

SINO-RUSSIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: AN OFFENSIVE REALISM PERSPECTIVE

Arooba Abbasi^{*1}, Maria Khan², Dr. Muhammad Fahim Khan³

^{*1,2}Mphil Scholar, Department of International Relations, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad;

³Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad

²maria.khan51@hotmail.com; ³dr.fahim@myu.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *

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ABSTRACT

This research paper discusses the idea of the "Strategic Partnership" regarding the close ties between China and Russia and evaluates the ramifications of this affinity for the West and the Western global world order. This article examines the degree of closeness between two Cold War rivalries and attempts to identify the aspects or causes that bring them together. In light of US unilateral policies, particularly in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its recurred intervention in the region across Asia and Eurasia, the article explains how Beijing and Moscow are embarking on a "strategic partnership" based on equality, confidence, and mutual coordination in the twenty-first century. Since Beijing and Moscow, both support multilateralism and question the US's unipolarity; therefore, this paper studies the partnership between them from an angle of offensive realism, whose central idea is to investigate why several great powers have pursued hegemony and why war between states occurs so frequently in the context of great power politics. Under offensive realism, states established relationships with one another by keeping their national interests first and foremost. This paper highlights the significance of understanding the economic, social, military, and trade relations between Moscow and Beijing, which are ultimately in the self-interest of each of them.

Keywords: Strategic Partnership, Hegemony, Multipolar world, Liberal International Order.

INTRODUCTION

China's Perspective on Strategic Partnership

China has established strategic alliances with many nations and nearly three international organizations since 2000. After the Cold War ended, China's first strategic alliance with Brazil was formed in 1993, marking the beginning of the concept of "partnership." By enhancing Chinese globalization and demonstrating China's adaptation to the outside world, this cooperation strategy aids China in highlighting its larger development both domestically and internationally. In 1996, China established a "strategic partnership of equality, confidence, and mutual co-ordination in the 21st century" with Russia; in 1998, it established a "collaborative partnership for the 21st century" with South Korea; and in 2005, it established a "strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity" with India. (Zhongping & Jing, 2014)

According to the Chinese dictionary, comprehensive strategic partnership encompasses economic, scientific, technological, political, and cultural fields and involves both governments and non-governmental organizations. It should be long-term, stable, equal-footed, mutually beneficial, and based on trust and respect. Cooperation ought to be enduring, steady, equitable, mutually beneficial, and based on mutual respect and trust. It must address the concerns of all parties and look for areas of agreement while putting disagreements aside. China has attempted to integrate strategic relationships with elements of multilateralism.

China has enhanced its participation and collaboration with numerous international organizations in the mid-21st century. China has significantly increased its influence in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Chinese strategic collaboration with the BRICS countries is also

notable. China views all of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries as strategic allies. China's foreign policy relies heavily on strategic partnerships, as the country's global influence necessitates a more comprehensive approach and advanced diplomatic strategies. (Zhongping & Jing, 2014)

Historical Perspective

The Sino-Soviet split, which refers to the total dissolution of their ties due to the rift in their political and ideological alliance that started in the late 1950s, was a significant event and setback for the Communist alliance during the Cold War. Despite the extensive research conducted by the scholars, there is still disagreement regarding the factors that led to the split. Some claim that there are ideological divides between the two countries, while others attribute it to Mao Zedong and Nikita Khrushchev's animosity and many others blame geopolitical factors. (Karneev & Kozylov, 2023) The border between the two countries, which is around 420 kilometers long, has always been a contentious subject in their history (Peters, 2023).

Conflicting ideologies over foreign policy, such as China's 1958 bombardment of Jinmen and its border clashes with India, as well as domestic issues in China, such as the People's Commune Movement and the Great Leap Forward, sparked increasingly bitter ideological debates between the two communist states in the latter half of 1959. ((Li,2020 pp.229,231).

Under Mao, China attempted to exert pressure on the USSR to change its position in the Sino-Indian conflict by using its power. In a meeting with Soviet envoy Stepan Chervonenko on January 19, 1960, Premier Zhou Enlai expressed China's belief that the 1959 Sino-Indian border crisis was completely caused by India. China hoped Khrushchev's visit to India would not mediate the Sino-Indian conflict. However, a few months later, personal attacks and disputes between Mao and Khrushchev escalated. A member of the CPSU CC Secretariat criticized China's foreign and domestic policies, blaming the dispute on China's aggressive nationalism. ((Li, 2020 p.232).

Sino-Soviet rivalry gained popularity at the point when the CCP and CPSU began to freely voice their thoughts in public and the West started to see glimpses of their conflicts. The main points of contention between Mao and Khrushchev were their

theoretical approaches and approaches to assuming leadership roles in the socialist world. The fact that Khrushchev was the only proponent of détente with the West incited hostility inside the Chinese Communist Party. Even if certain circumstances and agreements brought about harmony between them, the Sino-Soviet detente only lasted until their organizational relationships broke down in 1969 over a border dispute. Beijing and Moscow's split grew once again in the middle of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966 when the entire soviet bloc turned against China and Mao Zedong. After the first border negotiations failed in 1964, territorial issues emerged as a new cause of conflict. The Soviet Union and Mongolia signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance in January 1966. Beijing did not see this action favorably, and the Chinese claimed that the Soviet Union was planning to send soldiers to Mongolia. (Li,2020 pg.300).

Under Mao Zedong's leadership, China's foreign policy shifted from anti-US imperialism to anti-Soviet revisionism in the 1960s. Mao begins to prioritize stopping Khrushchev's revisionism in China over containing US policy. To accomplish his goal of containing revisionism abroad and preventing its spread domestically during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, Mao adopted an ultra-leftist foreign policy that included anti-revisionist and anti-imperialist measures. Mao did this by opposing parties that, like Khrushchev, resisted the cultural revolution in China. (Li,2020 pg.321).

A military confrontation on Zhenbao Island in 1969 was the consequence of the Sino-Soviet split caused by the increasing ideological tensions of the 1950s. (Peters, 2023, Kuisong, 2000). Following the events on Zhenbao Island and the Soviet nuclear threat, Mao began to view the Soviet Union as China's greatest security threat. Mao reverted to reconciling with the US against "socialist imperialists" in the USSR, believing they had replaced US imperialists as China's primary adversary. Before Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in July 1971, 11 countries had established formal diplomatic relations with China. Between 1969 and 1972, the United States and China effectively worked to promote reconciliation. (Li,2020 pg. 322)

Meanwhile, Beijing and Moscow engaged in intense debate and disagreements over the nature of the historical treaties between China and Russia, whether they should sign a new state treaty or a

provisional agreement, and whether or not there were any disputed areas between the two nations. But eventually, both sides agreed that they would sit at a discussion table. By lowering tensions with China, the Soviet Union hoped to hinder and undermine the Sino-American rapprochement. China hoped that the signing of a temporary agreement would prevent an assault by the Soviet Union. The Soviet-American Cold War system experienced minor shifts throughout Asia and around the world as a result of China's modifications in diplomatic strategy. In the 1950s, China was at the forefront of anti-US strategy in Asia due to the Sino-Soviet alliance. However, after the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, China altered its foreign policy and formed a partnership with the US to counter the Soviet Union. (Li, 2020 pg. 322). As Henry Kissinger notes, "In fact, throughout the 1970s, Beijing was more in favor of the United States acting robustly against Soviet designs than much of the American public or Congress. (Kissinger, *On China*, p. 277.) This is because, in the words of offensive Realism, governments operate in self-interest and out of a desire for power and security (Mearsheimer, 2019). The boundary issue between Sino-Russia was settled with the signing of a border agreement in 1991, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Except for the repatriation of three islands, which was settled later in 2004 using a "Fifty-Fifty" method that concluded all outstanding territorial disputes, all territorial disputes were settled with the agreement. (Peters, 2023).

Post-cold war partnership

The "strategic partnership" between Beijing and Moscow dates back almost two decades, to the mid-1990s, when Beijing was subjected to harsh criticism by the West for the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, while Moscow felt inferior to the United States of America as a defeated adversary. Russia's relations with the United States and its Western allies began to worsen in the mid-2000s after Vladimir Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin. After two years, this positive partnership turned into a strategic one. The agreement to establish the SCO as a strategic partnership with equal coordination for the twenty-first century was made public in a joint announcement on April 17, 1996. (Akram et al., 2024).

While China admitted that Chechnya is an internal Russian matter, Russia acknowledged Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan and Tibet and refused to

commit to diplomatic relations with Taiwan or Tibet. (Malik, New York: St. Martin's, 1997, pp. 182–183). Their cooperation was further enhanced by the 1996 protests against NATO's invasion of the Balkans (Vidya Nadkarni, *Opcit* pp156).

In 1997, both sides published statements opposing unipolarity and in favor of multipolarity, which allows each country to choose its route to economic growth (Popov, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 165–168). NATO's attack on Iraq in December 1998 alarmed both Beijing and Moscow. When Washington continued with its plan of NATO enlargement and acquired seven additional members in 2004, it strained both Moscow-Washington relations and Beijing-Washington relations. (Lansford, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007, p46).

Moscow quickly turned to China after being forced into isolation by Washington in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea. Beijing maintained its cautious approach to strengthening its strategic ties with Moscow and showed benevolent neutrality about Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, despite having several disagreements with the United States. (Lukin, 2020)

Post 9/11 coordination

In a joint statement released in Moscow, Beijing and Moscow rejected the US and its allies' invasion of Iraq (Andrey, 2013, p 220). After their border disputes were resolved, the two nations decided to strengthen their strategic partnership, and in doing so, they announced the creation of a new international order in which they committed to working toward "safeguarding sovereignty, guaranteeing the right of countries to choose their way of development in light of their condition, protecting the gain of globalization through trade, curbing its uneven effects through coordination and mutually beneficial cooperation, and ensuring that human rights protections are based on the principle of firmly safeguarding the sovereign equality of all countries, among other things" (Nadkarni, *Opcit*, pp. 62–63.). They also attempted to minimize US influence in Central Asia. In 2001, at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference in Kazakhstan, a joint appeal was issued for US soldiers to abandon all Central Asian bases. To strengthen their military ties, China and Russia conducted collaborative exercises in 2005. Both nations announced their strategic alliance, energy

partnership, contacts with North Korea and Iran, and cooperative resolution of the Iraq and Israel-Palestine issues in a second joint statement released in 2006 (Nadkarni, Opcit, pp. 63). In 2007, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and SCO established a framework of collaboration to address the security and economic issues facing Central Asia. In the "Peace Mission 2007" military drill, China and Russia participated with the states of the Central Asian region (Adomeit, 2020, pp. 218–219).

Since 2013-2018

Since 2014, the strategic cooperation between China and Russia has grown stronger due to US policies that have brought the two nations closer. Regardless, what unites Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin is their shared hostile stance toward Western criticism and their comparable personalities. Both seek to establish a "post-West" global order that is in opposition to the Western global system and takes into account their interests, respectively. Russia appears to accept its status as a junior partner in this cooperation. Although there are many asymmetries in Russo-Chinese relations, those who advocate for Russia to distance itself from China and ally with the US overlook China's unwavering support for Russia's domestic system, which is critical to Putin's regime; unlike the US, China is not seen as a threat to Putin's rule. Furthermore, the US approach of sanctioning Russia and waging a trade war with China eventually brought the two countries together. (Stent, 2020)

Their growing economic ties signaled the strengthening of their military cooperation. In 2016 and 2017, China signed two major agreements with Russia to purchase Su-35 fighter jets, the first of which would be delivered in 2016, the second in 2017, and the remaining quantity in 2018. China has also been in the process of purchasing an S-400 missile system from Russia since 2013 (Andrea et., al pp. 137–139) Cooperation was strengthened in subsequent years as both aimed to create heavy-load helicopters for the PLA as well as LADA-class submarines, and both upgraded their aero-engine technology, space component production, and satellite navigation systems. In addition to the military relationship, due to Russia's pressure on China, both countries have solid relations in the energy industry as well (Adomeit, pp. 218–219).

Post-Russian invasion of Ukraine

China has maintained a "neutral stance" over Russia's invasion of Ukraine and repeatedly defended its bilateral trade with Russia. Hence Beijing and Moscow both view this conflict as a struggle against Western hegemony, therefore, China is satisfied to present this kind of neutral stance despite being concerned about what is occurring in Ukraine. (Dizikes, 2023) Scholars believe that China has never maintained a neutral stance toward Russia, despite claims made by Chinese diplomats about their country's neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. China has consistently supported Russia in matters of politics, economy, diplomacy, and morality, and it has voted in favor of Russia in opposition to the West in the United Nations Organization (UNO), where both countries are permanent members. (Zhao, 2023)

However, China's stance on the Ukrainian conflict is based on an offensive realist strategy and goals rather than neutrality, as China seeks to maintain power equilibrium and balance the power against the US and its allies in an anarchic international system, knowing that an alliance with Russia will allow it to maximize its power and both states will be able to counter Western hegemony.

The year 2022 was characterized by a changing Chinese-Russian relationship to rewrite the global order and a shared opposition to the United States on the global stage when Russian tanks once again rolled into a former Soviet neighbor, Ukraine, in February. However, unlike Georgia, Putin's invasion of Ukraine elicited a rapid economic and political response from the West. (Standish, 2022). China and Russia are not formal allies, which means they have no signed military treaty to support each other and do not have a traditional "alliance" like NATO, but they are close strategic partners, a relationship that grew stronger during the war in Ukraine as Russia became increasingly isolated from many other countries.

Economic relations between the two have grown dramatically since Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014 when it invaded Crimea. At the time, China assisted Russia in avoiding the sanctions imposed by the Obama administration, which were intended to cut off Russia's access to global markets. (Hong, 2023) A partnership between them is beneficial to both countries. China acquires 19% of its oil and 25% of its coal from Russia, with coal making up roughly half of China's energy consumption, making

Russia the country's tenth-largest trading partner, behind Malaysia. (Dizikes, 2023)

China's and Russia's alignment within the framework of multipolarity is associated with their "unified front" against the US and its allies. Although China is not a party to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the conflict's outcome is not determined by China nevertheless, China formally opposes NATO expansion. China-Russia relations are a major variable in the international environment in which the conflict is taking place, and they have a critical impact on the strategic balance between Russia, the United States, and Europe.

China's policy decisions are critical, and it must identify the best position despite having limited moving space. China's foreign policy decisions revolve around its relations with Russia, which in turn shapes the strategic framework and balance of power that are critical to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. (Zhao, 2023)

Regarding the origins of the war between Russia and Ukraine, there are two schools of thought. One is a straightforward, static viewpoint that takes things as they are and doesn't consider any outside influences; the US and Europe have embraced this viewpoint. The other is a historical and macro viewpoint that places more emphasis on cause and effect. This is the stance that Russia has taken. Two distinct interpretations result from these two different points of view. The US and Europe claim that the outbreak was directly caused by Russia's military intervention against Ukraine.

The other argues that the core of the conflict stems from the strategic oppression of Russia brought about by NATO's five eastward expansions following the conclusion of the Cold War. China takes a more comprehensive stance, comprehending the origins of the conflict from both a macro and historical standpoint in addition to identifying the immediate causes of the conflict's emergence. China has not objected to the assertions of the US and Europe, but it does comprehend Russia's explanation and considers that it is a more objective method of understanding than neutrality. (Zhao, 2023)

Undoubtedly, friendship has deepened between the two during the Ukraine crisis, contrary to Western predictions, and both are working together to counter Western influence. To the surprise of the West, and especially the US, Russia and China released a joint statement on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, criticizing the US nine times, including US

developments regarding missile defense, the deployment of missiles, and biological and chemical weapons. (*What Are the Key Strengths of the China-Russia Relationship?* 2022)

Despite the sanctions aimed at isolating Russia and specifically Putin by the US, the European Union, many of their allies, and other countries worldwide, which targeted Russian entities and the flow of goods to and from the warring nation, Russia's economy exceeded forecasts to grow by 3.6% in 2023. The two nations' bilateral trade reached \$240 billion last year, exceeding the aim of \$200 billion in two-way trade by 2024, all due to China, which has emerged as a crucial economic lifeline. Western countries have expressed disapproval of China's alleged role in financing Russia's war, citing the country's increased commerce and oil purchases throughout the conflict. (AcostaNoya & McCarthy, 2024)

While on his most recent visit to China in April last month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, among other Western officials, warned Beijing that action would be taken by the US and other nations if Beijing failed to stop this flow. During Xi's state visit to France last week, Emmanuel Macron, the president of France, and Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the European Commission, also put pressure on Xi regarding these supplies. However, the war has not altered the dynamic; Xi and Putin have a history of celebrating major accomplishments together.

This week's visit marks Putin's symbolic first overseas trip since he was elected to a fifth term in an election held in March. It is mirroring Xi's state visit to Russia in March 2023, the Chinese president's first international journey following the start of his historic third term in office. (Acosta Noya & McCarthy, 2024). Hence, the conflict has pulled them even closer together rather than keeping them apart.

What does Xi want from Russia?

The China-Russia relationship is based first and foremost on mutual respect and accommodation of each party's primary interests. For China, this entails embracing its authoritarian political system, supporting (or not opposing) China's sovereignty and territorial claims, and adhering to China's one-China policy, which is central to its foreign policy. (*What Are the Key Strengths of the China-Russia Relationship?* 2022)

Similar to how Mr. Putin has portrayed China in speeches to Russians, Mr. Xi has taken a more

aggressive position against what he sees as an American effort to contain China's rise. Mr. Xi wants Mr. Putin to join him as a like-minded friend in opposing US and Western dominance, stating in a Russian-published piece that China and Russia must cooperate to tackle security issues such as "damaging acts of hegemony, domination, and bullying." (Hong, 2023)

The Russian government has long supported China's claims to Taiwan. In the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, Moscow avoided criticizing China for holding military drills and missile launches close to Taiwan, instead blaming Taiwan and the US for the increased tensions. Russia supported Beijing's position on Taiwan and endorsed the "One China" policy in 2001. Moscow has also supported Beijing's actions toward Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang, and it appears to support Chinese claims to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which Japan also claims. Although Russia maintained its apparent neutrality over China's contested claims in the South China Sea, it implicitly supported Beijing by criticizing "non-regional powers"—that is, the United States—for intervening in the region. (*What Are the Key Strengths of the China-Russia Relationship?* 2022) Based on the aforementioned considerations, Beijing must have a solid and growing collaboration with Moscow to restrain the global world order and Western hegemony, especially the USA's unilateralist policies (military or political). Furthermore, Russia is the world's greatest natural gas exporter, second-largest oil exporter, and third-largest coal exporter, and China is very well aware of this, and this has boosted their strategic partnership.

What does Putin want from China?

International sanctions are now one of the most significant tools in international politics due to the growth of globalization in the post-Cold War era (Stent, 2020). As certain nations persist in their efforts to isolate Russia globally, Russia endeavors to fortify its economic, military, and political connections with China, as its principal partner. With the growth of economic cooperation in 2022, Russia emerged as China's top supplier of raw materials, supplying goods including frozen fish, fertilizers, wood products, and fuel (which is made up of coal, oil, petroleum products, and gas). (He, L. 2022). China is necessary for Mr. Putin to strengthen his economy, which has been severely impacted by

Western sanctions. (Hong, 2023). Russia's existence in the current geopolitical context depends on strengthening its strategic partnership with China, which is why in 2022–2023 Russia expanded its oil exports to China. (Aksenov et al., 2023). China has also been hesitant to fully support Russia; (Hong, 2023): the burgeoning strategic alliance between the two countries necessitates Russia establishing a realistic counterweight to China; otherwise, the asymmetric interdependence would generate temptations for China that might be detrimental to Russia. The key objective for Russia at this stage is China's "soft" balancing, which requires creating a balancing act and avoiding zero-sum games. (Diesen, G. 2022). Nevertheless, implications of the relationship between the two states on the present US-led international order could be dangerous and pose a threat to US hegemony.

Implications for U.S. Policy

The synergy between Russia and China may represent a threat to the United States. According to Andrea Kendall-Taylor and David Shullman, Russia-China partnership in defense has significant implications for US military dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. China's modernization of its surface combat capabilities and the difficulty for the US to compete with China in the Indo-Pacific region are directly related to Russia's provision of advanced armament technologies, such as the Su-35 fighter jet and S-400 surface-to-air missile systems. Russia and China are collaborating to avoid US sanctions and limits on technology exports. The United States efforts to keep up with China's joint innovation in the technology sphere would put a great deal of pressure on the country's already limited defense budget if Russia and China continue to collaborate and grasp the benefits of their relationship. (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2021)

Analysts argue that their collaboration is motivated more by their shared enmity with the United States than by any natural affinity. Nevertheless, since the start of the twenty-first century, ties between China and Russia have significantly strengthened. Both countries increasingly collaborate within and across international organizations to challenge the rules of the US-led world order, in addition to having a strong defense and economic alignment. As a result, Washington has expressed concern over their burgeoning strategic relationship. In September 2023, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee

Chairman Michael McCaul described the collaboration as the most "large-scale" threat Europe and the Pacific had faced since WWII. Similarly, to challenge the US's unilateralism, they build institutions such as the BRICS (together with Brazil, India, and South Africa) and SCO to gain support from developing countries. Many countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, have joined the BRICS as of January 2024. (Maizland & Fong, 2022)

Since the inauguration of the BRICS summit in 2009, the group has worked to advance de-dollarization as a counter to the US dollar's hegemony over the world economy. (Peters, 2022) This goal was ultimately achieved at the most recent Xi-Putin meeting, where they talked about creating a new global order and popularizing the idea of de-dollarization, which has raised serious concerns among US officials and policymakers.

Asia's influence on global capitalism and the fallout from the colonial world system's ultimate defeat is best seen in the BRIC and G77 countries' developing unity and expansion. Without a doubt, the rise of China within a complex web of bilateral trade relationships—with ASEAN serving as its largest trading partner—has resulted in a shift in the center of economic gravity from the wealthy transatlantic democracies to Asia. Undoubtedly, the world is shifting towards multipolarity, as evidenced by 'improved Sino-Russian relations, the emergence of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the New Development Bank (previously the BRICS Bank), an alternative to Bretton Woods institutions though setting up a competition between the US and China'. (Peters, 2022)

John Mearsheimer, the strongest proponent of stopping the rise of China believed that the "Liberal International Order" was in grave danger due to China's development and the resurgence of Russian dominance, which ended the unipolar era and is the liberal international order's death knell. He claims that if Russia wins in Ukraine, it will help China and cause a shift in US political policy. (Mearsheimer, 2019)

In a recent summit meeting, both sent a clear message to the US that the US's unilateral hegemony will no longer rule the world, with Xi describing their partnership as "a stabilizing force in the face of rising hegemony." Putin and Xi both promise to cooperate in enhancing Asia-Pacific security. Putin also

condemns the AUKUS alliance (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and supports Xi's claim that it is a treaty aimed at restricting China. We must not undervalue Russia's ability to revive itself, as it may be China's greatest ally in transforming the world system into one with uniquely Chinese characteristics. As Sari Arho Havren notes "Russia is an important partner in displacing the United States and transforming the global order in favor of China." (Hale, 2024)

Political analysts in Washington and beyond have been closely monitoring China's and Russia's increasing collaboration and alignment, but they disagree on what this expanding partnership entails. Analysts in Washington see Russia's collaboration as exacerbating America's China issue and posing threats to US global interests. To challenge US leadership in the world, Beijing is establishing its defense collaboration with Moscow as well to close gaps in its military might and advance its technological innovation to undermine the US's global leadership. (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2021). China is more economically significant to Russia than vice versa, as China is Russia's most important commercial partner and the second-largest buyer of Russian military weapons. (Stent, 2020)

Defense collaboration between the two countries might pose a challenge to US strategic competitiveness with China in the Indo-Pacific region and undermine US military advantages. The alliance between Russia and China may also pose a threat to liberal democracy, the American way of life, and the liberal international order. Russia and China are promoting authoritarian rule, defending strategic interests in international forums, and supporting illiberal leaders in their respective regions to maintain power. Furthermore, as evidenced by their collaboration to lessen the impact of US sanctions, China and Russia are attempting to lessen the role that the US plays in the world economy. The US's centrality in the global economic system may be jeopardized by de-dollarization efforts by both countries in response to US sanctions and economic pressure. American analysts and policymakers are also concerned about these actions because they believe an alliance between them would be detrimental to US security and foreign policy interests. (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2021)

Literature Review

A review of the selected literature reveals a range of viewpoints on the concept of great power competition between the United States, China, and Russia. The strategic partnership between China and Russia has grown significantly since 2014, with the United States' offshore balancing strategy playing a key role. Cooperation between the two countries was made possible by NATO's expansion towards Russia and China's free and open Indo-Pacific agenda. They see the US's primacy in international order as being in contradiction to their national interests. (Storey, 2021:3). Furthermore, Xi's fondness for Russian President Vladimir Putin resulted in more profound government cooperation. (Yakhshilikhov, 2023) Their alliance is viewed not just as mutually beneficial but also critical for global order, (Fu 2016) as many Western scholars believe China and Russia pose a direct challenge to Western interests and values, as well as the post-Cold War, rule-based international system. (White House 2017, 41; Dibb 2019). Realist thinkers believe that the world is approaching a new binarism: on one side, the West and its allies and partners, and on the other, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, (Wright 2018) described by some as an "axis of authoritarians" (Ellings et al. 2018) and a "quasi-alliance." (Kashin 2019; Karaganov 2018).

A Sino-Russian partnership is primarily a pragmatic, interest-based relationship that takes a rationalist approach to bilateral cooperation. Though they have different perspectives, ambitions, and priorities, they believe that having a dominant America is undesirable for both of them. The resumption of Sino-Russian collaboration after a 30-year pause is one of the major success stories of international relations. The two sides have experienced a remarkable journey, especially in light of the animosity and mistrust that existed between them during the Cold War. (Lo, 2020) The authors contend that despite emotional attachment and ideological baggage, their partnership is built on self-interest, with both parties knowing what they want, and they enjoy excellent economic, trade, and bilateral relations today. International relations now primarily revolve around the concept of global politics, an idea that has an alignment with political realism. Every nation today strives to survive for its national interests in this international system that is devoid of a 'Leviathan' and has a vacuum of authority and every state tends to maximize its power relative to other states for self-defense.

The movement of global power from the Atlantic to Asia, driven by China's growing influence in security, development, and civilization projects and the Sino-Russian partnership, has given rise to new dynamics in geopolitics. In Cold War geopolitics, the Nixon-Kissinger overture to China aimed to divide the region and maintain a stable balance of power in the world. The growing strategic alliance between China and Russia, which is controlling Eurasia for a shared goal, is currently a potent tool in international affairs. China was able to set its own rules by implementing the Beijing Consensus through the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road, the BRICS Bank of Brazil, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRICS countries are the primary participants in the 'Southern World Order' (SWO), which established international institutions as alternatives to the Liberal International Order. These countries, however, did not leave the LIO and maintained close economic ties with the West. This dual-track strategy may be correlated with a variety of domestic sociocultural factors and challenges, encompassing ideological and material connections to the West. (Dahal, 2024) The Literature review highlights that the assistance of these institutions has enabled China to overtake the US in the race for global leadership and governance. The new geopolitics shifts from a state-centric approach to alliance formation, interdependence, globalization, de-dollarization, and the emergence of new security, political, and economic groups help rising China and the resurging Russian power to have pushed global politics to Eurasia, the world's political heartland. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which was driven by Ukraine's desire to join NATO and the EU, raises the possibility of a new Cold War, in which there is an involvement of both state and non-state actors, including the Wagner group from the Russian side and NATO troops who fought for Ukraine against Russia. (Dahal, 2024)

The Literature Review also sheds light on the antagonism between a Western and a non-Western world, such as the Southern world, which has been exacerbated and revitalized by the Ukrainian war, which gave rise to the Southern world order by forcing countries to take sides and move toward forming a new world order in contrast to the Western-dominated post-World War II world order, the Liberal International Order (LIO). (*The Economist* et al., 2022) Although the US-led

Western world aspires to isolate Russia, the country is not a globally isolated pariah state. The majority of nations in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East discounted Western sanctions against Russia and their support for Ukraine. Many of these countries refrained from condemning Russian aggression in the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), maintained tight economic, political, and (partially) military ties with Russia, and distanced themselves from Western ideas of world order. (*The Economist*, 2023). Together, the BRICS nations account for 42% of the world's population and 25% of the global economy. (UNCTAD,2023). Likewise, the BRICS represent more than 18% of global exports and 17% of global imports. (World Bank,2023) The PRC (People's Republic of China) has been leading the establishment of its international order and is by far the most significant member of the BRICS group. Russia, on the other hand, played a key role in the BRICS formation as a political group in the 2000s. (Caffarena, et al., 2017). Finally, the Western world cannot ignore the relevance of BRICS countries or underestimate their power.

Scholars claim that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reinforced the boundaries of international rivalry and different views of world order, while the Political South has evolved its own institutions and policy positions over decades. The Political South places greater emphasis on national autonomy, sovereignty, non-intervention in domestic affairs, and state-permeated economies than does the Political West, which emphasizes democracy, market economy, universal human rights, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts as guiding principles of the international order. Most scholars believe that international politics will continue to be shaped by collaboration and conflict between opposing ideas of world order. The long-term economic success of the two political and economic camps, as well as the course of the conflict in Ukraine, will determine how appealing and resilient each world system is in this global context. Academics assert that the West's backing for Ukraine demonstrates its ability to uphold principles of international order such as democracy, territorial integrity, and peaceful conflict resolution. (Schirm, 2023)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had various effects, but perhaps the most significant one is that it represents the turning point in history where geopolitical and ideological blocs once again

dominate the world. More specifically, toward the three worlds—global west, global east, and global south. The United States and Europe lead the first, followed by China and Russia in the second, and an unspecified coalition of developing non-Western powers, including Brazil, India, and others, leads the third. (*Financial Times*,2022) Grand narratives about the issues surrounding the Ukraine crisis, its relationship to broader issues, and the future of the global order in the twenty-first century are presented by each "world." This evolving system of Three Worlds is not just a reflection of changes in the polarity and power structures of the world; indeed, it is predicated on the collapse of American unipolarity to some extent and the emergence of China as a prospective rival competitor. A measure of material power capabilities, including military, technical, demographic, and economic ones, is called polarity. In this sense, China is rapidly occupying a pole position, resulting in what some observers perceive as a developing bipolar system similar to the Cold War. (Addison-Wesley, 1979).

However, the global south is not a pole in the realist sense, and this term downplays its significance; therefore, diplomacy—that is, speeches, summit meetings, and UN conferences where leaders present their worldviews—defines the Three Worlds in significant manners. The conflict between these three groups may determine global order, but no one will 'win' this conflict. This is because each of these groups carries with it firmly-held political ideals and projects that are ingrained in their respective developmental contexts and global positions and are unlikely to fade away shortly. In other words, it is difficult to see another "global liberal movement" like the one that occurred in the 1990s, when nations and civilizations came to a consensus on universal definitions of human rights or a shared vision of modernity. A certain irreducible political and intellectual plurality will persist for a long time. The struggle of the Three Worlds may be a creative one, as the global West and East will be motivated to compete for the support and cooperation of the global South. They can accomplish this by promoting inclusive governance, development aid, clean energy, peacemaking leadership, and multilateral rules. This competition may lead to the promotion of these kinds of policies and political philosophies. Furthermore, the return to the Three Worlds is now based on some profound ideas of world order. The United Nations' ideals of sovereign equality, self-

determination, sustainable development, and social justice are among them, as are the Westphalian norms of territorial sovereignty and non-intervention. The global West might never again be the world's dominant geopolitical and ideological force. However, it maintains its dominant position in the prolonged dispute over the parameters of global governance. This is partially due to its advantages in technology and military prowess, as well as its wealth and power, and partly because democracies continue to have benefits in politics. (Ikenberry, 2020)

Which coalition is China's nightmare, and which is America's? For the US, this would mean that the global west would be relegated to the periphery and would become weaker and smaller than the global east and global south. For China, an alliance between the West and the global South would be a nightmare. The worldwide political structure of the Three Worlds will likely persist for some time to come. However, the incentives and patterns of cooperation and conflict that this Three Worlds system produces have the potential to mold and modify the institutions and laws of international law. Building an open, rules-based, and progressive global system is advantageous for the United States and its Western allies. The historical curve has been turned in a way that is generally viewed as advantageous by the postwar system of multilateral institutions and alliances.

The world has improved under the Western-led system when it comes to social justice, economic progress, and physical security. liberal international order—though not solely—led by liberal democracies to address world issues. Throughout history, this system has struggled to address the fundamental issues of modernity, including global capitalism, decolonization, empire, war, and great power politics. Building an open, rules-based, and progressive global system is advantageous for the United States and its Western allies. The historical curve has been turned in a way that is generally viewed as advantageous by the postwar system of multilateral institutions and alliances. The world has improved under the Western-led system when it comes to social justice, economic progress, and physical security. liberal international order—though not solely—led by liberal democracies to address world issues. Throughout history, this system has struggled to address the fundamental issues of modernity, including global capitalism,

decolonization, empire, war, and great power politics. It has experienced successes and setbacks, but because it is focused on finding solutions and preserving universal values like openness, the rule of law, and the liberty and consent of the governed, it has persevered for openness to remain the focal point of world order. The global West has found it still has a part to play in a performance whose script hasn't been ended yet, even in a world where these values are coming under more and more criticism. (John, 2024)

Literature Gap

The focus of many academics and scholars in the US and the West is mostly on analyzing the strategic cooperation and closeness between China and Russia; however, there is a lack of research on the behaviors and elements the leaders of the US and the West have, that further strengthen this partnership. How this closeness and so-called "No limits" friendship are changing the current global world order and having a very hostile effect on it is another important factor that Western studies disregard. By examining the various facets of developing close relationship between two of the most intense rivalries of the Cold War, this research paper has attempted to close this gap.

The study's focus was that although several sanctions have been placed on Russian entities and the movement of products by the US, the EU and numerous other western allies to cut off Putin's administration's military budget and to isolate it, despite these measures, Russia's GDP exceeded in 2023, expanding by 3.6%. Official Chinese trade records also show that Russia has surpassed Saudi Arabia to become China's primary oil supplier; since the Ukraine conflict. (Acosta Noya & McCarthy, 2024). The current study also discussed how the failed western policy towards Ukraine brings the both nations together. In 2014 when Russia seized Crimea, a peninsula it believed would be home to a naval base, Russian leaders have made it plain that they would not watch as its strategically significant neighbor became a Western stronghold and have been vehemently opposed the enlargement of NATO.

Although Washington may not agree with Moscow's stance, however, it should recognize the reasoning behind it. This is Geopolitics 101; imagine if China formed a formidable military alliance and attempted to include Mexico and Canada in it, just think of the

fury that would ensue. Imagine the outcry in Washington if China attempted to include Canada and Mexico in an oppressive military alliance that it had formed. Along with this; article additionally tried to discuss the loopholes in western led LIO which by 2019, were facing significant issues because the tectonic plates that support it are shifting, there isn't much that can be done to save or repair it. That order bore the seeds of its own destruction, meaning it was bound to collapse from the start.

Theoretical Framework: The Offensive Realistic Approach

The framework provided by the Offensive Realist theory is suitable for analyzing the competition among the great powers. Realism is a general term for a variety of opposing ideas, including classical realism, neoclassical realism, defensive realism, offensive realism, and structural realism (neorealism). (Yuan Kang Wang, 2004). Mearsheimer's theory attempts to explain the reason for the high level of resistance in the relationship between the major powers in the contemporary state system. Mearsheimer contends that comprehending the current situation requires a knowledge of the organization of international politics. Mearsheimer specifically depends on five fundamental presumptions that define the essential characteristics of international politics and are, more or less, held in common by the majority of modern realists. (Toft, 2005). It appears that power is central to Mearsheimer's ideas and leads him to narrowly concentrate on the extension of territory. Moreover, he contends that the necessity of land troops for area control makes land power indispensable. Therefore, he acknowledges that gaining territory would probably not be the main strategy for maximizing power in the coming decades, as he believes China, which is the US's most likely rival, will try to dominate Asia in more subdued ways. (Brzezinski and Mearsheimer 2005) According to Mearsheimer, coalitions are appealing because there is shared responsibility for dealing with an enemy. (Toft, 2005)

With the end of the Cold War, China-Russia relations have steadily improved, and, they have been formally recognized as "comprehensive strategic partners having equality, mutual trust, mutual support, common prosperity, and long-lasting friendship." (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Slovenia 2016) China has never publicly

reproached Russia or adopted a firmly anti-Russian posture about Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine, which contrasts significantly with the responses of European and American officials. Similarly, Russia's response to the South China Sea (SCS) dispute, a matter of great significance for Beijing, is likewise uncertain. (Korolev & Vladimir Portyakov, 2018)

As Mearsheimer said, the US and China are engaged in a power struggle rather than an ideological confrontation. Despite being communist nations and liberal democracy, China and the US got along just fine from 1990 until about 2017. Around that time, something altered, and it had nothing to do with ideology; but the balance of power shifted, with China and the US becoming fierce competitors as a result of China's emergence as a peer challenger and its desire to rule Asia in the same manner that the US rules the Western Hemisphere. (CHAU & WANG, 2023)

The Western elites who created the liberal international order and have reaped numerous benefits from it are appalled by its collapse. This is what is happening with China's growth, which has ended the unipolar era together with the return of Russian power. The global world order that governs the future multipolar world will be centered on realism and will be vital in regulating global economic affairs, addressing arms control, and dealing with worldwide common issues such as climate change. (Mearsheimer, 2019)

Offensive Realism contends that states want to maximize their power in part to enhance their interests. China and Russia both understand that working together is in their best interests as, just as China depends on Russian military and logistical support, Russia depends on China for its economic support, especially amid Western sanctions after it invaded Ukraine. The balance of power is what matters most, and nations like the US and China understand that maintaining as much power as they can is critical to their existence. As a result, they attempt to maximize their power by making alliances while logically considering the risks and rewards of aggressive behavior. If we apply offensive realism to the current discourse of the XI regarding Russia during their joint summit that occurred a few days ago, we can see how China is balancing power in Asia by allying with Russia. The Chinese president characterized this partnership as "a stabilizing force in the face of rising hegemony, no doubt referring to

the US". Furthermore, both agree that they felt that the G20 and the UN should be "depoliticized" and that they both "would work together to improve security in the Asia-Pacific." (Hale, 2024)

If we examine it using alliance theory and foreign policy theory, which provide fresh perspectives on the significance of geography and power in global politics, we conclude that

both states rely on each other to protect their national interests in geopolitics and to contain the same enemy. China understands that if it wants to create a counterbalance and resist Western hegemony and interference in Asia, it needs Russia. Russia comprehends that to resist US economic pressure and deal with the rest of the Western powers, it needs a strong force like China. Offensive Realism helps in the explanation of how state interests, military power, alliances, and other elements affect international relations. A realistic viewpoint can help one comprehend the motivations of the different actors more clearly. Ultimately, a realistic, pragmatic viewpoint can help analysts and decision-makers to make better choices. Long-term sustainable and effective solutions may be reached by taking into account the realities of power dynamics and the goals of the various players.

Conclusion

Is regionalism and multipolarity replacing unipolarity in the world? Will the period known as the "Washington consensus," which arose following World War II, reach an end? The system that has controlled the world economy since the Second World War has been weakened for many years; It is almost collapsing now. China claimed at a recent summit between Russia and China that it had sold at least \$53.3 billion worth of US bonds in a bid to de-dollarize the country, which has been used for decades as a political weapon and to arbitrarily seize assets under pressure from US administrations. Both state that the global south is expanding and that the trend toward global multipolarity is accelerating. They also note that nations that support hegemony and power politics are trying to undermine the international system. The West, particularly the US, is losing its influence on China, as evidenced by the fact that last month when the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, visited China, he emphasized that Chinese authorities should stop providing aid to Russia; but, despite this, Chinese help to Russia is still underway. It undoubtedly demonstrates that the

status quo American-led order is disintegrating, and raising questions that need to be addressed, such as whether this is due to the USA's unethical behavior of interfering in internal affairs under the pretense of preserving human rights and democracy.

As this paper has already explained, China and Russia condemned the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, and later in 2003 the US invasion of Iraq was condemned by both countries, and it was those particular events that brought the two authoritarian states together. However, the two nations have also strengthened their military ties, conducting joint war exercises over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea and setting up ground force training on each other's soil. Both perceive US action in the Asia Pacific as unneeded and inappropriate; these are the issues that will undoubtedly challenge the liberal international order. Russia goes even further and attacks the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) military alliance, which Beijing views as an attempt to exert influence over China in the region. (Hale, 2024). Currently, not only are China and Russia a threat to Washington and its allies in the West, but Western leaders are also concerned about Moscow and Beijing's alignment with Iran as the three are working more closely together. Since Iran and Russia are regaining their strength in the region, they could pose a serious threat to the US. The US officials especially its military leadership acknowledge that all three nations, especially China and Russia, are focusing on their militaries and are a threat to US interests, tensions with all three have been rising in recent times and could lead to facing two major nuclear powers. (Britzky, 2023). Similarly, when the Houthis, an Iranian-backed rebel group, began targeting Western ships in the Red Sea, they assured Chinese and Russian vessels wouldn't be targeted by them because China purchases the majority of Iran's oil exports. (Dagher & Hatem, 2024)

Furthermore, regarding a China-Russia "unholy alliance", it remains to be seen how long this will last; and whether it will be successful in challenging US and Western hegemony in the geopolitical sphere, Is it strong enough to overthrow the current Liberal international order and create a new one with, of course, "Chinese characteristics"? It will also be worth noting that is world-war 2 led Washington consensus soon being replaced by Beijing consensus? In a nutshell, it will be intriguing to see

how the US manages this alliance and what actions it takes to restrain both countries.

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