

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
Institute of Political Studies  
Department of Political Science

**Master's Thesis**

**2024**

**Tomáš Rothschein**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Political Studies  
Department of Political Science

**Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine**

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Tomáš Rothschein

Study programme: International Security Studies

Supervisor: Aliaksei Kazharski, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2024

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on

Tomáš Rothschein

## References

ROTHSCHEIN, Tomáš. *Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine*. Praha, 2024. 97 s. Master's thesis (Mgr). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies, Department of Political Science. Supervisor Aliaksei Kazharski, Ph.D.

## Length of the Thesis:

Number of characters (with spaces): 130 720

## Abstract

The main objective of Diploma Thesis: "Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine" is to determine whether and how has the war in Ukraine influenced Sino-Russian relations. To determine this, the paper focuses on a research question: "Why did China not oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite its long-lasting tradition of non-interference policy?". To answer the question, the paper contains a complex analysis of the evolution of the modern Sino-Russian relations, its converging and diverging tendencies, the history and relevance of the Chinese policy of non-interventionism and indicators proving close Sino-Russian cooperation despite the ongoing war effort. The tracked indicators are composed of joint-military exercises, number of official visits, official statements, and perceived patterns of behaviour in the UN Security Council. All of these factors would subsequently be analysed through the prism of Neoclassical realism. The results of the study indicate the partially fading importance of the non-interference policy, which can be outweighed by the realist cost/benefit calculations. Consequently, the said balance of power logic and attempts to maximalise state power were concluded to be the motor behind the post-invasion Sino-Russian rapprochement.

## Abstrakt

Hlavním cílem diplomové práce "Reakce Číny na ruskou invazi na Ukrajinu roku 2022" je zjistit, zda a jak válka na Ukrajině ovlivnila čínsko-ruské vztahy. Z toho důvodu se práce zaměřuje na výzkumnou otázku: "Proč se Čína navzdory své dlouholeté tradici politiky nevměšování nepostavila proti ruské invazi na Ukrajinu?". Pro zodpovězení této otázky článek obsahuje komplexní analýzu vývoje moderních čínsko-ruských vztahů, jejich sbližujících a odstředivých tendencí, historie a významu čínské politiky nevměšování a ukazatelů dokládajících úzkou čínsko-ruskou spolupráci navzdory probíhajícímu válečnému

konfliktu na Ukrajině. Sledované ukazatele se skládají ze společných vojenských cvičení, počtu oficiálních návštěv, oficiálních prohlášení a vnímaných vzorců chování v Radě bezpečnosti OSN. Všechny tyto faktory budou následně analyzovány prizmatem neoklasického realismu. Výsledky studie naznačují částečně slábnoucí význam politiky nevměšování, který může být převážen kalkulacemi nákladů a přínosů. V důsledku toho byl učiněn závěr, že zmíněná logika rovnováhy moci a snaha o maximalizaci státní moci jsou motorem čínsko-ruského sbližování i po ruské invazi.

## **Keywords**

Russia, China, war in Ukraine, Neoclassical realism, balance of power, non-interventionism

## **Klíčová slova**

Rusko, Čína, válka na Ukrajině, Neoklasický realismus, vyvažování moci, politika nevměšování

## **Title**

Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine

## **Název práce**

Reakce Číny na ruskou invazi na Ukrajinu roku 2022

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Aliaksei Kazharski, Ph.D., for his valuable insights and council.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	8
1. Russia and China: Historical rivals, contemporary friends, and future allies? .....	10
1.1 History of Sino-Russian relations.....	11
1.1.1 Imperialist Russia and Early Soviet Era.....	12
1.1.2 Foundation of Communist China and the Sino-Soviet Split .....	13
1.1.3 From Ally to Enemy – The Russo-Chinese border conflict and turning towards the US .....	14
1.1.4 Mutual Rapprochement and positioning in the Unipolar World.....	15
1.1.5 Sino-Russian cooperation in the new millennium.....	16
1.2 Converging and Diverging Tendencies in the Sino-Russian Relations.....	21
1.2.1 Converging aspects of the Sino-Russian relations .....	22
1.2.2 Diverging aspects of the Sino-Russian relations .....	26
2. Theoretical Framework.....	30
3. Methodology.....	34
4. China’s position through the optics of Neoclassical Realism .....	37
4.1 Systemic factors.....	37
4.2 Domestic factors .....	40
5. China and the policy of non-interventionism .....	43
6. War in Ukraine and the Sino-Russian relations.....	49
7. Why didn’t China denounce the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine?.....	57
Conclusion.....	62
Summary.....	64
List of References.....	66
List of Appendices.....	73

## **List of Abbreviations:**

NCR - Neoclassical Realism

PRC - People's Republic of China

CCP - Chinese Communist Party

SCO - Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

PLA - People's Liberation Army

UN - United Nations

USA - United States of America

CACF - China-Arab States Cooperation Forum

FOCAC - Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



## Introduction

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, when Russia has decided to unleash its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the very foundations of European security architecture has been shaken to its core. By starting the bloodiest conflict on the European continent since World War II, Putin's regime has effectively terminated an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity, that has (with some exceptions) guided Europe on its path of economic growth and rise in standard of living for almost 80 years (Shahi, 2022). Entering already its third year of all-in conflict, the ghost of war doesn't seem to intend to stop haunting the Old Continent anytime soon. On the contrary, its arguably increasing intensity and deadliness is steadily suctioning third-party actors, forcing them to pick a side, while simultaneously creating security, diplomatic, and economic dilemmas along the way.

Indeed, both of the warring parties can lean on multiple allies in their struggle, whether directly or indirectly. However, it is always the voice of the great powers that bears the most importance. While the support of the Western camp is unsurprisingly almost unanimously behind Ukraine, the position of China on the conflict has long remained an object of speculations. To that end, many experts point out the seemingly outstanding relations between the leaders of the two great powers. In fact, since Chinese President Xi Jinping's first official visit to Moscow in 2013, the two head of states have met over 40 times (Lin, Hart, Lu et al, 2023). Furthermore, during one of his visits in 2019, Xi described Putin as his "*best and bosom friend*", to which the Russian President mentioned that the mutual relations "*enjoy an unprecedented high level of trust and cooperation*" (Cox, 2023). At the same time, while the recent Sino-Russian rapprochement has left only a few thinking Beijing would turn against Moscow after its 2022 invasion, there are some indications that the mutual support is far from absolute (Yakhshilikov, 2023).

We must keep in mind, that with China as one of the potential "kingmakers" in the conflict, the variations of effectivity and depth of the Sino-Russian cooperation can spell a large array of implications that go far beyond the two countries at war. While the exact intensity of the mutual cooperation between Moscow and Beijing remains a topic of the debate between numerous scholars, its potential high-stakes consequences urge the importance of profound studies on the topic.

For that reason, in this paper I will try to analyse the Sino-Russian relations and its evolutions since the beginning of the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, specifically whether and to what degree did the war impair these relations. I will do so by analysing the Chinese position towards Russia through the optics of Neoclassical Realism, putting under scrutiny both systemic and domestic factors responsible for the shaping of the Beijing's foreign policy towards Russia. As this theoretical approach postulates, such factors are often influenced by the nation's specific cultural and historical background. For that reason, this paper will provide an analysis of the evolution of the modern Sino-Russian relations and the dynamics between the two actors, while also looking into the contemporary converging and diverging tendencies between them, as it provides an important contextual reasoning behind Beijing's approach towards Russia and the war itself. Such findings will then be put into perspective through an analysis of the longstanding Chinese policy of non-interventionism, which has been a highly influential feature of Beijing foreign policy, ever since the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, part of the analysis will try to determine how has the historical role of this policy evolved, as the position of China on the international scene transformed over time.

Since the support of China is likely to have a significant impact on the Russian standings in the war, it will be key to look for signs of deviation between the pre- and post-invasion patterns of cooperation, to see whether and how did the war test or strengthen their relations. Therefore, in order to answer to my research question: **"Why did China not oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite its long-lasting tradition of non-interference policy?"**, I will first determine the post-invasion standing of the Sino-Russian relations on a set of pre-selected indicators ranging all the way from a number of official visits, joint military exercises, official statements, to perceived patterns of behaviour in the UN Security Council, and comparing them with the pre-invasion levels. After figuring out the intensity of the cooperation, the final goal of this paper will be to present an argument, stating that Beijing is likely to stand with Russia despite the breach of its non-interference policy as the potential gains of the war in Ukraine outweigh the potential losses. In summary, the goal of this paper will be to shed some light onto the issue and contribute by its modest piece to the complex mosaic of the Sino-Russian relations.

# **1. Russia and China: Historical rivals, contemporary friends, and future allies?**

Already by the end of the last millennium, therefore mere years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and fall of the Eastern Bloc, some security analysts have warned before Sino-Russian rapprochement, describing it as one of the worst geopolitical outcomes possible for the US and its Western allies (e.g. Brzezinski, 1997). Others remained stellar that mutual animosities and discrepancies will create frictions, which will deem possible alliance between the two powers unsustainable in the long run (Lo, 2017; Yakhshilikhov, 2023). While there is likely a grain of truth in both of the said optics, the cost of underestimation could turn out to be simply too great to be ignored, therefore fuelling the narrative of an emerging axis of authoritarian states, which poses direct threat to the Western world and aims to crook the very principles of international order based on liberal political values (Carlson, 2021). Indeed, numerous Western scholars argue that whether a marriage of convenience, or soon-to-come full-fledged alliance, the Sino-Russian convergence is set to challenge the global dominance of the United States, and assert greater control over the territories, that both countries declare as their respective spheres of influence (Adomeit, 2022). As the global great-power competition intensifies, so does the incentive for the cooperation between Russia and China. Should the two powers reach a point of mutual trust where they perceive their “strategic rear” as secured by the other partner, it would most likely mean that a significant portion of both resources and manpower safeguarding the more than 4000 km long border between the two countries, would now be available for alternative use in both European (for Russia) and Indo-Pacific (for China) theatre.

The importance of such assessment is highlighted by the declared US incapacity to lead two major military conflicts in different global theatres simultaneously. Being seemingly unable to directly face both full-scale Russian attack in Europe and coordinated Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific, the US have chosen to address the latter of the two threats, hoping that it would force the hand of its European NATO allies, who grew too cozy under the American protective umbrella (Giegerich & Terhalle, 2021). The 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine has served as a wake-up call in this matter.

Despite severe initial military miscalculations, that have caused Russian Federation to trap itself within a bloody and costly war, we could argue that the perceived initial self-

confidence of Moscow was likely caused – to a significant degree - by a belief that China would diplomatically back Russia’s quick success and stand on its side. Such assumption could offer us a hint of the general trajectory of the “pre-invasion” mutual relations; however, it tells us very little about their depth and cohesion. Especially considering the significant setbacks Russia has faced both on and off the battlefield, which could potentially have a crucial impact on the development of the Sino-Russian relations. The goal of this paper is therefore to shed some light on this matter by further exploring potential changes in behaviour patterns between the two great-powers and to see whether the general trajectory of the mutual relations has remained unaffected by the all-out war or whether it might display some noteworthy changes.

## 1.1 History of Sino-Russian relations

There are only few heads of state in the world, if any, that have met so many times as the recently “re-elected”<sup>1</sup> President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart President Xi Jinping. Most recently in October, when the two national figureheads met for the 42<sup>nd</sup> time, during the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (Lin, Hart, Lu et al, 2023). Now, just days after securing himself his 5<sup>th</sup> presidential term, Putin’s office has announced his plan to visit Xi in China as his most-likely first official visit abroad after re-election (Reuters, 2024). Personal affiliation of the two leaders seems to also be mirroring the steady rapprochement between their respective countries. Chinese officials have even described the friendship between the countries as one with “no limits or forbidden zones in the trust and strategic cooperation” (Lukonin, 2023).

While it is hard for analysts to determine which statements are meant as a mere psychological tool against the West and to what degree it is intended seriously, the potential outcome of a real Sino-Russian strategic alliance with “no limits” could spell trouble for the Western oriented international order (Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, 2022). Luckily for West, history shows that while currently on good terms, a friendly Sino-Russian relations can be taken for anything but granted.

---

<sup>1</sup> Although declared a winner by his own regime, the “record-high” result of the elections was tainted by the supposed ballot manipulation, pressure campaigns against voters, forced voting, restriction of all and any relevant opponents, and straight-out rejection of the results by multiple Western countries as a “staged election” (*Kastouéva-Jean, 2024*)

As Bekkevold (2022) points out, it would be hard to spot any bilateral relationship changing more dramatically over the years than this one. She further states: *“During the last century, China has seen Russia as an imperialist, a comrade in arms, a foe, and a partner, and is now discussing whether it should be her ally”*. China has more than anything always sculpted her approach towards Russia based on by its needs and power positioning with the international system, always balancing its risks and benefits linked to its systemic or revisionist approach, combining them according to the likelihood of the highest reward (Lukonin, 2023).

### **1.1.1 Imperialist Russia and Early Soviet Era**

While the resentment of the general Chinese public towards imperialism is still considerably vivid to this day and has been tied to what Chinese historians describe as the “Century of humiliation”, due to work of propaganda, its hatred falls almost exclusively only at the Western European former colonial powers, leaving Russian empire aside. Nevertheless, Russia as well has joined the partition of the Chinese territory, taking advantage of the weakening of the Qing Dynasty after the Second Opium war (1858 - 1860). Forcing concessions from the pressured ruler, Russia has stationed its operatives throughout the country and claimed for herself the Amur River basin and the Sakhalin Island, which Russia does still possess to this day (Paine, 1996).

Only the expansion of the Japanese Empire in the 1890s’ has brought the two regional powers together. After a defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1895, China was urged to sign a secret Alliance Treaty with Russia in 1896, obtaining security guarantees in exchange for increased Russian political influence within its borders (Eskridge-Kosmach, 2008).

After the 1917 October revolution, the newly formed Soviet government has repeatedly denounced other powers for not abandoning their imperialist colonies and economic interests in China. However, in 1924 Soviets have signed a series of secret treaties with the government and local warlords, effectively taking control of the Chinese Eastern Railway. Back then, railway rights were a topic of national importance and became an important theme of the Chinese nationalist movement (Spence, 1990).<sup>2</sup> The sensitivity of the issue is

---

<sup>2</sup> Some historians are of opinion that due to the high sensitivity of the issue at the time, should this information become a wide-spread knowledge, it would severely undermine the communist affiliations in the country (Elleman, 1994).

further demonstrated by an unsuccessful attempt of the Chinese North-East Army to regain control of the railroad in 1929, only to be pushed back by a large-scale Soviet retaliation strike, which brought the railroad again under the Soviet control. The de-facto rule over the rail line would be going back-and-forth, especially after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, only to be finally settled in 1950 as part of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty (Bekkevold, 2022).

### **1.1.2 Foundation of Communist China and the Sino-Soviet Split**

Travelling to Moscow mere weeks after the foundation of the People's Republic of China, Mao met with Stalin and together they signed the above-mentioned Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty, as a response to the perceived threat of the United States to the socialist foundations of the newly formed state (Nathan & Ross, 1997). While the mutual convergence of the two socialist regimes did not come as a surprise, their relations were at times far from ideal. Soviets were following an ambiguous agenda of combining state-interest and spreading its ideological beliefs, however not always would these policies be in accord. Nevertheless, the Stalin's support for the Mao's communist party during the WWII would bring Soviets on good terms with the Communist China, growing ever closer to one another during the early 50s' and the Korean War. At the time, China viewed Soviet Union as a template of the communist state that Mao wanted to imitate in regard to the military might and inner organisation (Westad, 2012).

However, such harmonious relations would not last long. As Bekkevold (2022) points out, already in late 50s' the seeds of discord started to sprout. Disagreements regarding implementation of various socialist policies was one of the four major causes of friction he names as an explanation of the subsequent fall-out between the two Eurasian giants. Soviet authorities disapproved of the Mao's policy of the Great Leap Forward, which the Chinese leader didn't take well. Personal differences in views of Khrushchev and Mao over the character of the world revolution and role of the global communist movements further fuelled certain antagonism (Westad, 2012). Secondly, their opinions on an adequate approach towards the global capitalist powers and specifically United States have varied, with Khrushchev aiming for a policy of "peaceful coexistence", while Mao - feeling emboldened by the "high tide of socialism" – wanted to employ a more confrontative approach (MacFarquhar & Schoenhals, 2006). Thirdly, Beijing has started to feel

increasingly stronger grievances towards a perceived unequal treatment from the Soviets. Since the Treaty of 1950, Soviet Union has been the greatest provider of financial, military, and technological aid for China, however the price was paid in pride and status, which was not to Beijing liking. One of the greatest humiliations came in form of forced acknowledgements of independent Mongolia and forfeited territorial rights to Russia, which was seen as reminiscent of the previous Western colonialism (Elleman & Kotkin, 2010). Lastly, Chinese national interests grew increasingly different to those of the Soviet Union. The issues of Taiwan would drive a wedge between the two leaders, and then in 1958 USSR has stopped its backing of the Chinese nuclear program in order to appease the US, furthermore in 1962, the Soviets did not support Beijing in its conflict with India, and finally in 1963, China condemned the adoption of the US-Soviet test-ban treaty (Garver, 2003).

To put it another way, Mao has never intended for China to become a Soviet satellite, while the Soviet leadership would not deliberately give up its position of the global leading socialist power, nor did they intended to share it. For Mao, the priority has always been the regime survival, national security interests, even if it would mean to sacrifice its ideological leanings (Goldstein, 2020). Result of this equation was a constantly growing spiral of grievances, that would eventually drive the two powers against one another.

### **1.1.3 From Ally to Enemy – The Russo-Chinese border conflict and turning towards the US**

As the mutual distrust between the two powers steadily grew, the Soviet Union has started to view its former ally as a new rival. Such concerns intensified rapidly after the first successful detonation of a Chinese-made nuclear bomb in 1964. Beijing, on the other hand, watch with repulsion the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and subsequent declaration of “the Brezhnev doctrine.” Interpretation in Beijing was that Moscow reserves the right to topple any socialist regime that diverges from the directives issued by the Kremlin. As a response, Moscow has enforced its combat presence on its eastern borders, rising from 11 divisions in 1961 to a total of 25 in 1969. Furthermore, Moscow would promote discontent voices within the Chinese border regions (Nathan & Ross, 1997).

What followed was a relatively tense period of bloody border clashes resulting in dozens of

casualties<sup>3</sup> on both sides and almost spinning into a full-scale conflict. Subsequent war-scare in Beijing motivated Mao to look for allies in his struggle. Solution was found in rapprochement with Washington and the famous Kissinger's "ping-pong diplomacy". Only two decades after the foundation of Mao's regime, its greatest ally has turned into regime's greatest threat (Bekkevold, 2022).

Following years would then be described by the historians as the iconic form of the realist concept of balance of power, with Russia reacting to the Sino-US conciliation by befriending China's regional rivals – India and Vietnam. However, as the United States turned increasingly isolationist in the mid-70s', China's fear of being encircled grew. Beijing's reaction was to systematically position itself as the leader of the "Third World", thus serving as alternative to the US led "First World" and Soviet led "Second World". However, as some scholars point out, the real intention was likely to establish a global, anti-Soviet front (Garver, 2016).

While US and China have remained de-facto allies in the rivalry against the USSR, throughout the 1980s' the two communist powers have started to exchange subtle hints signalling will to work on mutual relations. One of the reason for this new dynamics was an increasingly dire economic situation of the USSR, which was unable to cope in the arms race with the US. Maintenance of significant military forces on its Eastern border seemed too costly for Moscow, especially since its priorities were elsewhere. Finally in late 1980s', Gorbachev took steps towards normalization of mutual relations, subsequently agreeing to ease on the border issue, end the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and cease its support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia (Fravel, 2008).

#### **1.1.4 Mutual Rapprochement and positioning in the Unipolar World**

After Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in 1989, the mutual relations started to gradually improve. Facing an intense international contempt and isolation after the massacre at the Tiananmen square, China's leadership was highly motivated to seek reconciliation with Moscow. In doing do, Beijing was willing to make compromise regarding the still pending border issue, resulting in a major settlement in the early 1990s' and final one in 2004. For the first time in its modern history, China's Northern border was now free of any threats. As consequence,

---

<sup>3</sup> Exact number of casualties differs in various sources (*Gerson, 2010*).



Beijing has turned its gaze towards its coasts, systematically building up its ambitions in the Strait of Taiwan and the South China Sea (Goldstein, 2005).

With the radical changes in the international arena and the global balance of power following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, China has decided to employ its two-pronged strategy towards the US. In its core was a determination to cooperate where needed, but also oppose if Chinese interests were overlooked. By doing so, Beijing has systematically undermined those policies of Washington that were aimed to limit or contain China in any sense, which eventually brought Beijing back into the Moscow's embrace (Bekkevold, 2022).

Being brought together by the shared opposition to the world order defined by the US hegemony, China has found Russia to be a somewhat reliable ally in the struggle. Seeing mutual interests in addressing topics like Islamic fundamentalism in the Central Asia, the two countries have steadily deepened their relations over time (Bekkevold & Engh, 2017). Soon, Russia has become China arguably most important provider of arms and advance military technologies, enabling Beijing to sidestep the arms embargo issued by the West in the aftermath of the Tiananmen. Among others, the two parties have signed a "Joint Declaration on the Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order" in 1997, Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship, and Cooperation in 2001, established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001, and managed the creation of the "BRIC" organisation in 2006, to further cement their relationship. The famous policy of "Low profile" have significantly aided the mutual harmonization, as it allowed for a steady rise of China without compelling Russia to feel challenged. Despite its success, the Sino-Russian cooperation remained rather modest even well into the new millennium, with limited economic and people-to-people exchange (Bekkevold, 2022).

### **1.1.5 Sino-Russian cooperation in the new millennium**

With past conflicts put to an ease by the border settlements and official normalization of the mutual relations, the Sino-Russian partnership in the mid and late 2000s' has experienced a brisk improvement in virtually all areas of cooperation. Furthermore, the steadily increasing great power rivalry on the international stage has further fuelled this convergence, as the United States became common denominator against which their respective policies were aimed. This brought China and Russia ever closer, providing a base for increased economic, political, and intellectual exchange (Bekkevold; 2022).

Especially the economic and resource trade has steadily grew in prominence. For more than a decade, China has remained Russia's largest trading partner, importing significant portion of the Russian annual natural resource export, in exchange for a supply of its advanced technological products. On one hand, Russia's natural resources have been nourishing the rapidly growing Chinese industry, while on the other China has served as an alternative market for Russia, which was especially important in the wave of the economic sanctions and trade restrictions introduced in 2014 and after the 2022 full-scale invasion. To that end, Russia has toppled Saudi Arabia as the largest crude oil supplier to China, representing 19% of all the Chinese national oil import in 2023. In terms of gas supplies, Russia is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest provider, but sharply rising in prominence, as Moscow attempts to make-up for the losses in Europe. To do so, Russia has invested heavily into its gas pipe infrastructure connecting its Far East gas fields with China through the "Power of Siberia" pipeline and moving ever closer to the construction of the "Power of Siberia 2". By 2025, Gazprom intends to increase the amount of gas delivered to China to 38 bcm annually. However, should the plans to connect China with the "Power of Siberia 2" pipeline and other links from the island of Sakhalin come to realisation, the total amount shipped is expected to reach up to 100 bcm per annum (Donnellon-May, 2023). For years now, China has also been among the largest investors in Russia, spreading its economic influence, which - notably in the Far East resource rich regions of Russia – cannot be matched by any other country (Wang, 2019).

On the diplomatic front, the relations were to a significant degree shaped by the complex strands of positions and both internal and external responses to the momentous historical milestones which either brought the two powers closer together or further apart. More often the former than the latter. Attempts of Western countries to incorporate Beijing and Moscow to the international order based on liberal values and the rule of law also played a significant role, as did the subsequent Western reactions to the perceived setbacks, or progresses in this effort, leading either to praise or backlash, depending on the desired position. In spite of this, the Sino-Russian diplomatic endeavours were not always in accord, as the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia has illustrated. Back then China has joined the West in its criticism of the violation of Georgia's sovereignty, and China even went as far as to leverage its influence in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), to sway other Central Asian countries from supporting Russia (Lampton, 2024). In the upcoming years, Beijing would be making inquiries regarding possible enhancement in the cooperation with Moscow, however it was

the 2014 annexation of Crimea that paved the way for a further rapprochement.

As Yakhshilikov (2023) puts it, both China and Russia assessed the US dominance in the international order as an obstruction to their national interest, creating impulses for cooperation. Coupled with the heated diplomatic conflict between Russia and the West following the annexation, the crisis turned out to herald the steadily strengthening strategic partnership between the two powers. At this point, regime's survival is becoming the main concern of the two autocratic leaders, who included in their national cooperation exchange of technologies and best practices that could potentially increase regime's resilience and effectiveness of suppression of the political opposition and civil society (Kaczmarek, 2022). Western sanctions seem to also be playing a role in the Sino-Russian rapprochement, as the surges in trade between the two states mirrored waves of sanctions introduced by the West. It is no coincidence that China was eager to help Russia face the Western sanctions, as Xi's administration was itself on a brink of a trade-war with the United States (Caliendo & Parro, 2023). Coupled with the Beijing's revisionist tendencies in the South China Sea that are aimed directly against the interests of US and its allies in the region, the incentive for an anti-Western coalition is only growing larger over time. Washington's decision to face this challenge, embodied in its "Pivot to Asia" policy, has further intensified the said tendencies, bringing China closer to the Russia's company and vice-versa (Hu & Meng, 2020).

Aside from geopolitical reasoning behind the Sino-Russian converge, the mutually warm relations between the heads of the two states seems to be playing just as important role. Given the fact that Putin and Xi are arguable the main and final decisionmakers (if not the only decisionmakers on certain topics) on the fundamental directions of the international policies of their respective states, their personal closeness might have severe implications on the wellbeing of their country's relations. To this date the two leaders have met on at least 42 different official occasions, most recently in October 2023, when the two national figureheads saw each other during the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (Lin, Hart, Lu et al, 2023). For Xi, Russia was also the destination of his first ever foreign trip as the Chinese president in 2013. Ever since then, the two leaders regularly lavish each other with compliments. In 2017, Vladimir Putin has awarded Xi Jinping with the Order of St. Andrew, the highest order conferred by the Russian Federation; to which Xi would answer by awarding Putin with the first ever Friendship Medal of the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, during an interview in 2019, Xi would describe Putin as

his “*best and bosom friend*” (Bekkevold, 2022). Both leaders would then be heard to say that their countries currently enjoy an “*unprecedented level of trust and cooperation*”. Similarly in 2021, when Putin and Xi met to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation, the two leaders described the relations between Russia and China as a “*comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation*”, which already by that time several scholars evaluated as a de-facto alliance (Storey, 2021).

As the self-confidence of the de-facto autocratic alliance grew, so did the tensions between them and Western politicians. Such tendency would only further fuel the already strong bonds between Putin and Xi, as they gradually and systematically created a “revisionist axis” which pulled into their ranks discontent leaders from all over the globe, proposing an alternative to what is perceived as the “Western led international order” (Stent, 2020; Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, 2022). In the wake of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, the situation got as far as for the two leaders to declare that the comprehensive partnership and the strategic interaction between the two states is entering a new era, adding, that there are virtually “no limits or forbidden zones of cooperation” between Russia and China (Danilin, Kislitsyn, Kvashnin et al., 2022). Should we hold the two leaders true to their words, it would paint a worrisome picture. We are already witnesses to the enhanced Sino-Russian cooperation in areas such as missile systems, 4IR military technologies, AI weaponisation, Arctic cooperation, or naval technologies, ergo technologies which have the potentiality to significantly tilt the regional military balance of power, should one side reach a significant breakthrough. Such worries would only intensify, should this “unlimited” cooperation also include areas such as nuclear deterrence and overall nuclear strategy aimed against the US and the West in general. Should these fears turn true, it would surely spell dire ramifications, potentially triggering a spiral of rising tensions. Credibility of their proclamations is also boosted by the significantly rising frequency and magnitude of common military exercises of the Chinese and Russian army in both land, air, and naval combat (Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, 2022).

Therefore, statements of that kind exchanged between Xi and Putin should not be underestimated. Especially given the fact, that they were said mere days before the launch of the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Such declarations combined with the supposedly increasing cooperation even in most-highly sensitive areas such as the nuclear deterrence, state-of-the-art military technologies, and military tactics, are causing substantial worries in

Washington and European capitals. Moscow has repetitively proven that it doesn't shy away from using brute force in order to achieve its goals when Kremlin feels confident enough. While the attack itself was most-likely severely miscalculated (experts often cite the Putin's gradually increasing self-isolation, systemic corruption, and pathological culture of lies surrounding the Russian military high command and political establishment as primary reasons), the invasion of Ukraine serves nonetheless as a prove of the great confidence Putin had in the believe that his allies would offer him backing or at least acceptance of his war effort and the expected "fait accompli" occupation. Arguably, the recent Chinese rise in importance, along with a rather successful anti-Western campaign of the revisionist powers, seems to provide Putin with enough confidence to dare to launch a significant war effort and directly challenge the European security architecture by a revisionist war of aggression. If this assumption is correct, it gives great importance to the recent Sino-Russian rapprochement, as Beijing's support is likely one of the major sources of Russia's pre-war<sup>4</sup> confidence. Confidence that could be one of the deciding factor between Putin's calculation to either wage destructive war or aim for other, perhaps less direct, and violent, means to achieve his goals in the future.

For that reason, I find it important to carefully study the Sino-Russian relations and its evolution, as its profoundness might be the deciding factor in Kremlin's calculations. Should Putin indeed feel more compelled to fulfil his proclaimed wish to restore Russia's former empire with China's backing, then it is important to know whether or how the full-scale war we are currently experiencing has changed Beijing declared resolute support for Russia. Importantly, it is necessary to look for deviations between the pre- and post-invasion patterns of cooperation, to see how does the war test or strengthen their respective relations. In the international environment full of lies and deception, it will be important to be systematically looking for differences in their behaviour, which could expose potential cracks or further reinforcements in the so-called "partnership without the limits". Having said that, the goal of this paper is to contribute by its modest share to the general knowledge of the said problem and shed a small ray of light into the complex web of Sino-Russian relations.

---

<sup>4</sup> Meant here as the full-scale war that started by the February 2022 invasion.

## 1.2 Converging and Diverging Tendencies in the Sino-Russian Relations

While the exact extent and depth of the Sino-Russian collaboration is a subject of intensive discussions between experts, there appears to be a gradual convergence of the two powers over time. From what experts sometimes described as a mere “wary embrace” (Lo, 2017) or “marriage of convenience” (Lubina, 2017), the alignment has evolved into a major source of the Western concern. Indeed, whilst it is true that scholars are not always united in the idea of how far the mutual relations stretch, there seems to be an increasing tendency to describe the Sino-Russian relations as an undeclared de-facto alliance (Krause, 2022). Having said that, the number and reasoning of the experts pointing out limits to the Sino-Russian cooperation (e.g. Yakshilikov, 2023; Lukonin, 2023) is still highly relevant to the study of the matter, as it may uncover weak points and fragilities that some argue might have dire effect on the effort of Putin and Xi to bring the two countries closer together.

Some experts have attempted to capture the essence of major opinion groups on the matter and divided them into group. Below we might see one such categorisation done by Saradzhyan (2020), and slightly modified by Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, (2022).

**Table 1** How Russian, Chinese, and Western policymakers and experts describe the Russian-Chinese relationship (according to Simon Saradzhyan, 2020)

Description of Sino-Russian relations	Expert(s) and year
An alliance already	Sergei Karaganov (2007) Vasily Kashin (2014)
Not yet an alliance, but likely to become one	Yevgeny Buzhinsky (2016) Yan Xuetong (2016) Zhang Wenmu (2016)
Not an alliance	Russian-Chinese statement of June 2019
Not an alliance and unlikely to become one	Fiona Hill and Bobo Lo (2013); Bobo Lo (2017), Sergei Ivanov (2014), Fu Ying (2016), Chao Xie (2016), Alexander Lukin (2018), Jim Mattis (2018), Graham Allison (2019), Mikhail Korostikov (2019), Dmitri Trenin (2019)
A partnership	Russian leaders and documents (“comprehensive”), Chinese leaders and documents (“comprehensive strategic”), Trenin (“close” in 2018), Lukin (“strategic” in 2018), Feng and Huang (“strategic” in 2014)
An alignment	Daniel Coats (2019), Graham Allison (2019)
Other definitions	Korostikov: Friendship at arm’s length (2019), Trenin: Entente (2018); Richard J. Ellings and Robert Sutter: Axis of authoritarians (2018)

Table 1 Categorization of Sino-Russian relations. Source: Saradzhyan (2020), amended by Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, (2022)

It is not the task of this paper to pick a camp in this debate, however it is important to approach the problem with respect to its complexity. If history taught us something, it is that bonds between Beijing and Moscow tend to shift dramatically over time, as significant historical milestones naturally either strengthen or weaken alignments between them. Indeed, the nature of the relationship has always been dynamic, which keeps alive possibility for a change if wielded by capable diplomatic figures, as was demonstrated by Kissinger's Ping-pong diplomacy during the "Sino-Soviet split". Such characteristic makes virtually all scenarios possible in the long-term, maintaining the importance of various scholarly outlooks. In other words, what might be seen today as a "marriage of convenience" or "undeclared alliance" might turn into a "full-fledged alliance" tomorrow, and the other way around. For that reason, it is important to understand the underlying motivations behind the actions of respective actors and in this cases study the converging and diverging tendencies that might act as a motor of such change.

### **1.2.1 Converging aspects of the Sino-Russian relations**

Both Moscow and Beijing have their own reasons to oppose the West, and whether that was its a cause or a consequence, the two countries have repetitively found themselves on the other side of the table from the West on various historical milestones shaping the politics of the last 20 years. In terms of Russia, the decline of her relations with the US and the West in general can be traced back to the Russian revisionist power-plays surrounding the 2004 Orange revolution, and the 2008 war with Georgia (Lo, 2019). Subsequent disagreements in dealings with the conflicts in Libya and Syria further widened these gaps, however it could be argued that it was the illegitimate 2014 Annexation of Crimea and primarily the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has fully uncovered Russia's imperialist mindset, that have turned the two camps from "mere" rivals into sworn enemies (Davis & Slobodchikoff, 2022). Some scholars argue, that from Moscow's perspective, this hostility is partially caused by the perceived status denial Russia is suffering from. As Heller (2018) points out, it is evident that Russia holds grievances against the West as it feels disrespected and often denied from its foreign goals, especially in former-Soviet countries, which Russia to this day still sees as its own domain. According to her, Russia's political, public, and even academic sector is deeply embedded around the idea of Russia's prominence, giving egregious importance to Russia's image and appearance. Putin has famously described the fall of the

Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” and is actively pushing the narrative that Russia only seeks to restore its deserved great power status, to which West stands as an obstacle and China an ally.

Meanwhile, the US-China contest has always been a bit more subtle. Compared to Russia, the more economy driven, and perhaps more cautious approach of Beijing offered much wider manoeuvring space, while not limiting its revisionist potential, nor intentions. Relying less on its army’s power muscle and more on strategic investments and covert expansion of both influence and infrastructure, China has managed to win over many like-minded countries around the globe, while at the same time paralyzing Western resistance by mutual economic entanglement. Indeed, the Chinese rise of military and economic might has sent shockwaves around the globe, signalling significant shift in global distribution of power, causing majority of scholars to declare the unipolar era of US dominance as concluded. As Washington felt the need to react to the steadily growing China’s power appetite, its priorities had to be adjusted. Reflecting this new reality, the US introduced its famous “pivot to Asia”, in order to contain or slow down Beijing’s rise to prominence (He & Li, 2020).

Importantly, both Russia and China build their national identities around heroic historical war struggles, strongly connected in both cases to their WWII experience, with Russia forming its ethos based on the “unbreakable will of the Russian people” during the 1941-1945 “Great Patriotic war”, and China fighting against its imperialist enemy during the 1937-1945 “War of Resistance”. The two country strongly relate to each other’s historical experience, offering a compelling joint narrative (Korolev & Portyakov, 2019). Shared history of great communist powers also helps the issue, boosting tourism, cultural exchange and makes it easier for the leaders of the two powers to paint the other country as their natural ally (Paulo & Phang, 2019).

In other words, Russia and China have great historical and ideological foundations to build their relationship on, with uniting factors in terms of a common enemy and similar historical experience. Combined with overlapping interests stemming from their shared autocratic nature and shared opposition to the democratic West, it serves as a compelling case for further convergence. Beijing and Moscow learn from each other in suppressing internal dissent, separatism, and ethnic individualism. On the international arena, and especially in the UN, the two powers work together to cover for one another’s human rights violations and serve as an opposition to the Western camp. Furthermore, experts point out increased



cooperation in other key areas such as cyber control, space development, arctic research, or 4IR technologies and their potential for a dual-use deployment (Kirchberger, 2022).

In the global landscape formed by the increasing rivalry between democratic and revisionist powers, the concept of balance of power is often cited in order to explain the urge of Russia and China to join forces on various fields of the great power contest. Similarly in military terms, there is an apparent build-up in intensity and depth of cooperation in recent years, serving as a prove of gradually increasing trust and level of coordination. Some Western analysts believe that such deployment will only further embolden both Russia and China in their revisionist campaign, as they safeguard each other's "strategic rear" in the Far-East. With their "back" secured, both countries may free up significant resources which were for decades allocated to protect the long-contested 4.200 km long land border, allowing to focus on their respective true objectives – the Russian war campaign in Europe and Chinese power expansion in the South China sea (Rumer & Sokolsky, 2021). Undeniably, it creates a dilemma for the US, as the Americans no longer feel self-confident in their ability to wage major war simultaneously in two different theatres.

Increasing Sino-Russian military cooperation gives credibility to these worries. Ever since 2008, we can see a gradual deepening in cooperation in defence-related areas, with significant intensification following the 2014 annexation of Crimea. The first joint Sino-Russian military exercise happened in 2003, in the wake of the creation of the Shanghai Security Organisation (2001). However, ever since then Russia and China have jointly participated on approximately 80 different military exercises, peaking in years 2016 and 2019, with 10 various joint exercises conducted in the said years (ChinaPower Project, 2023). As shown by the table below, the degree of mutual cooperation in the military and defence-industrial sector is indeed intensive and seems to have reached a significant milestone by the 2019, when the two parties announced, that Russia is assisting China with its ballistic missile early warning systems. The underlying motivation is to overcome the technological military superiority of the West and mitigate their technological bottlenecks (Kirchberger, 2022). Moscow and Beijing also send a message, that they no longer see each other as a threat, and that their relations have indeed achieved a new level of strategic trust, probably going as far as touching certain aspects related to nuclear weapons (Carlson, 2022), and certainly include cooperation on nuclear energy plants (Bekkevold, 2022).

Year	Significant Sino-Russian military or defense-industrial milestones
1992	Agreement on military technology cooperation
1994	China orders two project 877EKM Kilo-class submarines from Russia (delivered in 1995)
1996	Establishment of a “strategic partnership of coordination.” China orders two improved project 636 Kilo-class submarines from Russia (delivered 1997–1998) and purchases two unfinished project 956 Sovremenny-class destroyers (delivered 1999–2000)
1998	China starts licensed production of the export version of the Russian Su-27 fighter aircraft as the Shenyang J-11
2001	Sino-Russian treaty of friendship concluded
2002	China orders eight improved project 636 M Kilo-class submarines from Russia (delivered 2005–2007) and two improved project 956EM Sovremenny-class destroyers (delivered 2005–2006)
2008	Agreement on intellectual property to prevent illegal copying of technologies
2008	Peaceful resolution of border dispute; defense ministers of both countries establish direct phone line
2011	Joint venture for servicing all Russian-made helicopters operating in China
2012	First round of annual joint naval exercise series “Joint Sea”
2013	Air forces exercise together for the first time
4/2015	Start of regular meetings within the framework of a “Sino-Russian Northeast Asian security dialogue” in response to THAAD deployment plans in South Korea
2015	Conclusion of new arms trade agreement over six battalions of the Russian S-400 air defense system and 24 Su-35 fighter aircraft, including delivery of extra engines and ancillary components, estimated to cost around USD3 billion
2015	Framework agreement on joint development of a heavy-lift helicopter
9/2015	Putin is present at China’s September 2015 military parade (an event largely boycotted by Western leaders)
6/2016	Agreement signed between Russian Helicopters and China’s Avicopter to jointly develop a new heavy-lift helicopter based on Russia’s Mi-26 design
11/2016	MoU signed between Russian satellite firm GLONASS and Chinese firm NORINCO for development of a new chipset for its navigation satellites
2016	First ever joint missile defense exercises
5/2017	Xi Jinping is guest of honor at Russia’s Victory Day parade on the 70th anniversary of the end of WW II (an event largely boycotted by Western leaders)
6/2017	General plan signed for bilateral military cooperation 2017–2020
12/2017	First Russian-Chinese anti-ballistic missile defense computer-simulated command post exercise takes place in Beijing
9/2018	First Chinese participation in Russia’s large-scale Vostok exercise
11/2018	Agreement signed between Russia and China on cooperation for the use of GLONASS and BeiDou global navigation satellite systems for peaceful purposes
7/2019	First joint strategic bomber patrol between South Korea and Japan near Dokdo draws warning shots from South Korean interceptors
7/2019	Russia passes law on GLONASS-BEIDOU SatNav cooperation
9/2019	A Chinese contingent participates for the first time in Russia’s Tsentr exercise
10/2019	Putin announces that Russia is helping China build a ballistic missile early warning system

Table 2: Significant Sino-Russian military and defence-industrial milestones. Assembled by Sinkkonen (2018), updated by Kirchberger (2022)

Year	Significant Sino-Russian military or defense-industrial milestones
10/2019	Putin for the first time publicly characterizes Russia-China relations as “an allied relationship in the full sense of a multifaceted strategic partnership”
11/2019	First trilateral naval exercise between China, Russia, and South Africa off South Africa’s coast (“Naval Operation Mosi”)
12/2019	First trilateral naval exercise between China, Russia, and Iran in the Indian Ocean (“Operation Marine Security Belt”)
9/2020	A Chinese contingent participates in Russia’s Kavkaz exercise for the first time
10/2020	Putin publicly states that a military alliance with China “can be imagined” for the first time
8/2021	Russia and China hold “Interaction-2021” exercise in China for the first time, later branded as part of the Russian Zapad-2021 exercise
9/2021	Russia’s state space agency Roscosmos announces it will place ground stations for its GLONASS SatNav system across China and China will place ground stations for BeiDou in Russia
10/2021	First ever joint naval patrol of Russian and Chinese warships circling around Japan’s main island

Table 2 (continued): Significant Sino-Russian military or defence-industrial milestones. Assembled by Sinkkonen (2018), updated by Kirchberger (2022)

## 1.2.2 Diverging aspects of the Sino-Russian relations

Seeing the gradual Sino-Russian rapprochement of the last decade, safeguarded by the personal closeness of Xi and Putin, one could argue that Moscow and Beijing are indeed headed towards a full-fledged alliance, if not already there. However, measuring their relations in a wider picture, several experts point out severe limitations or possible setbacks that restrain its potential. These constrains varies in forms and importance; however, they could generally be sorted into 4 major groups of constrains: 1) **systemic**, 2) **identity & socio-economics**, 3) **historic and present rivalries**, 4) **Issues related to its spheres of influence**.

The **systemic** constrains generally tend to revolve around the idea of differences in approach and comprehension towards Russia, China, international order as a whole and the respective roles the two countries ought to be playing in the system. As Moscow’s divergence away from the accepted norms of behaviour in the international system goes hand-in-hand with its public declarations directly challenging the West and the entire systemic security architecture, Beijing remains accusatory yet somewhat complying within the system. While Russia has declared the events of recent years to be a “*radical break with the past*”, painting globalisation as a cause of social degradation, and welcoming the perceived collapse of the unipolar world, China, on the other hand, has persistently promoted globalisation, its role in the system, and active participation in the global integration processes (Lukonin, 2023).

While Russia has embarked on a highly aggressive stance against the West, some experts believe that China – driven by its realist cost-benefit calculations – is in essence theoretically receptive on potential compromises with the United States and that its current harsh position against Washington is primarily an outcome of the currently most effective realist mathematics. The difference in motivations and the weight of their respective determination to confront the current the Western-built international order could potentially drive a wedge between the national interest of the two players, which might lead to potential frictions and disharmony.

In terms of **identity & socio-economic** factors, both China and Russia pride themselves with their respective long and complex historical tradition, that has shaped their unique identity. However, such identity is an outcome of different challenges, distinctive cultural believes, priorities, and unique historical experience; and as such can from times serve as a natural cleavage line. The Chinese civilisation is believed to be approximately five thousand years old and was formed by a rich spiritual tradition (noticeably Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism), specific way of governance and societal organisation, causing substantially different understanding of the world to the Christian, Eastern Slavic social order of Russia, which has been exposed and shaped for centuries by the influence of its European neighbours (Lucas & Lo, 2022). Unlike China, Russia sees itself as a European power and despite numerous historical conflicts, has always revolved around the pattern of refusal and acceptance of Western ideas and policies (Adomeit, 2022).

Concerning economics, the Sino-Russian partnership is confronted with multiple issues. Firstly, the ever-growing asymmetry between China's and Russia's economic performance is becoming increasingly apparent. Being aware of Russia's deep-rooted insecurity related to the perceived denial of its great power status, China has for decades deployed its policy of reassurance towards Moscow, in order not to further inflate the problem and avoid being seen as a threat. However, as the differences grow it might be increasingly difficult for China to continue do so (Bekkevold, 2022). The negative impact the war in Ukraine might have on Russia's economy is likely to further enhance the issue. Representing mere 3% of China foreign trade volume, arms sale remains one of the last sectors of Russia's innovative relevance (Lukonin, 2023). Yet at the same time one of the most sensitive. While highly profitable in terms of fund raising, arms dealings create a security dilemma of systematically boosting military power of a former foe. By doing so, Russia is

exchanging short-term profit for a security uncertainty, only to further widen the power gap between the two states and thus again risk to undermine its own great power status that Moscow so desires.

To make matters worse for Russia, the two countries share a long history of mutual rivalry and betrayals, which was acutely visible especially in the mutual arms trading. Significant portion of today's and historical People's Liberation Army (PLA) military systems are based on older Soviet or Russian versions of the given piece, that was blatantly copied and/or reversed engineered, and sometimes then modified to better fit the PLA's intentions (Sheldon-Duplaix, 2022). According to studies, this was the case of S-602 cruise missile, Tai Hang WS-10 fighters, duplication of SU-27 fighter bomber, Pantsir air-defence systems, and many others. Most of the time, China would eventually reduce the number of orders or stop them completely, as they soon managed to create their own variations and part replacements. According to the Russian sources, there were more than 500 cases of intellectual theft of Russian arms related technologies committed by China over the last 20 years (Simes, 2019).

In order to properly understand diverging aspects of the Sino-Russian relations, we also must take into the account the **historic and present rivalries**. In case of Russia, we see that the combination of sanctions, inflation, secondary sanctions, and the outflow of both cash and manpower towards the war effort, are all factors weakening the Russian position. Furthermore, Kremlin seems to make a significant effort to shift its resource depletion firstly towards the more remote areas of Russia, where the potential discontent is the least worrisome. Having said that, these areas of discontent might eventually coincide with areas that are sensitive for Moscow due to its distance from the centre and of strategic material importance to China. Loosening power grip in the Far-East regions, to some of which China has historically laid claims, worries the Kremlin, as Chinese investments in the region grow and so does the illegal migration from the overpopulated regions of China to the scarcely populated and impoverished regions of Russia. Analysts in Kremlin fear the scenario, where the resource rich regions of Russia, often inhabited by ethnic minorities, grow hostile towards the central government for stripping them off the riches of their land without providing appropriate profit in exchange (Kirchberger, 2022). Such outcome, in combination with opulent Chinese investments could severely undermine the loyalty of the region, or at least make it more receptive towards further outside influence. Likewise, the two powers do not refrain from an

espionage against one-another, as was shown during the 2020 Valery Mitko case, a Russian scientist and professor convicted of providing Beijing with top-secret documents related to the Russia's submarine hydroacoustic research (Juris, 2022).

To that end, the rivalry between Russia and China does not limit itself solely to the historical brawls around mutually shared border territories and influence within their respective countries, on the contrary such competition often intensifies in other areas. For one in **issues related to the spheres of influence** in neighbouring countries within the proximity to the two major regional powers. Especially, in the area of Central Asia, we see numerous cases of influence competition, with Russia considering former Soviet countries as their natural and justified point of interest, and China systematically spreading its influence operations abroad as its importance on the international scene constantly grows. Such process has only amplified with the perceived deterioration of Russia's might on the international scene following their military struggles in war in Ukraine. Facing significant international diplomatic isolation, severe economic sanctions, and redirection of significant amount of both cash and manpower towards the war effort, Russia's ability to cultivate or even maintain its interests on other fronts have been considerably restrained. China on the other hand, is using the situation to its advantage, filling out premises of Russian influence that have been vacated due to their war struggle. The famous Belt and Road initiative has been used as a motor of such change, fuelling Chinese incentives in the region, steadily building its prominence and by doing so directly challenging Russia's former dominance in the region. Many scholars believe the Central Asia influence competition will be the true test of the Sino-Russian alliance, as Moscow have always considered the former Soviet republics as its own exclusive backyard (Ferrari & Tafuro, 2019; Pavel, Kirchberger & Sinjen, 2022). However, this position will be difficult to maintain, as Russia's weakening condition has already been met with signals of greater independency visible for ex. during Putin's meetings with the Kazakh president Tokayev, or from Armenia following the lost war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Last but not least, historical tensions between Russia (or Soviet Union) and China, especially during the Sino-Soviet split, have driven Russia closer to Beijing's greatest regional rivals, particularly India and Vietnam. To this day, Russia remains the greatest supplier of both of the countries, occasionally leading to discord with China (Bekkevold, 2022).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

With respect to my research question: “**Why did China not oppose Russia’s invasion of Ukraine despite its long-lasting tradition of non-interference policy?**”, I have decided to look at the issue through the optics of the **neoclassical realism**, as I find the theory the most suitable to tackle such issue, while also capable to offer an interesting perspective into some of the hidden motivations behind the Sino-Russian cooperation.

Similarly to other theoretical concepts from the realist household, neoclassical realism adheres to the primacy of **systemic factors** in the shaping of foreign policies of respective agents in the international system (Sherill & Hough, 2015). The neoclassical realism (NCR) shares their elementary premises regarding the understanding of the role of the state, the power, and the primacy of the anarchical material structure (Foulon, 2015). However, unlike neorealist theories, the neoclassicists ponder deep in the domestic affairs of the given agent (state) in order to analyse its foreign policy. While the systemic factors still remain the primary indicator behind state’s motivations, the NCR scholars tend to reject neorealist’s notion of states as a coherent unit and deeply rational actors, on the grounds that should all the states behave rationally, two countries in a similar position would always show similar behaviour (Glaser, 2010). While it can be helpful to determine the general direction of a given actor, such predictions offer little help in understanding how specific policies are made (Rose, 1998).

Essentially, NCR is an “outside-in” approach that stresses the importance of the systemic factors (independent variable), while also taking into consideration the domestic factors as the “**intervening variables**”. Reversely, to the liberal school of thought, which is the primary epistemological difference between the two groups (Shiping, 2023). As one of the key neoclassical realist thinkers Rose (1998) summarizes: “the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they (NCRs) are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical”. The intervening variables are sometimes also referred to as “moderating factors”, as they do not change the general direction or aim of a foreign policy, yet they moderate its final shape and form.

Therefore, the particular foreign policy is seen as dependent variable, that is the result of independent variable (systemic factors) being shaped by the moderating factors (domestic factors).

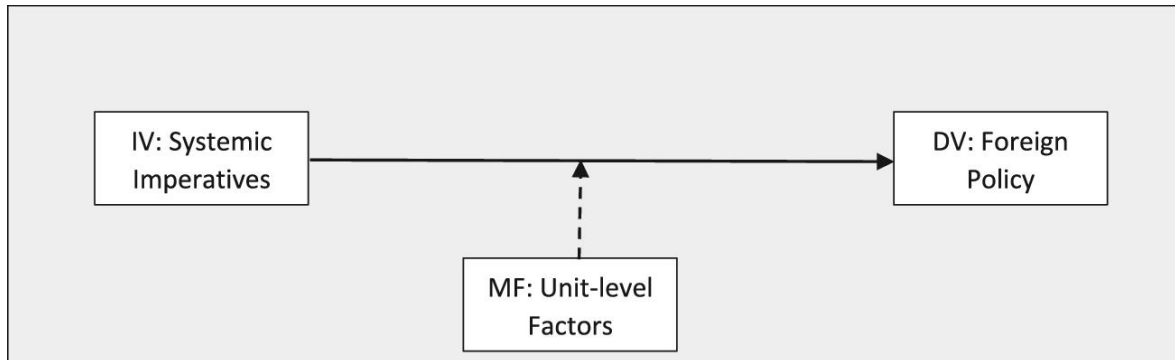


Figure 1: Relation between independent variable, dependent variable and moderating factors in the NCR theory. IV: independent variable; DV: dependent variable; MF: moderating factor. Presented by Götz (2021).

Having said that, there seems to be no clear pattern to perfectly translate state’s material capabilities into a concrete policy conduct (NCR scholars use the term “transmission belt”), as the human factor of the specific state in question needs to be considered (Taliaferro, 2006). Heads of states are human being from “blood and flesh” with all the merits and weaknesses inherent in the human species (Rose, 1998). They navigate the treacherous waters of domestic politics, constantly manoeuvring between the need of support from the elites and approval of the masses. To understand the aspects of national foreign policies, one must also study the perception of relative power, more than its mere quantity, as humans naturally hold true to what they perceive to be true. Needless to say, that such calculations oftentimes vary from the state’s objective power quantity, which might result in incorrect evaluations in power balancing – or as Schweller (2004) has described: “overbalancing”, “underbalancing”, or “nonbalancing”. Furthermore, we must factor the notion that national leaders rarely possess the ability to channel the entirety of the nation’s power potential. Power position of the leader within the domestic system thus plays role crucial role in his ability to extract power and direct it towards the desired policy. This is where the importance of perception arises, as it fuels the feeling of either necessity or redundancy in mobilisation of the state’s power. States choose different approaches in dealing with an adversary depending on how strong they perceive him. If the perceived national power of a state deviate too far away from its objective power, there is likely to appear what NCRs call the



“**perceptual shock**” – an event that restores the balance between perceived power and actual power of the given subject (Christenson, 1996). The fall of the Soviet Union was one of those shock, which fully uncovered the domestic fragility behind its superpower façade.

In other words, as Rose (1998) argues, countries rely on “**agents**” – individuals who comprise of the governing body – who act in the name of the state. These individuals are tasked to “understand and interpret” the real distribution of power within the state in regard to the matter at hands. Expectedly, their attempts to mobilise the state’s power towards the given policy is likely to face difficulties. The intensity of the difficulties depends on the power and interest fragmentation within the government–society fission line and within the government-elites fission line. The ability/inability to act in accord with the elites and general public either enhances or undermines agent’s ability to extract national resources towards the pre-defined policy. The NCR scholars call the final aggregation of power the state agent is capable to harness as the “**state power**”, which is the share of the “national power” the government is capable to mobilise to achieve its objective (Zakaria, 1998). To analyse the state power, the scientists who belong to the NCR school of thought have developed a wide array of factors and indicators perceived as important to properly describe the complex nature of state’s domestic affairs. They range from economic conditions, state’s ideology, culture and the elite narrativized collective memory, all the way to party structure and leader’s personality (Shiping, 2023). All things considered; it seems only natural that a profound knowledge of the cultural-historical background of the subject of the analysis is seen as a necessity in the NCR research, which highlights the importance of the first chapter of this paper. To discover how perceptions matter, one must understand the problem through the optics of the agent in question, and to understand the agent, one must have a deep comprehension of how the domestic institutions that have shaped him work (Christensen, 1996). The eclectic nature of NCR – incorporating the context-dependent manners of liberalist and structuralist, while at the same time maintaining its realist core – is highly praised by its followers.

Consequently, the variety of research relevant features within the domestic system is expanding each year, as numerous NCR authors make a name for themselves by introducing new intervening variables (Meibauer, Desmaele & Onea, 2021). The greater the complexity of the research, the greater the descriptive power of the analysis. However, as the critics of the NCR method rightfully point out, there is a fine line in appropriate balancing between

descriptive power of the theory and its applicability, as well as comparability between various cases. Some tend to go as far as to comment on the resemblance of the overly enthusiast inventors of NCR intervening variables, and the liberal schools anchoring its foreign policy explanations primarily on the domestic factors. Others appreciate the theory's ability to bridge the spatial (domestic-international), the cognitive (matters-ideas), and temporal (present-future) divides of the problem. In other words, the Neoclassical realist theory always tends to sacrifice some of the elegant parsimony of the neorealist school in exchange for more in-depth state-level analysis and more concise explanation of the empirical foreign policy in question (Schweller, 1993).

With this in mind, in my own research I will deploy one of the more traditional of the NCR approaches, following the Schweller's (2003) classification of the intervening variables, based on four main points: **(1) domestic institutions, (2) state-society relations, (3) strategic culture, and (4) leader characteristics**. While there are also other variables that could prove to be relevant for the research of the Sino-Russian relations, the somewhat broad definition of the respective brackets allows for an incorporation of majority of the most pertinent aspects. In my eyes, further expansion of the research domestic variables would either exceed the dilemma beyond the scope of this paper, or would spread the finding too thin, and thus curtail its explanatory value.

### **3. Methodology**

The objective of my diploma thesis is to shed some light into the Sino-Russian relations and its recent development, especially focusing on the influence and potential changes caused by the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. With respect to the research question of this paper, I will be looking for reasoning behind perceived lack of condemnation of Beijing towards Moscow in regard to the invasion, which is in sharp contrast of both traditional and latest official foreign policy doctrines declared by China (The State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2023).

As mentioned above, I will be studying the problematics via the neoclassical realist optics. Consequently, this study will have to briefly describe the specific systemic and domestic aspects that influence the position of China in the international system, and the influence of moderating factors onto its foreign policy. To achieve this goal, I will start by applying the NCR approach (explained in the second chapter), on the descriptive framework of the Sino-Russian relations (explained in the first chapter), in order to determine the independent variable (systemic factors) and moderating factors (domestic factors), which will allow for a theoretical analysis of the dependent variable (China's foreign policy towards Russia). The in-depth knowledge and context analysis of the China's situation and development of its relations with Russia over time provided by Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, (2022), as well as Lukonin (2023), and Yakshilikov (2023), combined with the research of Sørensen (2013), Kai (2015), and Shiping (2023) - which applied the Neoclassical realist approach on the specifics of the Chinese background - will be the backbone of the analysis of both systemic and domestic factors relevant to this study.

After establishing both the systemic motivations and domestic constrains of China and Xi's administration, the study will focus on the Chinese non-intervention policy, its history, tradition, and perspective. The point of this particular part of the research will be to obtain some insights into how Beijing traditionally responds to military interventions and to determine whether or not was Chinese reaction (or the absence of it) in line with its traditional approach and how it potentially deviated from the case of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. To prove my point, I will need to find examples indication support of Russia from the Chinese side, or at least lack of condemnation compared to other historical cases. Central to this part will be the analysis of the important Chinese foreign policies that

have shaped Beijing's approach towards interventionism, such as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", or the recently formulated "Global Community of Shared Future" policy.

Indeed, having to choose between the policy of non-interventionism (which has always played a significant role in China's foreign policy ever since the very foundation of the PRC), and the continuing rapprochement with Russia after the blatant breach of this policy (along with many norms of international law following the invasion), could potentially put Beijing in a dilemma of either keeping the remnants of its self-portrayed image of a constructive power or prioritising raw realist cost/benefit mathematics and continue supporting Russia. Consequently, in order to answer to my research question and to determine how Beijing has positioned itself in regards to this dilemma, I have decided to formulate two research hypotheses, the testing of which should help to shed some light onto the issue. These hypotheses are:

**H1: "The 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine will impair Sino-Russian relations in the short period after its initiation."**

However, according to my second hypothesis:

**H2: "The Sino-Russia relations will experience quick recovery."**

Should China indeed condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are likely to observe certain differences in the conduct of the mutual Sino-Russian relations. To demonstrate this aspect, I have pre-picked several indicators of the mutual relations, which will be analysed and compared on the pre- and post-invasion bases. Specifically, I will be analysing Chinese official statements, official meeting between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, military exercise, and the UN Security Council voting patterns, as cooperation in any and all of these indicators would demonstrate considerable trust and closeness, unexpected from a state powers that suffer from a significant diplomatic discord.

To determine validity of my hypothesis, I will be testing the above-mentioned aspects of the Sino-Russian relations in years before invasion and then in year 2022 and year 2023 separately. Provided that my first hypothesis is correct, I should be able to see a decrease in coordination (especially in year 2022) in comparison between the pre-invasion and post-invasion years. To confirm my second hypothesis, there should be a tendency towards normalization between year 2022 and 2023. Given the nature of the topic, I will be using a

mixed research method, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Finally, to answer my research question, I will use the combined knowledge and analysis of the previous steps in order to determine why did China not condemn Russia's full-scale invasion, despite its long tradition of non-interventionist policy, using Neoclassical realist argumentation combining both domestic and systemic factors responsible for the shaping of Beijing's foreign policy and the calculations behind perceived power maximalisation.

## **4. China's position through the optics of Neoclassical Realism**

Proper interpretation of the Chinese behaviour will be paramount in order to understand Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As explained in the previous chapter, I will be deploying the neoclassical realist optics to assess the problematics, as I believe it has a potential to offer interesting insight into Beijing's way of thinking and explanation of its general standings and trajectory. As many experts agree, realism is deeply embedded within the Chinese political thinking and general worldview (Sørensen, 2015; Bekkevold, 2022). To conduct the neoclassical analysis, I will first define the associated aspects of the theory, namely the systemic and domestic factors functioning as the "independent variable" and "moderating factor".

### **4.1 Systemic factors**

General trends of the academic discussion regarding China tends to follow several trends. China is generally characterized as a rising great power on a path to become a superpower, with some scholars arguing that Beijing has already seized this trophy, and rest envisioning the prediction to materialise soon (Alenezi, 2024). Despite undeniably facing earnest issues such as the current housing crisis, or alarming demographic conditions, in the outlook China remains the most serious challenger to the US global hegemony. Such reality is reflected by several indicators, ranging from the ever-expanding Chinese military might, self-confident global initiatives (such as the Belt and Road initiative), or in economic terms, where Chinese economy is currently the second largest in terms of GDP, and have already overtaken the United States, as the largest global economy in terms of PPP (IMF, 2023).

Realist authors considering systemic conditions influencing China's position tend to agree that as China grows increasingly stronger, so does the necessity for China to participate in the systemic maintenance. While offensive realists expect China to grow in ambitions (Mearsheimer, 2021), defensive realists expect intensification of security dilemmas (Raditio, 2015). Both of the schools however assume, that in order to survive in the anarchic international system, states will opt to balance out against stronger states and cultivate their relative power capabilities, either by alliance or increase in military power (Waltz, 1979). The dawn of unipolarity will represent a significant alteration for China, offering great

opportunities, but also challenges. For a long time, Beijing greatly benefited from avoiding the spotlight. It gave China the time, to invest into domestic development and strengthening of its strategic ties abroad (especially in Africa and East Asia), reaping the fruit of a functioning international system, while at the same time evading the necessity to upkeep it. As long as it was the role of the hegemon – the United States – to deliver on the “international goods”, China profited from the “shadow”, essentially free-riding on the system (Sørensen, 2015).

Globalisation was key for China’s economic success, and while the US and its Western partners spent time, energy and resources on its maintenance, China has learnt, observed, assisted if deemed beneficial, and most importantly nested within the economic and political system of its strategic regional and global partners, who often let their guards down feeling safe to trade with China, when being protected by the hegemon. In accordance with the “Low-profile” policy, China has for decades systematically downplayed its revisionist tendencies and power growth, in order not to intimidate its strategic partners (this was especially apparent in the case of Russia). The purpose of the policy was to avoid excessive attention and for as long as possible delay potential containing strategies of other great powers, particularly the United States. The Problem that Beijing faces is that such a strategy is running into its limits as China’s might can no longer be camouflaged and the US is driven into action as its hegemony is being increasingly questioned. As unipolarity is weakening, China is gradually building its international responsibility and becoming more assertive in its security policies.

While undeniably strong, China’s position is largely defined by conflict. Chinese growth is thorn in the side for many of the regional player, who’s bilateral relations with China are tainted by territorial disputes (e.g. Philippines, Malaysia), regional rivalries (e.g. Japan, South Korea) and in some cases even past military conflicts (e.g. India, Vietnam), with most of these states belonging to more than one bracket. Naturally, the mutual rivalry draws them closer to the US, which is then using these states as bases for its containment policies. With the US pivot to Asia, China will resort to balancing. According to Waltzian realist theory, balancing by alliance or armament – in this case likely both. As depicted in the graph below, Chinese military spendings are gradually rising and the announced 2024 defence budget with the 7.2% annual increase is likely to become yet another record high in terms on absolute numbers (Tan, 2024). The build-up in ballistic missile systems (Kirchberger, 2022), the joint

development of new type of nuclear submarine with Russia (Larson, 2020), the current build-up in the number of nuclear warheads, and other factors (as portrayed in the Chapter 1.2.1) also testify in favour of this trend. In fact, according to Jash, China is likely to possess the currently fastest growing nuclear arsenal in the world. In his words, Beijing is doing so to achieve sufficient deterrence with its nuclear rivals (namely India and USA) and achieve more favourable parity with USA and Russia, through which Beijing might enhance its global standings.

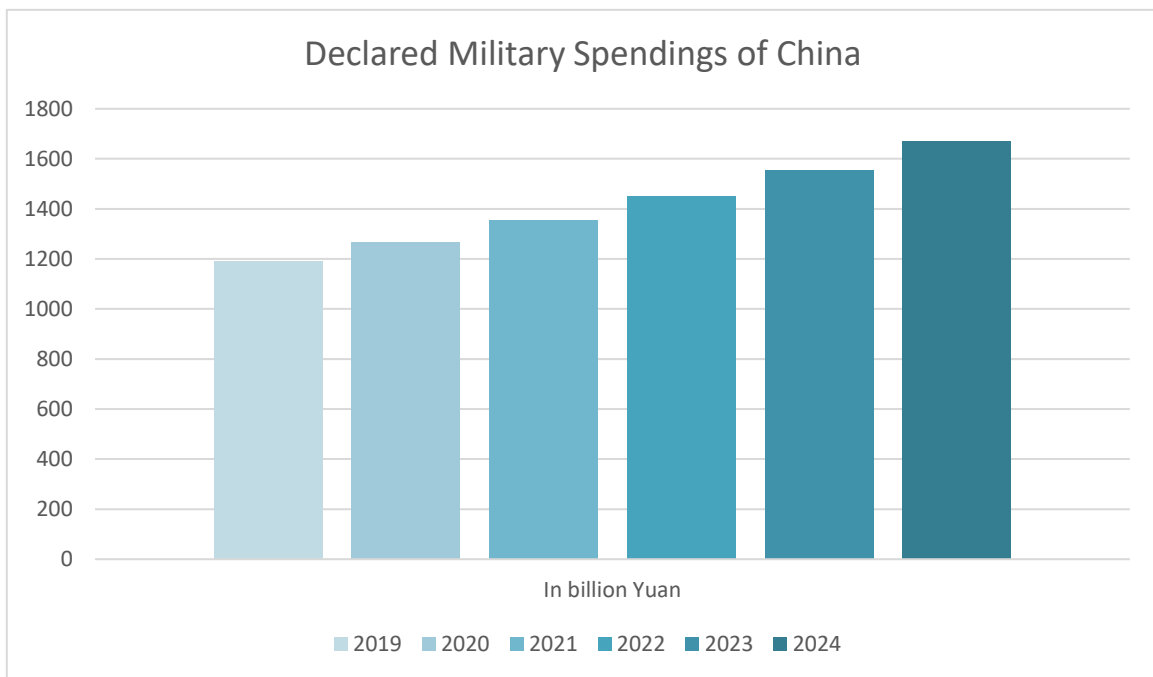


Chart 1: Declared Military Spending of China. Assembled by the author, based on official statements of Chinese Ministry of Finance (2024)

On the diplomatic front, China is busy building an intricate system of allies, partners, and business associates, who now form a truly global network spanning all the way from South America to East Asia. A cunning combination of strong economic incentive, coordinated political support, and infrastructure investments has gained China a considerable diplomatic support in virtually every region of the Globe, which Beijing skilfully leverages in many ways, one of which is support in bodies of international organisations where this network stands as counterbalance to the US-led Western camp. Some of China’s most resolute alliances are forged by Beijing’s foreign investments and large-scale initiatives (such as the Belt and Road initiative), or political organisations such as BRICS. Having the largest number of international missions in the world, it is safe to say, that China does not



underestimate the importance of diplomacy and such approach seems to be paying off (Global Diplomacy Index, 2024).

## 4.2 Domestic factors

Having established some elementary bases of the systemic factors influencing China's foreign policy as the independent variable of the neoclassical realist research, I will now focus on the domestic influence, representing the "moderating factor" in the theoretical analysis. Such study presents interesting showcase, as authoritarian states are likely to display different domestic dynamics than its democratic counterparts. The "agent" running authoritarian state have different concerns and motivations than democratic leaders. In order to understand China, one must first try to understand Chinese rationale, which in turn is possible only by studying its socio-historic context. To do so, I will be analysing the "domestic factors" in terms of 4 indicators that shape the China's foreign policy: **(1) domestic institutions, (2) state-society relations, (3) strategic culture, and (4) leader characteristics.**

In general, the dynamic and quickly developing Chinese economy, military might, and society are a constant source of new opportunities, but also challenges that Chinese **domestic institutions** need to address. While both the Chinese society and the government seems to be able to cope relatively well with the fast-changing domestic conditions and changing priorities, one priority never changes - the ultimate task of domestic institutions in China is and always have been to keep the Chinese Communist Party (CPP) in power. This is one of the most determinant characteristics of the governing body. Loyalty to state is required, loyalty to the regime is unconditional. According to experts, when at odds, party interests trump even national interest (Paine, 2014). On the other hand, the authoritarian nature of the state allows for an effective channelling of the national power towards desired policies. Indeed, seeing the firm grip of regime over business, the effectively eliminated opposition, and seemingly absolute power of Xi Jinping I argue, that the agent's (Xi's administration) "state power" is almost mimicking the overall "national power". Should it be party's decision, there is no domestic institution daring to stop, slow-down, judicially challenge, or even denounce deployment of resources in any direction the agent wishes. That is undeniably one of the benefits of authoritarian states over democracies (Sørensen, 2015).

However, as mentioned above, such states face other dilemmas, one of which is reflected by the **state-society relations**. State-society relations are a fascinating phenomenon in the non-democratic regimes, as due to lack of free and just elections the state does not necessarily need objective confirmation of popular support, yet at the same time it seeks to maintain the perception of support and thus regime's legitimacy, to justify its own position (Hermet, 1978). In China, domestic social and political stability is of key importance to the regime, which was aided by a systematically cultivated vigorous nationalism, combined with a near total control of the information space. This creates for an interesting constellation, where domestic institutions must sometimes balance between the nation's strategic interest and will of the nationalized public. As illustrated during the crises linked to the territorial disputes of islands in the East China Sea with Japan and rivals in the South China Sea, the central government in Beijing is sometimes pressured by the public to adopt a more confronting approach to avoid being seen as too soft and is willing to do so even in cases where softer means could have brought more to the table (Quek & Johnston, 2017). Overall, the state-society relations in China are subject to an interesting internal dynamics. The monopolization of power by the government, which was for decades explained by the party's ideological legitimacy and need for its guidance, have now been gradually replaced by the performance legitimacy and need to provide results to the ever-wealthier society who expects results to be delivered. The social contract has been "rewritten" and Chinese society has a growing expectations of the government to present the country as a confident global power and deliver economic growth (Sørensen, 2015).

Likewise, **strategic culture** is to a significant degree shaped by the idea of perception. As I will discuss more in detail in the next chapter, perception of growth, perception of power, and importantly perception of China's own history and its interpretation play a significant role in how Chinese foreign policy is formed. The infamous "Century of Humiliation" has sown within the Chinese minds the urgency to avoid "weakness" and necessity to be seen as a strong and unbreakable nation. Never again to succumb to foreign pressure in domestic matters and build its military prowess so that it can, not only withstand any foreign invasion, but also promote national interests abroad (Metcalf, 2020). Furthermore, as the perception of US decline and the end of unipolar international system compels China to take up more responsibility for the international order, so does it strengthen the general view in China that such development is only natural, and that China is merely reclaiming a position it is historically entitled to. As mentioned in the first chapter, Chinese culture has evolved for

thousands of years - for a long portion of which has been considered the centre of their known world. After all, even the name China (or Zhōngguó in Chinese) means the “Middle Kingdom”, a reference to the central role China has historically always played in the region and this belief plays its role in shaping Chinese foreign policy even today (Carroll, 2021).

Finally, the **leader's image** and personality represent a significant factor. Xi Jinping has used his years in office to tighten his grasp over the party and thus the entire country. In order to be re-elected, Xi had to remove from Constitution section limiting maximal number of presidential mandates to two terms, before being unanimously restored in the presidential office by the party vote in 2023. Over his now 11 years tenure, Xi has rooted-out all significant opposition, strengthened authoritarian rule, fuelled the wave of nationalism within the country, and is likely to retain his position for life (Brødsgaard & Beck, 2023). Personally, Xi Jinping seems to be a close friend with Vladimir Putin, which helps immensely in promoting mutual Sino-Russian collaboration. As mentioned in the first chapter, some of the projects on military cooperation between Moscow and Beijing were initiated based on a specific wish of the two leaders. Especially Russia's arms dealers were initially hesitant to cooperate with China after their unpleasant experiences with intellectual theft and reverse engineering, however warm relations between the two leaders have managed to overcome this cautiousness. The real degree of fondness for one another is a matter of speculation, however the chemistry seems to be there and employing the realist rational I argue, that as long as China can leverage mutual relations for its own benefit there seems to be no reason for Xi to alter his current policy towards Moscow.

## 5. China and the policy of non-interventionism

After having summarized the evolution of Sino-Russian relations and its converging and diverging aspects in the chapter one, followed by the application of neoclassical realist analysis on the specifics of the Chinese systemic and domestic variables in chapter four, it is now necessary to look into the Chinese position on non-interventionism in order to properly understand Beijing's position on the war in Ukraine.

The introduction of the principle of non-interference in Chinese foreign policy is generally credited to the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, from which it would soon become one of the core pillars of China's foreign diplomacy. Later in 1954, the non-interference principle would become one of the "**Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**", which would in turn develop into a cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy. These principles are: 1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, 2) mutual non-aggression, 3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, 4) equality and co-operation for mutual benefit, and 5) peaceful co-existence.

The role of the Five principles was so significant, they were even adopted into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and are regularly mentioned as the guiding principle on which the framework of bilateral diplomatic and economic cooperation of China and other countries is based on. In fact the Five principles are specifically mentioned as a foundation for both the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CACF) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Likewise, the Sino-Indian relations and countless other nations, with which China builds its bilateral ties are proclaimed to be guided by this principle (Murphy, 2022).

The historical background explained in the first chapter is important in order to comprehend the significant role the principles played. Having been formulated in the Sino-Soviet friendship treaty only few years after the WWII and mere 4 months after the foundation of the PRC and Mao's ultimate victory in the Chinese civil war, the principle of non-intervention was issued as a protective feature of the young communist regime. Mao was aware of the fragility of his position and needed time to consolidate his power. Generation of Chinese living at this time have been born into what we now call "the Century of Humiliation" and only knew China as a nation with a weak domestic regime humbled by predatory European colonial powers, and ultimately fighting for its own survival until 1945.

Having been reborn during the Cold War era, where the infringement of other nation's sovereignty was a daily bread of virtually all great powers of the time, has only reassured China in the necessity to promote idea of non-interventionism in the international area. In certain way it could be understood as a balancing policy. The US policy of containment and subsequent wars in Korea and Indochina have proven that the West does not shy away from interventionist policies in China's backyard, while the USSR would later prove the same following the Sino-Soviet split and the invasion of Czechoslovakia (among others). With both of the global superpowers circling around like birds of prey, China could never feel safe. I argue that in the "Three Worlds" settings, where "First" and "Second" worlds were driven by ideological beliefs, China was compelled to become the champion of the Third world, whose appeal was built around the non-interference policy and offer of a Great Power shielding against the other two "worlds". Such narrative would become especially attractive to the African countries, with which China retains strong links to this day.

As consequence, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are specifically mentioned in essentially all major Chinese foreign policy guidelines, functioning as a foundation upon which other foreign policies are built on. For example, during the 2018 FOCAC conference, Xi Jinping have declared the "Five Nos" that are to guide the multilateral and bilateral relations between China and African countries. These include: (1) non-interference in other countries' pursuit of development paths suitable to their national conditions, (2) non-interference in domestic affairs, (3) not imposing China's will on others, (4) not attaching political conditions to foreign aid, and (5) not seeking political self-interest in investment and financing (Meng, 2023). Similar tendency can be seen in China's most recent grand foreign policy – the 2023 "Global Community of Shared Future" – where Beijing repeats its commitment to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and directly states that China *"remains committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, upholding non-interference in others' internal affairs, and respecting the independent choices of development paths and social systems made by people in different countries"* (The State Council Information Office, 2023).

At the first glance, China's activity in the international arena seems to adhere to these values. As I analysed in the table below, ever since the PRC has become the permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1971, Beijing has used its veto right 19 times in total, each time in accord with its non-interference policy and always on the grounds of direct or indirect

sovereignty violation. Other authors point out that such pattern applies even for the majority of China’s “Abstain” votes (Murphy, 2022).

<b>Vetos Issued by the People's Republic of China at the UN Security Council</b>			
Date	Topic	Grounds for dismissal	Russia Vetoed
22 March 2024	Middle East/Palestine	Israel's violation of Palestine's sovereignty/Intervention	Yes
25 October 2023	Middle East/Palestine	Israel's violation of Palestine's sovereignty/Intervention	Yes
26 May 2022	North Korea	Opposing sanctions as tool of international intervention	Yes
10 July 2020	Middle East	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
7 July 2020	Middle East	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
20 December 2019	Middle East	Sovereignty and territorial integrity violation	Yes
19 September 2019	Syria	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
28 February 2019	Venezuela	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
28 February 2017	Syria	Against international investigation in Syria	Yes
5 December 2016	Syria	Against intervention in Syria	Yes
22 May 2014	Middle East/Syria	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
19 July 2012	Middle East/Syria	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
4 February 2012	Middle East/Syria	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
4 October 2011	Middle East/Syria	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
11 July 2008	Zimbabwe	Opposing sanctions as tool of international intervention	Yes
12 January 2007	Myanmar	Perceived violation of Myanmar's sovereignty	Yes
25 February 1999	Macedonia	Unnecessary use of Peacekeeping force	No
10 January 1997	Guatemala	Perceived violation of China's sovereignty	No
25 August 1972	Bangladesh	Bangladeshi separatist movement / India's intervention	No

Table 3: Vetoes issued by the PRC at the UN Security Council. Assembled by the author based on data from UN Digital Library (2024)

Such consistency would suggest that the principle of non-interventionism indeed plays an important role in Chinese policy making. Yet, at the same time, when examined more closely, one might see otherwise. As Chinese might grow, so does its necessity to participate in the upkeep of the international system. China, as a nation profiting immensely from globalisation and liberal trade opportunities, is invested in system’s orderly operations. Evidence suggests, that while historical influence might still play its role in China’s motivation to adhere to its non-interventionist policy, the influence of ideology recedes into the background. Over time, China is seen as increasingly constructive, even assisting at times, seemingly less principled, however instead ever-more focused on following potential economic or political gains from the outcome (Davis, 2011). For several years now, the PRC has been among the top 10 personnel providers for UN’s international peacekeeping

missions – by far the largest contributor of any other permanent member of the UN’s Security Council - and also the second largest overall fund contributor (Karlsruh, 2023). Consequently, the deviations between China’s declarations for the policy and actual behaviour spark certain semblance of ambiguity. During the allied intervention in Libya, China has succumbed to the pressure of Arabic and African countries and supported sanctions and arms embargo against the Gaddafi regime. Few years later, Beijing would be applauding Russian interventions in Syria, describing it as a necessary fight against terrorism. These findings along with China’s refusal to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine testify to the complexity of the problematics of the non-interventionist policy of China and Beijing’s motivations behind the policy.

For that reason, I believe it could prove fruitful to look into the problematics through the optics of Neoclassical Realists and aside from the systemic motivations behind the Chinese non-interventionism, we should also take into the equation the domestic aspect of the problem. By systematically emphasizing the respect for national sovereignty and non-interference, China is feeding the narrative where nation’s territory is its privileged zone where a country should have absolute freedom to determine its own fate. Such approach is not only important from the perspective of China’s behaviour towards the outside world, but -arguably even more so – has always been more important from the perspective of outside world towards China. Looking at historical development of PRC through this optics, offers an interpretation of history, where Central Government has always attempted to maximize its grasp over the nation, while simultaneously limiting influence of other actors. Every time, some outside actor became too influential, or had potential to erode CCP’s absolute sway over domestic affairs, Beijing would launch pre-emptive steps to thwart such effort. As illustrated in the first chapter, Soviets have experienced this “corrective action” after attempting to impose upon China its interpretation of Marxist-Leninism and positioning itself as the world’s leading communist power. What resulted was the Sino-Soviet split. In recent history, we could have seen this pattern in economic terms, where Western investments and business activities in China had to face extreme protectionism and systemic mischief from the side of authorities, in order to never exceed influence of domestic companies. Furthermore, the foreign finance and know-how brought to China would then be used to drive the very companies that have introduced them, from the Chinese market, as was among others the case of Sino-Russian military cooperation also mentioned in Chapter 1. On the information front, China would apply this principle to block all international

companies and initiatives deemed threatening to the Party's interpretation of the world. Sources of information, social media, and other sites used daily by millions of people in the West, fell victim to the Chinese censorship, as they could provide alternative viewpoints and thus weaken the information link between the Party and the masses, potentially altering the official narrative.

However, arguably most important is the Chinese interpretation of non-interventionist policy towards its domestic territorial issues. While actively portraying Taiwan as a renegade province, Beijing has used considerable resources to gradually pressure most of the countries around the world into officially declaring their approval of the "One-China policy". By doing so, the international society has indirectly granted credibility to the China's non-interference policy, promising to stay away from Beijing's "internal" problem.

All things considered, I argue that the Non-interference policy is a defensive policy, deployed by China in the 50s' to sustain its control over its large nation ravaged by the "Century of Humiliation". It was a tool designed to aid Central government to accumulate its power, retain absolute grip over the nation, and maintain CCP's rule. Its creative interpretation on the international stage, along with rising Chinese commitment to international initiatives and peacekeeping missions is further supporting the argument that the Chinese non-interference policy was primarily engineered as a protective measure against external influence rather than China's guideline on how to navigate international relations. The international aspect of the non-interference policy was undisputably significant; however its main purpose was to raise credibility of the policy from the external viewpoint, which in turn allowed China to enforce respect to non-interference from other international actors, thus securing a *carte blanche* for its own plans for domestic power maximalisation. Having its hands free, Beijing's would use the policy as a shield against foreign disapproval for the ethnic suppression and ethnic engineering in provinces where Han ethnics wasn't absolutely dominant (suppression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang province), restriction of rights for self-determination and self-governance (Tibet), as well as tightening its rhetoric and resolve to restore its domain over Taiwan.

Should this assessment be truth, it would present an interesting angle on China's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as it would offer partial explanation to the Beijing's decision not to adhere to its policy of non-interventionism. To conclude, my argument is that since the policy of non-interventionism is primarily a defensive policy, focused on the



“outside-in” approach (meaning that external actors should respect China’s internal sovereignty). As consequence, the “inside-out” layer (China’s respect towards other’s sovereignty) of China’s non-interventionist policy plays mainly sustaining role, presenting narrative, and gaining credibility for China’s own plans within its perceived domain. As such, its adherence is of secondary importance, thus more likely to be ignored, should national interest outweigh the need for consistency – as was likely the case during the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

## 6. War in Ukraine and the Sino-Russian relations

Having covered China's position on interventionism, the last missing piece of information required to answer my research question "**Why did China not oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite its long-lasting tradition of non-interference policy?**" is to determine what the war in Ukraine meant for the Sino-Russian relations. How have they evolved, whether the war weakened them, and if so, to what degree. To do so, I will be looking at several indicators of the mutual Sino-Russian cooperation, which should together be able to illustrate the general dynamics between the two Asian giants following the outbreak of the war. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the studied indicators will consist of an analysis aimed at Sino-Russian 1) **Joint military exercises**, 2) **Voting patterns in the UN Security Council**, 3) **Head of state visits**, and 4) **Public declarations on the war**. I will be analysing these indicators using a mixed method approach, with the intention to prove or debunk my first two Hypotheses, stating:

H1: **"The 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine will impair Sino-Russian relations in the short period after its initiation."**

H2: **"The Sino-Russia relations will experience quick recovery."**

First, I will be looking into the joint Sino-Russian military exercises, their evolution, and current dynamics. I have chosen military exercises as one of the key indicators to follow in order to determine mutual relations between the two countries, as they symbolise the amount of trust that respective nations have for each other. By revealing one's military technology, strategy, organisation structure, or chain of command structure, you unveil some of the most sensitive topics a state can uncover. One does never exercise with his enemies, but rather with his allies against his enemies. The quantity and level of cohesion is also a significant factor, as it might tell us the difference between various tiers of allies of the state in question. Concerning China and Russia, the two countries are each other's most significant military exercise partner in terms of both frequency and scale of operations (rivalled only by Belarus on the Russian side). Aside from objective military benefits, a joint military exercise thus also serves as an indicator of decent relations between the participating countries. By joining forces together, the involved nations declare some degree of consensus of who their allies and enemies are. Therefore, when joining forces with other regional powers around the globe, such as Iran or South Africa, Beijing and Moscow cement their position as an

alternative camp to the Western powers. Lastly, by regularly infringing on territorial waters and airspace of other nations, they declare their unity in struggle against their rivals. All three of these aspects were demonstrated, among others, at the Northern/Interaction 2023 joint military exercise taking place in the Sea of Japan. This was probably the largest combined air & naval joint military exercise of Russia and China up to date, trumping even the era of the warmest Sino-Soviet friendship during the Cold war, at least in terms of scope and coordination (Bin, 2023). Deployment of such significant number of units and resources despite Russia's ongoing war struggle only highlights its importance for the Putin's regime. Regarding the war in Ukraine, the data seems to be in accord with the tendency demonstrated in Chapter 1, showing the unprecedented level of closeness between the two countries, whose rapprochement turned increasingly intensive following the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and Moscow's gradual fall-out with the West.

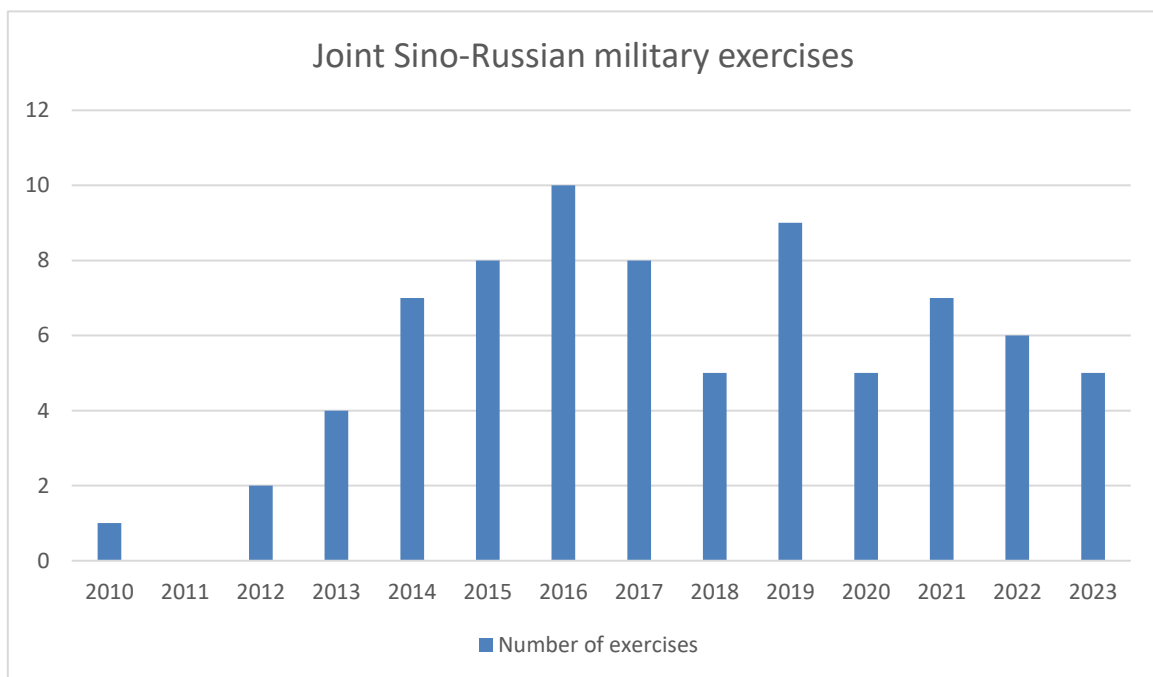


Chart 2: Number of joint Sino-Russian military exercises. Assembled by the author, based on data from ChinaPower Project (2023).

As can be seen on the chart above, even despite great losses Russia has suffered since the beginning of the war in both equipment and personnel, it did not stop Moscow from conducting considerable number of joint military exercises. In fact, whole 5 out of 6 of the 2022 joint Sino-Russian military exercises occurred after the February Russian invasion.

Such evidence would support the premise of the Hypothesis 2, suggesting that if there was any relevant quarrel between the two parties, it did not last long.

Secondly, the diplomatic front can also offer some relevant findings. When analysing China's voting behaviour in the UN Security Council, an interesting pattern emerges. Ever since the PRC has become the permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1971, Beijing has used its veto right 19 times in total, with 16 of these vetoes used in tandem with the Russian Federation. Interestingly, last time that China pled its veto right, without Russian Federation following the suit, was in February 1999 – exactly 25 years ago. By not issuing its veto right on the vote condemning Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, nor the 2014 annexation of Crimea, China has clearly breached its own declaration for commitment to the non-interventionist policy by choosing to abstain in both cases. Such apparent inconsistency makes China's lack of denouncement for Russia's invasion of Ukraine look more like a purposeful rather than accidental deviation. Indeed, while China has historically been rather vocal (Hodzi, 2019) about perceived Western attempts of interventionism around the globe, the silence surrounding Russia's war of aggression towards Ukraine - especially in the wake of numerous war crimes committed by Moscow - is almost "deafening". In 2014, following the Russian annexation of Crimea, Mr. Liu Jieyi representing PRC during the March 2014 meeting of the UN Security Council on the issue explained China's position in vague terms saying: *"The key to resolving the crisis in Ukraine is to act within the framework of law and order, seeking an early solution to the differences through dialogue and negotiations."*

In February 2022, mere days after the commence of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Mr. Zhang Jun representing PRC at that time has commented in similar fashion, describing the war as a *"...result of the interplay of various factors over a long time."*, adopting even partially apologetic stance towards Russia saying: *"China advocates a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept, in the belief that the security of one country cannot come at the cost of undermining the security of other nations, and that regional security cannot be secured through the strengthening or expansion of military blocs"*.

Virtually same statement was repeated during a second vote of UN Security Council on the full-scale war in Ukraine in September 2022. Mr. Jun has reiterated Beijing's position on the issue, further stating that: *"We believe that the pressing priority is to make every effort to de-*

*escalate the situation and guide the parties to restart diplomatic negotiations as soon as possible in order to open the door to a political settlement.”*

While during all of the said speeches the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference were mentioned, China’s representatives have not once used the platform to criticise Russia for the invasion, nor for the infringement of Ukraine’s sovereignty as one would expect from a country declaring allegiance to the non-intervention policy. Their declarations calling for peaceful solution were never followed by action denouncing the war of aggression.

Having said that, China’s decision not to apply its veto on the proposition condemning the 2022 Russian invasion could on the other hand be interpreted as a proof of certain degree of disharmony between Moscow and Beijing on the issue, and thus work as an indirect confirmation of the Hypothesis 1. However, it could just as likely simply mean that despite Chinese alignment with Russia, the violation of international law and Beijing’s own policy of non-interventionism was so blatant in this case that even as ally, China has decided not to openly back Russia. Such interpretation also seems to resonate with interpretation of recent Chinese behaviour towards Russia described in Chapter 1 and 5, thus separately inconclusive. Having said that, China’s veto right application from February 2022 onwards is again mimicking the pre-war patterns of Sino-Russian voting coordination (now on the currently ongoing conflict in Gaza), showing that every single Chinese veto has been accompanied by a veto from Russian Federation – therefore supporting the argument of Hypothesis 2 (UN Digital Library, 2024).

Thirdly, I intend to fill in the picture by analysing the official meetings between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, which has already been described in previous chapters as great individual motors behind Sino-Russian rapprochement. Here I will have to rely on individual analyses of other authors analysing the respective meetings that took place after February 2022, and then subject them to the metrics of my research. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the two leaders have officially met impressive 42 times, since Xi’s rise to power in 2013. This figure strongly supports the narrative of extraordinary relations between them, especially considering that opportunities for official visits between 2020-2022 were severely restrained by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The last “pre-war” meeting happened in early February 2022, during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, which was used by the two regimes as a display of unity and proclaimed partnership “without limits”. Ever since then however, Vladimir Putin was facing severe isolation and signs of disapproval from various global

leaders – including some of those seen as allies prior to the full-scale war (Ellison, Cox, Hanhimäki et al., 2023). Consequently, many anxiously awaited the first meeting of Xi and Putin, as its outcome was likely to determine the dynamics of their respective relations for years to come. Such opportunity offered itself during the planned September 2022 SCO summit in Samarkand. Russian position was already severely weakened coming to the conference, as the Russian Armed Forces had just suffered multiple humiliating defeats on the battlefield, having to retreat from their drive on Kiev, while suffering heavy casualties. The world then watched a rather awkward and cold reception of Vladimir Putin by Xi, who had reportedly first time ever “voiced his concerns”, while the usually joyful Vladimir Putin has described the meeting as “normal” (Mamatkulov, 2022). Such description seems to work in favour of the claim of my Hypothesis 1.

That said, already by the end of the year, over a videocall taking place in December 2022, Xi has reassured Putin that: *“China is ready to work (with Russia) to stand against hegemonism and power politics, and to oppose unilateralism, protectionism and bullying.”* The perceived return to Sino-Russian rapprochement is seen in the context of substantial domestic difficulties of Xi’s regime, following an unprecedented wave of protests against the “Zero-Covid” policy, eventually spilling into general display of grievances against the Central government (Yeung, Tarasova & Stambaugh, 2022). The two leaders would then meet again during Xi’s trip to Moscow in March 2023 and during the October 2023 Belt and Road Forum. According to expert analysis, the bond between the two figureheads was seemingly reminiscent of the pre-war levels, with Xi putting emphasis on the “long-term commitment” of the mutual relations (Lin, Hart & Lu, 2023). Such findings seem to favour the validity of my Hypothesis 2.

Lastly, I would like to focus on the manner the narrative of the war in Ukraine is presented by the Chinese authorities, particularly to the domestic audience. As the neoclassical realist analysis of the domestic factors shaping Chinese foreign policy in Chapter 4 suggested, regime’s stability and legitimacy is not tied to winning elections, but rather to a perception of popular support. For that reason, we might expect the government to be motivated to use its firm control of information space to shape the public narrative in a way that would offer support for the ultimate outcome the authorities desire. In other words, should the government decide for a specific course of its foreign policy, we are likely to see it reflected in the way they attempt to control public narrative. The goal will be to create a favourable

environment for the said trajectory. Therefore, we are likely to be able to determine Beijing's position on the war in Ukraine based on the point of view the state medias will be trying to "sell" to the domestic audience.

Given the absence of plurality of opinion in the Chinese information space, which is particularly true for the public information course taken by the Party, one might expect that any narrative presented by the high-ranking Party representatives is the official narrative decided upon by the Party's leadership. Such factor helps in identifying government's position on important topics, as its leaders are likely to present a unified picture. Having said that, we might see quite an apologetic approach towards Russia coming from the likes of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his spokespersons, who have already few months into the full-scale war, started to increasingly refer to the "complex historical background of the Ukraine issue" and the "legitimate security concerns of the Russian side" (Gündoğan, 2023). According to other scholars, Beijing has deployed a specific interpretation of its non-interference policy criticising Western sanctions as gross violation of Russia's sovereignty and international order, yet refrained from any criticism of Russia, and instead urged for "dialogue and peaceful consultations" (Dong & Ma, 2022). This is relevant, because according to experts, there has been a noticeable shift in linguistics regarding the war in Ukraine when comparing the reporting during its early days and some months later (MOFA, 2022a). As Gündoğan (2023) points out, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated at the Munich Security Conference in February 2022 that "*the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected and safeguarded. [...] And that applies equally to Ukraine*". Such claims were accompanied by an occasional denouncement of the invasion from sides of Chinese cultural elites and academia. However, shortly after the invasion the narrative of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shifted – instead of talking about "war in Ukraine", the ministry has softened the issue, talking about "Ukraine issue". The term "war" or "Russian aggression" were changed into "crisis", "conflict", "Special military operation" and other euphemisms (MOFA, 2022b). Likewise, there was a visible effort into transforming the original narrative of "Ukraine's sovereignty" and "national integrity" into a "the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries," (Feigenbaum, 2022), likely creating intentional ambiguity in the cause-effect chain of events.

Similar picture is painted in the Hanley's, Kumar's, & Durumeric's (2023) study on the reporting in Chinese state media, noticing significant manipulation with the information picture. Topics related to the war are systematically buried to the bottom of the news feed, and when featured it is rich in disinformation and propaganda (spreading stories like the existence of US biolaboratories), while at the same time remaining silent of apparent Russian war crimes such as the massacres in Bucha or Mariupol. Government in Beijing seems determined to limit the space for unnecessary questions. In other words, CCP wants to prevent the topic to be widely discussed and debated by the Chinese public, as it might bring unwanted attention to the inconsistencies and holes in narrative, especially given their long-standing adherence to the non-interventionist policy (Gündoğan, 2023). Reportedly, the openly pro-Russian voices have incomparably greater media space, and the state media are systematically trying to water down Western interpretation of the events (Repnikova, 2022). All that while the US, NATO, and the West are consistently blamed for the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine (McCarthy, 2022).

All of this evidence suggests China's inclination towards Russia. Chinese media has obviously picked a side, however since they are state controlled that means that if they chose a side, the regime has chosen a side. Clearly, Beijing has decided to stand with its ally Russia, and is now transforming the domestic narrative in a sense that is supportive to the formation of its foreign policy. In view of the war itself and to my hypotheses, it seems without a doubt that such scenario strongly supports Hypothesis 2, predicting quick recovery to the "pre-war" level relations between Russia and China. At the same time, the initial wavering in reporting consistency and some signs of disapproval might be a partial confirmation of Hypothesis 1.

To conclude, I would like to summarize the findings of the analysed indicators. All four indicators illustrate Sino-Russian relations as converging and warm overall. In terms of mutual visits between the leaders, the joint military exercises and voting patterns in the UN Security council, the current situation is reminiscent of the "pre-war" level suggesting that should there be any fall-out in the mutual relations, it has likely quickly recovered. Same argument is supported by the analysis on the narrative in Chinese media space and official statements. All of this seems to prove my Hypothesis 2 valid. On the other hand, findings related to the Hypothesis 1 are more inconclusive. While none of the four measured



indicators directly disproves the hypothesis, only the “official visits between leaders” and “media discourse” provide some ground for its support, implying it has only a partial merit.

## **7. Why didn't China denounce the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine?**

Whether or not is Chinese behaviour of allying itself with Russia objectively beneficial and rational, I cannot tell, however according to all the evidence and the logic of the NCR theory, the Chinese regime seems to believe so. As realist theory postulates, the states will act in a manner that will maximize their national power. According to this logic, Xi's administration believes the supportive neutrality towards Russia to be the most beneficial course of action for China. My research has proven that Beijing has indeed fared towards this trajectory, meaning there is likely a perception of reward awaiting China somewhere on this path. Final part of my research in order to answer to my research question will thus constitute of an argument trying to determine what such motivation is.

What seems to be the case, is the Beijing's dilemma to satisfy seemingly contradictory goals of committing to its responsibility for maintenance of the international order, support for globalisation and free trade rights, and adherence to its own declared foreign policies (like the policy of non-interventionism) on one hand, while also committing to the foreign policy course of "strategic partnership" with Russia, weakening of global Western influence, and securing its superpower position by driving the US out of its sphere of influence. To do so, China has employed a stance of "pro-Russian neutrality", essentially trying to navigate between the two poles.

Having described the dynamic history between China and Russia, and covering the converging and diverging tendencies between the two powers in Chapter 1, analysing China's position and foreign policy formulation through the lenses of Neoclassical realist theory in Chapter 4, explaining Chinese stance on non-interventionism in Chapter 5, and finally proving Chinese alignment with Russia in the wake of the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine in Chapter 6, I will now merge all the evidence and knowledge of the respective chapters in order to answer my research question. The answer is in principle twofold.

Firstly, I argue that China did not denounce Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite its blatant breach of its non-interventionist policy because it is primarily a defensive policy, which was constructed to first-and-foremost protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity from outside influence. The external aspect of such policy was nevertheless important, as among others it provided credibility for the domestic aspect and oftentimes provided China with a

narrative to present Beijing as having the higher moral ground. Looking at the non-interference policy as a primarily defensive scheme would explain the many inconsistencies and its creative interpretations by Beijing on the international scene.

Being formulated right after the end of the “Century of Humiliation”, which was concluded by the ultimately victorious fight for its survival against the Japanese Imperial army and subsequent civil war, the non-interventionism policy was designed to raise chances of the early regime’s survival. Now that Chinese might grow to an unprecedented level, so does its assertiveness. With global influence secured by the immense Chinese economy (largest in terms of PPP), its borders protected by world’s third largest and ever-growing nuclear arsenal and its regional interests promoted by the mighty People’s Liberation Army, China no longer needs to suffer from fear of mainland invasion. All of this offers China a certain degree of flexibility in the enforcement of the policy, as sometimes the national interest might outweigh the need for principality. I argue that the fact that Chinese cumulative strength (both in term of “state power” and “national power”) is increasingly outclassing Russia plays an important role in the motivation of Beijing to disregard its policy of non-interventionism. As Moscow - due to its comparable weakness - no longer presents an existential threat to the Chinese regime, Beijing can afford to ease on its non-interventionist policy, since its military is a sufficient deterrence itself. These findings on its own do not explain the Chinese breach of its own non-interventionist policy, however it does illustrate conditions under which it could happen so.

For that reason, it is important to also look at the second leg of my argument, according to which China has refused to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine because from the point of view of geopolitics (and realism), Beijing benefits from the current conflict constellation. During the Cold war era, China has position itself to be the leader of the “Third World”, as a shielding against the “First World” led by the US, and “Second World” led by the USSR. Nowadays the system seems to be divided between the US-led pro-status quo camp and China-led revisionist camp. In the anarchic international global landscape currently formed by the increasing rivalry between democratic and revisionist powers, the realist theory says that in order to survive, states will opt to balance out against stronger powers either by an alliance or an increase in military power (Waltz, 1979). As regional rivals of China are - in fear of Chinese growing power and malicious intentions – increasingly turning towards the US, which is then using these states as the launching bases for its containment policies, China

will answer to the US pivot to Asia, by balancing, ergo building the PLA's capabilities, expanding its nuclear arsenal, and by looking for a likeminded regional powers – the Russian Federation. To achieve its military build-up, Beijing is motivated to remain on good terms with Moscow as - according to the findings of Chapter 1 - weapon system production is one of the few remaining fields of innovation Russia is capable of producing on a competitive level. As consequence, Beijing can use Russia's desperate need for allies to free-ride in the last few areas of Moscow's predominance, in an attempt to overcome the technological military superiority of the West and mitigate their technological bottlenecks (Kirchberger, Sinjen, Wörmer et al, 2022).

Moreover, with their “back” secured, both Russia and China may free up significant resources which were for decades allocated to protect the long-contested 4.200 km long land border, allowing to focus on their respective true objectives – the Russian war campaign in Europe and Chinese power expansion in the South China sea. By waging a war in Europe, Russia has already applied a considerable pressure on the Western community, testing the very limits of the Trans-Atlantic cohesion both on the level of supranational organisations (EU, NATO, UN, ...), but also on the state level, where each democratic country is fighting its own battles for its nation's international orientation. To put it simply, I argue that China did not denounce Russian invasion of Ukraine because no matter the outcome of the conflict, in the context of the global balance of power and cost/benefit mathematics, China is likely to profit.

If Russia will achieve anything that can - even distantly - be declared as victory, the entire global revisionist bloc led by China will be encouraged. Russia will prove that an aggressive war for territory isn't only a relic of the past and that not only is the Western-led global order weakening, more importantly, it can be changed by force and directly challenged. United States are already facing a dilemma how to balance between great power frictions in multiple global theatres and even partial Russian victory would only further strengthen the perception of the US as superpower in decline.

Additionally, should Russia fail in its war, or achieve mere stalemate, its geopolitical position will be severely weakened. Moscow would likely be forced to vacate premises of influence it is still desperately trying to hold in the post-Soviet countries, which are however also in China's scope, for their natural resources and strategic location for the Belt and Road initiative. Arnold Wolfers has said "*Since nations, like nature, are said to abhor a vacuum,*

*one could predict that the powerful nation would feel compelled to fill the vacuum with its own power"* (Wolfers, 1962). In my view, such scenario would compel Beijing to fill the power gap caused by Russia's weakening, and since of all the regional powers it is best equipped to do so, it will. Furthermore, China does not need a strong Russia. Already today, there are very few products with high added-value Russia is capable of producing, playing primarily a role of supplier of raw materials for the ever-expanding Chinese economy. This role only intensified, as the trade with Europe plummeted, and Moscow was pressured by Beijing to sell its resources under the market-value in order to finance its expensive war in the west. Such notion is already mirrored in case of the mutual military collaboration. By aiding China with its military build-up, Russia is systematically boosting the military power of its former foe, relations with which tend to shift dramatically over the course of history. Ultimately, Moscow has decided to exchange a short-term profit for a security uncertainty, only to further widen the power gap between the two states and thus again risk to undermine its own great power status that Moscow so desires.

Furthermore, a potential defeat in the war would throw Russia into a serious depression, lacking manpower, investments, and national trajectory. The already apparent economic power asymmetry between Russia and China would further significantly intensify and such weakness would likely be met with corresponding increase in Chinese influence, which can be particularly effective in the scarcely populated resource rich Far East region that Moscow plunder, yet mostly neglects. Regions that are often populated by ethnic minorities that are systematically prioritized in the Kremlin's military mobilisation in attempts to shift the blame for the war away from the power centres of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Loosening power grip in the Far-East regions, to some of which China has historically laid claims, worries the Kremlin, as Chinese investments, and illegal migration from the overpopulated regions of China grow. The combination of sanctions, inflation, secondary sanctions, and the outflow of both cash and manpower towards the war effort, are all factors further weakening Moscow's position in these regions, which could severely undermine its loyalty, or at least make it more receptive towards further outside influence.

What is certain is that whatever the case, China has already been able to learn many priceless information about how the system reacts to a significant test of its cohesion. The war in Ukraine is essentially like a free war game for China, where it can test the very limits of Western will and ability to stand for its declared principles. Should Beijing ever decide to

test them, the war in Ukraine has presented a blueprint on many “dos” and “don’ts”. This can all be applied to China’s targets in the South China Sea or the Taiwan issue. Indeed, China has already gained a lot by this war, and it seems like there is even more to be gained for the fabled Middle Kingdom. To conclude, I argue that the underlining reason for the absence of condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine by China is the ultimate result of the benefit/cost mathematics that Beijing expects from the outcome.

However further research on the topic will be needed to put these findings into greater context and perspective. As the war in Ukraine enters a new stage, close monitoring of the impact on the global balance of power and the Western-revisionist tensions will be required by academia. Especially the evolution of the dynamics between Russia and China will be interesting to follow, since the performance on the battlefield is likely to influence to a significant degree Russian performance on the international arena. The war in Ukraine will likely be one of the defining moments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a potential to tilt the scales decisively towards either greater engagement of the West or bring it upon an ethos of defeatism. In my research I have focused primarily on China since no matter the outcome of the war, the role of Beijing will be central to any kind of potential post-war scenario that may occur. For that reason, I believe it could be valuable for the global understanding of the issue to further extend the research by applying new variables into the Neoclassical realist perspective on China, as well as applying other theoretical scopes of interpretation, which might potentially uncover other pieces of information which could prove important for the better understanding of the intricate web of restraints and motivations on the international scene.

## Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to determine whether and how has the full-scale war in Ukraine impacted the Sino-Russian relations. To accomplish this, I have constructed several arguments related to how Beijing's policy towards Moscow is shaped, stemming from the analysis of the modern Sino-Russian relations, their converging and diverging tendencies, systemic and domestic factors shaping its position on foreign policy, and finally the Beijing's declared policy of non-interventionism. These findings were then analysed through the optics of Neoclassical realism. The subsequent comparison of the Sino-Russian relations measured on specific indicators consisting of a number of official visits, joint military exercises, patterns of behaviour in the UN Security Council, and official statements analysis, has shown only negligible difference between the pre- and post-invasion levels. Likewise, the media and official statements are heavily tilted towards pro-Russia narrative, systematically bending the Chinese domestic information space in its favour. Such findings demonstrate a significant degree of trust and cooperation between Beijing and Moscow, thus strongly supporting the validity of my Hypothesis 2: "The Sino-Russia relations will experience quick recovery." Having said that, the results offered only partial support for the Hypothesis 1: "The 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine will impair Sino-Russian relations in the short period after its initiation.", and its validity therefore could not have been satisfactorily proven.

Furthermore, after considering both domestic and systemic factors shaping the Chinese policy of non-interventionism, I concluded that the said policy was intended to be primarily defensive, creating a narrative that would add further illegitimacy to any potential foreign invasion, and thus assist with ensuring regime's survival during its most vulnerable times shortly after its establishment and the end of the "Century of Humiliation". Additionally, my claim is that the domestic incentive to uphold this policy is weakening as China's might gradually grows and its sovereignty and territorial integrity is secured by its strong military. Moreover, as China rises in importance on the international sphere, its determination to adhere to the policy of non-interventionism is further depleted by its needs to contribute to the maintenance of the system. While the relevance of this policy in Beijing is accounted for by the numerous declarations of Chinese officials on the topic, the reference in the Constitution, and Beijing's official foreign policy proclamations, my underlining argument

is that the fading importance of the said policy is diluting Beijing's resolution to support such declarations with actions. Therefore, should the national interest outweigh the lessening benefits of compliance with the policy, China is increasingly motivated to ignore it, as was the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. To summarize all of these separate analyses, I come to conclusion answering my research question "**Why did China not oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite its long-lasting tradition of non-interference policy?**", arguing that Beijing has above all always sculpted its approach towards Russia based on its needs and power positioning with the international system, balancing its risks and benefits linked to its systemic or revisionist approach, combining them according to the likelihood of the highest reward. In other words, as necessity to adhere to its non-interventionism policy softens, China's lack of condemnation towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine stems from the result of their perceived cost/gains calculation.

In most of the possible war scenarios, China is likely to benefit as even illusory Russian victory in its war of aggression would likely spell large array of dire consequences for the already weakening Western-led international order, empowering the global revisionist camp guided by Beijing. Russia's defeat, on the other hand, or unsatisfactory stalemate for Moscow would severely weaken the Eurasian giant, further intensifying its dependency on China, further positioning the already unfavourable Russian negotiation situation into a mere "raw material" supplier, which would further open the vulnerable and resource rich regions of Far-East Russia towards more intensive economic colonisation from China, and accelerate the process of overtaking of the bastions of Russian political influence in former Soviet states of Central Asia. Indeed, I argue that Beijing seems to be the true winner of the Russo-Ukrainian war, however more studies need to be done on the topic, as the conflict's dynamics is still evolving, and the final outcomes are yet to be seen.



## Summary

Cílem této práce bylo zjistit, zda a jakým způsobem válka na Ukrajině ovlivnila čínsko-ruské vztahy. Za tímto účelem jsem zkonstruoval několik argumentů týkajících se utváření politiky Pekingem vůči Moskvě, které vycházejí z analýzy moderních čínsko-ruských vztahů, jejich sbližujících a odstředivých tendencí, systémových a domácích faktorů utvářejících čínskou zahraniční politiku, a na závěr také studiem Pekingem deklarované „politiky nevměšování“. Tyto poznatky následně byly analyzovány skrze optiku neoklasického realismu. Následné srovnání čínsko-ruských vztahů měřené na základě konkrétních ukazatelů sestávajících z počtu oficiálních návštěv hlav těchto států, společných vojenských cvičení, vzorců chování v Radě bezpečnosti OSN a analýzy oficiálních prohlášení ukázalo pouze zanedbatelný rozdíl mezi úrovní vztahů Ruska a Číny před a po invazi na Ukrajinu. Z vyjádření médií a oficiální prohlášení čínských státních představitelů navíc vidíme silnou tendenci k prezentaci ruského narativu, což systematicky ohýbá čínský domácí informační prostor ve prospěch vzájemného sbližování. Tato zjištění ukazují na značnou míru důvěry a spolupráce mezi Pekingem a Moskvou, čímž silně podporují platnost mé Hypotézy 2 predikující rychlé oživení čínsko-ruských vztahů. Naopak tyto výsledky poskytly pouze částečnou podporu pro Hypotézu 1, předvídající dočasný propad rusko-čínských vztahů po zahájení invaze a ruských neúspěších na bojišti. Platnost této hypotézy tak nemohla být uspokojivě prokázána.

V následovné analýze domácích i systémových faktorů formujících čínskou politiku nevměšování dospěl k závěru, že zmíněná politika měla být primárně politikou obrannou, která měla pomoci vytvářet narativ, který by zvýšil nelegitimitu případné zahraniční invazi a napomohl tak k přežití režimu v jeho nejzranitelnějším období krátce po založení Čínské lidové republiky a ukončení tzv. "Století ponížení". Dále tvrdím, že domácí motivace k udržování této politiky slábnou s tím, jak postupně roste moc Číny a její územní celistvost je zabezpečena silnou armádou. Stejně tak s tím, jak roste význam Číny na mezinárodním poli a Peking je nucen více se angažovat v údržbě mezinárodního systému, klesá její odhodlání dodržovat politiku nevměšování, ježto se s ní tato role občas vylučuje. Ačkoli je význam této politiky pro čínskou zahraniční politiku stále značný, jak lze vidět např. v rámci četných prohlášení čínských představitelů na toto téma, odkazem v ústavě, či oficiálními proklamacemi v dokumentech popisujících zahraničně-politického směřování Pekingem, jedním z argumentů této práce je, že slábnoucí význam uvedené politiky oslabuje odhodlání Pekingem podpořit své deklarace činy. Pokud tedy národní zájem převáží nad stále se

snižujícím se přínosem dodržování této politiky, Čína je stále více motivována ji ignorovat, jako tomu bylo právě v případě ruské invaze na Ukrajinu. Shrnu-li všechny tyto samostatné body mé analýzy, docházím k závěru, který odpovídá na mou výzkumnou otázku "Proč se Čína navzdory své dlouholeté tradici politiky nevměšování nepostavila proti ruské invazi na Ukrajinu?", kde tvrdím, že Peking především vždy utvářel svůj přístup k Rusku na základě svých vlastních mocenských potřeb a postavení vůči mezinárodnímu systému, přičemž vyvažoval rizika a přínosy spojené s jeho systémovým či revizionistickým přístupem a kombinoval je podle pravděpodobnosti nejvyšší odměny. Jinými slovy, společně s tím, jak se zmírňuje nutnost dodržování politiky nevměšování, narůstá význam kalkulace nákladů a zisků, která stále také za absencí odsouzení ruské invaze na Ukrajinu.

Ve většině možných scénářů vývoje války Čína pravděpodobně získá, protože i iluzorní ruské vítězství v agresivní válce by pravděpodobně znamenalo velkou řadu neblahých důsledků pro již tak oslabující mezinárodní řád vedený Západem, což by dále posílilo globální revizionistický tábor vedený Pekingem. Na druhou stranu ruská porážka, nebo pro Moskvu neuspokojivá patová situace by euroasijského obra vážně oslabila, čímž by dále posílila jeho závislost na Číně, podkopala by již tak nevýhodný ruský vyjednávací kapitál v oblasti dodávek surovin, otevřela by zranitelné a na suroviny bohaté regiony Dálného východu Ruska intenzivnější ekonomické kolonizaci ze strany Číny a urychlila by proces ovládnutí bašt ruského politického vlivu v bývalých sovětských státech Střední Asie. Na základě těchto zjištění tvrdím, že Peking se zdá být skutečným vítězem rusko-ukrajinské války, nicméně na toto téma je třeba vypracovat další studie, jelikož dynamika konfliktu se stále vyvíjí a na konečné výsledky si ještě musíme počkat.

# List of References

## Academic Articles

Alenezi, D. A. (2024). US rebalance strategy to Asia and US-China rivalry in South China Sea from the perspective of the offensive realism. *Review of Economics and Political Science*, 9(2), 102-115.

Bekkevold, J. I., & Engh, S. (2017). Silk road diplomacy: China's strategic interests in South Asia. In S. Rynning (Ed.), *South Asia and the great powers: International relations and regional security* (pp. 147–173). I.B. Tauris.

Bin, Y. (2023). Testing the Limits of Strategic Partnership. *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, 25(2).

Caliendo, L., & Parro, F. (2023). Lessons from US–China trade relations. *Annual Review of Economics*, 15, 513-547.

Carroll, J. M. (2021). *China Hands and Old Cantons: Britons and the Middle Kingdom*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Cox, M. (2023, December). 15. Comrades? Xi, Putin, and the Challenge to the West. In *Ukraine* (p. 335).

Danilin, I., Kislitsyn, S. V., Kvashnin, Y., Kobrinskaya, I., Lomanov, A. V., & Utkin, S. (2022). European Union–China in the Changing World Composition. *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, 66(1), 68-79.

Davis, G. D., & Slobodchikoff, M. O. (2022). Great-Power Competition and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 5(4), 215-226.

Dong Xue, Ma Zhuoyin (2022). Foreign ministry spokesman answers reporters' questions on Ukraine, US–Russia relations. *Xinhua*, 24 February. Available at: [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-02/24/content\\_5675296.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-02/24/content_5675296.htm)

Donnellon-May, G. (2023). Power of Siberia 2: Moving beyond a pipe dream?. *Lowy Institute*.

Elleman, B. A. (1994). The Soviet Union's secret diplomacy concerning the Chinese eastern railway, 1924–1925. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 53(2), 459–486. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2059842>

Ellison, J., Cox, M., Hanhimäki, J. M., Harrison, H. M., Ludlow, N. P., Romano, A., ... & Zubok, V. (2023). The war in Ukraine. *Cold War History*, 23(1), 121-206.

Eskridge-Kosmach, A. N. (2008). Russia in the boxer rebellion. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 21(1), 38–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040801894142>

Feigenbaum Evan A. (2022a) China faces irreconcilable choices on Ukraine. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 24 February. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/02/24/china-faces-irreconcilable-choices-on-ukraine-pub-86515> (accessed 21 December 2022).

Ferrari, A., & Tafuro Ambrosetti, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Russia and China. Anatomy of a partnership*. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. <https://doi.org/10.14672/67059799>

Foulon, M. (2015). Neoclassical realism: challengers and bridging identities. *International Studies Review*, 17(4), 635-661.

Garver, J. W. (2003). Review: Mao's soviet policies. *The China Quarterly*, 173, 197–213. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009443903000111>

Gerson, M. S. (2010). The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict: Deterrence, Escalation, and the Threat of Nuclear War in 1969. *CNA*.

Götz, E. (2021). Neoclassical realist theories, intervening variables, and paradigmatic boundaries. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(2).

Gündoğan, I. (2023). China's Responses After the Russian War of Aggression Against Ukraine vis-à-vis the European Union and Its Own Population. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 18681026231212493.

Hanley, H. W., Kumar, D., & Durumeric, Z. (2023, June). "A Special Operation": A Quantitative Approach to Dissecting and Comparing Different Media Ecosystems' Coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian War. In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (Vol. 17, pp. 339-350).

He, K., & Li, M. (2020). Understanding the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US–China strategic competition, regional actors, and beyond. *International Affairs*, 96(1), 1-7.

Hu, W., & Meng, W. (2020). The US Indo-Pacific strategy and China's response. *China Review*, 20(3), 143-176.

Karlsrud, J. (2023). 'Pragmatic Peacekeeping' in Practice: Exit Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 17(3), 258-272.

Korolev, A., & Portyakov, V. (2019). Reluctant allies: System-unit dynamics and China-Russia relations. *International Relations*, 33(1), 40–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818812561>

Larson, C. (2020, August 28). Russia and China want to build a 'non-nuclear' submarine together. *The National Interest*. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russia-and-china-want-build-non-nuclear-submarine-together-167911>

Lin, B., Hart, B., Lu, S., & Liao, Y.-J. (Grace). (2023, October 23). Analyzing the latest XI-putin meeting and China's belt and road forum. *CSIS*.

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/analyzing-latest-xi-putin-meeting-and-chinas-belt-and-road-forum>.

Lubina, M. (2017). Russia and China: A political marriage of convenience—Stable and successful. *Barbara Budrich Publishers*. <https://doi.org/10.3224/84742045>

Lukonin, S. (2023). Russia-China Relations: An Asymmetrical Partnership?. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 16(2), 65-86.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2021). The inevitable rivalry: America, China, and the tragedy of great-power politics. *Foreign Affairs.*, 100, 48.

Meibauer, G., Desmaele, L., Onea, T., Kitchen, N., Foulon, M., Reichwein, A., & Sterling-Folker, J. (2021). Rethinking neoclassical realism at theory's end. *International Studies Review*, 23(1), 268-295.

Meng, W. (2023). *Developmental Peace: Theorizing China's Approach to International Peacebuilding*. Ibidem.

Metcalf, M. (2020). The National Humiliation Narrative. *Education about Asia [JJ]*, *Education about Asia*.

Quek, K., & Johnston, A. I. (2017). Can China back down? Crisis de-escalation in the shadow of popular opposition. *International Security*, 42(3), 7-36.

Raditio, K. H. (2015). China's shifting behaviour in the South China Sea: a defensive realist perspective. *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 309-328.

Repnikova Maria (2022) Deciphering Chinese media discourse on the Russia-Ukraine war. *China Media Project*, 29 June. Interviewed by Joyce Chan. Available at: <https://chinamediaproject.org/2022/06/29/deciphering-chinese-media-discourse-on-the-russia-ukraine-war/> (accessed 21 December 2022).

Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), 144–172. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054068>

Rumer, E., & Sokolsky, R. (2021, June 17). Chinese-Russian defense cooperation is more flash than bang. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/17/chinese-russian-defense-cooperation-is-more-flash-than-bang-pub-84787>

Saradzhyan, S. (2020). Why Russia's alliance with China is improbable, but not impossible. *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*. <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/recherches-et-documents/2020/202013.pdf>.

Schweller, R. L. (1993). Tripolarity and the Second World War. *International Studies Quarterly*, 37(1), 73-103.

Shahi, D. K. (2022). War in Ukraine: A Geopolitical Analysis. *International Journal of Research in Social Science*, 12(06).

Sherrill, C. W., & Hough, R. A. (2015). Current Japanese security policy towards China and neoclassical realism: Testing IR theories. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 2(3), 237-265.

Simes, D. (2019, December 20). Russia up in arms over Chinese theft of military technology, Beijing's rise as a major armaments' exporter is a double-edged sword for Moscow. *Nikkei Asia*. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Russia-up-in-arms-over-Chinese-theft-of-military-technology>.

Sørensen, C. T. N. (2013). Is China Becoming More Aggressive? A Neoclassical Realist Analysis. *Asian Perspective*, 37(3), 363–385. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704834>

Taliaferro, J. W. (2006). State building for future wars: Neoclassical realism and the resource-extractive state. *Security studies*, 15(3), 464-495.

Wang, W. (2019, December 9). Russia, China need strategic reassurance. *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1172848.shtml>.

Yakhshilikov, S. (2023). Unavoidable Clashes: Exploring the Implications of a China-Russia Alliance on Global Geopolitics. *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 12(23).

## **Books:**

Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives* by Zbigniew Brzezinski. Basic Books.

Christensen, T. J. (1996). *Useful adversaries: Grand strategy, domestic mobilization, and Sino-American conflict, 1947-1958* (Vol. 179). Princeton University Press.

Elleman, B. A., & Kotkin, S. (Eds.). (2010). *Manchurian railways and the opening of China: An international history*. M.E. sharpe. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315702643>

Fravel, M. T. (2008). *Strong Borders, secure nation. Cooperation and conflict in China's territorial disputes*. Princeton University Press.

Garver, J. W. (2016). *China's quest. In The history of the foreign relations of the People's Republic of China*. Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190261054.001.0001>

Giegerich, B., & Terhalle, M. (2021). *The Responsibility to Protect. Rethinking Germany's Strategic Culture*. London.

Glaser, C.L. (2010). *Rational theory of international politics: The logic of competition and cooperation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Goldstein, A. (2020). *China's grand strategy under xi Jinping. Reassurance, reform, and resistance*. *International Security*, 45(1), 164–201.
- Heller, R. (2018). *More rigor to emotions! A comparative, qualitative content analysis of anger in Russian foreign policy*. *Researching emotions in international relations: Methodological perspectives on the emotional turn*, 75-99.
- Hermet, G. (1978). *Elections without choice*. Springer.
- Hodzi, O. (2019). *The end of China's non-intervention policy in Africa* (p. 109). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kirchberger, S., Sinjen, S., & Wörmer, N. (2022). *Russia-China relations: emerging alliance or eternal rivals?* (p. 315). Springer Nature.
- Lampton, D. M. (2024). *Living U.S.-China relations: From Cold War to Cold War*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lo, B. (2017). *A wary embrace: What the China-Russia relationship means for the world*. Lowy institute for international policy. Penguin Books.
- Lo, B. (2019). Introduction in J. I. Bekkevold & B. Lo (Eds.), *Sino-Russian relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 1–17). Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92516-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92516-5_1)
- MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M. (2006). *Mao's last revolution*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk12s4j>
- Murphy, D. C. (2022). *China's rise in the Global South: the Middle East, Africa, and Beijing's alternative world order*. Stanford University Press.
- Nathan, A., & Ross, R. S. (1997). *The Great Wall and empty fortress. China's search for security*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Paine, S. C. M. (1996). *Imperial rivals: China, Russia and their disputed frontier*. Routledge.
- Paine, S. C. M. (2014). *The wars for Asia, 1911–1949*. Cambridge University Press.
- Spence, J. D. (1990). *The search for modern China*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Storey, I. (2021). *The Russia-China Strategic Partnership and Southeast Asia: Alignments and Divergences*. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Waltz, K. (1979). *Structural Realism*. Cambridge University Press
- Westad, O. A. (2012). *Restless empire. China and the world since 1750*. The Bodley Head.
- Wolfers, A. (1962). *Discord and collaboration*. doi:10.2307/1952839

Zakaria, F. (1998). *From wealth to power: The unusual origins of America's world role*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## Internet sources

Brødsgaard, K. E., & Beck, K. I. (2023). The 14th NPC Meeting: Work Report, New Government, and Institutional Reform.

Chen, L., Tian, Y. L., & Faulconbridge, G. (2024, March 19). *Exclusive: Putin to visit China in May*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-visit-china-may-sources-2024-03-19/>

*China-Russia joint military exercises*. ChinaPower Project. (2023, August 22). <https://chinapower.csis.org/data/china-russia-joint-military-exercises/>

Chinese Ministry of Finance (2024)

"Global Diplomacy Index – Country Rank". Lowy Institute. Retrieved 26 February 2024.

International Monetary Fund. (2023). World Economic Outlook Database.

Kastouéva-Jean, T. (2024, March 16). *"Russia's presidential election is about Putin convincing himself and others that he has mastered all the workings of the system."* Le Monde.fr. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/03/16/russia-s-presidential-election-is-about-putin-convincing-himself-and-others-that-he-has-mastered-all-the-workings-of-the-system\\_6623892\\_23.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/03/16/russia-s-presidential-election-is-about-putin-convincing-himself-and-others-that-he-has-mastered-all-the-workings-of-the-system_6623892_23.html) Lin, B., Hart, B., Lu, S., & Liao, Y.-J. (Grace). (2023, October 23). *Analyzing the latest XI-Putin meeting and China's belt and road forum*. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/analyzing-latest-xi-putin-meeting-and-chinas-belt-and-road-forum>

Mamatkulov, M. (2022, September 16). *Putin says XI has questions and concerns over Ukraine*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-xi-set-meet-thursday-samarkand-2022-09-15/>

McCarthy Simone, and CNN's Beijing Bureau (2022) *China's promotion of Russian disinformation indicates where its loyalties lie*. CNN, 10 March. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/10/china/china-russia-disinformation-campaign-ukraine-intl-dst-hnk/index.html> (accessed 21 December 2022).

MOFA (2022a) Wang Yi: All parties need to work together for peace, not create panic or hype up war. *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 19 February. Available at: [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202202/t20220220\\_10643724.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202202/t20220220_10643724.html) (accessed 21 December 2022).

MOFA (2022b) Wang Yi expounds China's five-point position on the current Ukraine issue. *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 26 February. Available at:



[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202202/t20220226\\_10645855.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202202/t20220226_10645855.html) (accessed 21 December 2022).

Paulo, D. A., & Phang, C. (2019, November 8). *How China and Russia are becoming BFFs, following Trump's US policy*. Channel news Asia.  
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/how-china-russia-becoming-bffs-trump-policy-belt-road-initiative-12074394>.

Tan, C. (2024, March 5). *China boosts military spending by 7.2%, vows to "resolutely" deter Taiwan "separatist activities."* CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/03/05/china-defense-budget-2024.html>

The State Council Information Office, *A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions* (2023).

Yeung, J., Tarasova, D., & Stambaugh, A. (2022, December 30). *Putin and XI meet against backdrop of growing crises for both leaders*. CNN.  
<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/30/asia/china-xi-russia-putin-video-meeting-intl-hnk/index.html>

# List of Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Categorization of Sino-Russian relations (table)

Appendix no. 2: Significant Sino-Russian military and defence-industrial milestones (table)

Appendix no. 3: Relation between independent variable, dependent variable, and moderating factors in the NCR theory (figure)

Appendix no. 4: Declared Military Spending of China (Chart)

Appendix no. 5: Vetoes issued by the PRC at the UN Security Council (table)

Appendix no. 6: Number of joint Sino-Russian military exercises (Chart)

Appendix no. 1: Categorization of Sino-Russian relations (table)

**Table 1** How Russian, Chinese, and Western policymakers and experts describe the Russian-Chinese relationship (according to Simon Saradzhyan, 2020)

Description of Sino-Russian relations	Expert(s) and year
An alliance already	Sergei Karaganov (2007) Vasily Kashin (2014)
Not yet an alliance, but likely to become one	Yevgeny Buzhinsky (2016) Yan Xuetong (2016) Zhang Wenmu (2016)
Not an alliance	Russian-Chinese statement of June 2019
Not an alliance and unlikely to become one	Fiona Hill and Bobo Lo (2013); Bobo Lo (2017), Sergei Ivanov (2014), Fu Ying (2016), Chao Xie (2016), Alexander Lukin (2018), Jim Mattis (2018), Graham Allison (2019), Mikhail Korostikov (2019), Dmitri Trenin (2019)
A partnership	Russian leaders and documents (“comprehensive”), Chinese leaders and documents (“comprehensive strategic”), Trenin (“close” in 2018), Lukin (“strategic” in 2018), Feng and Huang (“strategic” in 2014)
An alignment	Daniel Coats (2019), Graham Allison (2019)
Other definitions	Korostikov: Friendship at arm’s length (2019), Trenin: Entente (2018); Richard J. Ellings and Robert Sutter: Axis of authoritarians (2018)

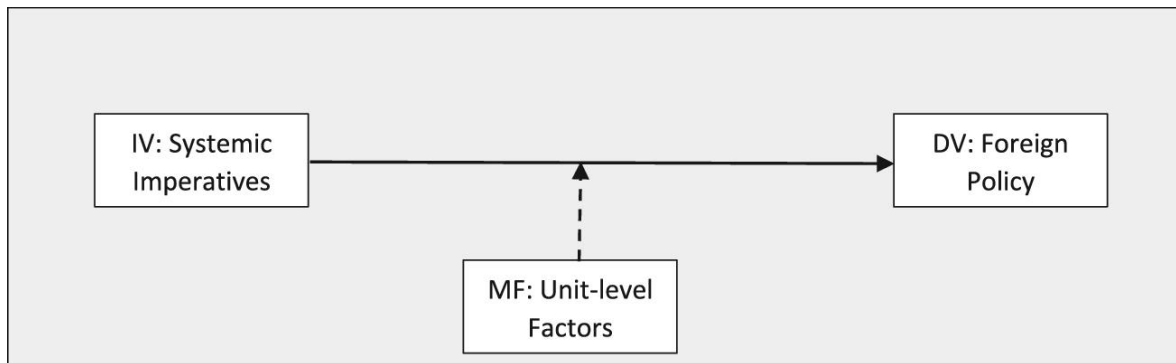
Appendix no. 2: Significant Sino-Russian military and defence-industrial milestones (table)

Year	Significant Sino-Russian military or defense-industrial milestones
1992	Agreement on military technology cooperation
1994	China orders two project 877EKM Kilo-class submarines from Russia (delivered in 1995)
1996	Establishment of a “strategic partnership of coordination.” China orders two improved project 636 Kilo-class submarines from Russia (delivered 1997–1998) and purchases two unfinished project 956 Sovremenny-class destroyers (delivered 1999–2000)
1998	China starts licensed production of the export version of the Russian Su-27 fighter aircraft as the Shenyang J-11
2001	Sino-Russian treaty of friendship concluded
2002	China orders eight improved project 636 M Kilo-class submarines from Russia (delivered 2005–2007) and two improved project 956EM Sovremenny-class destroyers (delivered 2005–2006)
2008	Agreement on intellectual property to prevent illegal copying of technologies
2008	Peaceful resolution of border dispute; defense ministers of both countries establish direct phone line
2011	Joint venture for servicing all Russian-made helicopters operating in China
2012	First round of annual joint naval exercise series “Joint Sea”
2013	Air forces exercise together for the first time
4/2015	Start of regular meetings within the framework of a “Sino-Russian Northeast Asian security dialogue” in response to THAAD deployment plans in South Korea
2015	Conclusion of new arms trade agreement over six battalions of the Russian S-400 air defense system and 24 Su-35 fighter aircraft, including delivery of extra engines and ancillary components, estimated to cost around USD3 billion
2015	Framework agreement on joint development of a heavy-lift helicopter
9/2015	Putin is present at China’s September 2015 military parade (an event largely boycotted by Western leaders)
6/2016	Agreement signed between Russian Helicopters and China’s Avicopter to jointly develop a new heavy-lift helicopter based on Russia’s Mi-26 design
11/2016	MoU signed between Russian satellite firm GLONASS and Chinese firm NORINCO for development of a new chipset for its navigation satellites
2016	First ever joint missile defense exercises
5/2017	Xi Jinping is guest of honor at Russia’s Victory Day parade on the 70th anniversary of the end of WW II (an event largely boycotted by Western leaders)
6/2017	General plan signed for bilateral military cooperation 2017–2020
12/2017	First Russian-Chinese anti-ballistic missile defense computer-simulated command post exercise takes place in Beijing
9/2018	First Chinese participation in Russia’s large-scale Vostok exercise
11/2018	Agreement signed between Russia and China on cooperation for the use of GLONASS and BeiDou global navigation satellite systems for peaceful purposes
7/2019	First joint strategic bomber patrol between South Korea and Japan near Dokdo draws warning shots from South Korean interceptors
7/2019	Russia passes law on GLONASS-BEIDOU SatNav cooperation
9/2019	A Chinese contingent participates for the first time in Russia’s Tsentr exercise
10/2019	Putin announces that Russia is helping China build a ballistic missile early warning system

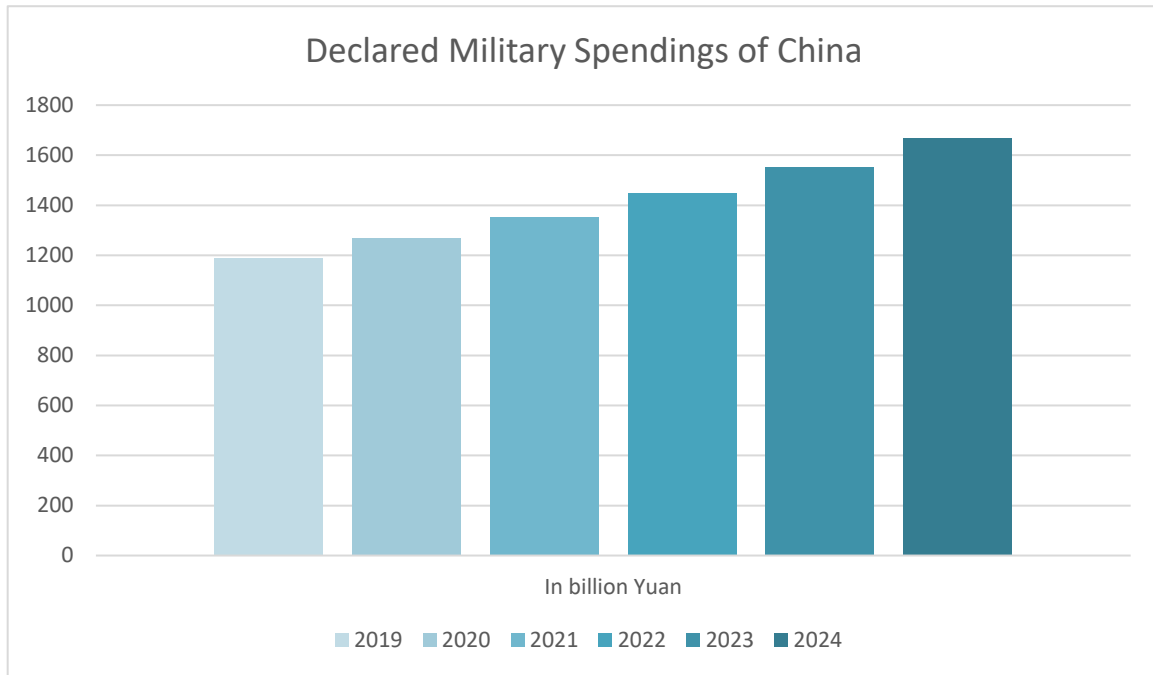
Appendix no. 2: Significant Sino-Russian military and defence-industrial milestones (table), part 2

Year	Significant Sino-Russian military or defense-industrial milestones
10/2019	Putin for the first time publicly characterizes Russia-China relations as “an allied relationship in the full sense of a multifaceted strategic partnership”
11/2019	First trilateral naval exercise between China, Russia, and South Africa off South Africa’s coast (“Naval Operation Mosi”)
12/2019	First trilateral naval exercise between China, Russia, and Iran in the Indian Ocean (“Operation Marine Security Belt”)
9/2020	A Chinese contingent participates in Russia’s Kavkaz exercise for the first time
10/2020	Putin publicly states that a military alliance with China “can be imagined” for the first time
8/2021	Russia and China hold “Interaction-2021” exercise in China for the first time, later branded as part of the Russian Zapad-2021 exercise
9/2021	Russia’s state space agency Roscosmos announces it will place ground stations for its GLONASS SatNav system across China and China will place ground stations for BeiDou in Russia
10/2021	First ever joint naval patrol of Russian and Chinese warships circling around Japan’s main island

Appendix no. 3: Relation between independent variable, dependent variable, and moderating factors in the NCR theory (figure)



Appendix no. 4: Declared Military Spending of China (Chart)



Appendix no. 5: Vetoes issued by the PRC at the UN Security Council (table)

<b>Vetos Issued by the People's Republic of China at the UN Security Council</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Grounds for dismissal</b>	<b>Russia Vetoed</b>
22 March 2024	Middle East/Palestine	Israel's violation of Palestine's sovereignty/Intervention	Yes
25 October 2023	Middle East/Palestine	Israel's violation of Palestine's sovereignty/Intervention	Yes
26 May 2022	North Korea	Opposing sanctions as tool of international intervention	Yes
10 July 2020	Middle East	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
7 July 2020	Middle East	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
20 December 2019	Middle East	Sovereignty and territorial integrity violation	Yes
19 September 2019	Syria	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
28 February 2019	Venezuela	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
28 February 2017	Syria	Against international investigation in Syria	Yes
5 December 2016	Syria	Against intervention in Syria	Yes
22 May 2014	Middle East/Syria	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
19 July 2012	Middle East/Syria	Sovereignty violation / non-interventionist approach	Yes
4 February 2012	Middle East/Syria	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
4 October 2011	Middle East/Syria	Perceived violation of Syria's sovereignty	Yes
11 July 2008	Zimbabwe	Opposing sanctions as tool of international intervention	Yes
12 January 2007	Myanmar	Perceived violation of Myanmar's sovereignty	Yes
25 February 1999	Macedonia	Unnecessary use of Peacekeeping force	No
10 January 1997	Guatemala	Perceived violation of China's sovereignty	No
25 August 1972	Bangladesh	Bangladeshi separatist movement / India's intervention	No

Appendix no. 6: Number of joint Sino-Russian military exercises (Chart)

