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## THE IMPACT OF THE US-CHINA-RUSSIA RIVALRY ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AT THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

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### **Abstract**

*In the altering global political landscape, paradigm shifts in power balance always have repercussions on the established international order. In this regard, it has been witnessed in recent years that the US-China-Russia rivalry has significant implications for the architecture of international security at both global and regional levels. On one hand, China appears to have expressed discomfort with the US-centric global security framework and aspires to lead the reform of global security governance towards a new paradigm of 'partnership and mutually beneficial outcomes'. While China has supported Russia's interpretation of the conflict in Ukraine and views Russia as a potential ally in its narratives, there are inconsistencies in its stance towards Russia. This suggests that China's foreign and security policy, including the prospect of cooperation and confrontation, is still in the making. In contrast, the United States views China and Russia's support for oppressive regimes as counterproductive, while China and Russia view the United States' democracy and human rights promotion and military intervention in certain regions as problematic. However, there is potential for cooperation between the US and China in areas such as peacekeeping, promoting global stability, and reducing the risk of inadvertent escalation. Consequently, the evolving relationship between these three powers and their impact on the global security landscape highlight the need for a deeper understanding of their respective interests and the potential for cooperation or conflict in various regions. Thus, keeping these notions into consideration, this paper attempts to assess the global chessboard where these major powers engage in a multifarious struggle for dominance. For this, the research endeavours to shed light on the evolving nature of global security structures as well as how this tripartite power play influences security landscapes across the world. The paper seeks to offer a panoramic view of the contemporary international order, which is shaped and reshaped by the interplay of forces between the U.S., China, and Russia.*



**Keywords:** US-China-Russia rivalry, International security, Global security framework, International order, Geopolitics.

### **Introduction**

The U.S. National Security Strategy and the U.S. National Defence Strategy of 2017 and 2018, respectively, introduced a notable change in U.S. strategic priorities. Rather than the focus on low-intensity conflicts against nonstate actors prevalent since 2001, there has been a deliberate shift towards prioritizing strategic competition with China and Russia. While this competition is intended to have global implications, much of the emphasis has been placed on Europe and Asia (Shifrinson, 2018). Over the past decade, it has been witnessed that Russia has experienced a continual downturn especially in the geopolitical and economic arena, whereas the United States has consistently maintained its position, and China has witnessed umpteen growth across various domains, which as undeniably expanded its global reach. However, some analysts anticipate potential tensions emerging between Russia and China in the near future, although the probability of significant conflict remains relatively low. In recent years, tensions between the United States and China have intensified, deviating from earlier expectations of harmonious relations based on the dynamics of the balance of power theory (Sutter, 2018). Despite China's lag in projecting offensive military capabilities, technological innovation, and sustained economic strength compared to the United States, the latter possesses the capability to take distinct actions compared to other major global economic powers. This capacity underscores the enduring dominance of U.S. influence on a global scale.

Thus, bearing these notions in mind, this paper attempts to discuss the changes in the geopolitical-cum-strategic relations between the US, China and Russia. The gist of the discussion revolves around US's security stance amid Russia-China cooperation on international security and the extent to which this tripartite relationship affects the international security both at the regional and global levels. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the alliance between Russia and China has expanded and strengthened, especially over the past decade. Prominent U.S. analysts widely concur that the growing collaboration between China and Russia is increasingly detrimental to U.S. interests (Mazarr et al., 2018). Therefore, previous assessments regarding the relationship being merely a convenient alliance with minimal implications for the United States are no longer valid.

Cooperation between Russia and China is influenced by various factors, including both catalysts and impediments. Presently, the motivating factors outweigh the constraints that could hinder close collaboration. While traditional U.S. strategies aimed at deterring such coordination may prove ineffective, it is important not to regard the United States as a constant in these dynamics. Instead, U.S. policy and actions represent significant variables that can influence the Russia-China relationship. Enhancing the United States' economic, diplomatic, and military capabilities is imperative for shifting the prevailing global power dynamics in favour of the U.S. position (Bharti, 2022). Therefore, considering these perspectives, the paper seeks to examine the expanding alliance between Russia and China since the Cold War by stressing on its growing

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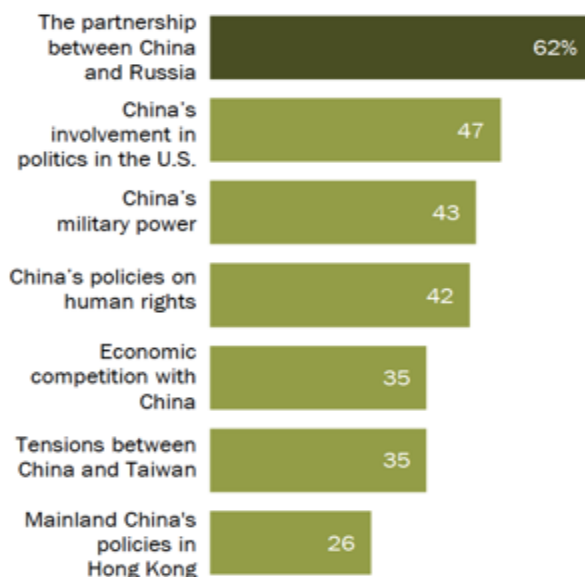
significance, particularly over the past decade. Furthermore, it explores how this collaboration is perceived by prominent U.S. analysts as increasingly detrimental to U.S. interests by downplaying its significance in the global geopolitics.

### Deciphering the Driving Forces of the Sino-Russia Relationship

The key drivers behind the partnership between Russia and China emerge from their shared geopolitical and security concerns. Both nations aspire to counterbalance what they perceive as the dominant influence of the United States, aiming for greater regional dominance and seeing U.S. actions as encroachments on their strategic interests. Specific targets of concern include U.S. missile defense systems, military surveillance activities near Russian and Chinese borders, and capabilities for long-range strikes. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping hold negative views regarding U.S. intentions and those of its allies, which reinforces their cooperation against perceived external threats (Wenzhao & Shengwei, 2020). This shared perspective shapes their outlook on global affairs and the international order. Their security collaboration encompasses activities such as arms sales, defence dialogues, and joint military exercises, all designed to exert influence on other countries and alter the balance of power to the detriment of the United States.

#### Majority of Americans say relationship between China and Russia poses a very serious problem

% who say \_\_\_ is a *very serious* problem for the U.S.



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 21-27, 2022. Q17a-g. "China's Partnership With Russia Seen as Serious Problem for the U.S."

Source: Pew Research Centre



Another factor driving the Sino-Russian partnership is ideology. Both the Moscow and Beijing governments feel vulnerable and threatened by Washington's promotion of human rights and democracy, leading them to seek closer cooperation in response. They both advocate for a doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, a principle they believe has been undermined by past U.S. interventions in foreign nations. For instance, Russia and China have criticized or opposed Western involvement in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya, arguing that foreign intervention to address domestic human rights abuses constitutes a violation of sovereignty (Kusuma et al., 2021). Additionally, energy considerations have played a significant role in fostering collaboration between Russia and China. China aims to diversify its energy imports beyond the Middle East, while Russia seeks ways to mitigate Western sanctions imposed on the sale of its abundant oil and gas resources. This has led to developments in energy cooperation, including a landmark 2014 agreement between Russia's Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation, establishing a 30-year deal to utilize the Power of Siberia pipeline for exporting Russian gas to China (Mearsheimer, 2021).

### **Understanding the Role of US Policy vis-à-vis Sino-Russia Cordiality**

As the threat to U.S. interests from the growing partnership between Russia and China intensifies, the historical impact of past U.S. policies on this cooperation has been minimal. Despite this, current policies have not succeeded in dampening key indicators such as weapon sales, energy-related trade and investment, and joint efforts in international forums like the United Nations against Western initiatives. However, this does not imply that the United States is fated to remain a passive observer as the Russia-China partnership strengthens. There are promising avenues for increasing U.S. influence by exploiting differences between the two countries, such as China's ascendance amidst Russia's demographic and economic challenges, and Russia's estrangement from the U.S.-led international order contrasted with China's continued reliance on it (Kim, 2019).

Moreover, the ambitions of Russia and China for dominance in their respective spheres could lead regional governments to seek closer collaboration with the United States as a strategic counterbalance. Potential actions by the Trump administration to ease tensions with Moscow has undeniably raised concerns in Beijing that Russia might align its policies more closely with the United States, though it did not significantly affect Chinese interests. The strategies adopted by the United States must be pragmatic and effectively implemented by stressing on long-term policy choices that necessitate sustained efforts across various government agencies (Zhao, 2019). These options range from reinforcing U.S. international dominance to accommodating either Russia or China, or a combination thereof. Intermediate strategies may involve a blend of bolstering U.S. capabilities while also accommodating aspects of Russian and/or Chinese interests.

The recent situation in the Ukraine-Russia conflict has been complex, with Russia asserting its interests in regions with significant Russian-speaking populations and Ukraine seeking to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Biden administration has shown strong support for Ukraine, condemning Russia's actions and providing military aid to bolster Ukraine's

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defences. President Biden has emphasized the importance of upholding international norms and agreements, particularly regarding Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The administration has also sought to coordinate closely with European allies to present a united front against Russian aggression in the region (Ambrosio et al., 2020). In addition to the ongoing tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the involvement of China adds another layer of complexity to the geopolitical landscape. China has strategic interests in the region, particularly regarding economic partnerships and energy resources.

While China has historically maintained a neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, it has also sought to expand its influence globally, including in Eastern Europe. The Biden administration's approach to the crisis likely involves considering China's role and potential impact on the situation. This may include diplomatic efforts to engage with China and encourage it to play a constructive role in promoting stability and respecting Ukraine's sovereignty. Besides, the administration may be wary of any potential collaboration or alignment between Russia and China that could further escalate tensions in the region (Lo, 2020). In nitty-gritty, the U.S. policy decisions could involve leveraging advantages by siding with or against Russia, China, or both. Ultimately, the path chosen by Washington will likely have the most significant impact on how Sino-Russian relations influence the United States.

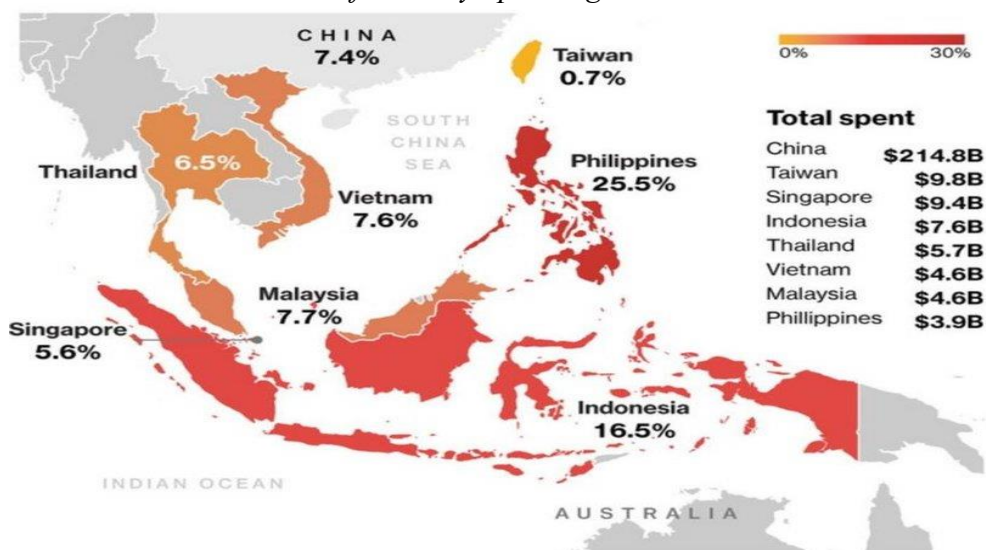
### **The Impact of Trilateral Relations on Southeast Asian Security**

The trilateral dynamics among the United States, Russia, and China have significant implications for regional security that prompt adjustments in strategic approaches by major powers and their allies. Political scholars are of the view that predicting the trajectory of U.S.-Russia-China relations, particularly bilateral interactions among these three actors, is challengeable owing to the multifarious nature of opportunities and challenges they present to global and regional dynamics. In order to overhaul intertwined dynamics, nations must endeavour to leverage opportunities and mitigate challenges to forge new positions and capabilities conducive to development (Sutter, 2018). Situated at the heart of the Asia-Pacific, Southeast Asia serves as a crucial hub for economic and business engagements, with Vietnam emerging as a focal point. Consequently, as major powers recalibrate their strategies, they accord strategic significance to the Asia-Pacific, especially Southeast Asia. This presents an opportune moment for member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), particularly Vietnam, to strategically select partners for cooperation aligned with their national interests (Goldstein & Kozyrev, 2020).

Accordingly, Vietnam has expanded its engagements with major powers, pursued greater international integration, and capitalized on external support to advance socio-economic development objectives while safeguarding its national interest, independence, sovereignty, and security. Regarding the East Sea, the United States advocates for freedom of navigation and overflight, upholds a rules-based order, and monitors China's activities with vigilance. Concurrently, other regional actors such as Russia, Japan, and India may increase their involvement by providing assistance, funding, and capacity-building support to parties involved in sovereignty disputes over seas and islands. Meanwhile, China continues to enhance its security and military capabilities in the East Sea through the militarization of artificial islands while

actively engaging and courting concerned countries, thereby complicating regional security dynamics (Shiffrinson, 2018). Furthermore, the region contends with the rise of populism, political instability in Europe, tensions stemming from the Taiwan and Hong Kong issues, and the U.S.-China trade dispute.

*The Rise of Military Spending in Southeast Asia*



Source: Zero Hedge (2020)

These manifold and unceasing challenges have wide-ranging implications for regional states, necessitating prompt strategic responses to protect national interests amidst evolving U.S.-Russia-China relations. In the case of Vietnam, its geostrategic positioning, status as a dynamically growing nation, and its active role within ASEAN and the international community provide substantial opportunities to pursue a foreign policy characterized by independence, self-reliance, multilateralism, diversification, and international integration. Vietnam aims to harness its overall national power in conjunction with epochal forces to advance industrialization, modernization, and homeland defence (Kim, 2019). However, Vietnam must remain vigilant to avoid entanglement in major power competition and be prepared for potential power dynamics between major actors. The geopolitical relationship among the tripartite United States, Russia, and China exerts direct influences on global and regional security, peace, and stability, amplifying the push-and-pull dynamics experienced by Vietnam and other regional actors. Consequently, countries with longstanding ties to Russia, China, or the United States encounter challenges in selecting partners for cooperation, compelling them to make judicious decisions aligned with their national interests (Wu, 2020).

**Exploring Strategic Dynamics in the Middle East**

Renowned for its strategic location and rich resources, the Middle East region has historically been a playground of competition among major global powers including the US.,



China and Russia. Dating back to the 19th century, the region witnessed the "Great Game," a rivalry between the British and Russian Empires over crucial commercial trade routes, many of which traversed the Middle East. This competition gained new significance post-World War I, with increased emphasis on military transit, overflight permissions, and access to bases. The discovery of oil in the region further intensified this competition, attracting the involvement of American companies supported by the U.S. government. World War II underscored the importance of securing both commercial and military access to the region, leading to heightened competition between the Soviet Union and the United States in the post-war era (Lake, 2018). Throughout the Cold War, both superpowers exerted economic, military, and political influence, including significant military presence, to extend their spheres of influence in the Middle East while limiting each other's access and influence.

It has long been recognized that for a country to be considered a great power, it must actively engage and wield influence in the Middle East. In the contemporary context, indications suggest that elements of strategic competition, as outlined in the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS), are unfolding in the region. Both China and Russia have bolstered their economic ties and diplomatic engagements with Middle Eastern countries. Moscow, in particular, has positioned itself as an alternative arms supplier and potential security partner amid regional dissatisfaction with the depth of U.S. commitments (Goh, 2019). China, through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has prioritized economic partnerships, particularly in infrastructure and communication technology, thereby gaining a degree of political influence, especially with less affluent states, and ensuring continued access to oil—a vital interest for Beijing in the region. Meanwhile, Russia has cultivated significant political influence and established itself as a key external player, partly through its intervention in Syria.

However, the Middle East serves as a convergence point for all three powers—the United States, China, and Russia—rendering this competition more than just a quest for influence. It is also about undermining the advantages of rival powers. Consequently, many Chinese and Russian shenanigans have undercut U.S. policy objectives in the region. China's extensive investments in port infrastructure across the region and the sale of commercial technologies, such as Huawei's 5G infrastructure, to countries hosting U.S. bases, pose intelligence and security risks to U.S. military personnel (Wu, 2020). Similarly, Russia's intervention in Syria to bolster the regime of President Bashar al-Assad has challenged U.S. efforts to remove Assad from power and complicated the U.S.-led Coalition's fight against ISIS in Syria. Through these actions and others, China and Russia are actively contesting U.S. interests and seeking to gain advantages in the Middle East, thereby escalating strategic competition in the region.

### **Methodology and Data**

With the application of secondary qualitative research method in this paper, numerous relevant and recent studies on US-China-Russia Tripartite relationship were incorporated to assess the balance of power and international security dynamics in terms of their regional and global rivalry. As a result, key data were compiled, analysed and subsequently articulated as under:

Following the imposition of sanctions by Western nations, Russia has drawn closer to



Beijing. These sanctions stem from Russia's annexation of Crimea. China's support for Russia aims to mitigate economic instability in the region. Over time, Russia and China have significantly deepened their relations in the Eurasian sphere. This bond, as observed by scholars, is marked by robust political and economic cooperation, particularly in security matters. Joint military exercises between the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Russian Army, conducted in both countries regardless of location, signify the strong collaboration between them. Russia's foreign and defence policies have been instrumental in bolstering its influence across the Asian region. China's substantial imports of military equipment and technology from Russia underscore its efforts to counter perceived US and Western influences in the Asia-Pacific region.

Both China and Russia maintain a vigilant stance in the Asia Pacific Region, opposing the formation of opposing alliances. Their opposition is particularly directed towards the US and its Indo-Pacific strategy for the region. In maritime affairs, China and Russia have consistently advocated for the construction of an inclusive and open rules-based system in the Asia-Pacific Region. Both nations are attentive to the trilateral security partnership involving the US, Australia, and the United Kingdom (AUKUS), viewing it as a challenge to their own strategic interests. There is a shared understanding between Russia and China that AUKUS represents a counteraction to US-led initiatives in the region, aimed at enhancing security predominance over the two nations (Liff, 2018). Since the epoch of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), China has engaged in arms trade with Russia to address security concerns.

Notably, China's procurement of sophisticated weaponry from Russia, such as the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system, exemplifies this collaboration. In the same vein, Russia's successful sale of fighter jets to China has solidified their longstanding relationship. This relationship, rated highly friendly on a global scale, underscores their aligned strategic goals and positions on global issues. Moreover, cross-border marriages between Russian and Chinese citizens contribute to strengthening Sino-Russian partnerships, particularly within diaspora contexts (Korolev, 2016). In the same vein, the Chinese government's procurement of medium-range helicopters from Russia highlights the depth of their military cooperation. In terms of research and development (R&D), both countries collaborate on designing weapon systems, with China benefitting from technology transfers under joint venture programs. Chinese acceptance of military supplies from Russian sources without restrictions further illustrates the depth of their cooperation. For instance, Russia's acquisition of naval diesel engines from a Chinese company instead of a German defence corporation demonstrates their joint efforts in defence production. Joint defence industries established in China produce fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft systems by addressing mutual defence needs (Wasser et al., 2022).

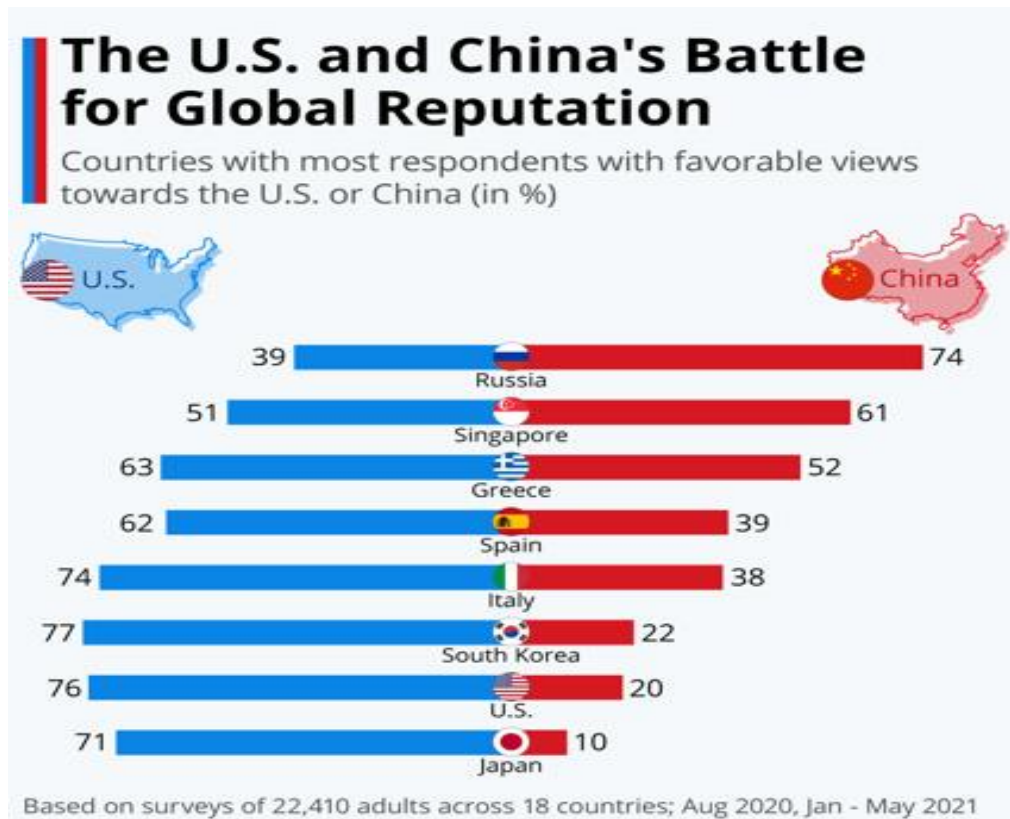
China's efforts seem directed towards reforming rather than replacing the existing world order, as it benefits from the current structure, which aligns with its international interests. China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2000 facilitated its multidimensional development across various sectors. China's emphasis on peaceful economic development, as opposed to military conflicts, is evident in its approach to regional challenges, including those posed by the US and India. Instead of engaging in conflicts, China is accelerating initiatives such as the Maritime Silk Road and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), spearheaded by President Xi Jinping,

aimed at expanding economic ties globally (Bharti, 2022).

### Key Findings

#### China and Russia in Opposition to U.S. Dominance

Russia and China present distinct challenges to U.S. national security. Russia, characterized as a well-armed rogue state, seeks to subvert the international order it cannot hope to dominate. Conversely, China, a peer competitor, aspires to shape an international order it aims to control. While both countries aim to disrupt the status quo, Russia has engaged in aggressive actions such as annexing territories and supporting insurgencies, while China's influence is primarily driven by positive measures like trade, investment, and development assistance. In the military sphere, Russia can be contained through conventional means, but China's increasing military predominance in East Asia poses a more formidable challenge. However, it is the realm of geo-economics that is expected to determine the balance of global influence between the United States and China. China's significant per capita GDP, large population, and rapid economic growth position it as a formidable competitor on the world stage (Beauchamp-Mustafaga et al., 2023). In contrast, Russia's economic prospects are relatively bleak compared to China's, making significant enhancement of its military power unlikely in the long term.



Source: Pew Research, Levada Centre



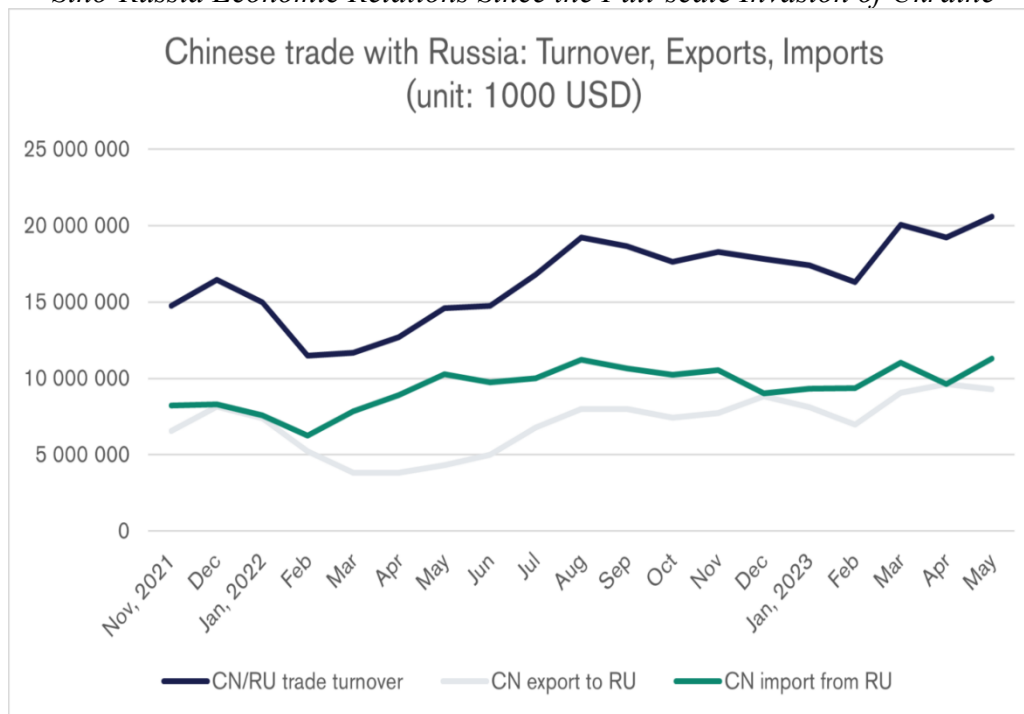
Key findings indicate that China's economic prowess surpasses that of Russia, with its economy ranking second globally, while Russia lags behind at eleventh place. Moreover, China's military expenditure outweighs Russia's, indicating a widening gap between the two countries in terms of military capabilities. Although Russia poses a more immediate military threat to U.S. national security, it remains vulnerable to non-military deterrents such as economic sanctions. Conversely, China's regional military challenge is coupled with global economic dominance, as it is indifferent to the political affiliations of its partners, enhancing its attractiveness as an economic ally (Kusuma et al., 2021). To infer, while Russia presents a more proximate military threat to the United States, China's geo-economic influence surpasses that of Russia, posing a long-term challenge to U.S. global leadership.

### **Sino-Russia Alliance: The Dragonbear**

In recent years, the relationship between China and Russia has significantly deepened, driven by a shared aim to challenge and dismantle what they perceive as the dominant influence of the West, particularly the United States, in global affairs. Despite the apparent alignment of interests, the dynamic between Beijing and Moscow is characterized by nuanced power imbalances and conflicting interests, especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which disrupted the global economic order. Analysts have drawn parallels between this relationship and the tale of 'Goldilocks' (Wenzhao & Shengwei, 2020), suggesting that both countries seek a middle ground where Russia remains neither too strong to challenge China nor too weak, leaving China ideologically isolated against the West.

While China has refrained from overtly criticizing Russia during the conflict and maintains its status as an ally, it has leveraged its privileged relationship with Moscow. Aware of Russia's reliance on powerful allies and trading partners for essential commodity exports like oil and metals, China has strategically capitalized on this dependency to advance its own interests. Political analysts contend that China has a vested interest in preventing Russia from experiencing significant weakening or defeat in the conflict. Such outcomes could not only undermine China's geopolitical standing but also potentially embolden Western democracies, leading to political instability in Russia, a region of strategic importance for China.

*Sino-Russia Economic Relations Since the Full-scale Invasion of Ukraine*



Source: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)

Etienne Soula, a research analyst at the Alliance for Securing Democracy within the German Marshall Fund of the United States, stressed on the inevitable balance China must maintain. China aims to keep Russia sufficiently weakened to prevent it from posing a threat while also ensuring that Russia remains capable of challenging their common rivals, primarily Western democracies led by the United States. Furthermore, it has been stated that China's strategic considerations entail the potential consequences of Russia's collapse, particularly in terms of nuclear proliferation risks (Winkler, 2023). Unlike European nations, China seeks to avoid the perception that Western democracies have triumphed over a major autocratic power, which could undermine China's narrative of its rise to global governance centrality. In essence, any perceived defeat of Russia by Western powers, even indirectly, would contradict China's narrative of inevitable Western decline and its own ascendancy. Such a scenario would challenge the story China projects about the future trajectory of global governance, potentially undermining its geopolitical objectives.

**Efforts to Reduce Reliance on Dollar**

In addition, it has also been assessed that the imposition of sanctions on Russia in response to its incursion into Ukraine, coupled with Washington's increasingly confrontational stance



toward China, has catalysed a convergence of interests between Russia and China, prompting intensified efforts to reduce reliance on the dollar. Both countries have embarked on measures to diversify their reserve holdings away from the dollar, with their central banks allocating a smaller proportion of reserves to dollar-denominated assets. Moreover, the predominant mode of trade between them now involves settlement in yuan, reflecting a strategic pivot away from traditional reliance on the dollar-dominated international financial system. As highlighted by Putin, concerted efforts are underway to encourage other nations to adopt similar strategies. The Biden administration has adeptly prosecuted the economic campaign against Russia by rallying a broad coalition of support for Ukraine, comprising virtually all major advanced economies (Goldsetin & Kozyrev, 2020). This concerted international effort has posed challenges for Russia's attempts to seek refuge in alternative stable currencies, such as the euro, pound sterling, or Canadian dollar, as these currencies are also being bolstered by allied nations in their responses to Russian aggression.

### **Indo-Pacific Conundrum**

Furthermore, on military grounds, the burgeoning military collaboration between Russia and China poses an indirect challenge to the strategic interests of the United States in both the Asian and European theatres. The convergence of military capabilities and interests between Moscow and Beijing presents a daunting prospect for U.S. policymakers, potentially leading to the unsettling reality of confronting simultaneous threats on two fronts. This emerging scenario portends a significant shift in the global geopolitical landscape, with implications for the established strategic doctrine of the United States (Ambrosio et al., 2020). The escalating tensions and potential conflicts in Eastern Europe, driven by the combined military activities of Russia and China, risk undermining the effectiveness of the U.S. strategic reorientation toward the Asia-Pacific region, commonly referred to as the 'pivot to Asia'.

The involvement of both Moscow and Beijing in Eastern Europe introduces a destabilizing element that challenges the United States' capacity to effectively address security concerns in both regions simultaneously. Retired General Ben Hodges, reflecting on the strategic challenges posed by the evolving military dynamics, has underscored the limitations of U.S. capabilities in managing the threats emanating from Europe and the Pacific. Hodges highlights the operational constraints faced by the United States in adequately responding to the perceived Chinese threat while concurrently addressing security imperatives in Europe (Lo, 2020). Russia and China boast formidable military capabilities, underpinned by enduring strength derived in part from the expansive geographical reach spanning the Eurasian region and beyond. The resurgence of Russia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union is driven by its economic, demographic, and geopolitical realignments, fostering closer ties with nations such as China and India, as well as other like-minded states. This shared agenda extends to the concerted efforts of both countries to amplify their military presence and influence across strategic domains, particularly in regions such as the Indian Ocean and the Asia Pacific.



## **The Ukrainian Question**

With regard to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Russian economy has faced notable challenges, juxtaposed against the relative stability of China and the United States. Despite economic headwinds, Russia has found support from countries like India, which have opted to procure Russian gas and oil during this period of turmoil. Additionally, indirect backing from China has bolstered Russia's position amidst geopolitical tensions. The United States and China's engagement in the crisis between Russia and Ukraine highlights the complex relationship of global power dynamics (Winkler, 2023). While the United States provides military assistance to Ukraine, China's support for Russia, albeit indirect, further complicates the geopolitical landscape. Russian leadership, led by President Putin, seeks to reclaim Russia's status as a major player in international politics, aspiring to regain its former stature as a great power.

However, the evolving geopolitical landscape suggests that Russia may face inherent challenges in fully restoring its historical position on the global stage. Concurrently, China's trajectory appears to diverge from that of Russia, with President Xi Jinping articulating a vision of China as an influential global actor poised to ascend to the status of a world superpower (Kusuma et al., 2021). This assertion reflects China's ambitious pursuit of geopolitical primacy and underscores the shifting dynamics of global power politics, wherein China emerges as a formidable contender challenging the traditional dominance of the United States.

## **Results and Discussion**

The complicated geopolitical rivalry between the US, China, and Russia is exemplified by their subtle but complex interactions on the international stage. This can be showcased by a combination of cooperation and rivalry and has a considerable impact on regional dynamics and global security. Also, such a geopolitical relationship is no longer of a zero-sum nature, with expanding common grounds for national interests. China takes relatively more complex approach by employing its economic prowess to gradually alter international conventions and become a significant global influence. In contrast, Russia prefers a more forceful shenanigan by resorting to military interventions and territorial grabs like the Ukraine conflict.

Additionally, economic disparity adds another layer of complexity, with China's burgeoning economic power far outstripping Russia's. This positions China as a formidable long-term challenger to US leadership, while Russia finds its economic stability shaken by the Ukraine war, prompting it to seek alternative partners and diversify its trade relationships. Both China and Russia are actively decoupling from the US-dominated financial system, exploring new reserve currencies and settlement mechanisms. This strategic move aims to mitigate US influence and diversify their options. The Ukraine war acts as a trigger for both convergence and complexity within the trilateral relationship. China maintains its alliance with Russia, but strategically leverages it to its own advantage. By supporting Russia, it aims to weaken its Western rivals and prevent their dominance in the region. However, the war also exposes vulnerabilities within the partnership, with Russia's reliance on China for economic support potentially limiting its independent actions.

The trilateral relationship between the US, China, and Russia is a perfect example of a



world in transition, with shifting power dynamics, flexible alliances, and readjusting economic plans. Understanding the consequences and repercussions of this complex cooperation is necessary for overcoming the complexity of the geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century. Only by actively participating in the continuing conversation can one find workable solutions, lower dangers, and advance a more stable and safe international order for all.

### **Conclusion**

Arguably, one of the most formidable challenges in contemporary geopolitics lies in the realm of trust, or rather, the lack thereof. Trust, an essential component in international relations, hinges upon the perceptions and interactions among adversarial nations. However, the current landscape is marked by a growing trust deficit, particularly evident in the strained relations between the United States, China, and Russia. Despite the potential role of international institutions in mitigating this deficit, their efficacy remains limited, exacerbating the challenges of fostering meaningful cooperation. As distrust deepens between the United States and its great power adversaries, the prospect of overcoming this obstacle becomes increasingly daunting. This erosion of trust not only amplifies existing barriers to cooperation but also diminishes the likelihood of future collaborative endeavours.

For the United States, assessing simultaneous engagements with two such formidable adversaries present a paramount geopolitical challenge. One potential strategy entails leveraging cooperation to disrupt the rapport between China and Russia. However, the identification of viable "wedge" issues suitable for such strategic manoeuvring proves elusive upon analysis. Furthermore, proponents of cooperation posit that successful collaboration may engender a virtuous cycle, fostering greater trust and harmony in bilateral relations. While this notion holds promise, tangible evidence of such positive second-order effects remains scarce, with notable instances of cooperation yielding limited spill over effects. Moreover, the pursuit of cooperation entails inherent trade-offs, with potential ramifications for regional dynamics and alliances. In light of these complexities, U.S. decision-makers face the formidable task of assessing the feasibility and implications of cooperation with great power competitors.

Despite narrowing prospects for collaboration on national security issues, strategic cooperation in select domains may still hold value. However, any such attempts must be undertaken with a clear-eyed understanding of the inherent costs and uncertainties. Fundamentally, the interactions between the United States, China, and Russia transcend individual policy issues, reflecting deeper negotiations and power struggles to shape the global order in alignment with respective interests and governance models. While areas of cooperation may exist, they are often juxtaposed with areas of competition. Ultimately, the prospects for peace and stability hinge on the ability of these nations, along with other international actors, to reconcile divergent normative claims and forge a legitimate and sustainable world order.



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