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Academic Thesis

**THE FUTURE OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND
THE USA IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINA`S RISE
AND THE NEW COLD WAR**

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This thesis is dedicated to my beloved grandmother, Lambrini, who passed away 12 years ago.

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Key words: Interdependence, Asymmetric growth, Thucydides' trap, Anarchy, polarity, multipolarity, balance of power, realism

SUMMARY

This thesis aims to explore and predict the evolving relationship between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, with specific consideration given to the rising influence of the People's Republic of China and its growing antagonism towards American interests. The analysis is primarily based on the Realist school of thought, although alternative methodologies can also yield similar conclusions. This economic expansion has contributed to China's emergence as a challenging force. Simultaneously, Russia, dissatisfied with being treated as a diminished power, has found common ground with China due to their shared grievances towards American dominance. However, examining their history reveals that the current alliance is an exception rather than the norm. The two have a long history of animosity, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century when Moscow seized Chinese territory. Nevertheless, as it often happens, old enemies can transition into being allies, or at least collaborators in certain world affairs, in which they may have mutual benefits. As it stands, they are both opposed to the United States, the West, and they are desirous of a different world order. Their old rivalries seem to pale in comparison with the potential gains of continuing, and even expanding their current informal entente. It is unlikely that the situation will see a major change in the medium-term, let alone the short-term. In the long run, it is possible that they may choose to maintain a more neutral attitude to each other, but it is much more likely that nothing will change. The Kremlin and Beijing ever becoming enemies is astronomically unlikely, barring extensive development in world affairs.

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Acronyms

ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	Asean Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAI	Cooperative Airspace Initiative
CNCP	China National Petroleum Corporation
CDB	Chinese Development Bank
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COSCO	China Ocean Shipping Company
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone,
ESPO	Eastern Siberia- Pacific Ocean
EU	European Union
EXIM	Export-Import
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GAG	Gulf Agency Company
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GUAM	Georgia Ukraine Azerbaijan Moldavia Organization
ICBM	Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LIO	Liberal International Order
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
NDB	New Development Bank
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
R&D	Research& Development

Methodology

This research was mostly based on the tradition of the realist school of thought, with regard to the international system. A methodical review of the bibliography-both Greek and foreign was conducted. I researched scientific articles and analyses, official documents; articles in magazines and newspapers; as well as internet-based sources. I made use of statistical sources in order to, make comparisons and to infer conclusions. The sources of information, excluding the historical ones, are mostly very recent ones, so as to be more useful in gleaning

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CHAPTER 1: THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF CHINA, RUSSIA, AND THE UNITED STATES WITH EACH OTHER

Introduction

1.1 Identifying the issue at hand

Taking a glance at today's bilateral relations between the USA and the Russian Federation, it becomes easy to conclude that they have reached their nadir. Even during the cold war, rarely has such a level of animosity been noticed between them. It would have been an easy conclusion, therefore, to declare that they shall remain thus in the long-term. However, such a statement would probably be premature. After all, as British Prime Minister Lord Palmerstone once said "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. "Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow." Or, as French President Charles de Gaulle put it "No nation has friends, only interests.

As of right now, the US finds itself in a classical predicament that of facing multiple great powers as rivals at the same time, (Carpenter, 2014:2) one of which, China, is an emerging Superpower. Concurrently, America has somewhat cold relations with another mid-to-big sized power, India, while having outright hostile ones with Russia.

Rationally, determining one's rivals and friends should be decided based on one's country's rational self-interests. Whether it is trade, access to resources, or cooperation against enemies, all these things and more can determine whether or not to change a state's attitude towards another country. After all, is this not what is currently happening in regards to the relations of the United States and Saudi Arabia? Despite the latter's near-genocidal war against Yemen, the American republic remains an ally of the oil-rich Salafi Kingdom.

In my opinion, we can rank the United States' interests, in descending order, as follows: 1) The western hemisphere, 2) The Pacific and Eastern Asia, 3) The Persian Gulf and the surrounding territories, 4) Europe. Up until now, this logic was indeed followed by

America's foreign policymakers. However, as of the last few years, Europe has once more been the recipient share of America's attention.

It goes without saying that today's Russia, weakened as it is, compared to its past glory, is once again, central to Us policy thinking. For one reason or another, it would appear that old habits die hard.

China, on the other side, is without a doubt the most preeminent of America's rivals, and the one with whom the country will have to contend with for the foreseeable future. It is due to China's strength that I am ranking East Asia as the most important theatre of operations" with regards to the US's struggle for world influence, second only to the Americas themselves. Nonetheless, for now, it would appear that East Asia has taken a back seat, in the American mindset, at least in comparison to the pre-Ukraine situation.

In the first chapter we are going to examine the intellectual foundations, on top of which this thesis is based. We will also take a glance at America's overall strategic situation. In chapter 2, our quarry shall be China. Specifically, her exponential growth during the last few decades, (1978). I will attempt to explain how she benefits, in her foreign relations, by using her relatively newfound economic strength, and what this means for America's relative power, on a global level.

In chapter 3, we will focus on the relationship between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. We will understand how their current amicable relations came to be, in spite of, how, unbeknownst to many, hostile they used to be in the past.

Finally, there is the thorny subject of America's relationship with Russia, or rather, America's enmity with Russia.

1.2Theoretical approach

For the sake of more easily comprehending the issues explored in this thesis, i will make a short summary of the various concepts that will be used, whether they are written into the thesis, or simply, for the benefit of informing the reader in regards to the intellectual basis behind the analyses and conclusion that will be made.

Anarchy: The anarchy of the international system is an often-quoted and much misunderstood concept. Anarchy, in the context of the study of international relations, has a different meaning compared to how the word is used colloquially. Here, the term refers not to “chaos”, but lack of order, brought by the non-existence of a single entity that would have the monopoly or near-monopoly of the power needed to enforce, through violence, when necessary, a specific order. Or, to use a Hobbesian terminology, there is a distinct lack of a “Leviathan” in the international environment (Hobbes, 1989:240-241). In particular, that of “Anarchy”. It certainly does not refer to perpetual war and chaos. There are no world-police to catch wrongdoers. In such a state, nations are forced to be ever-suspicious of their neighbors, and the system leans towards conflicts, albeit without conflict being the only possibility. After all, one country’s spending on defense can very often be used for offensive purposes, also known as “Security dilemma”. (Walt, 2018:14)

Arms race: The end result is that the defensive spending of the neighboring country is very likely to be interpreted as offensive by my own, and vice versa. Even if the other country is honest in her intentions, what is true today may not be so tomorrow. Some years along the line, it is possible that my neighbor may decide to invade my country, even if this was not their original intent. Thus, their spending is very likely to spur an increase in the size of the military budget in my own, which may then lead the neighbor down the same line of thinking, and so on. (Batzis, 2022:8), (Platias, 2010: 30)

Balance of Power: Simply put, by the term “balance of power”, we infer the relative strength of various actors in relation to each other. “Relative” is the key word in this concept. For example, if a country doubles its economic might, this may seem like a positive development, but if that country’s main enemy expanded tenfold, during the same time period, it becomes transparent that, in reality, the balance of power has changed in favor of the first country’s enemy, rather than itself. Changes in the balance of power, especially rapid ones, are perhaps the main cause of instability and conflicts within the system. (Waltz, 2011:272) A stable balance of power, on the other hand, creates the pre-conditions for peace. (Spyropoulos, 2010:206)

Realism: Realism is a school of thought that attempts to give a unique answer to a series of certain issues, such as the structure and nature of the international system. It analyses

the causes behind the strategic behavior of states, the methods by which they survive in a competitive system, how peace is achieved within the system, as well as the role played by “justice” and “morality.” (Platias, 2010:26) It is further divided into Classical Realism, and Neorealism.

Polarity of the international System: The polarity of the system is dependent on the great powers within said system, as well as their ability to create polarization within it. Obviously, their ability to do so is equivalent to their actual power.

Bipolar System: It is composed of two rival poles, or two complexes of states that are competing with each other under the primacy of a Superpower. (Spyropoulos, 2010:259) The most basic condition for such a system is the existence of a relative balance, particularly military, between the dominant poles. (Heywood, 2013: 374)

Unipolar System: A unipolar system is one in which there is a single dominant state or pole. In international politics, the state that leads a number of other states is called a “hegemon” The imposition of control in economic and military resources assures its primacy and gives it the power to direct the actions of the other states with their own free will rather than using violence. (Heywood, 2013: 384)

Multipolar System: A multipolar system is where three or more great powers co-exist. (Heywood: 396) These systems can be further analyzed in a range of subsystems from tripolar ones to even ones with no poles, when power is divided to such a degree that in practice, there is no pole capable of action within the system. (Haans, 2008)

In a multipolar system, there is no single hegemonic power in the international system. It is, essentially similar to bipolarity, save that it usually implies more than two powerful actors, albeit, they are rarely equally powerful. A pecking order then arises. For example, before World War 1, Austria-Hungary was frequently referred to as “least of the great powers”.

Security dilemma: As mentioned above, the existence of anarchy is one of the defining characteristics of the international system. Needless to say, anarchy guarantees that the system is innately unstable. States fear each other, and are suspicious of any move their

counterparts may make. Thus, not wanting to be caught unprepared, most states try to augment their defensive capabilities, as much as they can. However, most of the military hardware and technological advances that can be used for defensive purposes can also easily be repurposed for offensive ones. (Platias, 2010: 30) As Thucydides wrote, over two thousand years ago, “war is the teacher of violence”. States know that when war breaks out, the only one they can fully rely on is themselves. After all, when war breaks out, the only real law is “natural law”. “The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must”.

Grand strategy: What we call a grand strategy is the sum of all actions made by a government or actor, for the sake of achieving their objectives, as defined by their leadership, via the most effective and efficient route that is possible. A grand strategy included both a state’s military strategy, as well as all non-military venues, such as diplomacy, that are available to the state. The four constituent parts of a grand strategy are perception of the international system-diagnosis of dangers and opportunities, to prioritize political goals, in accordance to my national interests, my country’s reputation abroad as well as the internal legitimization of my grand strategy, and finally, using all available means, to improve on my state’s strengths, while eliminating weaknesses, as much as possible. (Platias, 2010: 83-85)

Actors: Every analysis that concerns the international system is incomplete without a full understanding of its “actors”. The main actors, using the “realist” approach, are states, particularly ones that are based on the “Westphalian” model of 1648. This need not mean, however, that other actors do not exist.

Thucydides’ trap: The term “Thucydides’ trap” refers to the tendency of war breaking out, when an emerging power threatens to overthrow the current global order (Allison, G, 2017: 389). Contrary to widespread belief, the ancient writer himself never considered such a scenario as inevitable. The Peloponnesian war, was not an outcome of inadvertent escalation, but of premeditated choices made by adversaries with clashing policy objectives (Platias & Trigas, B 2021:227-228)

Thucydidian prudence: A quality of leadership that includes: 1) rational assessment of the strategic environment, including that of the structure, as well as relative understanding

of the national capabilities and interests that are at stake. 2) restraint of the worst tendencies of human nature, such as a lust for power, endless power and glory, all of whom usually lead to hubris, and the management of the public's tend(Platias& Trigas B. 2024:89)

1.3 America's Grand Strategy and Geopolitical Ambitions The security changes within the international system have given discussions regarding America's security and external affairs an increased gravity, within the context of her grand strategy and geopolitical goals.

As far as the United States' grand strategy and geopolitics are concerned, she is now focusing on the area of the world where the largest population, resources and economic activity all co-exist. I am referring, of course, mainly to the Eastern Hemisphere, Eurasia.

If we examine the issue from America's perspective, her strategy can be easily understood as one that takes place on a global or interregional one, in contrast with strategies that are concerned only with specific countries or regions.

In the last few decades, America has chosen, as a goal of their national strategy, to preemptively stop the creation of a regional hegemon, in one part of Eurasia or another. Her rationale is that such a hegemon would concentrate so much power as to threaten the basic interests of the United States. For instance, America may find herself denied entry to the resources and economic activity of the other hemisphere.

While, of course, this strategy has never been officially confirmed by the ones actually deciding America's foreign policy, the military, and diplomatic activities can be safely interpreted as having been made for the sake of this goal (O'Rourke, 2014:5)

According to Kirk Campbell, a former aide of an American Secretary of state, the American turn to Asia follows two axes. First, to deter the creation of a new hegemony, specifically hegemony by a vengeful China. Second, the maintenance of the "functional system" of the Asian international order, in regards to the preservation of norms, values and institutions, that have, up till now, supported the stability and prosperity of Asia in the last few decades. (Yong Deng, 2022: 187)

America's goal of preventing the rise of a new peripheral hegemon in any part of Eurasia is the most important reason for the current structure of the American military. Its structure has elements allowing it to act in great expanses of sea space and airspace, and, upon arrival, enabling it to enact ground-based operations. She possesses a multitude of air bombers, large airships, aircraft carriers, large amphibious ships and underway replenishment ships, aerial refueling tankers, nuclear-powered attack submarines etc. (O'Rourke 2014: 5)

Earlier in this thesis, we defined a country's "grand strategy" as the use of all available means (military, diplomatic, economic, etc) for the sake of achieving the state's political objectives, while preparing for a conflict, whether real, or potential. A good strategist should always try not to focus singularly on only one of them. The larger the variety of one's means of potentiating their nation's goals, the greater the probability of success, as well as its effectiveness. It is for this reason that merely possessing nuclear weapons is not enough to turn someone into a great power. (Platias& Koliopoulos 2021: 131)

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CHAPTER 2: China's meteoric rise and its implications for the American hegemony of East Asia.

In this chapter, we will attempt to examine the relationship and growing tension between the two superpowers, the ways in which said tensions manifest, the doctrinal basis of the two states' perception of each other's policies, as well as gauge the size of the Chinese threat to America's established International Order.

2.1 Chinese economic growth in the last decades and future prospects

In 2002, China's GDP was the sixth largest in the world. In 2010, China surpassed Japan and became the world's second largest economy. (Yong Deng, 2022:154)

According to economists studying macroeconomic trends, China's GDP has multiplied by a factor of 40 since the beginning of its economic reforms in 1978. From the enunciation of Deng's reforms till recently, China's economic growth rate has averaged over 10% for over 30 years, (IMF,2013) before finally slowing down after the great recession, (world Bank,2017) a trend that has only increased, even after the crisis was long over. In spite of that, the tremendous increase of China's total economic might remain undeniable. In 1980 her GDP constituted a mere 3% of the world economy, whereas in 2018, it had increased to a total of 16%. (World Bank, 2020). (Chart: 4 World Bank: 2020)

2.1.1 "Going Global Strategy

The moving force of this growth is the "Go Out Policy", also known as "Going Global ", which began in 1999. The goal of this strategy was the importation of oil as well as other important natural resources. The rationale behind this was to help the economic intensification of Chinese labour. While this was going on, she was also increasing her export capabilities, particularly those of manufactured goods with "low added value", such as iron, coal, steel, and low-tech machinery. (OECD, BRI,2018:24) As a result of her impressive growth, the international monetary fund has recently (2018), predicted that by 2030 the size of the Chinese economy will surpass that of America's, which would make, ipso facto, China's economy the largest in the world. (IMF, Article IV, 2018)

If we look at the (see chart 1), even after 2008, we can see her high annual GDP growth, as well as the concurrent slowing down starting from 2018, which was after the international crisis was over. A new trend that can be traced to the reduction in the sales of low added value goods. Having said that, the Chinese economic growth was still 6.8% in 2018 (World Bank) . It has been noticed that in the course of the last 10 years, the Chinese “Go out Policy” has changed its focus to the production of high added value goods instead of low-added value ones. At the same time, she has invested in the infrastructure needed for the development of trade networks, both regional, and global ones (Meick, E 2008:22-23)

2.1.2 “Strategy of state-directed Chinese investments”

For the furthering of her competitiveness on a global scale, China has formulated two new strategies:

- 1) The very well known “One Belt, One Road Initiative” (BRI), starting from 2013
- 2) The “Made in China 2025” new industrial strategy that is supported by investment made by the Chinese state itself. (ECA, China 2020:13)
- 3) China standards 2035. It is a plan to ascertain that China becomes a frontrunner in the fast-growing high-tech sector, in time for the fourth industrial revolution. (Yong Deng, 2022: 132)

These new policies attempt to give to both the State-Owned Enterprises (SOE), and the private ones, financial support for the sake of incentivizing them to invest in various strategic sectors abroad, via “Foreign Direct investments (ECA, China 2020:13)

The BRI (see chart 2) was launched back in 2013, and is today known as the economic zone of the Silk Road, as well as the Maritime Silk Road. The intend behind their creation was to encourage economic growth on a regional level. In the following (graph) we can see the geographic locations and states from which the BRI passes through. Those links extend into more than 64 economies, constituting more than a third of the global GDP, not to mention the majority of the world’s population. (OECD, BRI, 2018:9.) In the sea silk route between China and the European markets, the Chinese port COSCO, in Piraeus, will be the land-bridge connecting Piraeus with Central Europe.(Hansel & Feyetabend, 2018: 6)

6) The gravity that BRI has for Chinese policy-makers can be proven by the fact that, in

2017, it was amended into the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party, and, as a result, this meant a guarantee of a constant flow of money being injected to the policies needed for BRI's success. (Eder,2018)

In order to make BRI more easily understood, I will present an example of an investment related to it: The roadway between Khorgos-Almaty, with a length of 305 km, was upgraded, and now has a total of 4 traffic lanes, a doubling of its initial capabilities. The upgrade resulted in the reduction of the time needed to transit between the two cities by around 40% of what was needed before. In addition, the cost of transit was reduced from 0,26 dollars per km, to 0,24. (World Bank, 2019:50-51) Beijing, using the BRI as a diplomatic platform, managed to enhance China's national prestige, while also using the organization, as a tool, to exert pressure, in order to take advantage of the strategic opportunities that have arisen. (Yong Deng, 2022:140) Due to BRI's expansion, China finds herself accused of neo-monarchism, and making use of "debt-trap diplomacy" (Yong Deng, 2022:138)

It is estimated that the formulation of the BRI will be concluded by 2049, an important date, commemorating the 100 years since the Communist victory over the Nationalists. China intends to become a fully developed country by then, an ambitious goal, long-held by Beijing, intending to resuscitate the Middle Kingdom's status as a world-power. Still, the Chinese government is ambiguous – perhaps intentionally so, on just what would constitute the status of a great power. Is a union with Taiwan a necessary prerequisite? What will the Sino-American relations look like in the year 2049? (Yong Deng, 2022:7)

As mentioned above, China has, at the same time, launched another policy that she hopes will enhance her global competitiveness. "Made in China 2025" was initiated in 2015. As illustrated by its name, it is meant to be a decade long policy, embodying an economy now focused on high added value goods, internally, as well as regarding her exports. This initiative lays bare China's ambition to transform itself into a global technological leader. It is estimated that this initiative has a price-tag of around 3 trillion US dollars! (Zenglein, Holzmann & Merics, 2019)

2.1.3: China's newest five-year plan

China's newest five-year plan (2021-2025) focuses in a new direction for the country, namely that of sustainable and quality-driven growth. In particular we could summarize that it is composed of five primary goals:

- 1) Quality, rather than quantity. The new 5-year plan does not focus on raising particular numbers as its goals, neither for GDP, nor GDP per capita. Instead, it focuses on the enlargement of the Chinese middle class, as well as raising their GDP per capita. In short, the focus is the middle class, so that it can one day reach that of the Developed countries.
- 2) A second goal is the increase of internal demand, through the aforementioned enlargement of her middle class. To achieve this goal, China intends to reduce taxes on businesses, as well as remove still-existing entrance barriers that prohibit businesses from competing in the market.
- 3) China's opening to the world. In short, this parameter concerns the further opening of China's economy to foreign actors, through trade and investments. In order to make this goal a reality, China is likely to reduce tariffs, and generally make herself more attractive to foreign capital.
- 4) Technology and innovation. This goal concerns the modernization of China's supply chains, and technological adjustments to the local order. The People's Republic will increase her R&D spending from 2.2% to 3% of her GDP. In order for Chinese Capital markets to improve their financing of R&D, we should be expecting financial reforms to happen soon. In this way, China will enhance her technological capabilities.
- 5) Green Growth. China has committed itself to continuing her course towards a green course. She has already achieved most of her old green goals in the old five-year plan. China will, presumably, continue reducing her CO2 emissions, in accordance to the Paris Agreement to combat climate change. The overall plan is for her to be Carbon-neutral by 2060. (HSBC Bank, 2020)

2.2 China's geoeconomic strategy

"China's grand strategy, in short, aims to increase the country's international clout without triggering a counterbalancing reaction." (Goldstein, 2005:12)

2.2.1 The peaceful growth doctrine

Increasingly, China finds itself in a state where she may use economic means, for the sake of affecting geopolitical aims. This is a stark reversal to its old post 1978 doctrine of using

foreign policy for the sake of improving her economy (Norris, 2016:44). China officially terms her economic doctrine as “peaceful development”, and is now an integral component of her China’s platform. It is through this doctrine, that China attempts to solve her internal issues, and improve the living standards of her citizens.

The doctrine used to be known as that of “the peaceful rise”, but the terminology changed, due to the new name’s fewer threatening implications. (Norris, 2016: 5, 20)

It was first formulated by Chinese President Deng Xiaoping (1978-1991), who was the leader of the People’s Republic of China. His successors also adopted it as their guiding path. It was Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s first prime minister, who actually suggested the change in the official terminology, for the aforementioned reason that the previous word sounded like a threat, and had no relation to the message China actually wanted to send. (Alison, Blackwill, with Ali Wyne, 2013: 5-6)

Per the Chinese official definition of her own doctrine, China must develop her economy via supporting the broader global one, to contribute towards world peace, and to achieve her growth through her own internal reforms. Concurrently, she must be outward-looking, to seek mutual benefit, in accordance with economic globalization, and cooperate with other states in order to achieve global harmony. Hers is a path of scientific, open and independent cooperation and co-development. As far as global security is concerned, the varying states must trust one another and use mutual cooperation to solve conflicts and other international issues, without resorting to war. Everyone must act in order to secure economic stability, through intergovernmentalism. Finally, they should avoid the use or threat of military force. (English gov cn 2011)

2.2.2 The dogma: Theory and practice

Given that President Xi Jinping has the unprecedented honor of being elected General Secretary of the Chinese Communist party, three times in a row, and that he is unlikely to stop there, we may surmise that the dogma of the so-called peaceful development is unlikely to stop, unless perhaps, the Chinese paramount leader decides it has outlived its usefulness.

Contrary to Chinese declarations, the theory of Offensive realism supposes that the above doctrine is unlikely to be actually materialized, because rising powers usually desire a

regional hegemony within their sphere of influence, and by logical extension, this will harm the interests of nearby states, probably causing the formation of balancing acts on their behalf. (Mearsheimer,2014:360-362) Most of China's neighboring countries, such as India, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Singapore, will align themselves with the United States, in order to balance China's rising strength. As an end-result, there will be an intense security rivalry, and constant conflicts, albeit, not necessarily of the armed kind. (Mearsheimer, national interest, 2014)

It should be kept in mind that it is not the rise of China's power in and of itself, that will bring about balancing actions by her rivals, but rather, China's own intentions, in accordance to which, said power will be used (Platias, Trigas, 2024:89)

Even now, China's increased military budget has caused some of her neighboring countries to start losing their nerve, in regards to Chinese intentions. For example, we have Chinese assertions in the East Chinese Sea, the South Chinese Sea, and, of course, Taiwan- a country that desires to be separate from mainland China. All these would not fit the bill of a peaceful future or any tranquil utopia that China claims she is trying to achieve through "Peaceful Development".

An example, typical of this problem is the recent news in Chinese State Media that the Chinese army will conduct regular military exercises in the eastern side of the medial line of the Taiwanese Strait. Shortly thereafter, the Chinese minister of foreign affairs, Huang Yi, stated that "Taiwan is not a component part of the United States, but Chinese ground". The pretext for this development was the visit, by American Secretary of State, Nancy Pelosi, in Taiwan, on August 8, 2022. (Kuo Lily, 2022) The next year after this sequence of events, new military exercises were once again announced in the same area to test the fighting capabilities of Chinese ships and aircraft, so as to whether they can achieve air and naval superiority, in accordance to the official Consulate "New China". It is no coincidence that all this occurred mere hours after the Taiwanese Vice-President, William Lai, had returned home from his trip to the United States. These exercises, according to the official press of the Chinese military, are meant to be taken as a serious warning to Taiwanese autonomists who, in the opinion of the military, desire independence and seek to issue a challenge to the People's Republic. (Nasser, Margano, 2023) Beijing has been

increasing its political and military pressure towards Taiwan, describing its elections as a choice between “Peace and War”. (Palmer, Craft, 2024)

China’s financing to foreign regimes is made through the country’s state-owned banks. The Chinese bank of Exports and Imports (EXIM), grants favorable loans, mainly for the sake of improving infrastructure abroad. The “Chinese Development Bank” (CDB) grants cheap loans, mainly to other state companies, for the purpose of large-scale investments regarding natural resources. The Chinese Investment Corporation has the role of buying shares in a variety of foreign companies, whose purpose is the extraction of said resources. (Economy, 2010:51)

China is focusing on strategic sectors. She buys anything that might be considered to be of strategic importance, in Africa, in the infrastructure sector, (airports, ports, railways, telecommunication), energy sources, mines, logistics. She makes use of methods that have been described as “neo-colonialist” (Platias- Koliopoulos, 2021:212)

In countries where Chinese companies are active, China provides those states with financial aid that may take the form of loans with favorable terms, including interest-free loans, as well as grants. Her intentions are to create a strategic platform, through which Chinese companies will be enlarged, and acquire global status.

One example is Gabon, where China has pursued investments in copper and oil, while constructing clinics, schools and government buildings. (Economy, 2010: 51)

CBD provides loans to foreign governments and state-owned oil enterprises, so that these can be invested in oil development. In return, these actors promise to sell a certain percentage of their extracted oil to China, for a number of years. In effect, they become bound to the People’s Republic for decades. The derivative of this arrangement is an inflexible non-market-oriented regulation, which is precisely what the West is afraid that China is promoting, thus fanning the flames of suspicion and paranoia. (Economy, 2010: 56)

In 2016, China, through BRI, extended her naval reach, beyond Asia. She created her first naval base in Djibouti (see chart 2), followed by the leasing of the port Hambantota in the Indian Ocean. (Vines, A, Van Rij, a & Tugendhat, H 2024), (Hillman, J 2018)

We can not neglect to mention her construction of a strategic port in Gandhar, Pakistan, (see chart 2) that is possibly the key to China's attempt to dominate over energy resources in the area. The port is meant to work as a conduit for energy, through the straits of Hormuz, which will connect China, through Pakistan, to the Persian Gulf. Through this ingenious move, China will finally be able to bypass the straits of Malacca. It is estimated that about 60% of China's oil originates from the Middle East, and 80% of her oil passes through the Malaccan straits. (Syed Fazl-e-Haider, 2015)

A further use for these bases is for the purpose of helping the Chinese navy as supply stations, while simultaneously letting China's navy help enhance the security of the energy routes that pass through the Indian Ocean. This, it should be noted, is a function that currently belongs to the United States navy and its fleet. The above bases are, for the BRI, a tool of a strategy of encirclement, directed against India. (Yong Deng 2022:68)

Combining all this, i believe we can safely come to the conclusion that the Doctrine of the "Peaceful Development" is no real break from the nigh-universal rule of the behavior of rising powers, but merely the contradictory propaganda that has become usual in foreign affairs, over the course of the 20th century. China's rise will probably be no different than America's or Germany's rise was in the 19th century, in regards to conflict with nearby powers and expansion of their sphere of influence. In particular, as we have already mentioned, many of China's financial ventures are done with the subtle- or not so subtle, intention of using their gains for military purposes, such as the acquisition of ports for her navy.

2.2.3 Nonetheless, problems abound.

1. Between 1971, and until fairly recently, China was navigating the waters of a relatively safe, from her perspective, international environment, enjoying the fruits of good relations with the United States. ii) Much of her resources has been already expended. Half of her rivers have dried up, and underground water pollution has reached, according to the Chinese government itself, 60% of the total. iii) Around 40% of the viable agricultural land has been destroyed, due to overuse.

This lack of resources is starting to make further economic growth more expensive, relative to what it was at the beginning of the century. (Beckley, brands, 2021 :3-4)

2. Recently, a lot of countries have begun to cut their supply chain with China, after hearing America's allegations concerning the connection between Huawei and the Chinese State. They are worried that any equipment provided by the Chinese company may be used to spy on them. For instance, neither Australia nor New Zealand use the company's equipment on their 5G network (Beckley, Brands 2021:5)
3. In March 2023, the IMF predicted, according to its forecasts, that China's strong economic rebound would constitute around 1/3 of the world's total GDP growth for Fiscal Year 2023. Her growth would also help the overall regional economy grow into higher rates. However, the worsening of China's recent economic data has, likewise, sowed fear of a domino-effect with neighboring economies being adversely affected. (Alpha Bank, 2023 :4)
4. In spite of the importance that China's economy has for the Global economic recovery, or, conversely, the consequences that the Chinese economy's sudden decline would have for the latter, such a scenario is not expected to cause significant attrition on the GDP of the United States. More specifically, Nobel-laureate economist Paul Krugman, (Krugman, 2023) suggests that America's exposure to a theoretical crisis is very small. In particular, the foreign investment portfolio (shares and bonds) of the United States in China-Hong Kong are only slightly over 300 billion dollars. Likewise, American direct investments are estimated at about 215 billion dollars. All of them put together, at around 515 billion dollars, do not constitute a significant exposure danger for an economic power as large as the United States. (Krugman, 2023)
5. The most usual way of measuring inflation, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), was reduced by around 0.3% on a yearly basis, according to the data of the Chinese National Statistical Agency. Deflation forces businesses to freeze the hiring of new employees, to fire existing ones, as well as a reduction in new orders being made. The result is the reduction of profits while the cost of production remains

unchanged. It is a vicious circle that economists call a “Deflation Trap” (see chart 3). (G. P. Morgan, 2023)

6. The Chinese real estate market, constituting around 25% of the economy, is in a state of crisis, with a definitive downward trend of both demand, and, by extension, prices of real estate. This led to construction companies and local governments owing large debts, which in some cases led to defaults. As a result, investors have been shying away from the sector, and the Yuan has been getting weaker, with all the dangers this entails for the banking system and China’s public debt (Alpha Bank: 2023)
7. In July 2023, the Chinese economy suffered the greatest ever reduction (-14.2%) in exports, which had always been a driving factor of Chinese growth. In the same month, the production price index shrunk by around 4.4%, according to the Chinese statistical agency (Capital.gr,2023)

Nonetheless, the future looks bleaker when one takes the effects of certain demographic factors into account:

- Youth unemployment, in June, reached 21.3% of the total, whereas the credit rating agency Fitch, reassessed the rate of the Chinese GDP growth downwards to 4.8%, from 5.6%, a prediction that had been made just two months earlier, in June. Fitch stressed that the economic drive that was the by-product of lifting the pandemic-related sanctions, had now slowed down. It should be noted that before the pandemic, the Chinese GDP growth was estimated at around 9% (2000-2019), now falling to less than 5. This downward trend has increased concerns that China has a number of issues that may negatively affect her even more, in the future. First, internal consumption is not as strong as China may have hoped for. (Fitch, 2023). Second, in 2022 the Chinese population will start to decrease for the first time after 60 years, combined with increased unemployment, due to insufficient demand in the economy. (Mao Fu, 2024)
- Moreover, the population of the people’s republic is aging. To be more concise, it is aging at a rate faster than every other country in the 21 century, an impressive

“feat” to be sure, but not one that she is likely to feel proud of any time soon. (*China Power Project*, 2023) Aside from the traditional causes, such as improved health care leading to longer lifespans, there are some that are unique to China. Principal among them is China’s historic “one-child policy”. While the rationale behind its implementation was rational- if ethically dubious-, and in spite of its termination, its effects are far-reaching and its shadow is starting to haunt China in ways never imagined by its proponents.

- Due to the one-child policy, China is running out of human resources. Between 2020 and 2035, she will have gained more than 135 million elderly people, and lose approximately 70 million adults from the workforce. China will lose a working population, as numerous as France, and gain an elderly one, as populous as Japan, with potentially disastrous economic consequences. It is estimated that by 2050, elderly-related expenses will rise from 10 percent of the GDP, to 30 percent. (Beckley, 2021: 4)
- From a macroeconomic perspective, the reduced supply of labor is bound to improve the wages of the remaining workers. As a consequence, this will make Chinese products less competitive in the global market, than they currently are. (Minxin Pei, 2018 :170-171)

The Chinese President’s, Xi Jinping’s campaign against corruption is yet another element that may negatively affect economic growth. This policy has resulted in local leaders dreading the prospect of providing large loans, less they go sour, and, as a consequence, the ones who provided them may find themselves accused of corruption. As it stands, China’s main vehicle of wealth production, the private sector, finds itself crowded out of most of state lending, receiving only around 20 percent of it, with the rest going into the state-owned enterprises. (Beckley, Brands, 2021: 4)

China has made attempts at combating these trends. Compared to 2006, for instance, the proportion of her funds allocated to Research and development spending has tripled. Regardless, an equivalent rise in productivity has not been achieved. China’s internal mechanisms may be highly efficient in the gathering of resources, but nonetheless, inhibits the free distribution of funds and capital needed for viable innovative capabilities. As a

consequence, China only has a small share in most high technology industries in the global market. A good example is her internal microchip industry. While she possesses funds numbering in the billions of dollars, China, regardless, is forced to import around 80 percent of the microchips she needs each year. Likewise, the vaccine she developed for the treatment of Covid-19 was inferior to those created in other countries. (Beckley, Brands, 2021: 6)

The Chinese nominal spending on Research and Development R & D is growing at an exponential rate. Between 1991 and 2018 China's R&D spending has increased by a factor of around thirty-five, going from 13,1 billion dollars to 462 billion dollars. Nevertheless, in 2018, China's R&D spending still lagged behind that of the United States by almost 89 billion dollars (China Power)

It is my hope that the above data is illuminating in regards to both how China's strength has increased over time, as well as its potential in the next decades. We can surmise that while the Chinese economy is not about to thrash the American one any time soon, if ever, it has still given China, and is expected to give, a large multiplier to her power.

2.3 The conflict between American and Chinese interests

American interests in the Pacific, East Asian, as well as nearby territories are well-known. She is committed to the territorial integrity of South Korea, the ongoing de-facto independence of Taiwan, as well as the preservation of the rules of the "Liberal International Order" (LIO) that she has created and championed.

In regards to the conflicts of interests between the two superpowers, either about land-borders or sea-borders, one of the most important ones is China's unilateral denouncement of the status quo. The People's Republic claims the lion's share of the South China Sea as Chinese, a claim that manifests with the map with the nine-dash line (see Chart 4). Daniel Russel, the assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, criticized China, stating that any claims based on the "nine-dash line" would not be consistent with international law. According to him, any claims on sea waters cannot be

legally made with rocks that can be covered by the sea during a tide. It is for this reason that China, as of late, has created artificial islands in the sea, called the “Spratly islands” (see Chart 4&5), on her Southern territory, using them to project her claims and her military capabilities. China has, through unilateral declaration, declared the creation, in the East China Sea, of a new zone of air defense (ADIZ), centered on the disputed Senkaku-Diaoyu islands. Among the goals behind its creation is the administrative control over the Pacific Ocean islands that are disputed with Japan. (Lobell, Toje 2018: 354)

The region of the Eastern Chinese Sea will be one where hot conflict between China and Japan will take place. Here, we have to add the rich natural resource reserves of the area, which have been estimated as being able to cover China’s energy needs for the next 80 years. (Jash Amrita 2017:81)

In the Southern Sea, China possesses the Paracel islands, which are claimed by Vietnam, as well as the Spratly islands, claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and, partially, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. (Economy, Levi, 2014:144) The United States considers the rock islands to be covered by article V, of the Bilateral Security Treaty, of Japan and the United States. (1960) In accordance with that view, America has the right to make use of violence, in order to defend the aforementioned territories, in case of a hostile action. (Palatano 2014:38) Starting from 2012, in the context of a strategy of balancing, the United States Department of State announced the reallocation of the navy’s forces in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, going from having an equal number of ships in each of the oceans, to now having three-fifths of them in the Pacific (Panetta:2012)

Through the above actions, China contests the status quo, and sets into motion a more assertive regional diplomacy that is entirely opposed to her previous doctrine of a “peaceful rise”. However, the more China continues to espouse expansionary views, the more will her weaker neighbors seek aid from other states, which is ever more likely to be provided by the latter. For instance, in 2016, Ashton Carter, America’s Secretary of defense, concluded new agreements of cooperation with India and the Philippines, motivated, mainly, by worries concerning Chinese claims. (Walt, Toje 2018:24)

Starting in the 1990s, China’s investment in anti-Ship missiles, short- and medium- range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, stealth submarines, and cyber and space arms began to

challenge US superiority, especially in China's littoral waters. This military hardware makes it costlier for the United States to operate in close proximity to the Chinese territory, in case of an armed conflict, while also undermining US aircraft carriers near China, thereby pushing them further offshore, in the Pacific Ocean. Also, China's strategy increases the vulnerability of American bases in Okinawa and Guam to attack by Chinese land-based missiles. (Lobell, Toje, 2018: 360)

Economically, Sino-American contestation has resulted in competing trade organizations. China is pushing to advance the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and has financed the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The RCEP is a free trade agreement between the ASEAN member states and six additional states, including Japan and Australia. The AIIB is a development bank to build infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region. (Lobell, Toje, 2018:355). These new financial institutions, led by Beijing, compete with, and complement the US dominated World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). (Liao, 2016)

China, using "Win Win" deals, and having as her most fearsome ally her own powerful economy, she has become a very attractive partner for peripheral economies, reassuring them, with regard to their worries concerning the Chinese economy's rapid pace of growth. These countries include Japan and South Korea. (keyue Hu, 2023)

Beijing has been distancing itself from Western choices. With regard to the Palestinian dispute, China abstains from condemning Hamas, while criticizing Israel, reinforcing its relations with the global South, where many countries are steadfast supporters of Palestine. (Lons, 2023)

China's deal with the Houthi rebels, allowing her ships, as well as Russian ones to pass through the straits of the Red Sea, (Dagher, Hatem, 2024) and also, her support of the Iranian government's attack on Israel, prove that the chasm between her and the West is growing. (Gan, McCarthy 2024)

The West is concerned due to recent successful efforts by China to conduct a reformation of the United Nations from the inside, thereby, advancing her interests in the organization, in terms of: a) funding for departments, programs, and initiatives b) staffing of executive-

level personnel positions c) voting in the UN General assembly, where China votes as one of the 193 states, and voting in the Security Council d) the use of PRC specific discourse and language (Courtney Fung, Shing-hon-lam, 2022)

In 2017, China passed a legislative framework directing all Chinese to contribute to state security. This development in combination with the approximately 350,000 Chinese students attending U.S.' universities, gives China an incredible capacity to use espionage to procure developing technology. There is a massive, coordinated espionage assault taking place on American technology, perhaps the largest, fastest transfer of intellectual property in human history, and much of it is taking place on U.S. soil." (Gambill, 2021)

Beginning from Mr. Trump's presidency, in 2017, and his economic strategy of "America first", the United States found themselves in an economic war with China. (Shirk: 2023: 270) The great ambition of the plan "made in China 2025" made Americans enact the trade tariffs "Super 301" of the Trump government, prohibiting the sale of high-technology goods to China, especially, that of the advanced semiconductors, and artificial intelligence (Rebecca Liao: ibid:259). The Biden administration continues Mr. Trump's policy, even enforcing newer tariffs (Pavlopoulos, 2021) A new bill demands that the owner of the social media known as "TikTok", to sell the rights of the app to the United States of America (Milmo, 2024)

Why are Asian states balancing against China? Realism gives a straightforward answer to the question: as China becomes more powerful, its neighbors worry about how it might use its growing capabilities. To preserve their autonomy, they are forging closer security ties with each other and with the United States. (Walt, Toje, 2018:23)

As it now stands, things have degenerated to the extent that China demands other countries' navies get its permission before sailing through its 200 miles "Exclusive Economic Zone" (EEZ), something that is very much against the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as against America's will. (Anson Zhang: 2023). The fact that all of this started under the leadership of Hu Jintao is a further reminder that the current conflicts are not just a by-product of Xi Jinping's leadership. (Shirk, 2023: 119-121)

It is, of course, well known that China has long desired to dominate the South China Sea. Nonetheless, from 1989 till the mid-2000s, she showed a remarkable restraint, (Shirk: ibid:

128-129) abiding by Deng's policy of "hide your strength, bide your time". China, as has already been mentioned, has made remarkable progress on the economic front. One rather unexpected result of said growth is the fact that China and America are now rivals in regards to accessing energy resources, such as oil and gas. The increasing demand for energy by China has caused an overall rise in the price of energy resources (Economy, Levi, 2014:195)

Of course, an often-mentioned thorn in their relations is the island country of Taiwan. It remains a sore wound in China's psyche that the United States spent more than two decades (1950-1972) denying them international recognition, in favor of a country with less than a hundredth of its population that styles itself "Republic of China. Successive US governments have retained an official, if ambiguous alliance with Taiwan. (See chart 4) (Nathan, Scobell, 2012:5-6). For China she is a strategic geographic location, for the purpose of controlling the sea routes, and the projection of her aeronautical power in the South and Eastern Chinese Sea.(Geopolitical Futures, 2016).

While trying to interpret Washington's intentions, Chinese leaders have come to two conclusions. America seeks to lull them into apathy, and she has no intention of letting her grow, militarily, to the extent that she could be a peer to her, and thus, threaten her pacific interests. Indeed, even the Obama administration, reiterated -according to the Chinese interpretation- that the US are only prepared to tolerate China if she plays by her rules. As far as China is concerned, the only reason the United States sought to help them integrate into the international system, economically or otherwise, was for the sake of balancing its then archnemesis, the USSR. (J. Nathan, Scobell, 2012: 7) Nonetheless, some have put forth the notion that China is unlikely to seek a direct conflict with America due to their economic interdependence. (Nathan, Scobell, 2012:8)

In this author's view, such an outlook seems naive, at best. Though history does not repeat itself per se, I would cautiously remind the reader that before the first world war, Germany and Great Britain were at least, if not more so interdependent as are China and the United States today. Most American policy makers do not seem to consider how their great rival views them and their actions, instead, maintaining a myopic view. Such a haughty perspective can, and probably will, have repercussions. Su Tzu's advice, "Know

thy enemy” remains as important today, as it was 2000 years ago. American leaders would do well to remember this.

It is theorized by many, that even as far back in the past, as the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, China had already begun formulating a strategy, with the intended purpose of become the hegemonic power of Asia, and, following that, to replace the United States as the global hegemon. At the end of the day, this is the expected default behavior of a rising power. Much more so, when said power feels itself threatened by another power, that being the United States of America. The trajectory and outcome of this conflict, which is expected to be long-lasting, will determine the fate of our planet. (Kolliopoulos, Platias, 2010:368)

All of these is not to say that conflict between the two powers is inevitable. While much-quoted, in the context of the rising tensions between the two powers, “Thucydides trap” is frequently misunderstood. Just as Thucydides never meant to say that conflict between Athens and Sparta was inevitable, so too in the case of America and China, we must not be ruled by any deterministic notions. (Platias, Trigas, 2023:6) It is my view that the best way war to be avoided, other than a balancing coalition, would be for the United States to demonstrate to China that she has much more to lose from a potential war between them, than to gain.

Nonetheless, it is often said that luck favours the prepared. It is in America’s self-interest to be ready for a worst-case scenario situation. Of course, one way to do so would be by disentangling her overextended forces from territories that are of no benefit to her, as well as limiting her list of foes.

If we were to focus on the causes of the Sino-American rivalry, we would readily conclude that it is caused by factors that are both economic, and ideological in nature. Changes in the balance of power between them are also to blame.

We are definitely not witnessing a new phenomenon. Before 1914, Great Britain was worried about Germany’s growth and the dramatic change in the power balance between them. Similarly, the policymakers of today’s USA are not just worried about China’s economic growth, but also the speed of said growth. Starting from 2010, China has the

first place, globally, in regards to production and exports. She, according to the program of global comparisons, run by the World Bank, is already the world's largest economy, at least in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). (Giles, 2014)

2.4 Changes in the balance of power and probable causes for war

China's rapid economic growth, compared to that of the United States, has led to a disruption in the balance of power, in favor of Beijing. What is going to happen in the coming decades? Realists, going back to the age of Thucydides, have had a pessimistic view of the international system. According to their beliefs, in a world where there is no strong central authority tasked to preserve peace, any great change in the extant power balance is inherently threatening.

While the reality of the international system does not make war inevitable, when changes in the balance of power happen, they still increase the possibility of one happening, through a distinct causal road. These trends, according to realists, will emerge whenever independent political groups coexist in an anarchic system, regardless of whatever international cultural, or institutional context, as well as, regardless of any other aspect of the world order.

The adept management of the crisis, a good diplomatic ability, the common political and cultural values can prevent open armed conflicts, and moderate existing tensions, while being incapable of eliminating them.

The realist theory predicts an increase in the suspiciousness between China and the United States, as well as competition for allies and influence. Finally, there will be an increased chance of armed conflict. Realists connect changes in the balance of power with more tensions, with four possible causes for a potential war. (Stephen M. Walt-Asle Toje, 2018:14)

1. Rising powers desire to change the status quo, for the sake of increasing their security, as well as export the benefits.

America's leaders are worried that China's growth in the trade and financial sectors will weaken the United States financially and geopolitically. The fact that, under President

Obama, five alleged Chinese military hackers, were indicted for industrial espionage underscored these concerns. (Layne, 2018:131)

According to Ian Bremmer and David Gordon of the “Eurasian Group”, China’s rise and the State capitalist model, are the greatest threat the United States have faced in the last two decades. (Bremmer, Gordon, 2012 Financial Times)

From the perspective of American officials, the Chinese rise puts their country’s very identity into question. A centralized regime that successfully combines the market economy with authoritarianism, is, to put it bluntly, an affront to America. (Friedberg, 2012:44)

A complex total of institutional arrangements defines the relationships between states. These can be as simple as mutually agreed upon borders, or as complex as the rules of the World Trade Organization. Such rules, whenever they are accepted by the Great powers, reflect the current Balance of Power, and the system’s stability increases.

The existing status quo is a good summary of the balance of power at the time the arrangements had been made. Thus, it also summarizes the interests of the most powerful states. (Walt-Toje, 2018:15)

A rising power may still adopt the arrangements of the pre-existing status quo, so long as her own standing is not hurt by it. In any other case, she will question and fight against rules that were made when she was in a weaker position. However, if the decision of an upcoming state to question the status quo, does not hurt the interests of the other powers, the status quo merely moves to a different, pareto-optimal position. In any other scenario, we will see a future conflict of national interests. (Krasner, 333-366, 1991) For example, the United States, at the zenith of its power and influence, after the fall of the USSR, when it was indisputably, the sole superpower, did not work to maintain the status quo, but rather, grasped the opportunity, to overthrow, or exert pressure pariah states, to spread its own values and ideals, and enlarge its sphere of influence. (Walt, Toje, 2018:16)

Because the future is uncertain, even great changes in the balance of power, in favour of a stronger state or states, can induce them to grab the opportunity presented, in order to reduce the existing dangers, or deter and slow down potential future challenges, therefore

strengthening their already powerful position, making it last as long as possible. In such a scenario, the possibility of future conflicts with states that are currently getting weaker becomes more likely. (Walt, Toje:16-18)

2. Attempts to alter the status quo encourage malicious perceptions of other states. Any change of the existing establishment, in favour of one power, is bound to make the others suspicious, concerning her future intentions. Even something as simple as the reversal of unfair decisions that were imposed on the state, when she was a small power, will lead to questions in the other states. The most hardcore among them will interpret these moves as malicious, sowing the seeds of doubt. In that way, mutually beneficial compromises become more difficult. (Walt, 2018:16-17)

This situation creates anxiety, with the rising power interpreting the status quo, as merely an attempt to keep her perpetually weak. In the end, both powers, not knowing what the other one wants, are led to the decision of strengthening their current positions, and removing any future challenges. (Walt: 2018:19)

3. Changes in the balance of power encourage opportunistic and deterrent wars. Even if a rising power does not challenge the status quo, her rise can still create motives for a preventive war, the idea being that while she has not yet challenged the status quo, she may do so later. "Wars of opportunity" are encouraged by swift fluctuations of the balance of power. The powers that are becoming weaker, may decide to conduct a military operation, for the sake of discouraging the rising power. Likewise, when the enemy suddenly becomes weaker, the enemy state is tempted to improve its position within the existing system. (Walt: ibid: 17-18)

4. Changes in the balance of power have a tendency of increasing a flawed perception of the enemy's power, something that encourages conflicts to break out. Two states are more likely to come to a military conflict, if they do not know which one is stronger. Either of them may overestimate its military might, or believe that the other one will back down. Conversely, a particularly good knowledge of the balance of power, as well as determination, reduce flawed estimates. Weaker countries are less likely to challenge countries who are either much stronger than them, or much more determined. (Walt, 2018:18) Even when a rising power is much stronger than it used to, nobody can say for sure its precise power. This includes both the country's leadership, as well as any potential

enemies she might have. Even more so, when she has acquired new military technologies that have yet to be tested in an actual battlefield. For instance, in the battle of Tsushima, in 1904, between the Russian and Japanese empires, Japan had only recently created a modern navy, and had yet to fight Russia, or any European power at sea. Nobody could have predicted quite how one-sided, in favor of Japan, the outcome of the battle would be (Walt: ibid :19).

America's peaceful rise remains the great exception. By around 1900, they were the world's largest economy. They surpassed Great Britain, the world's most powerful state, without raising any serious possibility of war. According to realists, Britain chose a policy of appeasement. She was mostly concerned by Germany's rise in Europe. Germany was located far closer, geographically, to the British Isles than America was. This combined with German revisionist policies, their powerful land army, and their expanding navy, made Germany a great threat, capable of overthrowing the balance of power in the Elder Continent, and her establishment as a European hegemon. This is precisely what Britain has always been trying to prevent (Walt 2018:21-22). As Winston Churchill put it, "For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating power on the Continent" (Churchill,1948: 207-208).

The United States may be exceedingly powerful, but they are not too threatening for most European States, and geography plays a large part in this assessment. (Walt,2018:22).

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CHAPTER 3: Current relations between Russia and China, as well as underlying issues between them

In this unit we examine the partnership that exists between the two states, a superpower, and a former one. We also take a glance at the history of their relations, their development till this day.

3.1. Cooperation between the two countries.

Introduction

In spite of their historic rivalries, that will be mentioned in Chapter 2, China and Russia could today be considered to have a de facto alliance, or perhaps entente between them. I believe that the reason for this anomaly is the fact that the two countries currently complement each other, almost perfectly. Sparsely populated Russia has enormous energy resources, while China has almost a fifth of the globe's population within her borders, as well as a fast-expanding economy. To her chagrin, though, she is a relatively energy poor country, forcing her to import various energy sources, such as oil, gas, and coal from abroad, in order to feed her hungry economy. Given the increasing rivalry between the United States and China, the cooperation of the former rivals can be seen as detrimental, if indirectly so, to core American interests.

3.1.1 Bilateral relations

Upon the accession of Vladimir Putin to power in the Kremlin, the two countries made important progress on a political level. In 2001, they signed the mutual "treaty of friendship".

Afterwards, they tackled a thorny issue that of their border disputes. This dispute was solved in 2004, due to Russia officially ceding 337 square miles of the contested territory to the People's Republic. Ever since then, the two countries formulated a "soft alliance", with regards to their foreign policy, that exists to this day. (Gabuev, 2014: 3) Next, the two states offered each other mutual support in the war against terror, by adopting mutual positions in security affairs. For starters, China took Russia's side, against Chechen rebels. (Bobo Lo, 2004: 296) When it came to the Ukrainian dispute and invasion,

whereas, at the beginning, China was neutral, she soon came around to supporting Moscow's actions. However, China did not hesitate to take advantage of Russia's need for diplomatic and financial aid, as we can see later on this chapter. (Wayne Ma, 2014) Reciprocally, Moscow has taken a clearly pro-China stance on the Taiwanese dispute, endorsing Beijing's "One China " doctrine. She has taken a similar position, on a number of similar issues, such as that of the Tibetan separatist movement, or the crackdown on Xinjiang. Lastly, we should not forget the ongoing development of their cooperation in various sectors of their economies, with a multitude of committees meeting on a regular timespan. (Bobo Lo: 296-297)

On the financial front, several Chinese banks have suspended transactions with Russian counterparts, in line with Western sanctions' guidelines, but on the food front, China has announced the lifting of limits on Russian wheat imports, previously in place, due to phytosanitary concerns. So, China is ready to help Russia without risking a legal confrontation with the West (Touxtidou, 2022) Chinese companies are rushing to fill the gap that was caused, on Russia's markets, due to the withdrawal of the European Brands. (See Table 1) Starting from February 2022, Asian cars have been replacing European ones. Comparable changes have been happening with regard to smart phones and electronic devices (see Chart 6). Chinese firms have more than doubled their sales, all but removing the equivalent Japanese and South Korean ones from the market. (Keeping consumers well-supplied) (Fasouloupoulou, 2022)

In addition, they have come to cooperate on the advancement of the polar silk road (see chart 7) The ongoing melting of polar ice, brought forth by climate change, while indicative of potentially catastrophic environmental issues, has had the side effect of making the rich resources of the Arctic available for exploitation. Their melting has also resulted in the northern routes, now being more viable. Thus, they have initiated two joint sea ventures, "Yamal LNG", and "Arctic LNG2". Having the world's only nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet, Moscow, through the North Sea Route (NSR), will increase the transit of trade-goods to 80 million tons per year, by 2024, and 130 million tons by 2030. This is a sea route that connects the Atlantic and the Pacific, along the Russian Siberian shores and the Far East. (Vergolia, 2023,)

Cooperation on the field of energy

In spite of the fact that the vast majority of Russian natural resources are located in its Asian part, that is, Siberia and the Russian Far East, for a long time, they were unexploited, due to the fact that Russia's most lucrative partners were located to the west. Accordingly, she had focused more on exploiting the resources in the Western or European part of her domain. Likewise, most of the investments on infrastructure were focused on her Western provinces. In 2009, though, the situation was different. Russia's extraction of oil from Siberia had reached around 11 million tons. (Henderson& Mitrova, 2016: 20)

Up until around 1990, China was actually self-sufficient in regards to oil. However, after that point, her needs increased, precipitously, and so did her imports. (Henderson & Mitrova, 2016: 23) By the end of 2004, an agreement had been concluded between the Russian company Rosneft, and the Chinese one CNPC that commenced the construction of the ESPO (Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean) pipeline (see chart 8). In 2009, the two companies concluded an agreement regarding the export of 15 million tons of oil per year, till 2030. Finally, there has been a more recent deal, for a new pipeline that would connect the central component of ESPO, in Skovorodino, with the Daqing area of China. (Henderson & Mitrova, 2016:26) As of today, around three quarters of China's energy have to transit through the straits of Malacca, a passage that is very easy for the United States to blockade. (Henderson & Mitrova, 2016:24) The above agreements are of particular significance to China, in that they are part of a series of measures to ensure her energy security. They illustrate the increasing need that China had of Russian oil. From China's perspective, the advantage of such a transaction is not just the acquisition of much needed energy, but the shared borders of the two countries means that, unlike China's energy imports from the middle east, Russian oil and gas can not be blockaded by neither the United States nor any other potential rival of China's.

In 2022, Chinese crude oil imports from Russia, increased by around 50%, in comparison to the previous year, making Russia China's top supplier of oil, and displacing Saudi Arabia. China took advantage of the fact that the price of Russian oil was at a historic oil, due to sanctions by the West. Chinese imports through ESPO, as well as sea routes, are around 8.4 million tons per year, or about two million barrels per day. China has, as of

recently, become the world's largest importer of crude oil. This data has been published by the Chinese customs office (GAC). (CNN, 2022)

Russia supplies China with not just oil but natural gas, as well, through the pipeline "power of Siberia". Through it, the gas is transferred to North China. The pipeline goes through Eastern China and ends up in Shanghai. The Russian company Gazprom and the Chinese one CNPC are responsible for the project's development. (Zachioti: 2022)

The middle phase of the project started in 2020, and by 2025, the pipeline will be extended to South China. "Power of Siberia" has increased Russian exports of natural gas towards China by 63,4%, or around 7.5 billion m³, during the first semester of the year. Russian gas exports to China are expected to reach 38 billion m³, in the course of the next few decades (see Chart 9). The next phase will be the construction of "Siberian 2", through Mongolia (Zachioti: ibid) (see Table 2)

In the sector of nuclear energy, the two countries are discussing the construction of two nuclear power stations in China, in the context of China's energy transition from coal, to more environmentally friendly sources of energy. Until then, however, China may keep buying coal from Russia at a bargain, due to the sanctions imposed on Moscow by a number of states. (Zachioti, 2022)

In regards to military affairs, Russia supplies China with advanced equipment. For instance, in 2014, Russia sold her the land-air missile system S-400, which is her most cutting-edge air defence equipment. China has access to Russian technology, such as land-air missiles, or submarine warfare systems. On the other hand, this situation makes Moscow feel nervous. That being said, after Russia's schism with the West, the selling of advanced equipment to China has become unavoidable (Georgoglou, 2023)

Their relationship is asymmetrical, and Russia may feel trapped in it, given that Western sanctions, after the war in Ukraine, push her to hitherto unknown levels of financial and technological dependence on China. (Georgoglou, 2023)

The increasingly good relations between the two countries are based on the fact that both of them desire to resist what they see as a series of Western intrusions into their internal affairs. In that way, they hope to weaken the West's dominance over the global financial

rules and the policy of information. According to Yu Bin, a professor of political sciences in Wittenberg University, their dysphoria for the world order has little to do with their unique “identities”, but much more with the respective changes in the West. In short, it is not about identity, but about cold, hard interests. They are worried about the recent re-orientation of successive American governments into Asian affairs, for the sake of balancing China, and they are particularly concerned about the spread of NATO. (Meick, 2017:20)

The real reason that the two countries, which used to be rivals, have come closer together is the fear of American hegemony. Some examples of this American strategy are the bombing of Kosovo in 1998, the Invasion of Iraq, in 2003, the alliance between America and Japan, the secession from the anti-ballistic missile treaty, the Ukrainian question, and the aforementioned rapid expansion of NATO. (Wilkins, 2008:369)

Due to the rekindling of relations between China and Russia, certain geopolitical analysts have been discussing the creation of a geopolitical axis, or an alliance between the two countries, for some time. Today we can treat such assumptions as pure facts. (Kollaros 2023)

Their extensive military cooperation and its consequences for America's interests in Asia and the Pacific.

Russia has sold a land-air defence missile S-400 system to China, worth 3 billion dollars. Certain Russian officials believed that Russia would first manage to fully equip her own army, but later concluded that the copying of the S-400 system would take time, and that by then Russia would already have readied a more modern version of the equipment, called S-500. (Meick, 2017:21) This newer version has already been successfully tested, according to the TASS agency. The first S-500 are operational, and are being used to defend Moscow, with 10 more being expected. When completed, these systems have a range of 600 km (Meick, 2017:21)

China's s-400, though, still upgraded her effective range from 300 to 400 km, covering Taiwan and portions of Chinese East and South Seas. She possesses a more advanced radar system, and now has a platform, through which, she can challenge Taiwan, as well as prepare for a future airborne conflict with the United States and her allies in the aforementioned seas. They could also, conceivably, help her in imposing her “Air Defense

Identification Zone” (ADIZ)”. Russia has also sold 34 SU-35 fighters to China, which will help the latter challenge the air supremacy of the United States. Common war games between the “People’s Liberation Army” (PLA), and the Russian military, give China precious experiences that will help them achieve their strategic goals. (Meick: ibid)

However, observers question whether or not the war games are of a high quality. According to Richard Weitz, director of political and military analysis of Hudson University, “the two countries lack equipment that is necessary for the enactment of a complete military operation.” Their exercises are far from the high quality of execution that is the standard in the completed exercises, conducted by the United States with allies, such as Japan, South Korea, or the ones from NATO. (Meick, 2017:22)

Chinese-Russia war games have been expanded, geographically, from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Japan, and the two countries have highlighted the alignment of their security interests, as well as a likely mutual support, regarding issues where either of them has interests, in opposition to the United States. Due to their mutual cooperation, on the sector of anti-missile defence, it is conceivable that in case of emergency, the United States may face a complex international environment, and find the efficacy of their respective defense systems impaired (Meick, 2008:22-23)

3.1.2 On a multilateral level:

They have decided on a common axis in the United Nations (UN). Starting from 2006, they have voted multiple times in tandem. By 2016, they had voted, in unison, with regards to Sudan in 2006, Myanmar in 2007, and Zimbabwe in 2008. (Cox. 2016:325) Last but not least, they did so fifteen times, concerning Syria, Moscow’s vital Middle East ally. (HuffPost ,2020) Their latest common act, as of this writing, was vetoing a United Nations Security Council resolution, concerning Gaza. (To vima, 2023)

They both participate in institutions such as the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (SCO), where states cooperate on issues of high politics and security. Its states-members deny any accusation that it constitutes a military alliance. Having said that, it is the only security organization, in the area, of which America is not a member. During a large-scale military exercise or war game that took place in the Yellow Sea, in the North-West Pacific Ocean, with the participation of over ten thousand soldiers, seventy air fighters, 65 ships-

both combat and support ships, and one hundred tanks. It should be noted that over seven thousand of the soldiers were members of the Russian and the Chinese militaries. The combat scenario was about the war on terror. (Walts, Ledberg& Engelbrekf, 2016)

Finally, their joint ventures include even more regional organizations, such as the “Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation”, APEC, which was founded in 1989, with the intent of liberalizing trade and investments in the area. (Yong Deng, 2022: 145). In the “Asian Regional Forum”, ARF, in order to apply the treaty of “Friendship and Cooperation” (TAC), which supports the principles of sovereignty and peaceful resolution of conflicts, with the end-goal of transforming the local international relations. China has been a partner since 1997 (Yong Deng, 2022:145)

Russia and China are both leading and founding members of the BRICS, an intergovernmental organization, which is a coalition of five countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China, reaching its current number with the accession of South Africa, in 2010. It was founded with the intent of providing investment opportunities for its members, improving the global economy, as well as the role that the BRICS could play in such an endeavor. The organization also wants to create “a fair, democratic, and multilateral global order”. The coalition created the “New Development Bank” (NDB), intended as a rival of the “International Monetary Fund” (IMF), and the “World Bank” (WB). According to the five countries, these two organizations are under the control of the United States. BRIC’S seat is in Shanghai, and, as one could easily surmise, China’s will have by far the most “weight” in the organization, given that the lion’s share of the NDB’s currency reserves is owned by China. (Prifti, 2015)

The bloc’s members seek a global upgrade of their role, in a global system that currently favours the West and the G7. Analysts are saying that the BRICS’ enlargement, with new members joining, will transform the coalition into a more multicultural one. China and Russia, due to increased tension with the West, want the rest of the BRICS countries-potential ones included, on their side, so as to create a powerful anti-Western block, a development that will have positive consequences for the two partners. Up till now, there are 22 members that have expressed interest in joining the coalition. Today, in terms of “Purchasing Power Parity” (PPP), the five BRICS countries, control upwards of 30% of the global wealth, whereas, G7, less than 30%. (Platias, 2023)

All of the above are confirmed by the statements made by China's ambassador to South Africa that the number of interested countries has increased, so that "their legitimate interests, in opposition to certain countries that hold the big stick of unilateral sanctions".

(McCarty, 2023) As of 1/1/2024, three large oil-producing countries have acceded to the BRICS (Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE), as well as Egypt and Ethiopia (Hancock & Cohen, 2024)

3.1.3 Attempts to weaken the dollar:

After the first western sanctions against Russia, in 2014, she tried to procure an alternative solution to substitute the dollar. As it stands, within their bilateral agreements, Russia, payments are made with the use of their respective currencies. This helps Russia keep her financial system stable. (Gabuev, 2024) Russia has also threatened to sell American government bonds, making investors feel nervous, finally, resulting in a partial weakening of the American dollar. As a matter of fact, as a rival to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, they have helped found the "New Development Bank", (NDB), formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank. (Venetis, 2023.) This bank intends to adopt a new financial currency. Alexander Babakov, the vice-president of the Russian Duma, has stated that the new currency will not only be linked with the current value of gold, but also, more categories of goods, such as rare minerals, etc. According to him, the new currency's inauguration will signal a new cycle for the global economy. (Louka, 2023)

Their efforts to undermine the dollar's supremacy, seem to be making at least some progress. Argentina and Brazil have agreed that when engaging in commerce with China, they will, from now on, conduct them via the Yuan. China, by virtue of being America's most potent rival, in recent years, has begun internationalizing her currency. Unfortunately for the PRC, the dollar seems to be holding up well, against any attempts to usurp its prominent place. In April, 2023, the dollar constituted up to 42% of the currency total that circulates in the international market. By comparison, the Euro came up at second place, with a total of 33%; the British Pound came at a distant third, at 6%, the Japanese Yen was number four, at 5%, whereas, only a mere 2% was made up of the Chinese Yuan. This data was collected and verified by the Society for 'Worldwide Interbank Financial Communication' (SWIFT). (AMPE Capital.gr, 2023)

The two states cooperate via attempts to increase the use of the Yuan between them. However, in spite of earlier upward trends, the current percentage of Russian reserves that are held in Renminbi is, approximately, only one eighth of its current reserves. Indeed, the percentages of reserves held in the Yuan have seen a downward trend. In short, Russia's continuing dependence in dollars gives the US methods of indirectly applying pressure to the Russian state. (Spivak, 2021:1-3)

Speaking of economic cooperation, no analysis would be complete without mentioning the current economic support that China offers to Russia, in order to help her reduce the weight of Western sanctions towards the latter, in light of her invasion of Ukraine. (Touxtidou, 2022) Their mutual trade has seen a 64%, during the last two years, due to the strengthening of their bilateral cooperation. Their total mutual trade is worth around 240 billion dollars (see Chart 10). (Stoliarov, 2024) In July 2023, the share of the Chinese Yuan, in Russian currency transactions, was estimated at around 44 % of her overall currency transactions. (Global Times, 2023)

3.2. Historical disputes between them.

“Comrades and friends...

The Chinese nation is a great nation. With a history of more than 5,000 years, China has made indelible contributions to the progress of human civilization. After the Opium War of 1840, however, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society and suffered greater ravages than ever before. The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilization was plunged into darkness. Since that time, national rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. (Nikkei Assia, 2021). The above was a speech made by Chinese President Xi Jinping, in 2021, in Tiananmen square, to commemorate the hundredth-year anniversary of the Communist Party of China.

We can infer, from the above, that the Chinese nation has not forgotten the century of humiliations. It is a wound that is deeply rooted within the psyche of every citizen of that country, from top to bottom. Through its long history, China has come into conflict with

countless nations, but it was only one of them that gave them their deepest wound, one that is still fresh.

For a long time, the relations between Russia and China were more hostile than otherwise. Starting from the time the two first made contact, to the century of humiliations, a number of territories in China's northern borders, was ceded to Russia. The diplomatic history between the two states goes back to the treaty of Nerchinsk, on 27 August 1689. It is an ominous beginning, given that China was forced to acknowledge Russian ownership of the areas between the Argun river and lake Baikal, territories that up until then, had been in the Chinese sphere of influence. (Krausse & Sidney, 1899: 330-331)

If the above can be likened to a thorn, then the events of the Nineteenth century could be compared to a thorn bush. The year 1856 saw the eruption of the second opium war, which ended in 1860 with humiliating terms for China. In particular, the year 1858, at the height of the conflict, saw the Treaty of Aigun, between the two countries, which revised the treaty of Nerchinsk by forcing China to transfer ownership of the area between the Stanovoy Range and the Amur River to Russia. Thus, Russia gained around 600,000 km. (Tzhou Byron 1990: 47)

Finally, with the Convention of Peking, on October 18 1860, the Qing dynasty of China was forced to part with the Qing province, commonly known as East Tartary, and henceforth as the Ussuri Krai, on which the warm-water port of Vladivostok is located today, without Russia shedding the blood of even a single of her soldiers. Concurrently, China also ceded the island of Sakhalin, and was therefore locked out of the Sea of Japan. (encyclopedia, history) Such terms were common through the Nineteenth century, and have come to be known, especially within China, as the "Unequal Treaties".

The above pattern continued, albeit on a smaller scale in the years that followed, not stopping even during the Cold War, a fact that prove that Geopolitics play a far larger role in determining the relations between two states, than any ideological alignment. The harsh feelings caused by said treaties are well known by the Russian political elite, a fact that makes them suspicious of Chinese intention, perhaps fearing a potential Chinese Revanchism.

One of the deepest Russian fears concerning China is that of Colonization. The “yellow peril”, as it was known, still exists, given the immense demographic differences between the two allies on their borders. The Russian Far-East has a size of 6.2 million square miles, and constitutes 36% of the Russian state. However, it is home to a mere 6.2 million people, whereas China's three north-eastern provinces, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning, are populated by nearly 110 million Chinese citizens, in an area whose size is a mere 804 thousands square miles. (Gabuev, 2014: 5) Knowing all this, it becomes quite clear that Russian fears concerning the immigration of Chinese workers in the Far-East area are well-grounded in reality.

As it has already been mentioned, it remains an uncomfortable reality that today's Russo-Chinese borders were the result of a Russian imposition upon China, wherein, Russia simply grabbed the area best known as Outer Manchuria, in the mid-nineteenth century. While the Convention of Peking (1860) clearly demarcates the two countries' borders, it can not be forgotten that half a century ago, in 1969, China and the USSR very nearly went to war over the aforementioned territories. (Miles Yu, 2022) It was only in 1992 that the two of them entered into a warmer, more cooperative phase in their relationship, one that for the moment is still ongoing.

3.3 Current issues that may potentially divide them.

In part due to its current political and economic isolation from the west Russia has found herself pushed more and more towards cooperating with Beijing. Of course, if we consider the immense disparity between the sizes of their economic, approximately a ratio of 10 to 1 in China's favour, (a nominal GDP of almost 20 trillion USD for China, versus a little over 2 for Russia), it seems overwhelmingly likely that such an alliance will be, perhaps ironically given their shared history, “unequal”, to say the least. (IMF WEO database 2023). Or, to paraphrase Nobel Laurette economist Paul Krugman, Russia will be to China what Fascist Italy was to Nazi Germany. (Krugman Paul, 2022). In fact, we could argue that this is already proving to be the case in regards to Central Asia, where the Economic rise of China has caused a new “Great Game” of sorts between Central Asia's largest neighbors. (Bobo lo, 2004: 299)

It seems China has, as of right now, been scared by Russia's aggressiveness towards Ukraine (Brands, 2023). While the war is useful for China – so that they may examine Western reactions towards it, and use them as a rough approximation for any similar ones, should she invade Taiwan, she probably believes that such a full-scale war happened too soon for her liking.

It should be noted that the current de-facto entente between them is a policy driven solely by the will of their political elite. The popular masses in the two countries, conversely, seem to not have forgotten the past. This may serve to drive a nail in their bicameral future. (Wilkins, 2008: 373) However, the very authoritarian nature of the two regimes may serve to at-least partially shield them from popular opinion. Only the future will tell (Gabuev, 2014:4)

Their extensive economic cooperation may hide certain dangers

Some of them originate from China's internal system, as interpreted by the ruling class, and others have to do with internal Russian problems regarding the structure of the cooperation with Beijing (Gabuev: ibid:4)

Starting from March, all of China's largest banks have suspended their deals with Russia, or have intensified their audits of transactions concerning merchandise, with double political and military applications. Certain Chinese companies are turning towards small banks, across the length of the border with Russia, that still continue to accept payments. This, however, has led to a congestion, with businessmen having to wait months, in order to open an account. Other companies are turning to underground financial channels, such as financials and forbidden cryptocurrencies, that carry important dangers (Reuters, 2024)

China does not wish to find itself in an escalatory conflict with the West, unless such a choice is made by its own leadership. Even if Beijing is taking important steps, towards a multipolar world, such as de-dollarization, China does not, under any circumstances, wish to lose her important position, within the great supply chains that end up in the West (Sotiris, 2022) As an example, Huawei has stopped supplying Russia's mobile phone companies with base stations, and has her office in Russia, that used to sell data storage systems, and telecommunications equipment. (Cerekova&Ruhlig, 2023)

The basis of this perception is based on the conflict of 1969, in the information about the rise of nationalism within China, and the typical, for many Russian officials, logic of strict control of a weaker partner- which, in this case, is Russia. As it has already been mentioned, the demographic decline of Russia's border regions, awakens the memory of the "yellow peril" (Gabuev, 2014: 4-5)

The current political situation may also be dangerous. Before the crisis in Ukraine, Moscow was in talks about constructions in the Far East, not just with Chinese, but also with Japanese companies. Many of these talks, either stopped after the sanctions, or at least were paused. Thus, while searching for reliable partners, Russia has no current alternatives to China, in order to support her business plans in the area. (Gabuev: 2014: 5)

In the energy sector:

1. In regards to infrastructure, the same thorns still exist. Russia was attempting to cover the lost ground in the rapid development of the energy market, with the construction of further pacific capabilities of transfer of liquified natural gas. Mainly, she was planning to construct them by Gazprom and Rosneft in the Primorye territory. Now, said plans concern only pipelines towards China, because, if Japan and South Korea decided to buy Russian LNG-, they might not be able to provide loans and technology, due to fear of American reprisals (Gabuev: 2014: 6)
2. The contract, signed by Gazprom and CNPC, concerning 38 billion cubic meters of gas to be bought, signed in May 2014, through the pipeline "Force of Siberia", has most likely derailed the Vladivostok LNG project. The transference of resources, by an aboveground pipeline from Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East to China, has resulted in Russia dealing with but a single buyer, (Gabuev: ibid:6) Russian commodity firms are growing increasingly reliant on China, as an export market, giving Beijing leverage over Moscow (Demarais, 2024)
3. China is diversifying its sources of energy resources, and, thus, other than Russia, she is importing natural gas from Turkmenistan. The supply is made possible via a pipeline, connecting the two countries, through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. She receives some supply of natural gas from the latter, so as to make the project mutually beneficial. It is imperative, from China's perspective, to diversify her

sources of energy, so as not to endanger her energy security. (Henderson & Mitrova, 2016:50) During the first semester of 2022, Chinese imports from Turkmenistan increased by over 52%, compared to 2021. (Zaxioti, 2022)

4. According to Yian Qin, a coal expert working for a company called “Refinitiv”, China has learned Europe’s lesson, and does not intend to repeat it. She has signed contracts about natural gas imports throughout the globe, such as a 60-billion-dollar deal with Qatar, lasting 27 years. China is the big winner of the Russo-Ukrainian war, according to Marina Shagina, of the IISS, due to her hand being strengthened by Russia’s relative isolation. In this manner, she can now import Russian energy at a bargain (Onalert, АПЕ-МПЕ, 2023)

Starting from 2015, after the Ukrainian crisis begun, the Russian Federation, with her economy weakened, (due to a combination of the effects of sanctions, alongside with a rapid drop in the price of oil), cut off from Europe and the United States, and dependent on China, begun to enhance their already extensive military partnership in new generation weapons sales. For China, having ready access to modern weapons is extremely important, as her defence industry has grown, and by extension, she needs highly sophisticated accessories and component parts, such as airship components, and, in particular, motors of warships.

The immense Russian dependence on China can lead the former to be continuously extorted, and be forced to keep giving China access to breakthrough weapon technology. It is worth remembering that in 2008, China and Russia signed an agreement, concerning the arms’ intellectual property, belonging to Russia, so as to assure that China will not flood the market with cheap copies of the arms made by the Russian Federation. The agreement was renewed in 2012, and followed up by more deals concerning intellectual properties. Nonetheless, Moscow remains alarmed by Beijing’s ever-increasing military might, worried that it might one day be used to threaten, even her, their current partnership notwithstanding. (Meick, 2017: 12-14)

Businessmen who seek funding through China, often complain about the terms of their loans, which are rarely as good as those they would have gotten from London or New York. Particularly, regarding high-cost ventures with a long recoupment period, the

Chinese are tough negotiators. Things are slightly less difficult for Rosneft and Gazprom, who have the relative certainty of state guarantees. The sanctions, combined with the cautiousness of the investors from other Asian countries, on top of the fact that Russia has few internal sources of funding, capable of covering all her needs, have brought China's financial institutes in a very powerful negotiating position. In fact, the situation has gotten worse, due to the fact that Russia's growing demand for Chinese lending coincided with the anti-corruption campaign. In 2013, many top managers of various banks were arrested, due to handing out loans with bad prospects for the state. As a consequence, their successors, fearing the same fate befalling them, tend to hand out loans with stricter terms, slowing down the negotiations. (Gabuev, 2014:7) More to the point, China simply cannot keep lending money to Russia indefinitely. Neither, can she keep giving her a carte blanche, just because she is fighting the common enemy that is the West. However, it is in China's self-interest to have the Russian Federation in the emergency unit: weak, but not dead. (Drivas, 2022) It should be noted that China herself is not terribly impressed with President Putin's aggressiveness. Nevertheless, the escalation of the war in Ukraine leads Russia to be ever-more dependent on China. (Brands, 2023)

3.4 The Sino-Russian perception of the United States of America, following the collapse of America, following the collapse of the Soviet Union

The cataclysmic changes that have taken place since the collapse of the USSR, initially seemed to open the way towards greater prosperity internally, and great economic opportunities abroad. America's call, with an apparently liberal and democratic president, for a deep strategic relationship, hinted that perhaps Russia could compromise with a reduced global role, perhaps even in the context of her empire.

The vision of improved relations between a post communist Russia and the United States began to fade, when, in 1990, the United States denied giving some much-needed financial aid to the USSR. It continued to fade with the enlargement of NATO in 1993, as well as the empowerment of communists and nationalists, within the Russian Federation.

The Russian economic collapse was seen as a Western ploy, done for the sake of reducing their country to the status of a third-world country. Let us not forget that a large

portion of the Russian people believes that, between 1989-1991, their country had committed a one-sided compromise with the West, on every issue possible, and that the only thing they have received in turn, is the breaking of all promises. Particularly, from their perspective, the West's political proposals simply ended up in a few oligarchs, and simultaneously doomed the nation's large majority to poverty. (Cox-Toye, 2018:329)

When Vladimir Putin first rose to power, while not entirely opposed to working with the West, he had the suspicion, in mind, that the wishes of the West were for Russia to remain weak, as well as that the collapse of the USSR, at the end of the Cold War, was all according to Western plans for the hegemony of the West and the United States, all the while being supported by traitors such as Gorbachev. (Cox-Toje, 2018:329)

His opinions found fertile ground in China, because she is also opposed to such reforms, such as those that brought down the USSR, perceiving a clear threat to the continued rule of the Chinese Communist party. China believed that the same collapse could also happen to herself, which is why she continued to "taking lessons" in how to secure itself against what had happened to the USSR. It remains China's view that necessary economic reforms should not threaten the sanctity of the state, and she continues to be suspicious towards Western intentions.

Having to face reality, the two countries, Russia and China, know very well that global market regulation, as well as global rules, overall, have been made by the West, at the top of which, lay the United States of America. To add insult to injury, not only does America possess enormous power, both hard and soft, but also, a great network of Alliances that work to remind the two countries of how few their allies truly are, as well as the kind of pressure America is capable of exerting. From China's point of view, America's change of her military doctrine, is seen as an exceedingly aggressive action, (Cox-Toje, 2018: 330-331) while causing an increase in anti-American sentiments. China become to perceive America, more and more, as a potential rival, and less as a global partner; a rival that tries, even by manipulating her dependent allies, to remain the hegemon of Asia.

China and Russia feel that after the end of the Cold War, and their integration within the International System, their interests are not adequately protected, within a unipolar system, with all power being concentrated at the hands of a liberal power, such as the United States. (Cox-Toje, 2018, 331)It is their view that this system enhances America's

assertiveness. Bill Clinton, with the exception of the Kosovo bombings, resisted the temptation. However, the 9/11 attacks radically changed things for good. The war against the global Jihan- with the tacit approval of Russia and China, reaffirmed American power, as well as Moscow's and Beijing's conviction that in such a system, their voices will continue being weak. This brought them into conflict with the American dogma of humanitarian intervention, which they view as an affront. The dogma in question allows the United States and her allies to apply external pressure to ill-behaved states, when the latter fail to uphold certain norms. China and Russia are convinced that this dogma can become the Trojan Horse, through which, their control over their own interior will decline. (Cox-Toje, 2018:331-332)

To cooperate on a financial venture, in the West, is another matter, though. Beijing and Moscow consider Western values problematic, believing that association with them can lead to their "contamination". Both countries have tried to limit the inflow of information from abroad, all the while maintaining their domination of the internet, inside their borders, and regulate the flow of information that could be used against them. The two of them connect America's aggressiveness with a deeply rooted cold war attitude, on top of their theory about their eternal uniqueness, and exceptionalism. In other words, they see that the United States consider themselves as having the right to meddle in other countries' internal affairs, but, concurrently, they do not allow anyone to interfere in their own. (Cox-Toje, 2018: 332)

In short, there exists an ideological battle against liberal America and her allies that increased China's and Russia's paranoia, to the extent that they believe that any internal dissent they might face is actually an insidious Western plot, meant to undermine their political systems.

Indeed, in 2014, a TV program was put out (hosted by the same individual who allegedly murdered Litvinenko in London) purporting to show that there were still many traitors in Russia, all of them—including a number of NGOs—being supported by (and obviously working for) the West. Others are portrayed in harsher terms still, most notably the Ukrainians, who are now systematically portrayed in the wider Russian press as being little more than stalking horses for the Americans and their dangerous allies in Brussels. China

may have adopted a somewhat (though only somewhat) less bellicose approach. Nonetheless, in its own ongoing struggles against all those who would challenge the idea of the “harmonious society,” it has rarely, if ever, been reluctant not to associate dissent at home with acts of subversion from abroad. (Cox-Toje, 2018:333-334)

In particular, China is deeply concerned about the close proximity of US soldiers all around her borders. They consider America a revisionist power, just as America considers China such. This is in great part because of America’s behavior after the cold war ended, during the so-called “Unipolar Moment”. For instance, the US pushed hard for the universal adoption of the dollar as a medium of transfer and deposit; the so-called “Dollar Hegemony” From the Chinese perspective, America’s drive for the spread of democracy- often at the barrel of a gun- is merely a method for her to “dye the map blue”. (Nathan & Scobell 2012:4)

In regards to the Chinese conception of the international arena, there is no doubt that China sees the United States as its principal rival, and vice versa. She is skeptical, to say the least, of American claims concerning Democracy and human rights. Perhaps ironically, all of this is highly related to the acceptance of many within the Chinese intelligentsia, of certain western theories, particularly that of “Offensive Realism”. Thus, they consider it natural for America to want to keep China down, in order to protect her interests. (Nathan & Scobell 2012:2)

To summarize, the Chinese perception of America and her actions is moving, or rather has already moved, towards that of an enemy that intends to strangle her by keeping her a prisoner within her own borders, surrounding her with a balancing coalition. Such a situation, i believe that China will inevitably continue to keep finding unacceptable. Whether we analyze her actions from a perspective of defensive (keeping American influence of her own borderlands), or offensive realism (attending to create and expand a zone of influence to the greatest extend that her capabilities will allow her to do so), the Chinese perception of America is unlikely to become less hostile any time soon. Classical realists too, believe that China’s view of America is unlikely to change. Although, they do believe that their animosity is still the byproduct of individual leaders’ actions and positions, rather than the mechanistic laws common to the positive sciences. In short, nothing can be

seen as inevitable. All of the above can also apply to Russia. According to Russian politicians, the United States have attempted, and to a great extent managed, to achieve an analogous strangulation, mostly, by expanding NATO, even though, according to Russia, the borders of NATO were meant to be frozen at their 1991 state. Whatever one thinks of such an opinion, the fact remains that Russia feels cornered, much more so than China, since, other than Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (NATO, member countries, 2024) no other space exists for the Kremlin to manoeuvre, politically, in its Western territories. Of the above, only Belarus and Armenia have not expressed a desire to also join the enemy bloc. Similarly, whether one sees Russia's actions as defensive desperation (Defensive Realism), expansionistic imperialism (Offensive Realism), it makes no immediate difference for the foreseeable future. Even classical realists find it difficult to argue that a change of government, such as Donald Trump's potential re-election, would be enough to make the two countries change their current trajectory, which seems to lead towards more proxy conflict, possibly even escalation.

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CHAPTER 4: Potential benefits of a detente between Russia and America

4.1 Historical background 1991-2023

In order to determine whether there is any possibility of a rapprochement between the two historic rivals, as well as any benefits that any such actions might bring, it is helpful to first summarize the history of their relations, in order to understand how and why they reached their current all-time historic low. When the Soviet Union collapsed, in 1991, Russia was forced to begrudgingly accept the loss of its status as a superpower, and to be reduced into a regional one, instead. The accompanying collapse of its economy only made the situation worse. To add insult to injury, she also closed nearly all of its ports in the Baltic and Black Sea, and found herself able to export her products only with the goodwill of her neighbours. (Tsardanidis, 1999: 8)

After those cataclysmic changes had occurred, we saw the gradual creation of two major schools of thoughts, within Russia, as to how she should conduct herself in the international arena from now on: The Atlantists and the Eurasianists. The former desire an ever-closer relationship with the west in general, and the United States in particular. They believe that Russia's goals should be primarily those of internal development, the creation of a fully democratic society, furthering her integration with Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community, as well as participation in international institutions. On the opposite side of that spectrum lie the Eurasianists. They criticized the ongoing Europeanization of Russia, fearing that it would only lead her to lose even more influence in her near-abroad. In their mind, Russia's unique geographic position, between Europe and Asia, was an advantage that should be cultivated in order to further the country's national interests. Furthermore, this lay in alignment with Russia's cultural traditions, at least from their point of view. In accordance with that view, Russia must acquire a prominent position, not just on a regional, but also, a global level. (Petro & Rubinstein, 1997: 238-240)

Particularly, given recent events, but even long before that, it bears no contention, in my mind, that this later view acquired an ever-increasing amount of influence within the Russian political elite. Such a transition – from a pro-western policy to that of Eurasianism – happened gradually, almost imperceptibly, perhaps, but it now being an incontestable truth, i will attempt to examine its roots:

Starting from around 1993, a series of external developments and internal crisis forced Moscow to begin reassessing its up-to then pro-western policies. Russia desires the furthering of her influence within the former soviet space. The top priority, contrary to the wishes of the Atlantists, now becomes the near abroad. The heart of the problem lay with the fact that Russia has irreconcilable views, in regards to the European security system, with the European states and America.

As every analyst understands today- albeit this “enlightenment” came a tad too late, Russia is vociferously against the loss of her sphere of influence in her near-abroad, including but in now way limited to her influence within the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Supranational organization between herself, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, (withdrawn in 2008), and most of the central Asian States. (Rozakis, 2010:156)

Nonetheless, in his first terms, Russian President Vladimir Putin, seemed to be desirous of pursuing Russian interests within a framework of cooperation with the West. In accordance with this, he successfully pursued his country’s entry in the World Trade organization in 2012, in spite of the fact that by then he had already spurned his former relative pro-western views. Until then however, he had cooperated with the United States on a number of issues, chief among them being terrorism, which had become a global issue after the bombings of 9/11/2001. (Shakleima, 2010:154-159) Of course, the fact that due to Chechnyan separatism, he had a vested interest in doing so, probably had something to do with this decision.

By the end of his second term, however, this had changed. He starts to fully embrace Eurasianist theories, seeing Russia as a distinct political and cultural unit. Perhaps, this change of attitude was partially because of the Russian economic recovery, which, driven to a large extent by rising oil prices, helped the Russian Federation recover its great power status. (Malofeeva & Brenton, 2007, russiaprofile.org) By that point, she had also solved, in part by use of brute force, its domestic separatism conflict. As a great power, Russia has multilateral world interests, just as any other of them. As it happens, these conflicted, and still do so, with those of the United States. Or at least, with what the American political elite defined as its interests.

4.2 Economic relations between the United States and the Russian Federation

The lion's share of America's imports (see Table 3) from Russia is natural resources. America's exports, however, are a wide range of goods, such as meat, airplane and vehicle's components, and machines. Russia, as of 2012, represented approximately 1.3% of American imports, and around 0,7% of her exports. Conversely, exports of Russia to America are 2.7% of Russia's total, and imports from the United States are estimated at 5.3%.

The two countries have never been vital trade partners. Nonetheless, in certain sectors, Russia is important for the American economy. For instance, Russia remains the single largest market for American poultry. Also, America has been increasingly exporting, to Russia, hardware for the extraction of energy, as well as agricultural industrial equipment. In the sector of energy- among others, Russia's peculiar, by American laissez-faire standards, tendency of constant intervention, may discourage investors from the US. For America, Russian political and economic prospects are important in the sense that they may affect the financial and political environment of the two countries.

Russia's growth might have a net positive effect on the American economy. Because financial markets are interdependent, it is possible that uncertainty in a relatively minor economy might affect the global markets. One example is the Russian economic collapse of 1998, or the crisis of 2008-2009. The United States, with the intent of stabilizing Russia, supported her accession into a number of global financial organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, etc. Russia is a significant produced of oil, capable of affecting its global prices, and, by extension, the American consumers (Nichol,2014:187-188)

In conclusion, it is obvious that the relations between the two states used to be headed towards a relatively positive partnership, but instead, a variety of events and decisions derailed them, resulting in the apparently unbridgeable gulf that exists, between them, today.

4.3 Anti-terrorist cooperation

One of the priorities of American policymakers is cooperation with Russia, for the sake of addressing the issue of Chechen terrorism. On February, 2, 2000, the director of the

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said, during a Congress session, that Chechnya was an area, where international terrorists were being trained, making her a future threat against US interests, and predicted that Russia would have to commit itself to long-term battles, for the reduction of the terrorist threat (Nichol,2014:32)

In June, 2000, during a summit meeting, Presidents Putin and Bill Clinton decided to cooperate in regards to Afghanistan, concerning the deterrence of the Taliban's threats. After the 9/11/2001 attacks against the twin towers, this was extended towards combating terrorism worldwide. In particular, so as to emphasize their cooperation, they called their bilateral cooperation "Study group for anti-terrorism" (Nichol,ibid: 32)

In July 2002, during a bilateral meeting, they gave emphasis to the armaments and military training program of Georgia, so as to make sure that the country can increase its effectiveness against Chechen terrorism, as well as Al Qaeda branches, operating on her territory. In September of the same year, the United States ambassador and the Russian vice-minister of foreign affairs signed an epistle, concerning the field of law enforcement, the war on drugs, and the education and financing needed for the elimination of terrorism (Nichol,ibid: 32)

In 2003, American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, in line with executive order 13224, defined certain Chechen organizations as international terrorists, connected with Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and threats to America's national security. This was preceded by attacks on Moscow, including one on a theatre, where one American citizen had been killed. (Nichol, ibid 34) In 2005, the two states signed a common declaration, of opposition to international terrorism and the global drug trade, requesting further legislative actions, with regard to the elimination of terrorism (Nichol,ibid: 32)

In 2012, after Putin's re-election as President, he and fellow President Obama, in a summit meeting, in June, the same year, committed to continue cooperating against terrorism*.

*During the cold war era, in the mid-1970s, a period of easing of tensions began, during which several agreements were signed:

- 1.The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), signed on March 5, 1970, between the United States and the Soviet Union, was the first serious attempt to contain the issue (Gakopoulos ,2008:10-11)
2. SALT I, May 26,1972, between the G. Secretary of the CPSU, Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon, to ban and build new Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) and the creation of new systems of Anti-Ballistic

Missiles (State Department-Salt I,1972)

3.Helsinki Final Act, 1975,apoliticalagreement of sovereign and equal states (OSCE, 1975)

4. SALT II,1979, between Leonid Brezhnev, and the new American President Jimmy Carter. Thenew deal limited the amount of strategic nuclear weapons that each side could have,to 2400, while also prohibiting the construction of new Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles(State Department -SALT II 1979)

5. INF, December 8, 1987, between the President of the United StatesRonaldReagan, andMichaelGorbatzov,for the elimination of nuclear missiles that are of intermediate-range or smaller.(StateDepartment-INF 1987)

6. NewStart, March 26, 2010, Presidents Barrack Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev,put their signatures on a new Strategic Arms Reduction Talks treaty that calls on each country to reduce its number of warheads and long-range missiles (NEW START-2010)

Russia on Tuesday 21 February 2023 announced the suspension of its participation from the NEWSTAR treaty. (DargakisN.2023)

From the Cold War Era onwards

However, at the end of that year, Russia communicated that starting from 31/1/2013, she no longer requires the support given to her through the Russia-USA deal, in the field of law enforcement. Therefore, Russia considers it null and void. According to Russian officials, cooperation will continue, albeit, with different regulations. (Nichol, 2014:33)

After the Boston bombing attacks, perpetrated by two Chechen immigrant terrorists in the United States, the two presidents, in a telephone meeting, agreed to extend their cooperation, regarding terrorism's elimination. For this reason, a physical meeting followed, in the context of the NATO-Russia summit of 23/04/2013. The meeting was between US Secretary of State John Kerry, and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. In May of the same year, the director of the FBI, Robert Miller, visited Moscow so as to continue the cooperation with regards to the bombings. (Nichol 2014:33)

In June 2013 in the summit synod of the USA and Russia, the presidents committed themselves, in a common statement, for the continuation and enhancement of their cooperation for the elimination of terrorism, intelligence sharing, and the coordination of mutual operations. Finally, they agreed to cooperate so as to enact the Olympic Games at Sochi (Nichol: ibid:33)

4.4 Relationship between NATO and Russia

After the end of the Cold War, attempts to build a successful relationship with the newly established Russia Federation, and cooperate on important issues, had mixed results. The diplomatic efforts fell victim to Moscow's doubt and scepticism regarding NATO's intentions. For years it had been an open secret-and, as of recently-an open truth that NATO currently exists to deter Russia (Kulesa & Frear, 2017:3)

First, though, it is important to give a short summary of Russia's relationship with NATO, and by extension, the United States, during President Boris Yeltsin's "honeymoon" period; that brief window of opportunity during which a peaceful co-existence was seen as plausible, even likely. In 1994, the Russian Federation became the first country to accede to the "Partnership for Peace" (PfP), programme, that being a NATO project intending to set up a practical bicameral cooperation between itself and its partner-states. (NATO, the background,2018)

Progress was slow but steady; on May 27, 1997, the Russian President and the leaders of NATO signed the NATO-Russia founding act. This act was meant to bind the two parties into cooperating in certain sectors, such as the preservation of Peace, fighting global terrorism, keeping military expenditures in check, the War on Drugs, as well as anti-missile defence. (NATO, the Background, 2018)

In May 2002, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin and NATO's leaders, signed the creation of the NATO-Russia council, (NRC), a forum composed of equal members. They recognize that they are facing a multitude of common global challenges, and they can, working together, enact successful strategic operations. They cooperate with regard to controlling military equipment budgets, the drug war, terrorism, anti-missile defence in their common Theatre, and finally, support for Afghanistan and of the helicopter fleet needed for the Afghan army. (NATO, the Bachround, 2018)

The NRC was not as successful as its capabilities had suggested it would have been. This is commonly blamed on the Russians' doubts regarding the expansion of NATO, between 1999-2004, in 10 former Soviet Warsaw pact members. This resulted in a reduction of

Russian strength and prestige, and enhanced already existing feelings of being surrounded. The NATO and American air bases in central Asia for the annihilation of terrorism in Afghanistan after 9/11, the military bases of the USA in Romania and Bulgaria in 2004, after the enlargement of NATO, all these things further increased, in certain Russian officials' circles, the feeling of encirclement by NATO and the United States.

Finally, the Russian invasion, in August 2008, of Georgia, escalated the tensions with the suspension of official bonds in the council of NATO-Russia, and there were talks, dominated by ways of dealing with Russia's recent aggressive foreign policy, which was determined to project Russian power across her borders with Europe. The permanent Russian presence in the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and Ossetia reduce the alliance's reputation as a collective defence, in accordance with article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty. (Nichol, 2014:45)

Nonetheless, expanded cooperation on the sectors of anti-missile defence and common education of Afghan and Pakistani officers, with regard to fighting drugs and their distribution through Russia, continued, along with mutual support of the Afghan's army helicopter fleet. In 2011 a new action plan against terrorism came into motion, intending the deterrence, fighting and management of terrorism, with crucial sharing of intelligence, development of technology that can share explosive mechanisms, cooperation on air space, (CAI) for the sake of deterring attacks like that of 9/11. In the context of the CAI, a series of common NATO-Russia military exercises have happened. The initiative STANDEX (a common undertaking of Russian and European research institutes), developed, successfully, the aforementioned technology that can sense explosive equipment on suicide bombers. The allies were commonly attempting, through their cooperation, to reassure Moscow, that NATO was not a threat for her. (Nichol, 2014:16)

In 2013, the council of NATO-Russia agreed for a 2014 enlargement of its activities for the elimination of landmines and bombs in Afghanistan, enhancement of its anti-terrorism cooperation, fighting piracy and armed robbery on sea. They also agreed on a five-year plan for the shedding of dangerous, obsolete ammunition in the Baltic Sea (Nichol, 2014:46). The same year, NATO enacted, in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the largest exercise of the last 10 years. The scenario of the exercise, called "Steadfast Jazz 2013" was about the deterrence of a possible invasion on a NATO country, Russia, naturally,

interpreted it as an exercise in the spirit of the cold war, given that the only conceivable attacker was her.

Concurrently, Moscow criticized the allies for refusal to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and refused to allow Georgia and Ukraine to enhance their relationship with NATO. She also declared her opposition to the Libya operation of 2011, which had as its goal, the removal of Colonel Qaddafi's regime, in spite of the United Nations' mandate for the protection of the unarmed population (Nichol, 2014: 47)

In March, 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, followed by NATO's decision to stop every practical cooperation between them. (NATO, the background, 2018). The above events, and, generally speaking, all of the Russian state's actions in Eastern Ukraine, and Eastern Europe, more generally, forced NATO to change its policy so that its military presence is increased in Europe. In the NATO summit conference in Wales, on September, 04-05, 2018 new initiatives were announced that were intended to re-orient the alliance, from operations outside of Europe, to deterrence and territorial defence within the Elder Continent, so as to support allies that are not yet members of NATO. Furthermore, an action readiness plan was co-decided, for the continuous military presence of NATO in the periphery of the alliance, and it mainly focuses on those states that are adjacent to Russia. (O'Rourke, 2014: 8-9)

The Security Council has never been suspended. From April 2016, till 26/10/2017, six conferences took place that showed progress, regarding mutual information and dealing with military exercises. On 14/3/2018, the United Kingdom informed its allies about the use of a neuroparalytic agent on Salisbury. According to the UK, Russia is the guilty party. After some intense meetings, around 150 Russian diplomats were expelled from at least 25 states, while the number of Russian representatives in NATO was reduced. The alliance now has a double orientation. NATO is open to dialogue, but also focuses on building a powerful defence, for the purpose of deterrence. (NATO, the Background, 2018)

Russia, desiring to de-escalate its relationship with the West, delivered, on 17/12/2021, through diplomatic channels, her proposals for security guarantees. It is a series of legally binding proposals for the non- expansion of NATO towards the EAST. It bestows the responsibility of achieving this goal to the United States. Russia also calls upon Washington to accede to the moratorium for the non-installation of short and mid-range

missiles on Europe, particularly, on Ukrainian soil. She also asks that they not develop any nuclear weapons outside their native soil, reaffirming that a nuclear war is not meant to be won. She also demands that personnel of non-nuclear countries are not to be trained in the use of nuclear weapons. No contributing party is to take actions, not apply security measures that undermine the fundamental interests of the other party, nor use the lands of foreign countries to enact an armed attack or any other action, directed against the other party. The Russian ministry of foreign affairs assesses the escalation as unacceptable, and accuses the West for, in Moscow's view, encouraging Russophobia, as well as supporting the Kiev regime to dissolve the Minsk agreement. Last, Moscow asks for an official denunciation of the decision taken by a NATO synod, on Bucharest, in 2008, regarding Ukraine's entrance into the alliance. (CNN, 2021), (MID Rossii,2021)

Whatever one may think of such attempts of de-escalation, it is a matter of fact that for now the two sides are heading headfirst on the side of further conflict. NATO, has decided to integrate the rest of Russia's European neighbors into its ranks. On April 4, 2023, Finland acceded to full NATO membership, and on April 7, Sweden also joined the defensive alliance. (NATO, Article 10, 2024)

4.5 The strengths and weaknesses of contemporary Russia.

4.5.1. Demographic issues

It has often been said that Russia is facing a demographic collapse due to an aging population. Such statements, while seriously overestimating the extent of said phenomenon, do have a certain measure of truth. (Mankoff,2021:109-110)

Many analysts consider her demographic shrink as a herald of her end as a Great Power. (Warsaw Institute, 2020,) Every year, starting from 2018, according to the data of the National Statistical Agency (Rosstat) Russia's population has been continuously shrinking. In 2020 alone, there was a net-loss of 40.000 Russians, bringing the population down to 146,74 million, a trend that is projected to continue, so that by 2035 her population will be down to 135,2 million. (Mankoff, 2021:109)

The average lifespan in Russia, in 2019, according to the tass agency, using data from the Russian Health Ministry, was 73.34 years, on average, for all citizens. Next year, there was a reduction in the average lifespan by almost two years, albeit, the global pandemic played a large role in this decrease. The pandemic was the greatest challenge to Russia's health care system in the last 100 years. (Churilova & Andreev 2022)

Russia's economic stagnation after 2014 seems to exert even more pressure on her fertility rate. It is well known that every industrialized country faces a challenge due to decreasing birth rates. In Russia's case, her declining lifespan, as well as her declining population, can be traced back to the destruction of the USSR. It is probable, that the problem can be partly attributed to emigration from the whole former USSR (Mankoff, 2021:110)

Her society is also facing immense problems caused by alcoholism, which result in the death of a significant number of its citizens every year. As a consequence, Russians have the lowest lifespan among all developed countries. Alcoholism in Russia is a pervasive issue that has plagued her for centuries (Khaltourina & Korotayev, 2008:272–281). This complicates any attempts to remedy the situation.

4.5.2. Economic problems

Her economic might is still very much based on selling oil and natural gas, lacking adequate diversification, and making her, essentially, a petrol-state with all that it entails. As a consequence, her economic development has become greatly dependent on the fluctuation of the world prices of basic goods, not to mention badly applied economic policies. The great financial crisis of 2008 was particularly harsh on the Russian economy, revealing her structural deficits, including her dependence on natural resources, as well as an impotent financial system. (Nichol, 2014:39)

A sudden drop in the price of energy resources could mean a renewed economic crisis, or even a collapse, since around 65 percent of the state budget comes from energy exports. This was proven when, during the Great Recession (see chart 1) the price of oil dropped from 147 dollars per barrel in July 2008, to 45 dollars per barrel, exactly one year later.

Even worse, earlier, in January 2009, it had dropped to thirty dollars per barrel. The end result was a budget revision for that year (AGORA, MFA, p: 7).

Thus, according to Russia's Financial Ministry, the up-to-then projected surplus, for the year 2009, became a 135 billion dollars deficit instead. Concurrently, her foreign exchange reserves, which were 596 billion US dollars in July 2008, were reduced, in the course of the year, due to negative developments in the financial sector, as well as attempts to retain the Rubble's exchange rates. By December 2008, they had shrunk to 427 billion dollars. (ibid: 2)

In the long run, in regards to Russia's geopolitical ambitions, her essential problem is her immense economic weakness, in comparison to the United States and China, or even other strong European countries. Russia's GDP, per current exchange rates, is only around 7 percent of that of the United States. Accordingly, her military expenditures, before her invasion of Ukraine, were estimated at a mere 9 percent of that of America. It is imperative to remember that even before the Crimea invasion of 2014, and the accompanying sanctions by America and the EU, Russia's economy was still advancing at a slower rate than that of the US and other industrialized countries. (Mankoff, 2021:110).

The source of most of Russia's wealth, and her only economic sectors that could be considered competitive, are natural resources and weaponry. Natural gas and oil sales make up around 40 percent of Russia's federal budget. Any attempts to reduce this dependency and diversify the economy are complicated by the influence of the great energy companies. While the advanced economies are evolving so as to emit fewer CO2 emissions in the future, Russia is still forced to continue extracting natural gas and oil, in ever greater rates. (Mankoff, 2021: 111)

Adding to that, due to a combination of sanctions imposed on Russia, due to her invasion of Ukraine, a weak currency, and a low economic growth, Russia suffers from a serious problem of capital flight. More than 53 billion US dollars are left in 2019, whereas, counting from the collapse of the USSR, the amount is estimated to be one trillion dollars. This loss of capital acts as an impediment to investments, creating a vicious circle that inhibits the improvement of industrial competitiveness. According to economist Vladislav Inozemtsev, "the Russian economy can generate money, but it lacks the industrial sector that can

consume it: up to 90% of office equipment, telecommunication devices and mobile phones, as well as medicines and healthcare devices, are imported.” (Mankoff, 2021:111)

Russia is dependent on the international economy on final and intermediary high technology goods, more than 60% of which are imported from the EU and the US, for which she can not find any substitutes. The end result is that her national competitiveness is vulnerable. These sectors include avionics (more than 60% of passenger airplanes in Russia are from Airbus and Boeing, with whatever that entails in regards to maintenance and replacement parts). Likewise, between the period 2007-2020, Russia doubled her imports of semiconductors, and she is similarly dependent on imports for her pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology, and mechanized equipment for the actual extraction of oil in sea areas. (Hazakis, 2022)

The shares from company incomes given to shareholders are frequently invested outside the actual country. This lack of competitiveness in non-military industries slows down development and innovation. While it is not a direct impediment to Russia's geopolitical ambitions, in the long run, it can make Russia get left behind as well as become more dependent on rival great powers. (Mankoff, 2021:111)

Furthermore, the invasion of Ukraine, along with the ongoing sanctions imposed on Russia by the West have resulted in about 900,000 Russians leaving the country by October 2022.(The Economist, 2023) Worse, the emigrants are disproportionately young and well-educated. (Lau, 2022) Needless to say, this reduction in the number of specialized personnel will, if not reversed, have severe consequences for Russia's long-term economic prospects, on top of a plethora of sanctions.

4.5.3.A malfunctional political system

After more than two decades in power, Putin's authoritarian regime shows its age, and so does himself. He has long since been trying to create a new social contract that appeals to younger and more educated Russians while also fearing any imbalances in the factions of the political elite: the oligarchs and the siloviki, that is the members of the intelligence agencies. Nonetheless, despite the Russian dictator's ongoing calls for transparency, corruption in his country is out of control. It should be noted that Alexi Navalny, the

country's most notable anti-corruption fighter, were imprisoned while his anti-corruption group has been declared "extremist" and is currently illegal! Support and trust in Putin, on a personal level, has decreased. After the annexation of Crimea, the closely watched index of trust in Putin, by Levada center, reached 95%, whereas, in the middle of 2021 it dropped to around 66%, within a context of ever-increasing loss of civil liberties and a rather weak economy. Conversely, support for the ruling party "United Russia " was much lower, only about 29%. With Navalny, first in jail and now dead, the Kremlin can not offer a stable alternative vision for the future. Conversely, it tries to evoke a stability that is reminiscent of the Brezhnev era, instead. (Mankoff, 2021: 111-112)

This erosion of trustworthiness in the eyes of the public makes it harder for the Kremlin to face Russia's mounting problems. One example is the recent COVID-19 pandemic. While the Sputnik-v vaccine made by the Gamaleya Institute of Moscow, was an exceptionally effective one, Russia, nonetheless, was seriously hurt by the pandemic with more than 135.000 certified deaths (the real number probably being much higher), as of July 2021, while the Kremlin downplayed the situation and oversaw a politicized rollout that left many Russians sceptical that Sputnik V was safe. (Mankoff, 2021:112)

Dissatisfaction with the government is also one of the causes of Russia's serious brain drain. Around 2 million Russians have left the country ever since Putin's presidency began, a rate that was accelerated after Putin's re-election in 2012, which destroyed any hope of a democratic revolution. In this case we not only had consequences, concerning the country's total population, but also the loss of some of the country's best and brightest. This ongoing development will surely complicate the country's efforts of moving away from a resource-oriented economic model. (Mankoff, 2021:112)

4.5.4. Russia is a power in the periphery and beyond Eurasia

Conversely, while Russia is definitely no longer a superpower proper per se, it is not yet time to count her among the dead. It is still an energy superpower, as well as a nuclear one, possessed of thousands of nuclear warheads, and with an- at least potentially powerful military. Russia remains a leading exporter of oil and natural gas, being one of the world's top three crude oil producers, and making up around 14% of the world's supply. She is also the world's second largest natural gas producer, veering just behind

the United States, as well as its number one exporter. In 2021 alone, she exported 210 bcm via pipeline, out of 762 bcm in total. Before the Ukrainian invasion, Russian gas made up around 45% of total gas imports to the European Union. (Energy fact sheet 2022). While Russia's economy and conventional military capabilities are not equal to those of the United States, what does matter is the extent to which Russia, as it stands, can oppose America or others. After her war with Georgia, the Russian Federation proved that she can be a very decisive and durable actor (Mankoff, 2021:112)

As much as American officials may dislike it, the fact is that Russia has sometimes proven herself capable of affecting Washington's policies, or deterring her according to her interests. She has also managed to affect her neighbours' internal policies, that of various European states, and even, in 2016, the US herself. In spite of her economical, sociological, and technological issues, Russia's projection of hard military force is relatively viable. Russia's foreign policies are supported by her national elite, most of whom believe that the globe is transitioning from unipolarity to multipolarity. According to that view, Russia must remain an independent pole, and the West has no right to impose her political system or her values on other countries. Russia's "new elite" has a deeply ingrained conception of her state as a great power, accepts a dominant role for President Putin in her political system, and is likely to continue down that route, at least for the remainder of the Russian leader's term. (Mankoff, 2021:113) In absolutist regimes, the leader redistributes the resources, so as to create ties of patronage and loyalty. This strategy was followed by Putin, with the de-privatization of many sectors of the economy, such as energy resources, infrastructure, agriculture, and military industries. The new economic elite has the role of a property manager, rather than a property owner, neither do they have independent political power. The end-result is the strengthening of the leader's position. (Petrov, 2023)

Russia's conventional forces might be inferior to those of the United States, but they suffice for the sake of maintaining a position of strength in her neighbourhood, which is vital for her national security. Before the collapse of the USSR her army was based on conscription, but a series of reforms, by the mid 2000s, resulted in an army that was smaller, but more professional and effective. Her military expenditures were estimated, until fairly recently, at around four percent of her GDP, an amount that was moderate, compared to what was spent in the time of the USSR, as well as against her rival, the

United States. Approximately two thirds of her military budget is allocated to supplies, as well as hardware modernization, for the sake of increasing her probabilities of defeating her neighbours in her periphery, something vital for her national security. Her strategic nuclear system is just as destructive as that of the United States, and designed for the explicit purpose of piercing the latter's anti-nuclear capabilities. As a result, America has been forced to sign new treaties with Russia, for the sake of limiting any military arms race. For the sake of preventing what she sees as NATO expansion close to her borders, she is quite prepared to use hard force, something proven in Georgia, in 2008. Both her and Ukraine have lost part of their territory to Russia, all to avoid any potential NATO encroachment. (Mankoff, 2021:113)

Today, in spite of the Ukrainian war that still rages on, as well as the great Western sanctions, Russia, after the 2022 recession, according to the IMF, had a strong rate of growth, 3%, in 2023, surpassing most analysts' forecasts. The IMF is revising its own forecast for 2024 to about 2.6%. Russia's military infrastructure has been very dynamic since February 2022. (Rich, 2024) According to Konstantin Sonin, a political economist at the University of Chicago, Russian exports of fossil fuels may have been reduced, but increased prices had the effect of helping her retain high levels of incomes. The money flow at state treasuries, along with increased military expenditures, had the effect of increasing trade activity and reducing the impact-cost of the sanctions. (Kozul & Wright, 2024)

The increase of carbons' sales to China and India, who benefits from reduced prices, combined with a sizeable fleet of tankers, which have opaque ownership deeds, and without any Western restrictions regarding insurance and financing terms, help her bypass the sanctions. (Fokianos, 2023)

The significant military cooperation with Iran, and Russia's use of unmanned Iranian airplanes in the Ukrainian war, (Washer & Lord, 2022), combined with North Korean solving Moscow's ordnance shortage crisis and China (see Chart 11) supplying her with dual use materials, today's absolutist regimes are part of Russia's arsenal in her war against Ukraine (Axe, 2024)

Today, in spite of the Up until now, Russia has not hesitated to apply pressure for the sake of removing any leftover American military units from the Afghanistan war, probably even

helping launch a coup, in 2010, against then Kyrgyzstan's President. The latter had apparently reneged on his promises towards Moscow, in regards to removing American forces from the Manas air base (Mankoff: *ibid*: 114). Russia maintains air force bases in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The existence of a treaty prevents these countries from making military deals with other states, without unanimous consent. Therefore, Russia has a form of veto against the presence of foreign military installations. (Nichol, 2014)

In Belarus, by applying financial pressure, and by threatening the country's security, Russia managed to retain her ally, Lukashenko, in power. Likewise, during the 2016 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia ignored everyone else and played the role of the main intermediary between the two combatants, ignoring global leaders such as the OECD, and their opinion on the matter. Russia did the same when war broke out between the two rivals in 2020. In this way, we can see how Russia is more than prepared, and willing to use what force she has left, for the sake of enforcing her self-interests, as well as limiting the presence of other powers in her neighborhood. (Mankoff, 2021:115)

Syria is the most characteristic example of Russia's ability to expand her influence outside her own neighborhood. In return for a relatively low-risk investment on her part, to support the Assad regime, she has managed to achieve a military presence in the region with bases in Tartus, and Hmeimin. She acted in a similar manner in Libya. Over there, Russian troops have been used, mostly as support, in combination with private military companies, hackers, and other low-cost tools of power projection. (Mankoff: *ibid*:115-116)

It should be noted that had Ukraine been a NATO member today, it might have led to all-around war. This is due to the existence of article 5 of NATO, which states that an attack against one member, is an attack against all of them. (NATO, article 5)

While Russia no longer possesses the forces she had as the USSR, she is still an important military agent in Eurasia, due to combining nuclear weaponry with conventional ones. Her past, and background as a superpower, prevents her from easily accepting the role of a secondary power. (Μάζης, 2005: 5)

4.6 Conflict escalation

After the collapse of the USSR, Russian president Boris Yeltsin, turned towards the United States for financial assistance. The country was facing serious economic issues, and Moscow knew that serious and painful internal reforms needed to be made, so that it could get back on her feet. Washington did not prove particularly eager to assist a former enemy power, and history proved it (Jacobsen, 1998:4)

Russia is now called to face a hitherto unknown situation. Former Soviet states are seeking relations with the West to solve their issues and survive in the international system. In tandem with the eastern expansion of NATO, and mainly, the addition of the three former soviet Baltic republics in the alliance, many in Russia start feeling as if they are being surrounded. This feeling is enhanced by her strategic culture, due to enormous borders that she can not adequately guard. If we take in mind the invasions she has suffered, throughout history, we can easily understand the traditional feeling of being surrounded that is so prevalent in the Eurasian country. (Filis, 2022)

Having said that, at the start of his presidency, Putin showed a more conciliatory attitude, towards cooperating with the West, and seemed to accept the reality of the post-cold war period. In particular, after the tragic events of 9/11/2001, he cooperated and eased the invasion of NATO-Russia into Afghanistan, having, of course, a benefit to do so. Putin offered airplane runways and top-secret intelligence to America (Sakwa, Richard, 2004 p.216-217) In order to facilitate the enactment of military operations, Putin agreed to the creation of American military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. (Service,2002:178-180)

On September,1, 2004, the terrorist attack at Beslan, committed by Chechen terrorists with about 300 dead victims, combined with the fact that in spite of Putin's warnings, America gave asylum to an agent of Chechnya's government in exile. As a consequence, Russia's conviction that her territorial integrity was in peril, was enhanced. (Graham, 2023)

The orange revolution of 2004-2005 in Ukraine and the tulip revolution of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan worried Putin, and conceived of them as a conspiracy, organized by the United States, to reduce Russian influence. Therefore, during the 43 annual conference of

Monaco for safety, in February 2007, he used harsh language against the foreign policy of the Bush government, as well as the unipolar globe that America is seeking, according to Putin's assertions. Ever since then, this critique has begun a perpetual component of his speeches.(Nichol, 2014:44)

Ukraine is the most important country of the post-soviet world, after Russia, of course. During the leadership of Yushenko-Timoshenko, after the revolution, Ukraine seemed to orient itself towards the European Union and NATO. Acting methodically, the Russian leader brought back the pro-Russian president Yanukovich, after the 2009 Ukrainian elections. However, the events that followed, in 2013, resulted in the Ukrainian president's fall from his office, with the end-result being the annexation of Crimea by Russia. (Φίλης, 2022) It is worth noting that another war had preceded the annexation of Crimea: the Russo-Georgian war that saw South Ossetia and Abkhazia secede from the Georgian state. These territories have never been annexed per se, but they are nonetheless supported by the Kremlin. (Nichol Jim:44)

According to Thomas Graham, special advisor of Bush junior, between 2002-2007, George Bush probably opened the most fronts with Russia, having as his partners, the most aggressive foreign policy hawks, especially during his second term as president, between January 20 2005, and January 20 2009 (Graham, 2023)

In 2005, the Shanghai cooperation organization, being pressured by Russia, made a statement that called for peripheral powers- meaning, the United States, to remove their troops from Asia. The same year, Putin openly applauded the Uzbekistan government when it decided to throw out an American military base, after her denial to denounce a violent protest movement in the Fergana valley, in Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks government believes that the movement intended to overthrow it.

America, as a counterpart to "the organization of the collective security treaty" (CSTO), which is dominated by Moscow, supported the organization known as "GUAMO", a peripheral organization for democracy and economic growth. Its membership includes Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova; countries which are friendly to the United States. Bush even supported Clinton's efforts to create an oil pipe starting from the Caspian Sea, by passing Russian territory. This would have supported the income and

independence of the former soviet states. Concurrently, it would have reduced the Russian domination of these states, and end Russia's monopoly as Europe's energy supplier. (Graham, 2023)

The head of the committee of intelligence, in Germany, announced that he is in agreement with the assessment of the American intelligence agency, concluding that Russia attempted to interfere with the 2016 American presidential election. (York, 2024)

During the American operation in Iraq, we had the first serious crisis of the USA-Russia relationship. Indeed, the fact that France and Germany, concurred with the Russian opinion, concerning the invasion. This was the first serious rift in the West, after the end of the Cold War. (European-Parliament-Iraq,2002, gr), (BBC Grec, 2003)

In 2003, the first bells rang for the "coloured" revolutions and the "revolution of the roses" in Georgia, causing the fall of Shevardnadze. Subsequently, the pro-American Saakashvili took power.

In 2011, we saw the French, and later, American intervention in Libya, with air projections, towards military targets in Libya. (BBC Libya 2011). Russia, loyal to the principle of "non-intervention", had expressed her opposition, and had she perceived, earlier, the scale of the operation, she would have made use of her "veto", in the United Nations Security council. (Zifcak, 2012:7)

The Arab revolts, with the tolerance, or aid of Washington, caused Moscow to worry, fearing that America would restore the Islamists in the secular Arab states, and their leaders could, afterwards, support secessionist movements within Russia, such as that of the Chechens. In the case of Syria, in 2015, having learned its lesson from Libya, Russia supported president Assad. She took advantage of America's hesitation to intervene, and thus, Moscow aided Syria militarily. The war's outcome turned out in favour of her ally, Assad. (Mc Donnell, Hennigan, & Bulos, 2015) Russia now has real influence in the middle east. She cooperated, with regard to defence, with several states of the area, which, nevertheless, still have political ties with the USA. Examples include Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Having made a show of force in Syria, her military might has won out an important

place in the area for Moscow, disproportionately big to Russia's actual capabilities. (Mankoff, 2021 :37-38)

The nautical base at Tartus, and the airbase of Hmeimin, close to Latakia, is of great military importance for Moscow mainly for the sake of power projection in the Middle East. (Mankoff & Pierini, 2021:2-3)

Bilateral conflicts between the two states range from Russian attempts to influence the US 2016 elections (Emma Ashford, 2018:2) to a wildly different conception of the future of the former USSR nations. As of 2014, the annexation of Crimea has created a rift between the two countries. (Carpenter, 2014:2) Needless to say, the accompanying full-scale invasion that commenced in 2022 has only made the situation worse. The American decision to continue supporting Ukraine, sending a new aid bill, shows that the schism between the United States and the Russian Federation only keeps growing. (Garamone Jim, 2024)

One way of interpreting the current insistence by the U.S in fighting a new cold war with Russia may be, at least in part, by recognizing that many American statesmen do not really perceive Russia as a great power, but rather, as a regional destabiliser. (Jeffrey Mankoff, 2021:107-108)

We should keep in mind that Russia is an enormous country whose size meant, historically, that she had a lot of enemies. The particular geography of Russia means that there are few to none natural borders to protect her heartland from a foreign invasion. Thus, in the past she has tried to remedy this problem by creating a lot of buffers between her inner core and her potential enemies. Therefore, it is not at all strange that after losing said buffer zone by 1991, she has been very suspicious of her neighbours. After all, over the course of 15 years, after the end of the cold war, NATO forces moved from Berlin, to the very doorstep of Russia near St. Petersburg. Moreover, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO leaves no room for wishful thinking (NATO, 2024)

In short, current events have caused their relations, as of 2023, to reach their nadir, being at their worst even seen, till now.

4.7 Russia's interests and perception of the international system.

As it has been mentioned in chapter 4.1, Russia has gradually adopted the Eurasian doctrine, when determining her national interests. The origins of the Eurasian school of thought can be found in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and the Russian civil war that followed (1917-1923). Following the defeat of the white movement, and the exodus of the Russian émigrés, some among them met in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria, in 1920, where they set the foundations of Eurasianism. (Karabelias et al., 2022:109). According to Mark Basin, both old and new researchers consider Eurasianism. A consequence of the First World War, the aforementioned civil war, as well as the reformatting of the Russian Empire into a new Socialist Republic. (Basin,2003:257-268) *

*(After the Soviet Union's collapse, the Eurasian doctrine came back into the foreground as a "New Eurasianism" Russia's aligning with Eurasian thinking meant a conscious choice of a gradual departure from any potential alignment with NATO and the West.)

First, the way Russia has defined her interests after the collapse of the USSR could be summarized as:

1. the preservation of Russia's Superpower status.
2. to retain great power and influence in all the aspects of the International political arena. III) To become a preeminent power in her own neighbourhood in all military and economic matters.
3. As a matter of pride, it would not be possible for Russia to back down, fearing even the potential loss of her national identity. (Aron, 2013)

After President Putin took the reins of power from Boris Yeltsin, on December 1999, he added a further parameter to the above: to reacquire the economic, political and geostrategic tools that the USSR lost when she collapsed in 1991. (Leon Aron: *ibid*) The above constitutes a basic enumeration of the fundamental aspects of the so-called "Putin Doctrine". Its ramifications are apparent through both Russia itself and the international sphere. In the former, he moved to make sure that the commanding heights of the economy, meaning the oil and natural gas sectors, were once again in the control of the state. He repeated the same move in regards to the Justice system, the Russian television channels, and national policy. In external affairs, on the other hand, the doctrine guided him towards achieving his geostrategic ambitions, as he himself defined them. (Aron: *ibid*)

Analysing the Putin doctrine is imperative for the sake of understanding Russia's international actions, if we take into account the long reign of the Russian dictator.

The first pylon means that Russia has not given up on her old ambition, that of matching her arch-rival, the United States, toe to toe. In particular, the both of them communicated with each other so as to limit their military expenditures, and avoid any new arms race. Conversely, Putin has been consistently opposed to NATO's missile defence system, openly stating that it disrupts the existing balance of power, and thus, the world system, since it reduced Russia's status as a nuclear power. (Aron, 2013)

Moreover, in accordance with the third pylon, Russia has spent decades trying to make alliances with other regional powers, gradually reinforcing her global position, and always trying to ensure that Russia is one of the principal decision-making actors. In particular, she strongly desires to influence the countries that were part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Oftentimes, she exercises her veto-power in the "United Nations Security Council" (UNSC), whenever the USA tries to launch an initiative within said body. She did so concerning Cyprus (2004), Myanmar (2007), Georgia (2009), peace and security in Africa (Zimbabwe 2008), Georgia (2009), and of course, to top it all, in regards to her de-facto military invasion in Ukraine (2015), which eventually deteriorated into today's war. Russia did the same regarding Bosnia in 1995. More specifically, she has exercised her veto power ten times, between 2012 and 2017. During that time period her last veto was in November 2017, blocking a resolution that would have strengthened the ability of international investigations in regards to chemical weapon usage by the Assad regime. (VETO List) Putin gives great importance to the third pylon, considering it must-be imperative of Russian external affairs, for the continuation of Russia's strength, economically and militarily in the area that once belonged to the USSR. (Arson, 2013)

In addition to that, Russia has achieved the creation of a military alliance between Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, called the "Collective Security Treaty Organization" (CSTO). It should be mentioned that three more countries, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan were also participants, but exited for a variety of reasons. Concurrently she also created a customs union through the inauguration of the "Eurasian Economic Union " in 2015, between all of the aforementioned countries, with the notable exception of Tajikistan. (Aron: ibid).

It has been concluded that Russia under Putin has sought the so-called Finlandization of her neighbors. That is, Russia does not care what political or economic model they follow, but she alone should direct their foreign policy. She is absolutely opposed to any of them choosing to align themselves with the West, even if it is not through a military alliance. (Aron: *ibid*). If there were any doubts in regards to this theory, they were put to the grave by the Ukrainian Question. First, when Ukraine sought to start the process of acceding to the European Union, Russia's swift response was to increase the price of oil and gas, followed by the military intervention in Crimea. And today we have the new invasion of Ukraine.

It comes as to no surprise that Russia's doctrine, and its required military interventions could not be undertaken without a powerful military. It is for this reason that Russia has heavily invested in her own military-industrial complex, dedicating a large percentage of her annual budget for the modernization of her defensive- and offensive capabilities. Putin has always held the conviction that barring a powerful military, a country is weak against other countries, and that the military is a tool that can strengthen one's international position. (EU, Policy Department 2017: 16). One can not help but being reminded that, inscribed on the cannons of Louis XIV, the Sun King was the phrase "Ultima Ratio Regum", or, "The last argument of kings"

It bears no hard thinking to realize that the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the immense consequences of that decision have caused Putin to update Russia's doctrine for the first time since 2017. As of right now, the United States has been declared as the Russian federation's principal rival, once again. Russia believes that we are transitioning in a more multipolar and just- in her opinion, world. This is an obvious reference to a reinvigorated and more aggressive China under the leadership of General Secretary Xi Jinping. It must be remembered that shortly before the invasion, the two countries declared that their partnership had "no limits". (Stognei: 2023) Of course, as in accordance with what has already been mentioned in a previous chapter, this statement is probably quite hyperbolic. The new foreign policy doctrine declares Russia as the one responsible with the historic mission to prepare a new multipolar system, while maintaining the balance of power against what she perceives as an aggressive West, led by the United States. I should note that the article also mentions that the Russian President sees the world divided in various

spheres of influence, an opinion that I consider a fact of the Universe rather than some astute observation on Putin's part. (Stognei: *ibid*) It is perhaps only the West that still deludes itself into thinking that we are living in the "End of History".

Essentially, it is evident that Russia no longer has any long-range imperial projects ongoing, neither as a short-term goal, nor as a long-term one. She does not plan to put boots on Berlin. Whether or not she would desire otherwise, the point is moot. While the knowledge that one has about a state's aspirations should be taken into account, America's foreign policy towards a former rival- that may prove a future uneasy ally, should mostly be based on the actual facts on the ground, rather than any deluded dreams that certain Russian officials might have. To put it brusquely, current-day Russia should not prove difficult to "appease", at least from a purely pragmatic perspective.

What she wants is, at a minimum, to be given some "space", so as to continue exerting influence on her immediate neighborhood. Russia desires to not be challenged within her own territory, and to possess a sphere of influence, as is usual for Great Powers to do.

Of course, as in the past, America is simply extremely unlikely to do even the most minimal of "appeasing" moves toward her old rival. Such a "reverse Kissinger", scenario, was speculated by many, before 2014. Today, it is simply unthinkable that anything even resembling such a move would be pursued by a US government – even if it, like Trump's actually wants to. At the very least, not in the short-term, and most likely, not on the midterm.

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Chapter 5. Conclusions and recommendations

We find ourselves in the midst of developments in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Until recently, the US National Defense Strategy named the People's Republic of China as the greatest long-term threat the country faces. However, the threat from Russia is the most immediate one. Energy resources, nuclear weapons, cyber-attacks, and destabilization of the world order are the main threats and, most importantly, the powerful axis created by the confluence of two great powers: China and the Russian Federation. The geopolitical game of trying to contain both powers has merely led to Mackinder's Eurasian nightmare, (Koliopoylos, 2010, p:204) which constitutes the greatest possible threat towards oceanic powers outside of Eurasia, that is, the integration of the Eurasian heart in an axis hostile to the West.

The US-Russia relationship is at an all-time low. Its future evolution will depend on a variety of factors. The key points will be the relationship between the US and China and the relationship between the two current partners, Russia and China.

FUTURE CHINA-AMERICA RELATIONS

Over the last five years, China-US relations have been on a downward trend. Growing trade and technological competition, trade war, human rights, pandemic, rising tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Straits, and finally the conflicting approaches to the Russia-Ukraine war give a strong sense that eventually, the two economic giants are heading towards economic disengagement and possibly a catastrophic conflict.

Washington wants China to stop its claims to Taiwan and the East and South China Seas, to end its strategic support for Russia and to end its unfair trade practices. It believes that Beijing's intentions are first regional hegemony and then global supremacy by displacing the US. Beijing, for its part, wants Washington to stop tariffs on Chinese imports and sanctions on Chinese companies, export controls on advanced technology, its support for Taiwan, and to cease criticizing it in the field of human rights. China, drawing lessons from the collapse of the USSR and the West's encirclement tactics against Russia, sees the US as aiming to prevent its economic and technological rise, pursuing a strategy of encirclement, changing its political system and dismantling the state. (Platias, 2023) Both political systems clearly understand that the other side is unlikely to give in on key issues. There is zero chance that Beijing or Washington will give in to the other's demands in the near future. In particular, Trump's aggressive policy of tariffs, sanctions on Chinese companies such as Huawei and now Tik Tok, strengthening US alliances in the Indo-Pacific, restricting China's access to US high tech chips, Biden's retention of many aspects of his predecessor's policy adding new export controls, and the visit of US House Speaker

Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022, have convinced the Chinese leadership that the confrontations between them will continue regardless of who leads America.

Beijing increases military and political pressure on Taiwan, describing the elections as a choice between "peace and war". China criticizes Israel and differentiates itself from the Western countries which support it, strengthening its relationship and with the Global South, where many countries strongly support the Palestinian cause - one of her diplomatic ambitions being to win the global South's support. Its deals with Houthi rebels to secure passage for Chinese and Russian ships in the Red Sea and its support for the Iranian government's attack on Israel proves that the gap with the West is widening. China is increasing its influence:

- Through international institutions. a. With China's growing presence in the UN. (With the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in an International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- Συμμετοχή σε περιφερειακούς οργανισμούς όπως : "Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN και στο " ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), στην Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP)
- Through the BRI she is increasing her influence in the Global South. She promotes client relationships, and her aggressive economic policy, with the buyout of strategic geographic positions, combined with unfair trade practices in developing countries, prove that her policies are no different than that of colonial regimes, such as Britain's policies towards China, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, or for that matter, colonial Africa itself, where China is reviving such practices. The expansionary policy of the BRI is leading to the undermining of America's economic and geopolitical interests.β.Αποφεύγει την αντιμετώπιση της ναυτικής ισχύος των ΗΠΑ στον ειρηνικό και κυριαρχεί στο κέντρο της Ευρασίας β. Με όρους αγοραστικής δύναμης οι G7 έχουν χάσει από τους BRICS την οικονομική πρωτοκαθεδρία
- With her new industrial strategy "Made in China 2025" and "China standards 2035", she aspires to become a global technological leader and a pioneer in the fourth industrial revolution. In achieving technological growth, she is using means both licit and illicit. Her strategy is dangerous, due to her use of the entire state apparatus, her industries, the military, every last Chinese citizen, to achieve her goal. In achieving technological growth, she is using means both licit and illicit. Ο τεχνολογικός ανταγωνισμός με τις ΗΠΑ αναμένεται πολύ υψηλός
- Because of her strong economy and win-win partnerships, she attracts, engages partners and tries to allay regional concerns about its growth as with South Korea and Japan Times So economic means to influence geopolitical goals

- To the extent that she can do so, she will continue to follow Deng Xiaoping's "opening to the West" policy, as she knows her growth is linked to the prosperity of the United States. Concurrently, she will grab any and all opportunities around the globe that can safely lead to a rise of her power. (John Mearsheimer, Foreign affairs, 2001: 46-61)

The recent meeting of the two leaders in San Francisco is an attempt to stabilize relations. But the structural factors that limit the development of relations remain and with a high probability of deterioration. The difference in economic governance is significant and there is deep-rooted military mistrust. Popular opinion of each other is at historic lows; the next U.S. presidents will likely compete over who will impose tougher measures on China.

The United States and China will remain the major superpowers but there will be multiple centers of power such as the European Union, India, Russia, which will be able to exert influence in certain areas.

Even assuming that China's internal issues become, in the future, of exponentially greater importance, leading to a contraction of her economy, the country will yet have enough might to stake her claims in the China Sea, or even, abroad. In fact, such a scenario may make her a lot more dangerous, compared to today, since the spectre of stagnation, and of a world hostile to her interests, will put a hold on her future grandiose plans. Knowledge that the balance of power will turn against oneself, can make a country just as bellicose as the opposite. After all, she might as well throw the dice, while the odds are still relatively in her favor. When the possibilities of a state's strategic ambitions becoming a reality fade, a chance of victory may seem a much-better option than a gradual but certain decline. Some have argued that authoritarian leaders, generally, are anxious about such downward geopolitical trends, an anxiety that often-times turns into desperation. Desperate people are dangerous. As I have already asserted, this same outlook caused Imperial Germany to desire an anti-Russian war, knowing what the future held in store. Likewise, Imperial Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, in spite of overwhelming odds against her, in order to prevent her future "strangulation"

The two economic giants are forced in the future to maintain channels of communication in order to de-escalate the tensions that arise each time and therefore they will be obliged in the future to develop areas of cooperation, as rightly argued at the summit of the two leaders. They will have to orient themselves towards an era of 'security and control' and move towards avoiding major risks by removing vulnerabilities and maintaining strategic autonomy in a 'managed strategic competition'. 'All of the above could include: Efforts to reduce carbon emissions and climate change

- Διαφύλαξη της δημόσιας υγείας με: α. συνεργασία στις πανδημίες Cooperation to combat the production and use of fentanyl and drugs in general
- Minimizing the risks associated with artificial intelligence Ελαχιστοποίηση των κινδύνων που σχετίζονται με την τεχνητή νοημοσύνη για αποφυγή ακούσιας κλιμάκωσης πυρηνικής αποτροπής με αμοιβαία κατανόηση για το τι συνιστά προετοιμασία πρώτου πλήγματος (Platias 2023)
- Military and diplomatic approach to avoid accidental military conflicts. e.g., a naval accident-avoidance agreement to limit any consequences, especially in the South China Sea, similar to the US-USSR agreement of 1972
- Arms control relating to nuclear weapons and other weapons of nuclear destruction
- Mutual understanding of the red lines: Taiwan, cyber attacks
- Revitalizing the WTO to prevent the collapse of the global trading system U.S.-China Relations in 2024: Managing Competition without Conflict (csis.org) and to preserve financial stability
- Promoting people-to-people exchanges between the two countries (speeding up visa procedures, increasing the number of direct flights)
- Controls on outbound products and outbound investments to ensure that information used for military **purposes is protected. This, of course, carries the associated risks because it increases suspicion.** When one side has a lead on a key technological achievement the other side will feel vulnerable.

Therefore, Xi must stabilize relations with the United States and the West in general, not only for foreign policy reasons, but also to restore confidence at home, which is central to creating growth and maintaining social stability.

The United States, for their part, must focus on an appropriate Grand Strategy, so as to maintain the trust of their allies in the area, while avoiding actual armed conflicts. Thucydides would have approved a moderate approach, intended to maintain the balance of power. Grand Strategies that are based on the balance of power, such as containment, or overseas balancing, usually prove themselves more realistic as well as effective, compared to those which intend the maximizing of one's influence. In other words, they must avoid the maximalist ones, used during the Cold War. Instead, an effective strategy must prevent a Chinese hegemony, through a stable and moderate balance of power. Smart management is required from both Beijing and Washington. They will keep competing with each other, and the tension of their competition will depend on the strategic decisions of the two powers, which will affect the rest of the world.

Οι ΗΠΑ από τη μεριά τους πρέπει να επικεντρωθούν σε μια μεγάλη και κατάλληλη στρατηγική ώστε να διατηρήσουν το ανάστημα των συμμάχων τους στην περιοχή αποφεύγοντας ενεργά τις συγκρούσεις. Ο Θουκυδίδης θα ενέκρινε μια συγκρατημένη προσέγγιση ισορροπίας δυνάμεων. Μεγάλες στρατηγικές που βασίζονται στην ισορροπία δυνάμεων όπως ο περιορισμός ή η υπεράκτια εξισορρόπηση αποδεικνύονται πιο εφικτές και πιο αποτελεσματικές από αυτές που βασίζονται στη μεγιστοποίηση της ισχύος .(αποφεύγοντας τον μαξιμαλισμό του ψυχρού πολέμου και της μονοπολικής, αποτρέποντας την κινεζική κυριαρχία μέσω μιας σταθερής και ευνοϊκής ισορροπίας δυνάμεων.) Στην προκειμένη περίπτωση απαιτούνται έξυπνοι χειρισμοί από την Ουάσινγκτον και το Πεκίνο. Ο ανταγωνισμός μεταξύ τους θα υπάρχει και η έντασή του θα εξαρτηθεί από τις στρατηγικές αποφάσεις της ηγεσίας των δύο δυνάμεων οι οποίες θα επηρεάσουν και τον υπόλοιπο πλανήτη

The above translates into Thucydidean prudence (*sophrosyne*), which according to classical realism is the highest virtue and refined quality of a leader and self-restraint.(Platias & Trigas,2023) Any such cooperation on subjects of mutual interest will be transient and incapable of affecting any substantial change in their trajectory towards conflict.

In this case, clever manipulations are required from Washington and Beijing. Their decisions will affect the rest of the planet.

The competition between them will exist and its intensity will depend on the decisions of the leadership of the two forces.

Certainly, their mutual rivalry can be considered "global", as it manifests itself in all dimensions of the International Scene and will last over time. We cannot make any safe predictions about how America will choose to contain China. Οι δυο χώρες πλησιάζουν ταχύτατα στη «Στιγμή E. H. Carr», που θέτει τον κατεστημένο ηγεμόνα ενώπιον της επιλογής της προσαρμογής ή της εναντίωσης στις αναθεωρητικές απαιτήσεις της ανερχόμενης δύναμης, εν προκειμένω της Κίνας(Layne,2018: 135) According to the realist approach, it cannot be done without war. The two major economies are also nuclear superpowers and that in itself constitutes avoiding a head-on conflict. Their confrontations are likely to take the form of proxy rivalries, of small heated incidents which the two powers will then settle through diplomatic channels to avoid escalation, and of economic competition. But it is not a predictable course. According to Thucydides, it will be the result of conscious choices, made by the political leadership and not the product of 'sleepwalking' according to the 'Thucydides' trap' narrative (Platias & Trigas2021). Who will ultimately prevail? Why, only the most resistant to time, in other words, the one with the most endurance.

FUTURE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND RUSSIA

Eurasia is a geographical area composed of parts of Asia and Europe. An area known for great powers connected to the West but also opposed to it. In its central and eastern Asian components lie China. In its eastern European one, Russia. In Russia, Putin is trying to create a Eurasian stronghold, to protect himself from what he views as Western liberalism and expansionism. These are two great powers, whose prestige in the international system is rising, whereas, beforehand, there was only a single dominant pole- the United States of America. The two countries are old enemies, whose rivalries have been in place for centuries. Their current cooperation certainly seems weird. There exists a de facto entente. Their cold relations are a thing of the past, and today, they are warmer than ever, with a strong cooperation, regarding matters of energy and national security.

The truth is that they have left behind the old enmities of decades ago, especially, during the Putin presidency. In 2004 they settled their territorial disputes and started the major oil cooperation with the ESPO pipeline. The two partners complement each other almost perfectly. On one side, we have Russia, a sparsely populated country with enormous natural resources, whose economy is chaffing under Western sanctions, after her invasion of Ukraine, and is therefore trying to find an exit and achieve her goal of restoring to herself a portion of the prestige and domination enjoyed by her predecessor, the USSR. She remains one of the world's most important producers of fossil fuel, and it is these resources that are the basis of her economic growth. As her commerce with the West wanes, she is fervently trying to find buyers elsewhere.

Conversely, China is very densely populated, with more than a sixth of the world' population within the confines of her borders. She combines this enormous and cheap workforce with a well-developed economic strategy. However, she is an energy-poor country that demands enormous quantities of fossil fuel, of which she is the premier consumer, globally. Thus, Russia's rough situation was for her a golden opportunity.

Since the invasion of Ukraine and in the context of the ever-heightening strategic competition between China and the United States, the geopolitical factors that have been pushing them towards a mode of cooperation that is growing and becoming increasingly important have been strengthened. The new Sino-Russian entente plays a significant role in reducing Western pressures on Russia, and the more their relationship deepens and Moscow's dependence on Beijing strengthens, Russia will pursue a common line with China, strengthening it mainly in the defense sector with technology that will make it a formidable threat to the United States.

For China:

Today and in the next decade at least, no other country can offer her as many advantages as Russia can.

- It is a key strategic partner. The China-US confrontation will be inevitable and protracted and Beijing needs Russia in particular, but also every partner it can acquire to counter the large network of resourceful US alliances. During World War II the US helped Britain and the Soviet Union financially to contain Nazi Germany. That is why China provides economic aid and other economic advantages to Russia for economic and political empowerment to face a common threat, the West. Historically, the United States aided the reconstruction of Europe, via the Marshall plan, following the destruction of the Second World War. The purpose of this act was not "altruism", but, rather, to help them deal with their common enemy, the USSR.
- Under these circumstances, Russia as an influential international actor is important for the creation of a common axis towards the West. Like China, it is a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto rights, which it exercises in the West's decision-making process, mainly concerning sanctions against authoritarian regimes and pressure campaigns in regional hot spots such as Syria. The world's two largest authoritarian states with revisionist ambitions support multipolarity and have a common goal of changing the US-led international status quo. They know that through cooperation, interaction and coordination of their efforts a new international order more favorable to China and Russia will be created.
- Their strong cooperation is a magnet for other states in confrontation with the West such as Iran, North Korea
- Russia is for China a source of cheaper and more logistically accessible energy resources, essential for the Chinese economy. And because most of their trade transactions are conducted via the yuan, their trade relationship contributes to the internationalization of the currency.
-
- Russia's advanced military technology in offensive systems, nuclear deterrence tools, submarine warfare technology, is superior to China's. Increased security and military cooperation in the form of joint exercises between the People's Liberation Army and the Chinese army deepen their interoperability. Possibility of conducting joint cyber operations and disinformation campaigns.
- They are two giants united by a border of 4200 kilometers. Russia's western border faces its enemies, the West, and China's eastern border faces the Pacific where its main aspirations for prosperity and greatest threats to its security lie. This strategic geography allows them, with peace between them in mind, to be able to confront their challengers in the East and West. On China's northern border there will be stable and predictable security, food, and especially, energy security, in the event of a major crisis and disruption of oil and gas supply from the Middle East. This reduces the chances of dependence on precarious routes such as the Straits of

Malacca, where the US Navy has a strong presence. The major projects Power of Siberia 1, Power of Siberia 2, and the overland Silk Road confirm the above.

- China has in Russia an ardent supporter in its claims on Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Tibetan separatists. In the context of a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, Russia would be its "strategic rear end" because maintaining a permanent Russian threat to NATO potentially reduces Europe's aid to the US and Taiwan. Russia in cooperation with North Korea, with large-scale maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait, could deter the actions of US allies in the region, especially South Korea and Japan.
- China will try to mitigate any resentments that may develop between them, because it does not want to risk possible political instability and the prospect of a pro-Western regime being installed if Putin abruptly leaves the political scene. Preventing Russia's turn to the West will remain China's top national security priority even if it had fewer material gains. For Beijing, a pro-Western Moscow would mean intensified pressure from the West, with the country's extensive northern border exposed and military forces redeployed to defend it. She wishes that Russia does not collapse, while in no-way seeking her resurrection as a superpower. Russia's economic destruction may very well spell her own doom. We could surmise that the Russo-Ukrainian war enhances China's own national security. It is a potential Russian defeat, rather than the war itself, that worries China. That is why, in the war with Ukraine, China will continue to support Russia economically, and send dual-use war material.

For Russia:

- After the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, war is the central point around which Russian domestic, foreign and economic policy is organized. China is the state that largely allows Russia to maintain its aggression in Ukraine by providing indirect support for its war effort, and its economy relies heavily on Chinese imports of Russian goods.
- The war in Ukraine was also a crucial test for Sino-Russian relations. After the invasion, China remained Moscow's key partner. Although Beijing was not prepared for a direct confrontation with Washington, it was a lifeline for Moscow, due to buying large quantities of fossil fuels, continuing to supply it with microchips and other technology products banned by the West, and most importantly, supplying it with dual-use items and materials, which can be used for military purposes.

- Trading between the countries' currencies supports its financial system, and imports from China of electric cars, electronic technology goods and other consumer goods keep the consumer well supplied.
- Cooperating with China in the economic sector and sharing Russia's high military technology with her, resulting in a Pax Sinica centered on Eurasia is the only way the Kremlin has to continue its confrontation with the West.

As leading and founding members of BRICS, they are trying to form a geopolitical bloc capable of counterbalancing the influence of Western-dominated global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The Russian bear meets the Chinese dragon in "One Belt, One Road". The China-Europe transport corridor passes through Russia, making Russia a major hub for the transport of Chinese goods to the European Union.

The two countries will expand their cooperation on the Arctic Silk Road, deepening their economic and military relationship as Moscow will no longer be able to deny the Chinese military presence in the Russian Arctic. Their joint military exercises in the Russian Arctic or North Sea are possible, adding another theater of operations to the US Navy. Melting ice will increase the days of sea route accessibility and bypass the Suez Straits. And Russia will enhance its geopolitical and geo-economics footprint.

In the midst of an ongoing war in Ukraine, the tightening of relations and the alignment of Russia and China's objectives is one of the biggest geopolitical outcomes of this conflict. Their cooperation is real, important, and strategic. It is the result not only of conscious efforts by the leadership of the two powers but also a consequence of the deeper rift between them and the West. Theories of Moscow's subservience to Beijing or possible attempts to erode their cooperation should be removed from Western thinking. The efforts under President Trump with Russia and under Kissinger with China did not thrive at this point in relations. In fact, America should be prepared for a long period of intense confrontation with two huge nuclear powers at the same time.

Their relationship will certainly contain tensions which may be exacerbated as Beijing becomes more assertive. Possible thoughts of being tempted to try to somehow dominate the Russians, something no Russian government would accept, will remain in the back of Beijing's mind. For now, the two partners have demonstrated a remarkable ability to manage their differences. Eurasia will remain the world's strategic center of gravity.

THE FUTURE OF U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

The US National Defense Strategy names China as the greatest threat facing the US; however, Russia today is the most immediate threat. Their relationship is locked in a downward spiral centered on Ukraine that affects all aspects of their relationship and according to Thomas Graham, special adviser to George W. Bush Jr. and a member of the

US National Security Council, could lead to a direct military confrontation with the risk of nuclear devastation.

When Putin came to power, his initial goal may have been to restore Russia as a major power on the international stage, but he showed a willingness to cooperate with the US. The two countries had deepened their cooperation on counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, global organized crime and were committed to the creation of a NATO-Russia forum. Subsequently, the West's efforts to limit Russian influence on its borders, coupled with the strengthening of its economy, brought about a major shift in their relations.

Today the level of relations between the two countries is at an all-time low. Russia blames the US through NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe, America's 2001 withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the invasion of Iraq. For its part, the US argues that Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the invasion of Syria in 2015, meddling in the US election and the invasion of Ukraine again in 2022 have caused the most damage to US-Russia relations.

We are experiencing an important turning point in the course of history, as with the fall of the Berlin Wall or the assassination in Sarajevo of the Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand. Putin's decision to invade is an entirely conscious choice. Desiring to de-escalate relations with the West or to justify the forthcoming invasion, Moscow's proposals for security guarantees through diplomatic channels had preceded it. It is a considered (rational) decision which means that Russia is abandoning Europe and orienting itself towards the East.

As long as the war in Ukraine continues, the US-Russia relations will have a conflictual character, and most likely, this conflict will be prolonged, because every day they are moving towards further escalation of the proxy war between them. Even after Putin's hypothetical removal from power, the relations between the two countries will most probably be strained because of the authoritarian resistant regime Putin has built during his long term in office. The elite and regime officials are invested in maintaining the status quo and benefit from it. In an authoritarian regime, authoritarianism usually endures and often remains intact after the departure of a long-term leader. Moreover, the entry of NATO into Russia's backyard and the membership of Sweden and Finland leaves no room for illusions. Regardless of the outcome of the war in Ukraine, even in the event of Russia's military defeat, the latter will continue to be a formidable future adversary for America.

The population decline, the brain drain, the economy being dependent on natural resources, and the poor performance of the Russian army, give the impression that this world power is collapsing. All this is reinforced by the imposition of Western sanctions and the duration of the Russo-Ukrainian war, which is draining Russia economically. No doubt, the end of the war will find Russia weaker economically. In the future Russia will suffer from the worsening demographic crisis. The heavy casualties of the war combined with the exodus of young people means fewer workers, economic stagnation and recession which

will be exacerbated by global sanctions. All this has led some analysts to the conclusion to dismiss Russia as a Potemkin power and to herald its end as a superpower.

But even after the collapse of the USSR during a period of sustained economic stagnation and brain drain, Russia developed a new generation of supersonic missiles and nuclear weapons, proving that it is capable of further modernization and expansion into a new generation of capabilities.

The damage caused by the war is difficult to estimate. But the results of what current research has been done, by focusing on Russia's ability to meet current and future challenges, show a Russia capable of developing conventional and nuclear capabilities in the future.

Let's examine both scenarios of the impact of the sanctions, describing the best- and worst-case scenarios, mainly concerning Russia's war machine if the war continues for a long time.

- Scenario 1. To date, Western sanctions have proved ineffective because Russia's economy has proven resilient, recording strong growth in 2023, exceeding expert forecasts. Having faced smaller-scale sanctions in the past since the Crimean invasion, Russia has come prepared. Major agreements with China such as the ESPO and Siberian 1, Siberian 2, the overland Silk Road (BRI) pipelines prove it. Increased public spending, especially military spending, has benefited other sectors of industry by increasing productivity.

Russia's economy continues to benefit from high hydrocarbon prices combined with a weak ruble...which allow it to enjoy strong export revenues. Saudi Arabia's policy of reducing oil production, the Iran-Israel conflict and developments in the Palestinian conflict point to rising oil prices. It should not be forgotten that Russia is one of the largest oil producing countries in the world after the US and Saudi Arabia and the second largest producer of natural gas . (source). The decline in revenues in 2023 from hydrocarbons due to Western sanctions is believed to be covered by increased exports to China and India which benefits from low prices despite America's recommendations. (David RICH "After two years of war, Russian economy proves resilient-but for how long? India's policy tends to be that of an unconstrained state in the midst of competition between the great powers and the emerging political world. Moreover, Russia to circumvent Western sanctions has created a large fleet of tankers with opaque ownership titles and no commitments from the West in terms of insurance and financing.

We should not forget the growing military cooperation with Iran, demonstrated by Russia's use of Iranian drones in Ukraine and North Korea's supply of artillery shells. Iran and Russia will get closer the more isolated they become (five things you need to know about Putin's growing dependence on Iran Iran, China and North Korea are Russia's arsenals in its war with Ukraine.

It is therefore possible to retain significant capabilities to meet future increased spending on military equipment, possibly focusing on a military modernization programme, either to cope with a prolonged war with Ukraine or the increased threat on its western borders from NATO expansion. The addition of Finland and Sweden to NATO increases the size of the borders it must protect. Its military may be partially weakened, but it will retain the capacity for a limited-scale conflict

- Scenario 2. In the opposite case, if the impact of sanctions is particularly effective in reducing the size of the Russian economy, the state will not be able to adequately support the replacement of its lost arsenal, nor technological development, and the military will come out of the campaign in Ukraine very degraded. But Russia's sophisticated nuclear force will continue to be viable for some time and could pose strategic dilemmas for the United States.

Russia's expanded nuclear arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons, combined with its strategic nuclear power, is a powerful temptation that precludes its downgrading as a threat. During the war or even after the war, the more vulnerable Moscow feels, the more it will try to compensate for its lost power by relying on unconventional tools, especially nuclear weapons. Therefore, supporting the allies in Ukraine and Russia losing the war will not solve the problem but will become more threatening. The suspension of its participation in the New START treaty demonstrates the future dangers of this move because it is the last major bilateral security agreement between the US and Russia. On the other hand, Beijing will increase its support to Russia by preventing a possible collapse and the negative consequences that would follow. According to Thucydides, (Laskaris 2021:3) weakening one's foe can be achieved by harming their allies.

Here arises the timeless question of Russian-American relations: how can they coexist despite different geopolitical ambitions and always under the nuclear threat? A rapprochement of relations has happened in the past and during this period treaties were signed such as on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, against ballistic missiles. The final Helsinki Act was signed. The personal relationship between Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev led to new bilateral treaties such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and SALT II. Also, in times of political tensions the negotiations may be complicated but were not averted, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty was negotiated with Soviet troops in Afghanistan and amidst economic sanctions by the US

But both countries must find a way to reduce tensions in the future. In the medium term their relations will continue to be at their nadir. It is hard to imagine that even a different American administration like Trump's could in the next few years repair their relations, let alone make some kind of accommodation with the Russian Federation. But even if Trump as he claims on the campaign trail or some other future US president will still mediate an

end to the war in Ukraine, at best Russia will pursue an economic partnership with the West, but with caution and lessons learned from the past and China's foreign policy. Moscow appreciates her good relations with China, Eurasia's most powerful state. For her to undermine this relationship would, from a strategic perspective be utter madness.

Despite the current tensions, US policymakers must envision what would be the appropriate conditions for rapprochement with Russia and how it would promote the interests of both powers. As long as the war in Ukraine continues in its current form, there will clearly be no political rapprochement. This will depend on the outcome of the war. A clear victory for Russia or Ukraine or a settlement of the conflict will lead to different results. But could America's leadership in the future work with Putin or with a more reactionary or more moderate leader? This could only happen if future leaders wish to form a relationship like Reagan and Gorbachev, or Clinton and Yeltsin

Despite the rivalries, there will be opportunities for cooperation in the future. Transnational threats such as global warming will be a reason for cooperation to mitigate it. In addition, melting ice will make Russia's Arctic coastline increasingly navigable and the US along with the Arctic states will work more closely with Russia. The renewal and strengthening of the nuclear missile treaties are perhaps the most imperative because the two countries together possess the most nuclear weapons in the world. Working together to reduce their quantity and the way they are deployed will help reduce the fear of mutual destruction and will clearly provide the basis for agreements with other countries that possess nuclear weapons, such as China. Cybersecurity, where Russia and the US dominate, will be an issue that can be settled bilaterally.

It is likely that the above scenarios for a reduction in tensions will apply in the very distant future. Washington is increasingly immersed in a hybrid war with Russia, and the new support package for Ukraine that is expected to be passed immediately will prolong the war and take it away from the negotiating table.

Epilogue:

In the context of the powerful geopolitical axis of Russia and China, the United States choose a maximalist balancing strategy, combining great moralizations and limitless competition.

America frames the international political scene akin to a titanic struggle between democratic states, and authoritarian ones. It should be noted that the father of international politics, Thucydides, held to the belief that the most deplorable atrocities of the Peloponnesian war happened due to the unaccountable passions of the democratic mass of Athenian citizens. (Katsaoras 2023)

The US and Russia will continue to develop their military technology and their most sophisticated and lethal weapons will not be constrained by any control framework, nor will they be subject to rules and restrictions. The absence of an arms control regime will increase competition in arms programs and the risk of a war by accident or miscalculation potentially jeopardizing safe second-strike capabilities.

The violent war in Ukraine has destroyed every hope for a stable and predictable relationship between Russia and the United States. Russia on her part, is a great revisionist power, able and willing to incur great risks, for the sake of pushing her geopolitical agenda. Siding with China gives her plans substance, whereas Washington has, as her goal, no matter the cost, the defense of a now “mythical” rules-based order. Today, Russia and America, are testing the efficacy of their military hardware, for the first time, in Ukraine. The conflict between them is sure to continue in the coming years.

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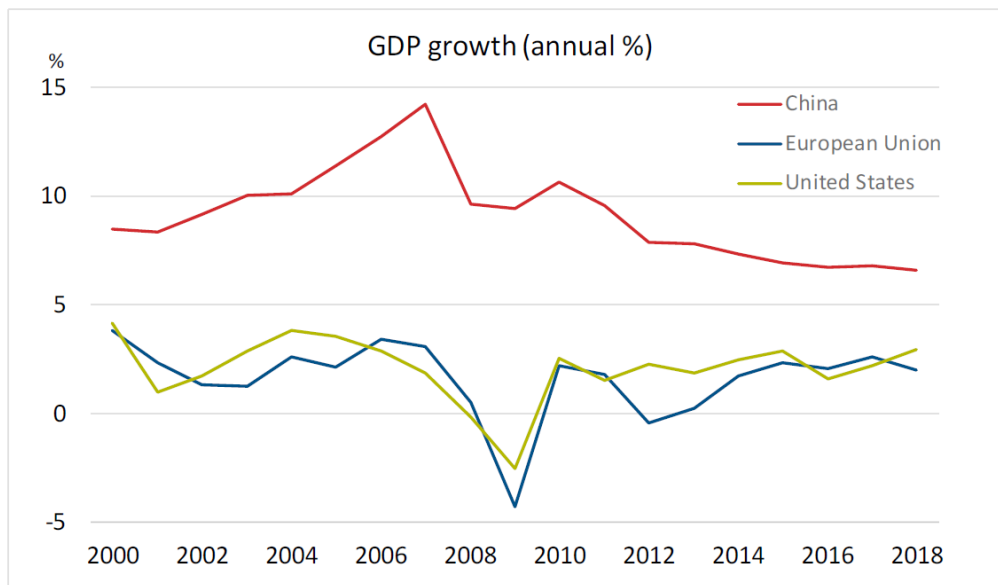
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7. Appendices

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Chart 1

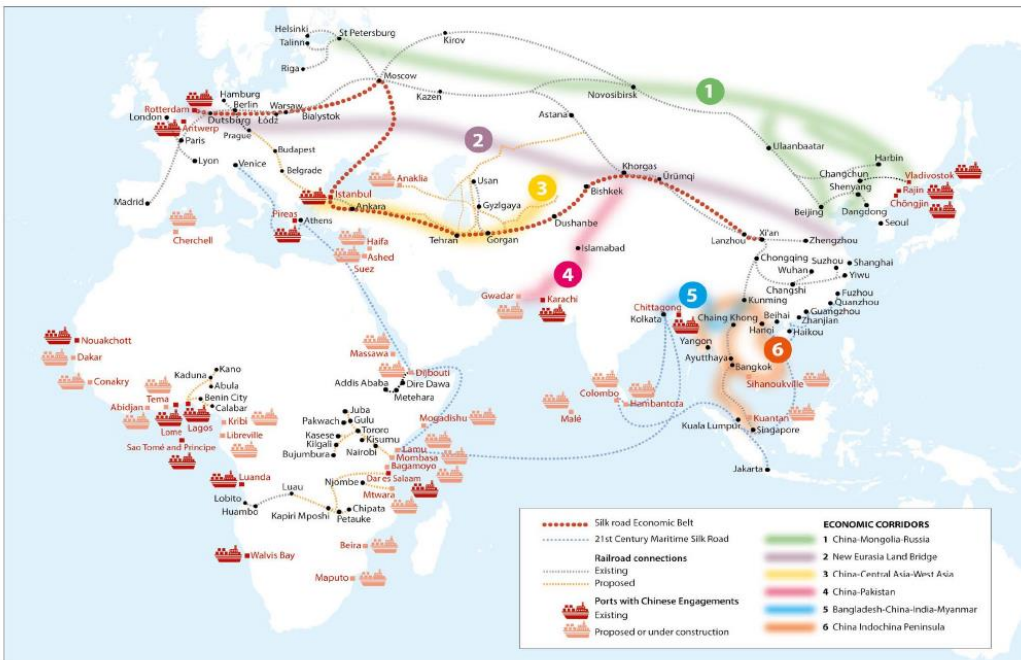


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Chart 2



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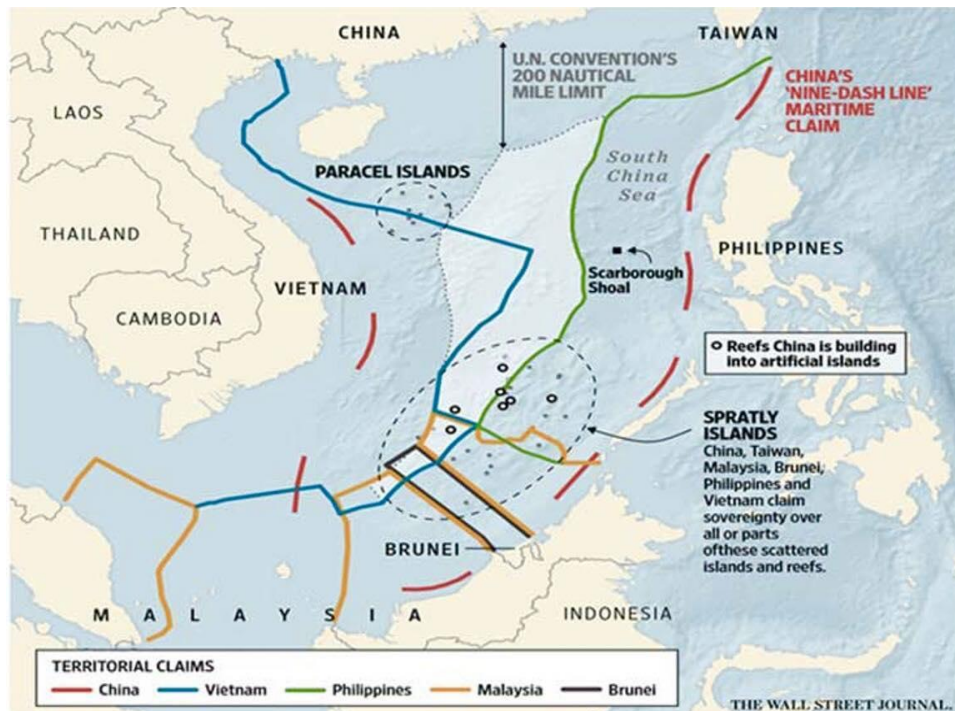
Chart 3



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The Chinese deflation

Chart 4



The South of China Sea

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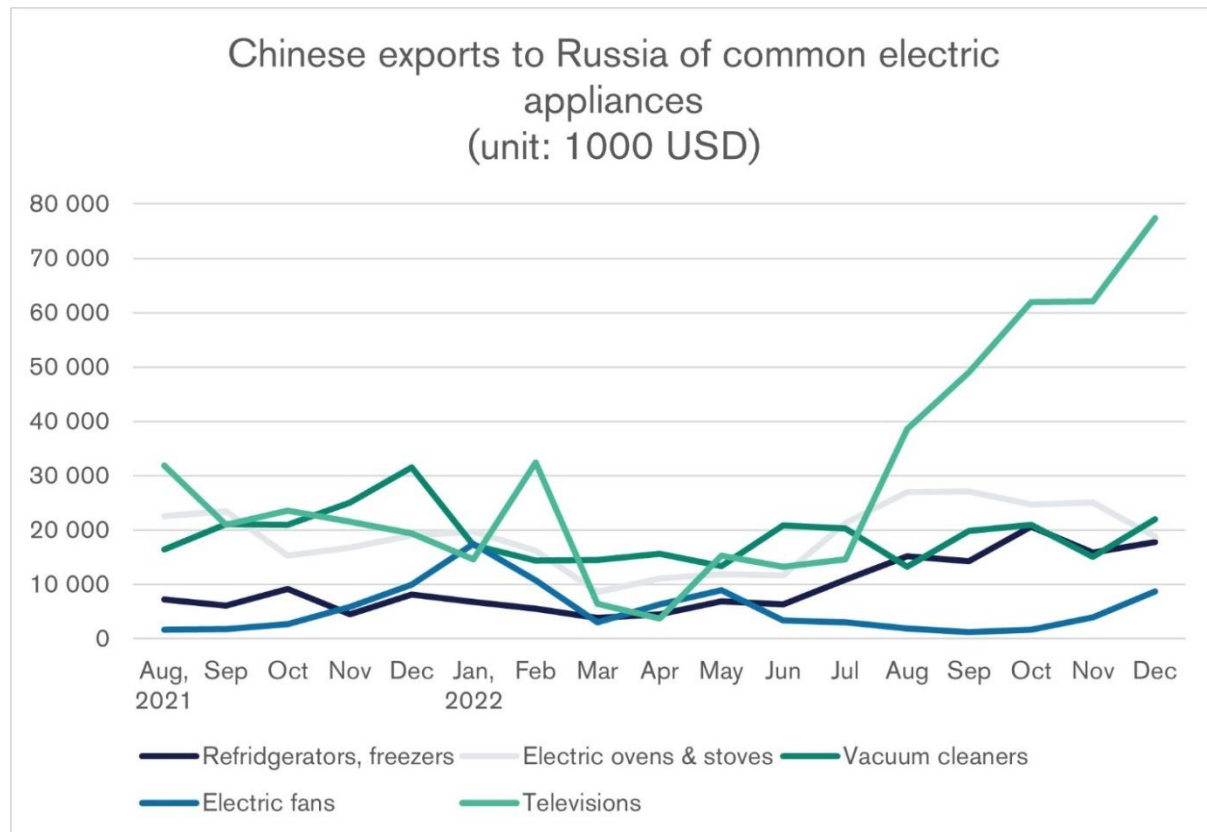
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Chart 5



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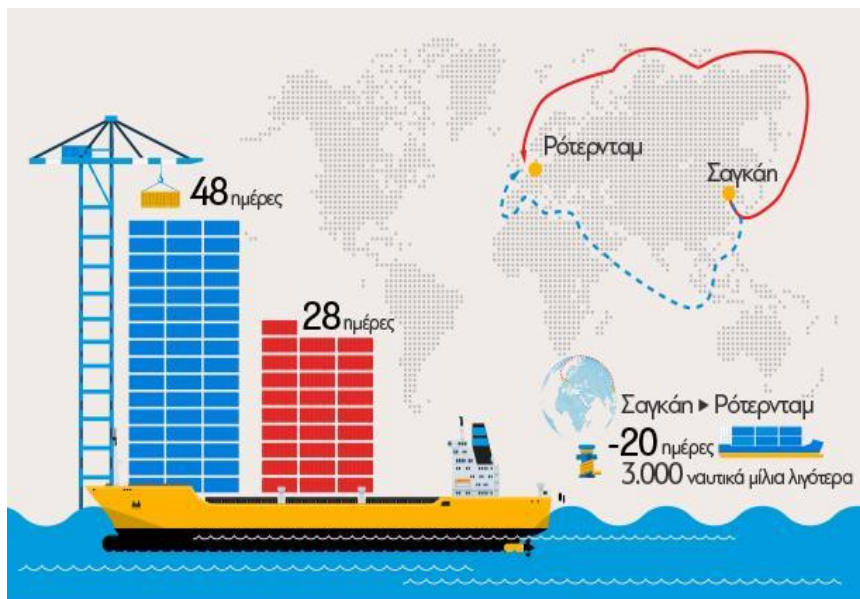
Chart 6



[Russia-China Economic Relations Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine - SCEEUS](#)

Essen, H, Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies, 5 July 2023

Chart 7



The Silk Route turns Polar Protagon.gr

Source: Protagon, [Ο δρόμος του μεταξιού γίνεται πολικός | Protagon.gr](https://www.protagon.gr),

Accessed 17may 2023

Chart 8



ESPO Pipeline Route Source: *Russia Unveils \$25bn Oil Link To Pacific*, Platta, J.P Morgan Commodities Research
<https://gulfbusiness.com/russia-unveils-25bn-oil-link-to-pacific/>, 7 December, 2012. Accessed 17 may 2013

Chart 9



Source: CNBC This map shows the massive gas pipeline that Russia and China are building
<https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/27/map-of-power-of-siberia-gas-pipeline-that-china-russia-are-working-on.html>

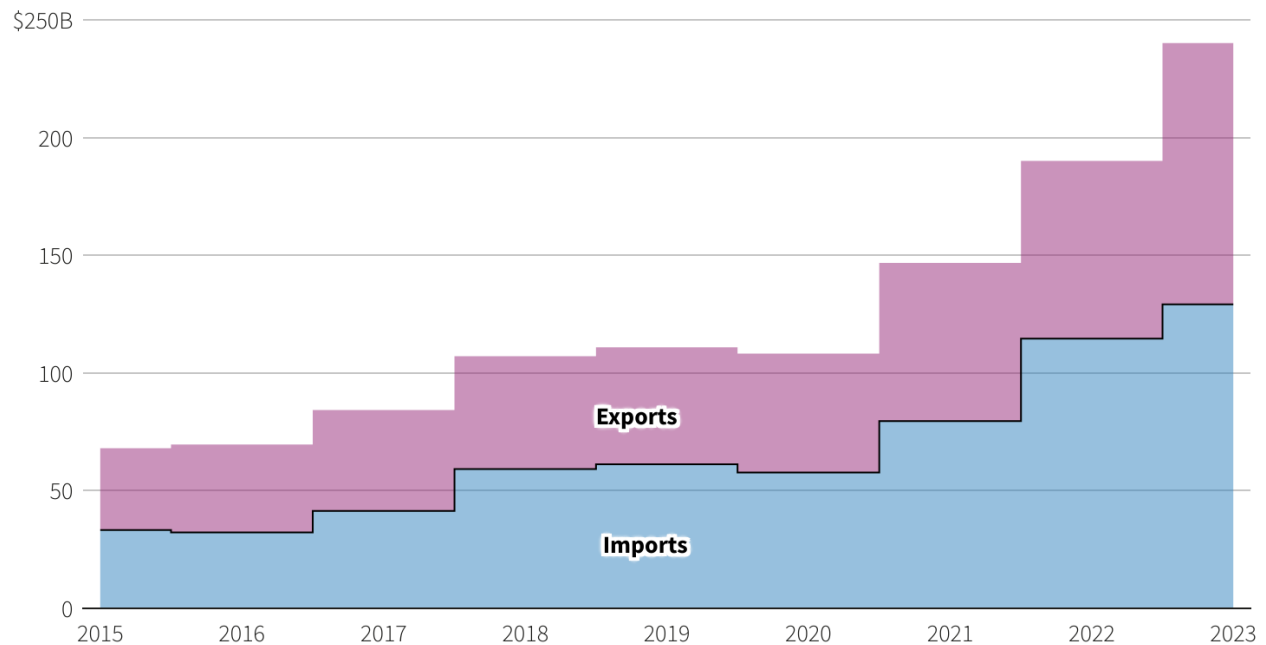
Power of Siberia.

Accessed 17 May 2023

Chart 10

China-Russia trade has more than tripled since 2015

Imports and exports from China to Russia



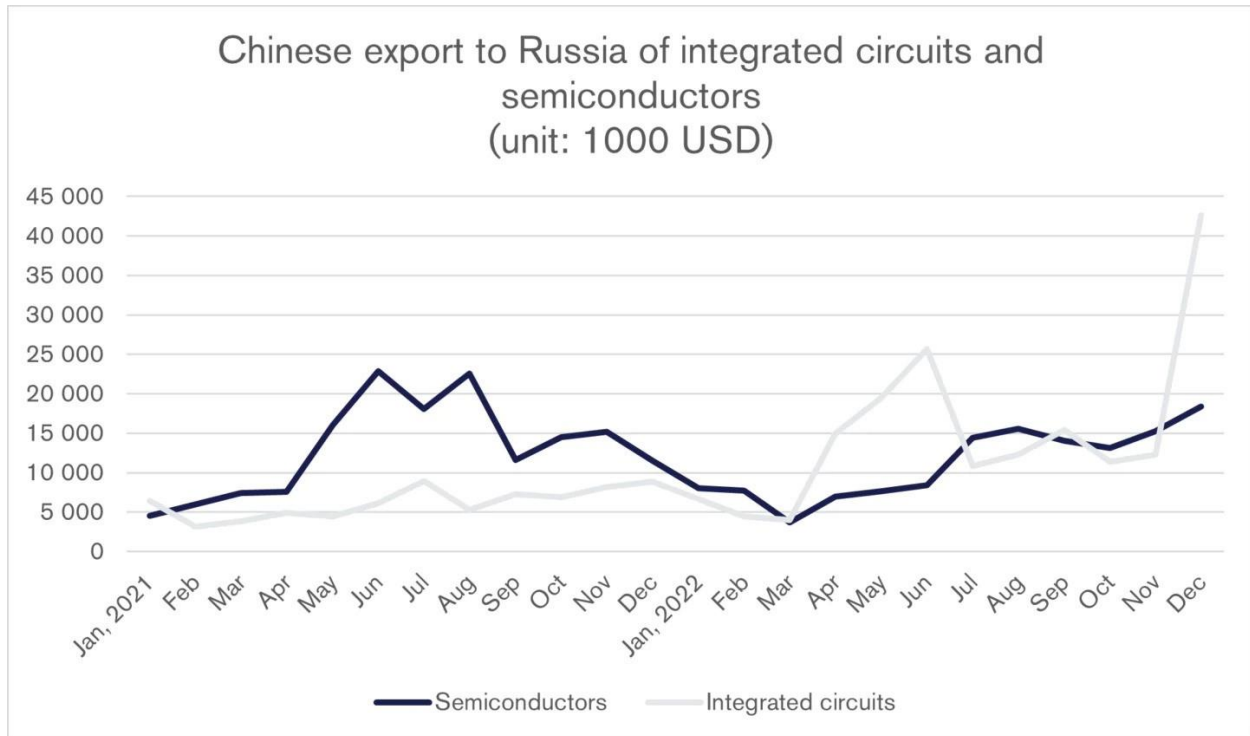
Source: Chinese customs data

Imports and Exports from China to Russia

[As trade with China booms, some Russian companies are flourishing | Reuters](#)

Stolyarov, G, Reuters, 13 March 2024

Chart 11



[Russia-China Economic Relations Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine - SCEEUS](#)

Essen, H, Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies, 5 July 2023

Table 3

Table 1. U.S. Merchandise Trade with Russia, 1995-2012
(in billions of dollars)

Year	U.S. Exports	U.S. Imports	U.S. Trade Balances	Year	U.S. Exports	U.S. Imports	U.S. Trade Balances
1995	2.8	4.0	-1.2	2004	3.0	11.9	-8.9
1996	3.3	3.6	-0.3	2005	3.9	15.3	-11.3
1997	3.4	4.3	-0.9	2006	4.7	19.8	-15.1
1998	3.6	5.7	-2.1	2007	7.4	19.4	-12.0
1999	2.1	5.9	-3.8	2008	9.3	26.8	-17.5
2000	2.1	7.7	-5.6	2009	5.4	18.2	-12.8
2001	2.7	6.3	-3.5	2010	6.0	25.7	-19.7
2002	2.4	6.8	-4.4	2011	8.3	34.6	-26.3
2003	2.4	8.6	-6.2	2012	10.7	29.3	-18.6

Source: Compiled by CRS from U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau data. FT900.

Note: Major U.S. exports: machinery; vehicles; meat; aircraft. Major U.S. imports: mineral fuels; inorganic chemicals aluminum; steel.

U.S.

Merchandise Trade with Russia, 1995-2012 (in billions dollars)

	HS section	Exports in 2022	Share of exports 2022	Growth vs 2021	2023 growth vs 2022 (Jan-May)	2023 growth vs 2022 (Aug-Dec)
Machinery and mechanical/electrical equipment	XVI	USD 30.2 billion	37%	5%	57%	3%
Vehicles and transportation equipment	XVII	USD 7.4 billion	10%	48%	281%	95%
Chemical products	VI	USD 6.7 billion	9%	76%	29%	-20%
Base metals	XV	USD 5.6 billion	7%	-2%	41%	2%
Textile products	XI	USD 5.4 billion	7%	0%	49%	4%
Plastics and rubber	VII	USD 5.3 billion	7%	47%	88%	-1%
Other products		USD 15.5 billion	20%	2%	58%	-10%

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Table 1 China's biggest export categories to Russia 2022-2023

source [Russia-China Economic Relations Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine - SCCEUS](#)

Essen, H, Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies, 5 July 2023

Table 2

	Oil	Pipeline gas	LNG	Coal
Total Chinese payments since invasion	EUR 67 billion	EUR 12 billion		EUR 7 billion
Total chinese payments in 2023	EUR 22 billion	EUR 2.5 billion		EUR 3 billion
Volume increase in 2022 vs 2021	8.3%	50%	44%	20%
Value increase in 2022 vs 2021	44%	160%	140%	N/A
Share of Russian exports 2022 (vs 2021)	35% (31%)	15% (5%)	20% (17%)	32% (25%)
Share of Chinese imports 2022 (vs 2021)	17% (16%)	25% (24%)	10% (6%)	23% (18%)

Chinese imports of Russian energy

Source [South China Sea Ruling Puts Beijing in a Corner - WSJ](#), V. Essen, H,5 July 2023,SCEEUS,Stocholm Centre for Eastern European Studies

