ukraine war, which was a significant topic at the 2023 BRICS summit in South Africa. BRICS countries pursue using this system as an alternative to the international trading system based on the US dollar. In this direction, in June 2024, Russian Finance Ministry officials indicated development of a payment and settlement platform known as BRICS Bridge, operating with three currencies: digital rouble, Chinese yuan, and Brazilian real. This system allows member countries to transfer funds directly, thereby reducing Western sanctions' impact on payments (Zhang, 2024).

Furthermore, in trade transactions between both countries, domestic currencies are used at a remarkable rate. According to Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, approximately 92% of trade transactions between both states in 2024 were conducted in rubles and yuan, representing a significant increase from the 80% rate in 2023 that President Putin had mentioned (Global Times, 2024). Through this measure, both countries neutralize one of the US most important power instruments—the dollar—thereby playing a role in creating an economic bloc opposing Western economic hegemony and reducing the threat of American economic sanctions.

5.2. The Role of the Alliance in Shifting Power Balance and Restructuring the International System

Some researchers point to the weakening of American hegemony due to the emergence and strengthening of regional actors, increased

defense and military expenditures, declining position and appeal on the international stage, changes in the global financial system, growth and development of emerging nations, loss of confidence, expansion of rival powers' hegemony such as China in Africa and the Middle East, withdrawal from international institutions, pressure on international judicial institutions, global trends toward multipolarity, rising levels of political awareness among nations, and several other factors (Kolyvand & Ghorbanali, 1402, 65).

China endeavors to increase its authority and influence over international power-balance. In economic and commercial sectors, its targeted plans for transforming itself into the world's primary economic power are evident. Membership in the G-20 economic group, establishment of and membership in the SCO, membership in BRICS, and creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) demonstrate this nation's rapid movement in this complex competition that gains newer dimensions on a daily basis (Abdollahi, 1397, 199).

Furthermore, Russia seeks to alter the global power balance. It perceives itself as a major state deserving a more significant role in managing global affairs. Russia desires several major states to jointly govern the world affairs, therefore, disfavors the US to remain as the sole super-power. For this purpose, Russia employs various approaches: establishing relations with numerous states, particularly with China, attempting to strengthen its own position, and creating appropriate situations to increase its hegemony (Nouri, 1401, 26-27).

In the post-Cold War era, China has continuously pursued the development of strategic relations with Russia. Implementation of this strategy constitutes a central component of China's foreign policy for restoring its historical position as a major power. The Sino-Russian strategic alliance is viewed by foreign policy officials of both states as an instrument for limiting American hegemony, unilateralism, and intervention, as well as for establishing a new world order that both define as "more rational" and "more just" (Yu & Sui, 2024, 40-41).

The strategic alliance between China and Russia has played a fundamental role in bringing about the prerequisites for transformation in the international system from unipolarity to multipolarity. Recently, China's rise as an economic and military hegemon have gradually reached a level that necessitates power redistribution in the international system to a new global arrangement where the US and China constitute two dominant centers (Kirchberger, Sinjen and Wörmer, 2022, 49).

Russian-Chinese strategic relations in the new context have paved the way for Moscow to access additional mechanisms for advancing its agenda in rebalancing power with the US and developing a multipolar vision internationally that grants it greater power in Europe. In exchange, China benefits from Russian support politically, economically (energy), and technologically (military), which are vital strategic capital for China in its disputes with the US in the Asian region (Gorenburg, 2020, 2). Thus, the alliance between both states—Russia as an effective military pole and China as a major economic pole—plays an important role in reshaping the new international order.

Both China and Russia share common concerns that deepened their strategic relationship. The fundamental point is both countries' effort to prevent the strengthening of American presence in their regions. Russia is concerned about NATO's expansion in Eurasia, particularly regarding discussions about Ukraine and Georgia's membership in the alliance; similarly, China views the strengthening of American alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, exemplified by QUAD, as a threat to its position (Seddik, 2024, 89).

As a result of shared threats, proximity between both countries has developed notably since 2014, particularly in military cooperation—purchase and sale of advanced military equipment—and extensive bilateral and multilateral military training programs. China and Russia have established a comprehensive framework for military dialogue, developed military technical cooperation and personnel exchanges, and increased joint military Maneuver (Gorenburg, 2020, 1-2).

Between 2003-2022, both countries conducted 60 joint military maneuvers, but from February 2022 through the end of 2024, approximately 30 additional maneuvers were conducted—meaning one-third of all Maneuvers occurred in just three years. This development has played a strategic role in changing the international power balance and become an instrument for demonstrating political-military alliance against regional competitors. The 2024 maneuvers were conducted in strategically sensitive areas such as the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, and around Alaska, indicating that this military cooperation resembles political and strategic objectives for demonstrating capability and power in such complex regions (von Essen, 2025).

The power projection of China and Russia has had and continues to have clear impact on regional balances. The growing hegemony of both powers in their respective regions could lead to power redistribution, alliances, and new regional arrangements, potentially challenging current regional hegemony and affecting the geopolitical interests of other major players, such as the US and its allies (Seddik, 2024, 92).

Although both states favor changing the international system, each state monitors systemic transformation in distinct manners. China, being a revisionist power, its approach is soft and gradual, more opportunistic than revolutionary. China attempts to benefit from both positive and negative aspects of the current world order, profiting from global and regional trade, investment, laws, and institutions. From the Kremlin's perspective, the post-Cold War order led by the US destroyed Russia's economy in the 1990s and marginalized its geopolitical interests, particularly in Eastern Europe; therefore, it seeks to transform the international system toward multipolarity (Kirchberger, Sinjen and Wörmer, 2022, 205).

Both states, despite being completely revisionist, simultaneously attempt to, a) present a perspective that primarily guards the traditional nation-state system; b) protect United Nations achievements; and c) oppose Western hegemony and Westernization processes (Politi, 2022, 4). The fundamental pillars of their vision consist of multipolarity, global order based on international law, democracy specific to each country, and global development defined by balance, unity, and inclusivity (Politi, 2022, 4). Both states endeavor to formulate different approaches to issues of democracy, human rights, and international law. Their intention is to replace Western understanding of human rights and democracy, and redefine the functionality of international organizations. In other words, the attempt is to reinterpret those concepts in ways that align with their own values and political systems, rather than the Western ones accepted as global standards (Kirchberger, Sinjen and Wörmer, 2022, 226).

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war had notable impact on the international system and Sino-Russian relations. After the war's outset, relations between both countries have witnessed remarkable progress. Although China has formally declared its neutrality, it has been Russia's major supporter in reducing Western sanctions' impact on its country and continuing the military campaign to achieve its

special military operation objectives in Ukrainian territory through providing high-tech materials and equipment, as well as purchasing Russian energy.

Commercial relations between Russia and Western countries have been at their lowest level. However, statistics reveal that in 2022 Sino-Russian trade levels progressed. China has secured its position as Russia's primary supplier of high-tech materials, while Russia has continued as one of China's main sources of energy supply (Lukonin, 2023, 65). As Russia becomes increasingly isolated politically, economically, and technologically from the European Union and America, its partnership with China, particularly in obtaining technological materials used in civilian and military industries, plays an important role in shaping future trajectories (Filatov, 2024, 44).

China and Russia need to limit Western hegemony, particularly any strategic activity supported by Westerners in their regions of dominance. China prioritizes the South China Sea, wanting to preserve its dominance and strengthen its position, while Russia focuses on Eastern Europe and eliminating threats to its national security. Meanwhile, both states prioritize Central Asia, where they have special interests (Saber, 2024, 85).

The cooperation between China and Russia determines whether the world can avoid war and confrontation between major powers. If China continues supporting President Putin in his efforts to control neighbors through using force, the world will likely fall into confrontation between Russia on the one hand and Europe, supported by America, on the other (Mahdi, 2022, 48). Therefore, the Sino-Russian partnership on the one hand, the US and Western allied expansionism on the other, could create a complex geopolitical environment filled with possibilities of tensions and escalation toward direct confrontation between the parties in the future.

6. Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that the Sino-Russian strategic alliance has become one of the most significant geopolitical phenomena of the twenty-first century since the end of the Cold War. This alliance has witnessed continuous development from "constructive partnership" to "comprehensive strategic partnership." The foundation of this alliance stems from three main factors: shared concerns about American unipolar hegemony, the need to rebalance international power, and their economic complementarity.

The Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China have demonstrated the advancement of their political relations by jointly vetoing several United Nations Security Council resolutions (16 vetoes between 2007 and 2025). Their economic relations have also deepened significantly, through bilateral trade increasing from 7 billion USD in 2000 to 241 billion USD in 2023, of which 92% was conducted in local currencies. Furthermore, the establishment of the SCO and BRICS as new platforms for international cooperation, particularly between the two states, has strengthened their economic interdependence. Military cooperation, another key dimension of the two states' agenda, has expanded, particularly after the war in Ukraine; the number of their joint military Maneuvers has reached 30. "The multifaceted alliance between the two states seeks to transform the international order from a unipolar to a multipolar system. This shift is instrumental in addressing the inherent imbalance of the current order by promoting a more pluralistic distribution of global power and challenging the centralized decision-making structure of the West. In this context, Russia and China are establishing alternative financial mechanisms and strategic cooperation to create a global counterweight that ensures a more equitable balance of interests

among diverse sovereign states. As a result, their partnership has emerged as an effective force in reshaping the international system toward multipolarity—a framework that limits unilateral dominance and allows for a broader representation of non-Western perspectives in global governance. This alliance, therefore, serves as a catalyst for a more balanced global structure, providing a strategic alternative to the existing lopsided power dynamics."

7. References

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