

RUSSIA-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, 2001-2017

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "**Russia-China Strategic Partnership, 2001 - 2017**" submitted by me in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for other degree of this University or any other University.

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*Dedicated to
My Parents*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SCO	Shanghai cooperation organization
BRICS	Brazil Russia India China South Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
CAR	Central Asian Region
CAS	Central Asian States
ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missiles
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
USD	United States Dollar
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
SCS	South China Sea
RFE	Russian Far East
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
OBOR	One Belt One Road
NSR	Northern Sea Route
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ITC	International Transport Corridor
EU	European Union
ETIM	Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank
NDB	New Development Bank
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorism structure
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
ESPO	Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean
CNPC	China National Petroleum Company
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
ASEM	Asia Europe Meeting
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

CCP

Chinese Communist Party

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off,”

-Franklin D Roosevelt, 1912¹

China and Russia are two countries on the quest to regain what they consider to be their rightful positions in the world. Both have lost their great-power status, in the case of China as a result of Western and Japanese collaboration, and for Russia with the fall of the Soviet Union. China and Russia share a geopolitical world vision and want to see a multipolar world order. How their relationship develops and how they perceive their positions in the international political system are of major importance for global development.

The partnership between China and Russia makes it possible to pursue a multilateral foreign policy and balance the influence of the West. For China, it is support for counteracting US influence in the Pacific region. The economic dependence between China and Russia is limited, but cooperation in the field of energy is evolving and arms cooperation with technology transfer is an important part of defense cooperation which is increasing. China's gradual economic reforms have created an economic superpower that is expected to be soon about the size of the United States as the world's largest economy, while Russia's economy stagnates. The Chinese government policy creates the conditions for economic cooperation, which has been successful in the competition with Russia in Central Asia.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia and China have gradually progressed to becoming pragmatic partners cooperating to push back an international system dominated by the West. The bilateral partnership between the two countries seems tactical and opportunist but there is an increasingly compatible economic, political and security interests. The common understanding regarding the geopolitical structure of the international system also arises from their desire to contain the dominance of the USA in the international political and economic system.

¹ Speech at the People's Forum in Troy, New York (March 3, 1912)

The two nations have common aspirations to shift the axis of global power from the Euro-Atlantic space to the East. Russia and China believe that they have been unfairly treated in the past and thus they seek to change the global governance structure which indicates the deepening of their strategic partnership (Ferdinand P, 2014). However, the Sino-Russian relations is complex because of the inherent mistrusts between them.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Russia and China did not have friendly relations up until early 1990s but changes in the outside world persuaded the two nations to come together and in 1996 a “Strategic Partnership” was established between the two countries. The Russia-China relations after the end of cold war can be considered as the greatest foreign policy success of the post-Soviet period. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian influence and status in the international structure were in a state of crisis in every aspect and in such circumstances the ‘strategic partnership’ with China was a notable exception. In this regard Paul. The development of the bilateral relationship between the two nations was arguably one of the biggest highlights of the Russian regime under Boris Yeltsin (Buszunski L ,2004).

The Sino-Russian partnership under the President Vladimir Putin was consolidated by signing the ‘Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation’, in July 2001². After the signing of this treaty, the gains of the 1990s were strengthened to take the bilateral relations at an all-time high. Thus, after being bitter enemies for a very long time, the two nations have adopted a path of friendship and close cooperation.

The strategic partnership between Russia and China is dynamic in nature as the global affairs are in profound transition and the two nations are not aloof to the emerging international trends and global events. The partnership between the two nations is thus not a static phenomenon, rather the strategic calculus is shaped by the adjustments according to the changes in the global and regional affairs. Thus, the bilateral relation between Russia and China cannot be studied in an isolated context.

² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China (2001), “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation”, 2001/07/24. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3220_664352/3221_664354/t16730.shtml

Russia and China have been working to reform their economies as a means to strengthen their status and influence in the global affairs. The Chinese economy has seen rapidly growing in the post-cold war period but the Russian economy has got limited success in its attempt to reform its economy. In the 2000s, Russian economy did have high growth rate but it could not sustain the same level of economic growth in the 2010s and the economic growth has been sluggish (Person R, 2016). In 2014, Russia went for a military aggression against the Ukraine over Crimea, which also had implication for its economy. After the Crimean Crisis, Russia was imposed with economic sanctions which gave a new dimension to its partnership with China. Ever since the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the relation with the West has worsened.

The Sino-Russian strategic partnership has got a push after the collapse of Russian relationship with the West over the issue of annexation of Crimea. The partnership has also flourished because of shared desire to challenge the existing international order based on principles which are promoted by the West. Despite the complementarities and shared understanding on many regional and global issues, the bilateral relation between Russia and China is complex marked by lingering mistrusts underlying this partnership.

Among the regional issues which play a significant role in determining the Sino-Russian strategic partnership include their engagement in the Central Asian Region, the Arctic, and the Russian Far East. The bilateral relation between the two nations is affected by the balance of competition and cooperation between them in these areas. The ability of the two nations to manage their differences in these areas and make tangible gains out of this cooperation indicate the deepening of the partnership.

In the last two decades, Russia and China have come closer owing to the developments in their external environment. The Sino-Russian partnership is a fluid alliance of two non-Western powers marked by presence of divergent views as well as cooperation in certain areas (Goldstein L.J, 2017). There is difference on the issue of relations with the West where China sees the importance of maintaining good relations with the USA as its most important economic partner while Russia's relations with the USA remains strained and in the last few years, even confrontational. Thus, a divergence of opinions on multiple issues prevents closer forms of cooperation and makes the bilateral partnership porous.

The process of rapprochement started in the mid-1990s when China and Russia had reached a point where enough trust had developed, and their interests had started to converge. The changing geopolitical structure and security environment of the two countries also encouraged the two nations to cooperate and seek rapprochement. The security environment in the post-Soviet space was increasingly becoming volatile as the former Soviet republics were looking for membership in the NATO and EU.

The Russian Foreign Policy during the early 1990s was focused on pro-Western approach which was later on replaced by a policy seeking to counter the influence of the USA. Also, Russia in the early 2000s, under the leadership of Putin was looking to diversify its relations with countries (Wilkins T.S, 2012). In this scenario, China appeared as the ally to achieve this objective. China, meanwhile, wanted to limit the presence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. The rise of China as an economic power and the need of China to modernize its Armed forces compelled it to seek closer relations with Russia. China has been apprehensive of the armament systems deployed by the United States during the first Iraq war and thus it wanted to modernize its army and here Russia was the most suitable partner to do that.

In 1989, the Tiananmen square event caused an arms embargo on China and following that China had very few suppliers ready to sell advanced equipment systems³. Russia was one of the available suppliers which caused the two nations to forge closer ties and seek strategic partnership. The two nations changed their views towards each other and in 1996, a ‘Strategic Partnership’ was established. Following the “War on Terror” after the 9/11 incident in 2001, China was shocked when Russia decided to side with the United States and allowed it to access the military bases in Central Asia⁴. This incident reduced the Russian interest in relationship with China. The concern in Chinese policy makers was that this orientation of Russian Foreign Policy would be permanent. However, Russia was soon disappointed with its treatment by the West in terms of its contribution

³ Council of Ministers Declaration on China, European Council: Madrid, 26-27 June 1989, URL:<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2016-03/Council-Statement.pdf>

⁴ The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days, US DEPARTMENT of STATE, URL:<https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/6947.htm>

in fighting the international terrorism. Russian leadership believed that its efforts were not appreciated to the extent that it anticipated.

Following this, other international events created conditions for Russia and China to forge closer ties and cooperate on regional and international issues. In 2003, in an action of unilateral aggression, the United States invaded Iraq without a UN Security Council Resolution⁵. The categorization of some states such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea as “axis of evil” further created the impression that the international arena is a unipolar world order, which is disliked by both the countries⁶.

Another important factor was that Russia and China did not approve of the ambition of the United States to spread democracy which further united the two nations on international issues. The Sino-Russian alliance also got a push because both the nations had apprehension that United States wanted to install friendly regimes under the garb of spreading democracy. The two nations share the belief that all nations have the right to decide their own political system and in doing so external interferences in the domestic affairs must be countered. Another point of common understanding was that Russia and China believe that a paternalistic centralized system with understanding which led to rapprochement was that the two nations promote market economy with a high degree of state intervention in a paternalistic centralized system.

All these factors and development in the international events helped Russia and China to resolve the border demarcation issues between them. The territorial disputes were resolved in 2004 by signing a treaty between them. Subsequently in 2008, a final agreement was signed to close the issue of border demarcation between them. In 2008, Russia and China signed an agreement to build the East Siberian Oil Pipeline (ESPO) which would carry oil from Siberia to the Chinese territory.

Russia-China relations trajectory suffered a minor setback when Russia went to war with Georgia. The Sino-Russian proximity was adversely affected after the incident as Russia went against two

⁵ “The U.S. Invasion of Iraq, 2003.” *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*, by David C. Gompert et al., RAND Corporation, 2014, pp. 161–174. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1287m9t.21.

⁶ *Beyond the Axis of Evil: Additional Threats from Weapons of Mass Destruction*, US DEPARTMENT of STATE, URL: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/us/rm/9962.htm>

principles which China considers important, non-interference in other countries domestic affairs and territorial integrity. This also raised an alarm among Chinese leadership as it touched upon the issue of Separatism, which is a highly sensitive topic for China given the ongoing separatist movements in regions like Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan.

After the incident put a minor strain on the bilateral relationship, it considerably improved since 2012. The new Chinese leadership under Xi Jinping which assumed power in 2012 also encouraged the rapprochement between the two nations. The bilateral partnership between the two countries was also facilitated by the personal chemistry which the President Putin and President Xi Jinping share.

Russia and China calling their partnership a 'Strategic partnership' is significant because it is a milestone that the two nations have achieved after decades of hostility. The approach adopted by the two nations was a way of dealing with a bigger neighbor with lack of trust and animosity between each other. Russia and China feared that they could turn out to be possible adversaries for each other if friendly relations were not established between them. The partnership between Russia and China thus is not entirely built on trust and goodwill between them. The partnership signifies that the two nations do not look at each other as adversaries. The two nations have strategic partnerships with many other countries which include the Central Asian countries and Western states like Denmark.

The Strategic partnership between Russia and China has its own set of challenges which emanate not only from their historical experiences with each other but also from their national interests. The two nations have realistic expectations from the partnership and they understand the limits of this partnership, thus adopting a flexible approach towards each other with regard to changes in international and regional environment. The Sino-Russian alliance is a fluid alliance which does not follow a specified set of principles and rather the response to each other's actions is based on their shared understanding on various issues.

The shared understanding on the geopolitical worldview, and the ambition to counter the influence of the United States in the region as well as at the global level. Russia and China promote the idea of a multipolar world order devoid of the dominance of the United States. The multipolar world order also signifies that actions of the nations are determined by their national interests. The Joint Statement released by Russia and China in 2005 also emphasizes the role of multilateral

institutions, international law, non-interference in domestic affairs and the nation's right to seek their own path to development⁷.

Defense and security cooperation has also shown signs of development in the form of joint military exercises between Russia and China, the first of which occurred under the banner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2005. While the 2005 "Peace Mission" exercise appeared to be evidence of deeper, positive cooperation, Bobo Lo (2012) observes that the exercise only took place after months of negotiating between Moscow and Beijing as to where it would be located⁸. China wanted the exercise to take place in Zhejiang province, near to the Taiwan Strait, but Russia rejected the location due to the provocative message it would send.

Furthermore, Russian and Chinese forces did not use the exercise to practice interoperability, but instead conducted their own exercises side by side. The critical ingredient missing in the early stages of the attempt to create closer ties was mutual trust and a readiness on both sides to move beyond rhetoric to pragmatic cooperation in the bilateral interest. In strategic terms, Beijing and Moscow would need to shift from coordination to collaboration.

Nevertheless, in recent years we have been witnessing a number of developments in world politics more broadly, as well as in Sino-Russian relations. These developments justify revisiting these assessments and the evidence on which it was based in at least three areas of policy relevant for evaluating strategy. The brief introduction above has alluded to all three, namely defense and military engagement, diplomacy and foreign policy, and geopolitics of energy.

1.2 Understanding Strategic Partnership

Over the last few years, Sino-Russian relations have shown remarkable improvement. Currently, Russia and China are closer than ever and the level of cooperation has progressed to 'strategic partnership' between them. The bilateral relationship between the two countries have expanded giving it a multidimensional character. In June 2005, the two nations signed an agreement to

⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China (2005), "China–Russia Joint Statement on the International Order of the 21st Century", Moscow, 1 July 2005. URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceee/eng/dtxw/t203102.htm>

⁸ The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s "Peace Mission" anti-terror exercises are an important tool for understanding how its members, which include China, Russia, India and most of Central Asia, view the regional threat environment and trends.

formally delimit the border stretching for nearly 4300 kms and since then bilateral dispute over territory has ceased to exist⁹. The two nations have been vocal and supportive of each other's priority issues: Russia giving strong moral and political support to China for Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang while China has expressed its solidarity with Russia on Chechnya and North Caucasus.

The coordination between the two nations highly visible when repelling the Western criticism of domestic human rights issues and political system. Since 1999, the trade turnover between the two nations have been on a rise, becoming eight-fold. China is the second largest trading partner of Russia. In areas like oil exports, the trade between Russia and China has risen to double-digit levels. The arms trade between the two countries has remained significant. Sino-Russian cooperation in the military sector has also made significant progress.

The concept 'Strategic Partnership' refers to a formal bond between two or more nations developed through an intentional process whereby the partners share resources and leverage complementary strengths to achieve defined and common objectives. Strategic cooperation is tied to the strategic goals and objectives of participating countries as a whole. It indicates a multidimensional engagement between the involved states and implies the joint undertaking of a diverse range of activities with the aim of the party's mutual benefit (Kuder 2014). Robert Bedeski (2016) argues that it is a broad, stable and trustful partnership that covers many departments and various levels. It covers a structural level of cooperation.

One of the difficulties in understanding of the concept in the context of Russia-China relations is that during the early 1990s the Russian leadership used to apply the term to every significant relationship. It was used as a form of legitimization. Strategic Partnerships were used to maximize Russia's influence on a global scale. These remain pertinent till date. Peter Harris (2011) observes that Russia in current international geopolitical scenario plays a more prominent role. However, its capacity to exercise its influence depends on the extent to which it is able to co-opt others in the pursuit of common agendas.

⁹The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China (2004), "China and Russia Issue a Joint Statement, Declaring the Trend of the Boundary Line between the Two Countries Has Been Completely Determined", 2004/10/14. URL:https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3220_664352/3221_664354/t165266.shtml

In contrast, the July 2001 Treaty of Good-neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between Russia and China provides a foundation to the strategic partnership between the two countries. It speaks of consolidation of friendly relations, promoting and establishing just and fair relations between the two countries to a completely new level (Alexeev, 2002). It commits the two parties to developing a “strategic cooperative partnership of good neighborliness, friendship, and cooperation and equality and trust” from a long-term view and in a comprehensive manner.

The joint statement in December 2003 summit in Moscow is considered to be more enlightening which focused more on the great strategic idea that the two countries will forever be good neighbors, friends and reliable partners and never be enemies¹⁰. It also highlighted that the two countries were building a new type of state-to-state relations based on non-alignment and non-confrontation which are not directed against third parties (Gertz, 2003). It was not until the March 2006 Beijing summit that the two parties set out the principles underpinning partnerships instead of merely restating well known policy positions.

Russia’s rationale for partnership with China is essentially twofold. Marlene Laruelle (2012) calls it “global strategic”. It primarily refers to using the partnership to counterbalance the dominance of the West and the US hegemony in particular. Though Russia is more stable and prosperous than under Yeltsin and Gorbachev, yet it still remains a minor player on the world stage, notwithstanding the claims of Russian leadership. The leadership in Russia thus needs to make common cause be it tactical or strategic with other powers including China if it wants to exert serious influence in international affairs.

Also, China is a significant partner for Russia as Moscow can leverage China’s economic, military and political potential to consolidate its re-emergence on a global scale. Putin’s “multi-vector” foreign policy is driven by the desire to maximize Moscow’s options. Russia would become the strategic as well as the civilizational bridge between the East and West and possibly even the “third pole” in the multipolar world of the future alongside the US and China (Lo, 2007).

¹⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China (2003), "Joint Statement Signed by the Chinese and Russian Heads of States", 16 July 2003

URL:https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3220_664352/3221_664354/t16731.shtml

Partnership with China is more than just about the geopolitical concerns. It also serves the critical security interests as well, ensuring a stable border and by extension the security of the Russian Far East and Russia's territorial integrity. Today Moscow sees the "strategic partnership" as its most reliable guarantee against a resurgent and potentially aggressive China. The argument is that a certain level of positive engagement in international relations helps to keep tabs on emergent threats and to establish a common interest in peaceful coexistence and cooperation. It certainly offers Russia security, political and economic benefits.

Russia views the bilateral relationship as one between "strategic equals". Russian views are here contradictory in the sense that on the one hand, there are concerns about China's aggressive rise and the changing balance of power between them and on the other hand Moscow is incapable of seeing itself as the "junior partner" in any relationship, particularly with a country that it has long regarded with a superior and even dismissive eye (Blank, 2012).

After gauging the factors and trends which determine the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, it is evident that the partnership is fraught with underlying challenges. The issues which threaten the partnership between the two nations include historical mistrust, conflicting interests in Central Asia, and spread of influence in the region, especially the Asia-Pacific. Some of the incidents which indicate these challenges include Russia's reluctance to sell China its newer weapons, Chinese expansion into the Russian Far East, and increasingly asymmetrical economic relations between the two where China's economy is rising consistently while Russian economy stands stagnated. These examples provide key insights regarding the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership. Thus, the underlying issues complicate the Russia China relations despite the strengths of this partnership.

When we analyze Russia's position on key Chinese island disputes and China's position on the Ukraine Crisis, the two incidents present the issues underlying this partnership. The neutral stand taken by China and Russia for each other demonstrates the silent support for each other revealing the true nature of Sino-Russian partnership. The South China Sea dispute has become a key factor in determining the nature of Russia-China partnership which is a foreign policy priority for both the countries. China is wary of the critical implications that the outcome of the issue will have on its global and regional agenda.

The ambiguous stand taken by Russia on the disputed Senkaku / Diayou islands in the East China Sea and holding joint naval exercise near the disputed islands in May 2014 indicate the subtle support for China¹¹. Not explicitly supporting the Chinese assertiveness for acquiring the disputed islands might hint at the weakness of the relationship between Russia and China. But this is a simplistic understanding of the nature of Russia-China partnership.

In international relations, 'strategic partnership' focus on areas of mutual interests and here the Senkaku/Diayou islands do not form a subject of mutual interests for Russia and China. The bilateral relation between Russia and China is one of strategic partnership as the two nations want to cooperate on multiple economic, political, military and cultural ties with each other. Thus, Russian stance here is consistent with the inherent nature of strategic partnership. Actually, from geopolitical perspective, an ambiguous stand by Russia reinforces the strategic partnership between Russia and China while showcasing that on controversial issues, Russia will steer clear of advocating or denouncing China.

The issues underlying this strategic partnership are more potential than actual concerns. Russia and China understand that confrontational stance on issues like the economic presence in the Central Asian Region, the Angarsk-Nakhodka pipeline sabotages their global and regional aspirations¹². Despite having some disagreements, the Russian officials do not advocate confrontational attitude towards China.

In the post-cold war period, the balance between the two countries has changes where China has become the economic powerhouse and Russian economy has been stagnating. Some scholars point out that the underlying stresses in the Russia China relationship may not allow it to survive a period of crisis. Absence of shared values might prohibit a genuine and long lasting partnership. The

¹¹ Since 2012, tensions have increased between Japan and China over the disputed Senkaku islands in the East China Sea. Japan administers the eight small, uninhabited features, the largest of which is roughly 1.5 square miles. Some geologists believe the features sit near significant oil and natural gas deposits. China, as well as Taiwan, contests Japanese claims of sovereignty over the islands, which Japan calls the Senkaku-shoto, China calls the Diaoyu Dao, and Taiwan calls the Diaoyutai Lieyu.

¹² Angarsk with a population of a little over 30,000 lies roughly 60 km north of Irkutsk in Siberia. Nakhodka on the western coast of the Sea of Japan is Russia's primary Pacific port. It is some 180 kilometers north of Vladivostok, the biggest city in the Russian Far East.

priorities of the two countries have been different at international and national level and this can be a reason to widen the divide in perceptions. However, another section of scholars observe that the future of Russia China partnership is likely to grow deeper. Sino-Russian partnership is encouraged by the two countries since they understand the implications of adversarial relations and thus strive to maintain substantive and mutually beneficial relations. Changing international environment and rise of China from a regional actor to global player do have the potential to expose the underlying weaknesses and limitations of the bilateral partnership.

At a time when Russia-China relations are at their zenith, the ultimate paradox is that we may be witnessing the beginnings of a transformation from strategic partnership into strategic opportunism.

1.3 Russia-China Partnership: Axis of Convenience or Superpower Symbiosis

The partnership between the two countries has evoked many scholarly debates and works. Some present the relationship between the two countries as marked by asymmetry. For example, Russia considers China as a crucial partner to harness maneuver capacity in its ability to conduct an independent foreign policy and to secure Russia's position as a global great power. For China, the relationship is of secondary importance, lagging behind its more substantial ties with the US, the EU and the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Many Russian policymakers are uncomfortable with rise of China and believe that China could re-emerge as threat one day.

In diplomacy and foreign policy, the Sino-Russian "axis" has been increasingly visible in the past few years, within multilateral organizations, informal institutions, and well as at the regional level. With the exception of the Middle East policy of early 2011, when the so-called "Arab Spring" altered the political landscape of that region and unsettled patterns of foreign policy behavior in many countries, China and Russia have developed their collaboration significantly (Mankoff, 2012). Mark Stokes (2017) argues that their coordinated behavior on the civil war in Syria 2011-2016 is the most obvious expression of this, where the Permanent Representatives of the two permanent member states have used to the veto four times in the UN Security Council. China, which only resorted to the veto on nine occasions since it took up its position in the Council, has thus adapted to the Russian stance on this matter.

In terms of multilateral institutions such as the G20 and the BRICS, a similar movement toward closer cooperation and consolidation of relations between Beijing and Moscow and with leaders

of other major economies in the world can be witnessed. The combination of the constellation of emerging great powers within BRICS and the wider community of the twenty largest economies appears to work for the benefit of Russia and China, as well as for their bilateral relationship. The multiplicity of platforms and arenas to which Moscow and Beijing have direct access allow governments in both capitals to be well-informed about the summit agendas well in advance, and to use their networks to prepare the ground for their own initiatives and downplay those of others that they disfavor. It is interesting that the BRICS group was not undermined by the assertive behavior of Russia in Ukraine in 2014, and that the launch of the BRICS Development Bank that year never seriously risked being derailed (Mosley, 2011).

At the regional and local level of Sino-Russian relations, there are some developments indicating that mutual trust may be growing between the two sides. This is especially the case within the SCO framework, which is one in which both Russia and China appear to collaborate comfortably. At the same time, Beijing and Moscow have recently been making diplomatic inroads and signing far-reaching agreements with neighboring countries. Kjell Engelbrekt (2012) argues that there are hardly any critical comments directed from one side to the other on such potentially contentious agreements, and it may be the case that policy initiatives in the vicinity are cleared at the political level before they go ahead. As indicated at the outset, the hesitancy is less visible in the realm of diplomacy than in economic and defense relations.

With regard to changes in the international environment, the two nations have different viewpoints. While Russia believes that a change from unipolar global order to a multipolar order is risk worth to take since after the instability in the transition process, chances are there for possible gains. While China resists this transition process as it believes it is too big a risk for its economic development and regime stability. China prefers a stable global order which is favorable for its continuous economic growth. Alexander Rahr (2011) argues that Russia and China share a common perspective on the pragmatic and realistic approach to be taken for dealing with international issues since going for ideological or principles considerations on global issues might not result in favorable outcome.

In the post-cold war period, China has taken an assertive approach on international recognition and seeking influence. The foreign policies of Russia and China seek to strengthen their status in the international order and reclaim their lost great power status. However, the foreign policy goals

of the two countries are not aimed at same direction. David Rees (2010) observes that the first and foremost objective of Chinese foreign policy is to maintain domestic stability for regime survival while for Russia the foremost agenda is to reclaim its lost great power status. This difference in the priority of their foreign policy goals drive their foreign policy behavior and thus leads to different positions in the world.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia and China for the most part have taken a coordinated approach to shared interests especially in the case of promoting stability in the Central Asian Region. For China, the regional stability is vital as it is a source for energy supplies. For Russia, it is also important as it gets revenue from the transit routes in the region and also resells the oil and gas of the Central Asian States to other countries, particularly the European countries. Thus, the two nations understand that any kind of instability in form of political revolution or civil war or terrorism is bound to adversely affect their economic development and will also cause damage to their security interests. The common desire to promote regional security in the region has led the Central Asian States to become a unifying factor in the Sino-Russian bilateral relations. Sergei Sanakoev (2012) argues that the Sino-Russian defense relations has been consolidated in the last two decades to become more integrated and institutionalized. The senior military officials, defense experts and army generals of the two countries meet regularly and have set up various mechanisms at different levels to carry out military negotiations and discussions on common security interests. The two nations have been conducting joint military exercises in the region sometimes involving the Central Asian neighbors also.

At multilateral platforms like the United Nations, Russia and China prefer to coordinate their foreign policies and take a joint stand in opposing Western backed sanctions on anti-Western regimes. Russia and China have used the multilateral forum to voice their support for state sovereignty, i.e. non-interference and territorial integrity with respect to separatism. This defense of national sovereignty is an outcome of a pragmatic approach to shield their own human rights violations and civil liberty abuses from criticisms. Officials of the two nations refrain from criticizing each other's policies on national and international platforms as it showcases unified stand. (Kerr, 2015)

Andrez Krickovic (2017) observes that there is a feeling of admiration among most Russians about the PRC' ability to carry out rapid economic development within a centralized regulated political

system. Many Russians also feel disappointed with how Russian economic reforms in the post-cold war period has not resulted into desired outcome. There is also a feeling of regret that Russia sought to align with the West during the post-communist transition period which did not help Russian economy and instead the West exploited the situation to expand NATO as Russian economy dwindled.

Russia-China energy relations has added a new dimension to the strategic partnership between them. Russia has expressed its need to secure investment from China to modernize and rescue its economy from further declining. China seeks to diversify its energy sources and here Russia serves as a suitable partner in in terms of location and transportation of oil and gas to its own territory.

This research work contributes to the sphere of understanding the current status and analysis of Russia-China strategic partnership and presents a comprehensive account of geopolitical alignment that have occurred between Russia and China. This research produces a long-term analysis of the Strategic partnership between the two countries and potential developments in bilateral relations. This work also contributes to exploring the implications of this partnership for security and stability in the region.

1.4 DEFINITION, RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Strategic Partnership refers to a long-term interaction between two countries based on political, economic, social and historical factors. Such a partnership manifests itself in a variety of relationships. Not all strategic partnerships are equally important. Some have a dominant political element, while others have a prominent economic dimension. In some cases, the security dimension may be the most important.

This Research studies and analyzes Russia and China Strategic partnership in a multi polar world order. The study mainly focuses on various grounds of cooperation and competition between the two nations. They are two powerful nations that are the heirs of great powers. This research work also highlights the evolution of the relationship into strategic partnership between the two countries and tries to understand their positions in the international system on vital international issues. This research work also analyses the relationship between them from strategic as well as political perspective and also compares how the two countries perceive themselves and their role in the

world. The time frame from the year 2001 to 2017 has been taken keeping in mind the signing of the first strategic treaty between Russia and China in July 2001 in form of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.

First the nature of the Sino-Russian relationship is delved into and the common interests and areas of divergence as manifested in the strategic partnership established in 1996 after decades of hostility. The defense and military engagement of China and Russia are explored in a comparative perspective and their economic and energy interdependency is examined. Then the characteristics of the foreign policy of the two countries are analyzed and compared. This being said, this work does not cover bilateral relations with other countries or Russia and China's positions on the global arena more generally. It mainly explores why the strategic partnership came into being and what it entails. It attempts to answer the question how China and Russia perceive each other, what unites and what separates them.

Whereas most contemporary analyses of Sino-Russian relationship have been built on a premise of a top-down understanding of strategy that highlights the desires and objectives expressed by political leaders, this research examines the evidence from the bottom up, starting with defense relations, military exchanges, and only then revisiting diplomacy and foreign policy initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the evolution of strategic partnership between Russia and China
2. To identify the areas of cooperation and competition under strategic partnership
3. To examine the hindrances underlying the strategic partnership between Russia and China
4. To study the current state and future prospects of partnership and its implications in the security environment of the two countries
5. To understand the character, scope and inherent potential of this partnership

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the Russia-China strategic partnership, and through what stages has it evolved since 1992?
2. What factors have motivated Russia to push for an increasingly geopolitical alignment with China?

3. How does Russia envision the Russia-China partnership within the context of great power relations?
4. What bilateral problems threaten to undermine the partnership?
5. What imbalances exist in the progress of partnership?
6. How does a multipolar global order provide strategic opportunity for a cohesive Russia and China partnership?

HYPOTHESES

1. The strategic partnership between Russia and China reflects new geopolitics characterized by flexible and opportunistic arrangements.
2. The dynamism between the two countries is one of strategic partnership rather than strategic convenience.
3. The strategic partnership between Russia and China is a model of positive sum cooperation, aiming at a more equitable world order.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Research is based on the descriptive and analytical methods of research. The study discusses the salient aspects of strategic partnership between Russia and China. This study has used both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. In chapter 2, I have used the historical method to study the evolution of Russia-China partnership.

In all the chapters, I have used data that was obtained from both primary sources as well as secondary sources. The primary sources include official documents such as the Russian and Chinese Foreign Policy documents, joint declarations, bilateral agreements, data reports, official policy statements, and speeches. It also includes the International documents (treaties, agreements and resolutions) as well as statements by Presidents, Foreign Ministers and diplomats of Russia and China. Documents such as statements from the SCO and BRICS Summits have also been used in the thesis. Also, documents from other organizations such as United Nations and North Atlantic Treaty Organization have been used in this study. These sources have established the empirical basis of the research. The extensive use of secondary sources in the analysis of this study include several books, journals, newspapers, published articles in academic journals, and internet sources.

I have also utilized several online journals, reports, expert opinions and articles published on websites of Think Tanks such as the Valdai International Discussion Club, the Russian International Affairs Councils, Russia in Global Affairs, Strategic Studies Institute and several others.

This Research investigates the impediments between the independent (political leadership, military capability, development in Asia-Pacific, domestic challenges, diplomatic activism) and dependent (strategic partnership between Russia and China) variables. Thus, a detailed analysis of the implications of this partnership on the security and stability of the region has also been presented in this study.

CHAPTERISATION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The introductory chapter discusses in brief the concept of Strategic partnership with the major focus on the nature and scope in the context of Russia and China. It also includes the research framework with an overview of the evolution of strategic partnership between the two countries.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIA-CHINA RELATIONS

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the development of bilateral relations between the two countries. It also highlights the overlapping and diverging interests between the two countries.

CHAPTER 3

RUSSIA AND CHINA COOPERATION IN DEFENSE, MILITARY AND ENERGY SECTORS

This chapter mainly focuses on the cooperation between Russia and China in arms transfers and military exercises and other dimensions of strategic collaboration. It mentions the key treaties, summits and agreements between the two countries to develop a robust military and defense

relationship. This chapter also discusses in detail the natural partnership in the energy arena and the economic and political differences over it.

CHAPTER 4

GEOPOLITICS OF STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT: RUSSIA AND CHINA

This chapter focuses on geopolitical construct presented by Russia and China in a new world order. The analysis mainly focuses on the nature of this bilateral strategic partnership that has developed and transformed in the increasingly complex web of global interdependence. This chapter sheds light on the dynamics of the geopolitical constructs as they stand today and future prospects

CHAPTER 5

MULTILATERALISM AND MULTIPOLAR ORDER: SCO AND BRICS

This chapter analyzes Russia's and China's foreign policies and their fundamental ideas, goals and priorities in dealing with each other. The chapter also discusses the different bilateral initiatives and cooperation at multilateral level to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights the findings of the study. It incorporates the overall assessment of Russia-China strategic partnership. Finally, this chapter summarizes the observations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIA-CHINA RELATIONS

2.1 Background

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the development of bilateral relations between the two countries. It also highlights the overlapping and diverging interests between the two countries. China and Russia have put aside their old animosities and are seeking to strengthen their relationship very pragmatically.

China and Russia present one of the most peculiar examples of neighbors which are so different, yet they have interests which have been overlapping at different stages of history. The relations between these two nations are of immense importance for regional and global security. Thus, it is of utmost importance to trace the historical linkages between the two countries that have led up to the present situation.

The relationship between Russia and China has always been very personalized and as a matter of fact it remains deeply personalized even today. Russia-China relations are very much what Xi and Putin make of them (Wendt, 1992). This is not to say that no one else matters. Leaders do not exist in vacuum, and the views they hold are often in and of themselves merely a personalized reformulation of prevalent narratives. It is fair to say that leaders shape the narratives and are, in turn, shaped by them.

The bilateral relationship between the two countries has been a roller-coaster ride. Using a constructivist perspective to understand the changes in their bilateral relationship is helpful. The dramatic shifts in this relationship can be explained in reference to the mutual perceptions of China and Russia by their political elites in the broader context of a global hierarchy dominated by the United States.

The history of the bilateral relations between the two countries extends way back to the seventeenth century which has an indelible impact on the present-day perceptions about each other.

2.2 History of Russia-China relations

The origins of the Russian-Chinese relations can be traced back to the age of Great Silk Road, which was the origin of land trade routes between Asia and Europe. History has played an adverse impact on how China perceives Russian actions. Tracing the Sino-Russian relations to 17th century one can find that the Russian and Chinese empires used to expand their territories in the east and north, respectively. The fight for expanding the territories was not a great power rivalry then but it did ensue clash for peripheries between them. During that period, the Sino-Russian relations were characterized more by competing interests rather than cooperative behavior.

During the 17th-18th century, the Manchus ruled China who harbored contempt against the outsiders. In the mid- 19th century, foreign powers arrived in China. During this period, Russia became a dominant player in the northern China. After turning from a largely disregarded power in China to becoming the dominant player, Russia transferred around one and a half million sq kilometers of Chinese territory within its own ruling area. These transfers were made under treaties of Aigun in 1858, Tarbagatai in 1864 and Peking in 1860¹³. These treaties were considered unfair by China as Russia also forced China to get treaty concessions for the main ports on the Bohai Sea.

The bilateral relations between the two countries remained acrimonious till the mid-nineteenth century. By the end of the 1850s the relation between the two countries grew more dynamic. However, between the 1850s and 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, there were two distinct phases of cordial relations between the two countries, which were followed by a sharp deterioration in the relations.

¹³ “The Treaty of Tarbagatai” in 1864 was a border protocol between Qing dynasty rulers of China and the Russian Empire that defined most of the western extent of their border in the Central Asia between outer Mongolia and the Khanate of Kokand. “The Treaty of Aigun”, named after the Chinese town in which it was signed, was concluded in May 1858. The signers were the Russian Count Muravyov-Amursky and the Manchu official Yishan. As part of the treaty, Russia received all land north of the Amur River. Another large part of land to the east of the Ussuri River was also given to Russia. The Treaty of Aigun amounted to an estimated two million miles of new territory for Russia.

“The Treaty of Aigun,” *Russia in Global Perspective*, accessed January 22, 2019, URL: <https://russiaglobal.omeka.fas.harvard.edu/items/show/23>.

2.2.1 The period of gradual rapprochement (1850s-1890s)

In this phase of four decades the rapprochement between the two countries enhanced from mere cooperation on the boundary issue, which was between 1850s to early 1860s, to turning into military allies, by the end of 1890s.

Russia was following expansionist policy in the second half of the nineteenth century. Russia incorporated Turkestan (the present day Central Asian Region) into the Russian territory and the further conquest of parts of Far East and into Siberia brought the Russian Empire into close contact with the Chinese, thus it became necessary for the two countries to establish diplomatic relations to demarcate the boundaries of the two countries.

The two countries thus signed a treaty on “general principles of mutual relationship” at Tianjin, in northern China, in 1858. This treaty laid the foundation on which the maps and detailed descriptions for border documentation for future use was agreed by the two countries. In 1860, the “Russo-Chinese border treaty” was signed in Beijing which supplemented the Tianjin treaty. Following this treaty, the border between the two countries was set, over most of its length, particularly in the low-lying areas.

In 1864, the two countries signed a border protocol known as the “Chuguchak protocol” at Chuguchak in western China. This protocol defined the western extent of their border in the Central Asian Region. This protocol also regulated the trade between the Chinese Xinjiang region and Turkestan across the border, which by then had become a part of the Russian Empire.

The Russo-Chinese relations were strengthened in 1881 after the accession of Tsar Alexander III in Russia. Another treaty was signed the same year at St Petersburg regarding the settlement of the border questions. This treaty was signed between the two countries at a major event which settled the border demarcation in the Cherny Irtysch river.

Alexander III (1881-1893) spearheaded the process of settlement of border disputes between the two countries which acted as a prelude to an expansion of economic cooperation and closer ties on military issues. After his death in the year 1893, Count Sergei Witte, the Minister of Finance (1892-1903) took the charge of developing active cooperation between the two countries and supported Russia’s involvement in the Far East. In 1895, the Russo-Chinese bank was established in St Petersburg which was an initiative led by Witte. In 1896, the two countries signed a treaty for the construction of the “Chinese Eastern Railway Society”. A significant part of this treaty was the

formation of a military alliance between Russia and China against potential threat from the neighboring country Japan on Russia, China or Korea. This treaty also led to the construction of a stretch of railway line from Chita (Russia) via Harbin (China) to Vladivostok (Russia). This railway line had immense importance for both countries, both economically and militarily. In 1898, a treaty was signed again in St Petersburg between the two countries with regard to leasing the ports of Dalian and Luishin to Russia. Both of these ports were in the Chinese territory, which later on became the pivot for Russian naval forces in the Far East (Turner S, 2009).

2.2.2 Period of cooling of relations (early 1900s to mid 1920s)

The main reason for this fallout was Russia's participation in the military intervention led by the Western powers in China. In 1898, a popular uprising took place in China, known as the "Boxer Rising" (1898-1901). This uprising was caused by the rapacious policies of the Western companies who held significant positions in the Chinese economy of that time. The uprising had the support of the huge population of China across a broad spectrum.

In the month of October 1900 Russian Empire sent their troops to suppress the uprising in northern China, along with western powers like France, Britain, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Germany. These powers then hatched a conspiracy to impose an unfair treaty on China. According to this treaty China was obliged to pay them a considerable amount of money.

This military intervention led by western powers including Russia caused widespread anti-Russian and anti-western resentment across the Chinese society. Since Russia had previously been an ally of China, the resentment against Russia was especially strong. After this debacle the Russo-Chinese relations deteriorated to a low level, where they remained for almost quarter of a century (Weitz R, 2014).

2.2.3 Strategic rapprochement and improving relations (mid 1920s-late1950s)

This phase in the Russo-Chinese relations lasted for about 35 years more or less coinciding with the Stalinist period of the Soviet era in the Russian history. This phase saw the gradual progression of China and Soviet Union relations from renewed diplomatic relations to a real politico-military alliance.

China became one of the first countries to recognize the USSR. In 1924, the diplomatic relations were established between the two countries and an agreement on “general principles of settling problems” was signed in Moscow. Following the agreement, the two countries ousted the Russian Asiatic Bank from the board of directors of the Chinese Eastern Railway and established a joint control over this strategically important route (Trenin D, 2017).

The bilateral relationship between the countries flourished throughout the 1930s, especially in the military arena. The common threat for both the countries at that time was Japan which was pursuing a particularly aggressive foreign policy and claimed several areas of both the USSR and China. Also like the earlier period, in the 1890s, their mutual interest also laid in countering Japan’s military ambitions in the Far East. In 1930, Japan attacked China, following which China had to fight for its liberation.

The USSR offered enormous economic and military assistance to China in its effort to repel the Japanese aggression, since Japan emerged as the main security threat to its security in the Far East. In 1930, the USSR granted China a huge aid of 250 million USD to enable it to purchase the Russian arms and military equipment. Later in 1945, USSR gave direct military assistance to China in defeating the Japanese army in Manchuria, in the northern China¹⁴.

The first decade after 1949 was a phase of ‘eternal and unbreakable friendship’ that as it turned out to be neither eternal nor unbreakable as the propaganda was spread and claimed by the two powers. 1949 was an important year in history of international relations when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emerged on the global stage. During that time cold war was unfolding and shaping the role and position of powers at global stage.

On July 1st 1949, Mao Zedong declared that China would henceforth lean on the Soviet side¹⁵. By that time CCP had practically won the Chinese civil war. The rival party leader had fled to Taiwan.

¹⁴ On Aug. 8, 1945 -- a week before Japan's surrender in World War II -- 1.5 million Soviet troops began a gigantic surprise attack against Japanese occupation forces in northern China and Korea, an area the size of Western Europe. Within days, Tokyo's million-man army in the region had collapsed in one of the greatest military defeats in history. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20131212214325/http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/a-soviet-push-helped-force-japan-to-surrender/210764.html>

¹⁵ Chairman Mao Zedong advanced the principle of "Starting anew", "putting the house in order before inviting guests" and "leaning to one side". The policy of "leaning one side" meant to declare that China would lean to the side of socialism.

The Chinese leader was now looking to position China in a world overshadowed by the political, economic, military, and ideological confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. This can explain the alignment toward the USSR was a pragmatic decision.

The accession of the Chinese communist party in China in 1949 derived enormous support from the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. The active participation of the Soviet Union in the war of liberation of the Chinese from the Japanese aggression in China and the political, financial and military support given to the Chinese communists played a significant role in this accession.

The Soviet-Chinese rapprochement gathered rapid momentum after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949¹⁶. The two leaders, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong played an important role in leading the charge for a military and political alliance between the two powers. Mao Zedong also claimed that he was a “pupil of Stalin”, that he held a “pro-Soviet orientation”¹⁷. The two countries also shared identical state ideologies. Thus from 1949 onwards the level of cooperation in military, political, economic and other spheres increased considerably.

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The Soviet industries furnished huge supplies of raw material from China, such as textiles, light industrial products and non-ferrous metals which were not easily available in the USSR at that

¹⁶ October 01, 1949 Proclamation of the Central People's Government of the PRC, URL : <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121557.pdf?v=d41d8cd98f00b204e9800998ecf8427e>

¹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong. January 30, 1949. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF [Arkiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow]: F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, Ll. 1–6. Reprinted in Ledovskii et al. (2005), pp. 33–37.

time and were vital for the industrial production. In return, China was aided by the Soviet Union in various forms such as construction of major industrial enterprises and power stations. Soviet Union also assisted China in training of Chinese people in science and technology to meet the increasing demands of the Chinese economy. The support also came in form of providing the PRC with military technology, officer training and manufacturing military equipments in China (Ziegler C, 2001).

During the Korean War (1950-1953), the cooperation between the two powers reached its climax with the joint participation by the both of them on the side of the communist North Korea against the South Korean government which was supported by the USA and its Western allies. Mao Zedong went even against better advice of some of his own Politburo comrades, who worried about the costs of war for the already impoverished Chinese economy.

Although there were multiple reasons for China's ultimate involvement in the Korean War, not least security concerns, as well as Mao's efforts to improve domestic morale through foreign adventures (Hajimu 2015; Chen 2010). But there was also the boost in revolutionary legitimacy in fighting a war on Stalin's behalf—that is, in the brave exercise of revolutionary duty, no matter at what cost.

When Stalin died in March 1953, the Sino–Soviet relationship entered a period of uncertainty. By 1958, the alliance was fracturing from within.

2.2.4 Deterioration and crisis in relations (early 1960s-end of 1980s)

As discussed above, during the earlier period at the beginning of the 20th century the relations deteriorated very rapidly, and the bonhomie of the preceding period was replaced with mutual suspicion and distrust. After an interlude of about three decades when Soviet Union backed China against the Japanese and then the Communist takeover in Beijing, the subsequent phase of nearly two decades again witnessed serious strains in the relations between the two Communist powers. The first decade of this phase was a decade of great polemics. Both the Soviet Union and China accused each other of selling out the revolution and betraying the Marxist-Leninist principles. In the later years of this phase ideology played a lesser role in the bilateral relationship which now resembled a traditional confrontation between the two powers.

At the end of the 1950s, the fall out began to appear. China and the Soviet Union had a face off over their disputed border in 1969. With respect to the Sino-Soviet split the scholars disagree over

the reasons and its chronology. One section of scholars believe that the cause of the split emanates from Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin from the platform of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (Wu 1999; Lüthi 2008) and began to develop after 1956. Stalin was accused by Nikita Khrushchev, his successor, of unleashing unjust repressions and fostering a personality cult. This whole incident made Mao Zedong very unhappy because Khrushchev did not consult him before pronouncing Stalin guilty of the abovementioned actions.

Nikita Khrushchev sought peaceful coexistence with the United States and was not particularly supportive of the idea of class struggle. The Chinese leadership under Mao Zedong viewed these policies as "revisionist", which led to the unfolding of the ideological conflict between the regimes of Soviet Union and China in the 1960s. Scholars consider 1956 as the turning point in terms of tracing the ideological sources of the Sino-Soviet conflict (Hershberg and Chen 2006:193).

With regard to the ideological differences between China and the Soviet Union, they never acted strictly in accordance with a given set of rules. Both the nations have used ideology as a means to legitimize and rationalize those actions which were taken for other reasons. Ideology was also instrumental in causing a split between the two countries as the alliance which was supposedly 'eternal' suffered unexpected deterioration and thus it offered rationalization for explaining the cause of the split.

Position of the United States and its relationship with China and the Soviet Union were other factors affecting this alliance. After the formation of the PRC, the relationship of Moscow and Beijing with the United States was lop-sided. China was isolated by the US, diplomatically and economically after the US chose to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The bilateral interaction between China and the US was minimal and the talks between them were limited to the interactions between their ambassadors which were very irregular. These talks were organized in Warsaw which dragged on inconclusively. The American policy of non-recognition of China did not surprise Mao at all who understood that the recognition comes with a price and will not be awarded for free. The grant of recognition by the US could only be achieved if Beijing achieves an economic breakthrough. Being a political realist, the Chinese leader understood that for domestic legitimacy, recognition from the US was necessary.

Like Mao, Khrushchev also wanted recognition from the United States. In this case, The US and the Soviet Union did have diplomatic relation, but the desire was to be recognized as equals.

Khrushchev wanted the US to acknowledge the Soviet Union as an equal. Khrushchev believed that the economic performance is linked to 'greatness' and thus he decided to overtake the American economy by setting targets for production of various goods and food articles. The claim for equality was also based on having a nuclear arsenal. The Soviet Union had enormous nuclear arsenal which made the US vulnerable to an external attack, especially after 1957 when the Soviet Union successfully developed the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. Khrushchev clearly understood the importance of this development that he could resort to nuclear diplomacy to achieve the foreign policy objectives while threatening the West with nuclear destruction¹⁸. This assertiveness led to a series of crises between 1958-1962, generally known as the 'Cuban Missile Crisis'.

Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States in September 1959, to initiate the process of peaceful talk with the US. However, he also sought a personal relationship with the American President. The Soviet leader and the then President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower agreed to relax the superpower tensions after realizing the destructive power of the nuclear arsenal possessed by the two countries. This meet came to be known as the 'Spirit of Camp David'.

After the visit to the US, Khrushchev flew to China where he persuaded Mao to release some American citizens held in captivity by the Chinese authorities on charges of espionage. During this visit Khrushchev had fallout with Mao on a range of issues, especially on India, with which China had border skirmishes going on in the disputed region of Himalayas. Mao was critical of the Soviet Leader's neutral stand in the conflict, deeming the Soviet action as a betrayal of the obligations of allies. Mao believed that Khrushchev joined China's enemy to bully an ally.

The theme of "bullying" (usually in "collusion") with the United States henceforth appeared with great regularity in China's foreign policy discourse. As Foreign Minister Chen Yi put it in 1962, "Now in the world big countries bully big countries, as in America bullying China. Big countries bully small countries, as in America bullying lots of small countries; small countries bully small countries, as in Thailand bullying Cambodia; there are also small countries bullying big countries.

¹⁸ Nikita Khrushchev challenges United States to a missile "shooting match", 15 November, 1957. URL: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/nikita-khrushchev-challenges-united-states-to-a-missile-shooting-match>

China is the most bullied country. It is bullied by big countries, and it is also bullied by small countries”¹⁹.

In August 1963, the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed between the Soviet Union and the USA. China believed that the treaty was an attempt to sabotage the nuclear programme of China which was at the stage of rapid advancement. In October 1964, when Nikita Khrushchev was ousted, it did not address the suspicions of the Chinese leadership regarding Soviet intentions. China charged the Soviet Union of colluding with the USA to help it to come out of the Vietnam fiasco. The Soviet Union was believed to be insincere in its gesture to build relations with China during this period. In fact, in February 1965, Mao famously told Aleksei Kosygin the then Prime Minister of Soviet Union that the conflict between China and the Soviet Union is meant to continue for 10000 years²⁰.

The Sino-Soviet relations continued to worsen. The bilateral relations fell apart even more after the Cultural Revolution in China. Mao Zedong labelled the Soviets and the Yugoslavs as ‘revisionist’. This further discouraged the rebuilding of ties between the Soviet Union and China. Unlike China, Soviet Union kept its domestic policy separate from its relationship with China. Soviet Union was more inclined to build the Sino-Soviet alliance than China during the 1970s. However, this attempt by the Soviet Union to rebuild the ties came with a strict hierarchy in bilateral relationship. In 1963, the basis of this hierarchy was highlighted by Nikita Khrushchev. This basis reveals the nature of opinion of Soviet Union on allied relationships. Khrushchev spoke about the basis of Sino-Soviet misunderstanding:

“It’s a question of nationalism, a question of egotism. This is the main thing. They want to play the first fiddle”. This is not decided by vote. This is determined by one’s status and by the others’ recognition. Even among friends: 5–10 people are friends, and one of them is the leader. They don’t elect him. They just recognize him for certain qualities. This is how it is, and how it will be in the future. People won’t all be black or red-haired. There will be different colours, and different temperaments, and different mental capabilities among people. There will be inequality, like elsewhere in nature” (Fursenko:2015).

¹⁹ Chen Yi’s speech at the Political Consultative conference session. April 17, 1962. Gansu Provincial Archives, 116–2-1–350, pp. 37–38.

²⁰ Minutes from a Conversation between A.N. Kosygin and Mao Zedong. February 11, 1965. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AAN, KC PZPR, XI A/10, 517, 524. Obtained by Douglas Selvage and translated by Malgorzata Gnoinska. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118039>. Accessed 20 Dec 2019.

Thus, the Sino-Soviet relations had two aspects in the period between 1969 to 1971:

- Confrontation over party relations and ideology, and
- Initiatives towards normalization of the relations between the two powers

In July 1971, when President Nixon of USA announced his visit to China, then Soviet Union assumed a cautious attitude towards the PRC and took such steps which aimed at countering China's rise on global platform. Soviet Union intensified its diplomacy of exchanging visits, which included the then General Secretary Brezhnev's visit to Yugoslavia and France. It also held a conference in Crimea in August of the same year for the COMECON members, except Romania²¹.

At this point of international relations, the Americans were having better relations with either of the two communist powers than they had with each other. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who was his National Security Adviser, very clearly understood the Sino-Soviet contradictions and were skillfully playing with their foreign policymaking.

Given the level of distrust between China and Soviet Union, it became easier to do that. Brezhnev consistently tries to persuade Nixon of the threats that he perceived from a resurgent China, which he held as not honorable and exceptionally treacherous and spiteful. This led to a stagnation in the Sino-Soviet border negotiations without making any substantive progress. The Chinese accused Moscow of "suspending the atomic bomb over the negotiating table" (Kireev 2006: 126). For their part, the Soviet leaders conjured wild images of a Chinese cross-border invasion to capture the resource-rich but sparsely populated regions of the Soviet Far East.

Thus Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated for a while which was marked by mutual criticisms in the United Nations. After the visit paid by the USA President Nixon to China, the Soviet Union severely attacked the "Sino-American rapprochement". General Secretary Brezhnev stated to the effect that the Soviet Union had no objections to the establishment of Sino-Soviet relations on the principles of peaceful coexistence (Weitz R, 2010). In view of the fact that the principles had been

²¹ Comecon is a byname of Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), also called (from 1991) Organization for International Economic Cooperation, organization established in January 1949 to facilitate and coordinate the economic development of the eastern European countries belonging to the Soviet bloc.

espoused by the People's Republic of China ever since October 1969 as a fundamental rule to govern Sino-Soviet relations, the move on the part of the Soviet Union to recognize them, even provisionally, was regarded as a new development in Sino-Soviet relations.

However, after a few months the Soviet Union relaxed the frequency and intensity of its criticism towards China and Beijing also reciprocated this move by reflecting a flexible attitude towards the Soviet Union. On the anniversary of the October revolution in 1971, China sent a congratulatory telegram to the Soviet Union which showed the desire from the Chinese part to set friendly relations with its neighbor.

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the Sino-Soviet confrontation continued unabated. A certain kind of inertia came in the bilateral relations between the two countries. In the Soviet Union administrative machinery anti-Chinese view had become entrenched. Sino-phobia led to negative interpretations of the evolving foreign policy of China. The ruling elite were in favor of running a hostile attitude toward China.

On the Chinese side, Ding Xiaoping was now at the helm of affairs who was not much in favor of mending ties with the Soviet Union. He came up with a theory that the strategy adopted by the Soviet Union resembles a weight barbell where it was pushing towards Southeast Asia and at the same time was also expanding in the Middle East. The two 'weights' were linked by the bar, represented by the Malacca Strait. Deng talked of this theory on many occasions to highlight what he considered the danger of Soviet expansionism. He clarified that he did not resist closer ties between China and Soviet Union rather he favored Sino-Soviet alliance if Soviet Union agreed to address the Chinese grievances. For example, improved relations could happen if Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan and the border region between China and Soviet Union, also pulling back its forces from Cambodia which was invaded by Soviet Union in 1978 (Wishnick E, 2001).

By the early 1980s the Sino-Soviet relations began to improve only in appearance. The Chinese authorities tried to reciprocate the tentative Soviet outreach. In the previous decade, Mao was not willing to normalize relations because of his observations regarding the Soviet Union which were:

- He considered the Soviet Union as a less formidable enemy than before, given the Soviet misadventures in neighboring Afghanistan. He was aware of the fact that Moscow had overstretched itself.

- Yet, he was apprehensive of America's duplicity of selling weapons to Taiwan. He believed that normalization of Sino-Soviet relations could benefit China with respect to the threat emanating from America.

However, the Sino-Soviet normalization in the post-Mao period was a consequence of a realization by both the Chinese and the Soviet leaders that they would each be in a better position to deal with the United States if they were not also bitterly opposed to one another. Another important reason was also that the structure of the Sino-Soviet relation was changing. Mikhail Gorbachev, who in March 1985 took the helm in the Soviet Union, did not cling to the outdated hierarchy that proved so unacceptable to Mao.

What this meant became clear in December 1985, during a meeting between Gorbachev and then Chinese deputy Prime Minister Li Peng:

"China will not become [the Soviet Union's] younger brother", Li Peng told the Soviet leader. Gorbachev recounted his response: "I said it would just be difficult to imagine China in the role of a younger brother" (Radchenko 2014:160).

But that had never been difficult to imagine for Stalin, Khrushchev or Brezhnev. The process of normalization edged forward gradually. The improvement in the relations started with the official visit by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989. Deng Xiaoping welcomed Gorbachev to Beijing to "close the past and open the future". During their conversation, Deng explained his take on the difficulty history of the Sino-Soviet relationship.

"The Soviet Union", he argued, "incorrectly perceived China's place in the world... The essence of all problems was that we were unequal, that we were subjected to coercion and pressure" (Radchenko 2014:167).

Just before the disintegration of the Soviet Union the two powers reached an agreement during this visit by the Soviet leader to normalize their bilateral relation in the interests of both the countries. The year 1991 saw a breakthrough in the relations between the two powers, when during the last year of USSR's existence, the PRC leader and the chairman of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Jiang Zemin, paid a visit to Moscow. During the visit the Soviet Union and China signed an agreement on the delimitation of the main part of the border and discussed other potential areas of cooperation.

Thus, the history of the bilateral relations between the two powers is marked by ups and downs, with periods of close cooperation interspersed with periods of deterioration in the relations. The periods of rapprochement were mainly because of the pragmatism of the ruling elites of the two countries, who had vision for long term interests. They saw cooperation in the political, military and economic spheres as a means for advancement of their respective national interests. The period of hiatus and conflict were mainly the result of short term, narrow national interests of the leaders of the two countries who subordinated their foreign policies to ideology, thus prevailing over a strategic vision and pragmatism about the common long-term interests. The following cases showcase this tendency among the leaders of the Soviet Union and China:

- The relation between China and the Russian empire broke down in the 19th and the early 20th century, largely because of the Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917) who could not see the long-term interests of Russia and sided with the Western allies in the military conquest of China in the year 1900.
- At the end of the 1950s the collapse of the Russo-Chinese alliance was due to the expansionist ambitions of Beijing and Moscow, both of whom wanted to be the center of the world communist movement and primacy of leadership among the third world countries.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist ideology and political-economic transformation in Russia drew a line under the confrontational relationship between the two countries.

2.2.5 The present state of Russia-China relations

Post disintegration of the Soviet Union there has been clear signs of rapprochement between Russia and China. The relationship covers all areas of bilateral cooperation. There have been more than 15 summit meetings between the two countries during the post-Soviet period and more than 160 agreements have been signed between the two powers until 2017 covering wide areas of politics, military and economic (Trenin D, 2017)

In the beginning of the 1990s the relation was lukewarm however it gathered momentum after 1995 and improved significantly in 2000 with the arrival of Vladimir Putin. It has improved markedly since then.

In 1991, Boris Yeltsin came to power and under him Russia made very little headway with its foreign policy and thus the relationship with China was no exception. It seemed that Russia's main interest lied with closer integration with the West. Also, after the sudden and unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union there was uncertainty in China about its foreign policy with Russia.

In 1992, President Yeltsin made a visit to China and a joint declaration was issued which was an expression of the intention of the two sides to develop the bilateral relations between them as "relations between friendly countries". Also, the declaration mentioned the need to expand areas of mutually advantageous cooperation. In 1994, when the Chinese leader, Jiang Zemin visited Russia another joint declaration was issued, which confirmed the successful development of relations between the two countries, now being described as 'constructive partnership' (Weitz R, 2007).

In the mid-1990s Russia redefined its foreign policy which was to be based on the construction of a multipolar system of international relations. Subsequently political interactions with China were considerably enhanced. However, another reason for this rapprochement was that this principle coincided with the Chinese leadership's strategic view of the world and their interests.

The Russian Foreign Policy was affected by the character that Yeltsin brought in. His process of government was characterized as 'controlled instability' which was marked by the expansion of the Presidential courts and the increase in the influence of the regional leader. His style of governance was like the President as a 'Final Judge' (Trenin D, 2017). However, this made matters worse as he governed with an unstable coalition. How wanted Russia to retain the Superpower status which was not related to the creation of influential space in the new world order. He just wanted Russia to have the same status as it had in the Cold War period.

During his tenure, the two competitive Foreign policy models dominated the Russian strategic thinking. The two were called 'the reformers' or 'the Atlantists' which included thinkers like the Yegor Gaidar and Andrei Kozyrev. Another group was called 'the Eurasianists'. The 'Atlantists' were of the view that Russia shares common interests worth the West and the Western Europe and thus must strive to integrate with them. This view had upper hand as it promoted closer engagement with the West. Also, they sought assistance and investments from the West. Since Russia was undergoing the democratic transition during that time, this group found Yeltsin as one of its supporters. This integration with the West could also help Russia to regain its lost status in the

world. Thus, cooperation with the Asian countries was not a priority for them. The view towards China was also guided by this thought and traditional view was dominant that China is a vicious neighbor.

However gradually Eurasianists replaced the Atlantists and it discouraged pro-Western discourses. They were highly critical of Russian diplomacy towards the West and the neglect of the Asian neighbours. They criticized the one-sided approach that the Foreign policy makers had adopted and negligent of other dimensions. They suggested the economic and political consolidation of the post-Soviet states and the reintegration of the Soviet geopolitical landscape. They brought China into the picture and referred to relations with China as the key to bring the lost balance in the strategic policies. They advocated that closer relations with China will provide Russia a leverage and more independence while dealing with the West (Trenin D, 2017).

Gradually, the Eurasianists had influence on Yeltsin and the Russian Foreign Policy. In 1996, Yevgeni Primakov was made the Foreign Minister of Russia. This marked the shift in the Russian Foreign Policy. The policies adopted by Yeltsin was erratic and was affected by the eternal geopolitical concerns. The priority was to use China as not to enhance the strategic partnership but as a ‘balancer’ to force the West to take account of the Russian interests. Some of the policies would also suggest that Russia was acting like a swing power between the China and the US. This approach was faulty and made Russia look like a weaker power. The ambition of great power status was inhibited by Yeltsin’s erratic foreign policies and domestic and international factors.

In 1996, Jiang Zemin and Boris Yeltsin met for a bilateral summit in Beijing where they released a joint statement calling the relations between the two countries as ‘strategic partnership’²². It was indicative of the emphasis being put on their foreign policies towards each other. In the context of the West and especially the US it was an expression of countering the influence of the US. This summit acted as a catalyst in the development of the relations between Russia and China in the post-Cold War world. The same year the annual meetings between the Heads of the two nations

²² On 25 April 1996, the two Presidents signed in Beijing the third Sino-Russian Joint Statement in which both sides formally declared the establishment of "partnership of strategic coordination based on equality and benefit and oriented towards the 21st century". URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18028.shtml

was set up and a hotline was established between the state council of the PRC and the State Duma of Russia.

The improved relations were also taken as an opportunity to improve the border relations and resolve the border disputes with legal registration and the identification of the borders along the entire length of its boundary. This was also visible in the trade disputes where the two nations tried to harmonize the bilateral trade relations with a focus on widening of the cross-border trade. In 1999, the bilateral border dispute was resolved except for the islands disputes on the Amur and the Argun rivers. In this process more than 100 agreements were signed between them (Stefanovich D, 2019). Soon the bilateral cooperation between the two nations were elevated to the inter-regional cooperation when in 1998 when Russia joined the Asia Pacific Economic Forum and thus became partners at a forum to discuss the regional issues.

Under Vladimir Putin the bilateral relations between the two nations received significant boost as the political relations also began to improve. The Russia under Putin has been more pragmatic in its foreign policies and the aim is to secure the long-term interests of Russia. Thus, in this context, Russia began to view China as the key 'strategic partner' to rebuild its status in the international community which after the Cold War had been considerably undermined. China for its part also started to view relations with Russia as one of key factors to enhance its own regional and global positions.

This phase under Putin is marked by a substantial improvement in the bilateral relations between the two countries. The normalization of relations in many areas led to deeper cooperation on many regional and global issues. China has become an important partner of Russia. The Russian domestic and Foreign policy is connected to its relations with China. The domestic policy in Russia does take into account the ties with Russia. This has affected the policy making at both institutional and the domestic level. At the institutional level, the bilateral projects are now negotiated at the intergovernmental commission (Stent A, 2014).

There were many factors at play which contributed to the strengthening of relations between Russia and China. Some of them included NATO's military operations in Yugoslavia in 1999 without the backing or support of the United Nations, and the activities of the USA and its allies in West Asia. These international and regional developments contributed to the closer coordination between Russia and China in their efforts to set up an alternative center of gravity to counter the

West, especially the United States. However, Lene Odgaard (2014) observes that the importance of this relationship lies in creating a basis for the successful construction of a multipolar system in the world and a counterweight to the USA as the only superpower.

In 2001, a Treaty on “Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation” was signed in Moscow which was an evidence of the strategic interests that the two countries had in developing their bilateral relations much further. This Treaty provided a legal basis for strategic partnership and mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries.

The formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 was another equally significant event in the political or geopolitical rapprochement between Russia and China. The grouping also included the Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan²³. In 2002, at the SCO summit in St Petersburg, the fundamental documents of the organization were agreed. Also, it led to the setting up of an integrated regional anti-terrorist structure in the form of RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure). The setting up of SCO also played an important role in spurring the Russo-Chinese dialogue. Now the bilateral meetings increased to three times a year, in addition to the frameworks of APEC and the SCO.

In 2012, Xi Jinping came to power and brought changes to the Chinese Foreign Policy. His form of governance is mostly characterized as the ‘*primus inter pares*’²⁴. Some examples to showcase this includes: The size of the Standing Committee was reduced from nine to seven members, taking control of army by taking charge of the Central Military Commission and creation of a new council, the National Security Council. The President has also been criticized for the anti-corruption campaigns as a way to limit the influence of other power holders (Muraviev A, 2016).

Alexander Lukin (2017) points out that Xi has reinstated personal leadership and replaced the Collective leadership kind of governance which was the former President Hu Jintao style of governance. He aspires for a greater role of China in global politics and does not like to keep the Chinese foreign policy low profile. Also, there are other characteristics which make him different

²³ The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation. URL: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/regional-organisations/sco,%202001,%20establishing%20declaration.pdf>

²⁴ a first among equals; the senior or representative member of a group

from the former Presidents of China: speaking in the first person, putting emphasis on the greatness of China, etc.

Natasha Kuhrt (2018) argues that his style of governance is aimed at establishing a party state as the ideal way of nation-building. Economically, Xi stresses on supervision and control while keeping the approach ‘top-down’. For Xi, his vision of China does not have space for political liberalization.

A Krickovic (2017) observes that Xi’s action represents “hardline modernization” that combines “nineteenth century geopolitics with twentieth century Leninist politics in order to gain the upper hand in a globalized twenty first century world” while Xi Jinping is “the Chinese Yuri Andropov”²⁵.

Xi included many of the “Chinese dreams” ideas in his new foreign policy strategy presented on 29 November 2014 during the party’s cadres’ conference²⁶. Xi called for a new development model and two centenary goals (Lanteigne M, 2017):

- completing the building of a moderately prosperous society by 2021 and
- more importantly in the context of foreign policy realizing the Chinese Dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Xi’s plans were a clear sign of “intensification of Sino-centrism” in Chinese foreign policy as the Chinese Dream is an acknowledgment of the Sino-centrism at the core of Chinese identity and perhaps the first step to restore the old China-dominated order in Asia. It remains to be seen whether Xi Jinping will be able to fulfill his ambitious plans.

²⁵ Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov was the sixth paramount leader of the Soviet Union and the fourth General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

²⁶ Xi Jinping has been promoting the “Chinese dream” since he became the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the 18th CCP Congress held in November 2012. Xi highlighted the “Chinese dream” as a unifying theme for the Chinese to achieve a great national revival. URL: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/05/04/xi-jinping-and-the-chinese-dream>

2.3 The Objectives of Russian Foreign Policy

The importance of foreign policy in both countries is different – in China domestic policy considerations prevail over foreign policy (the latter fulfills the overarching goal of economic development, a fundamental source of legitimization for the party); in Russia the opposite is true, as foreign policy is a source of legitimacy for the current regime.

In a way Russian foreign policy is reactive. It has a better idea of what it does not want than of what it does. It opposes a unipolar world dominated by a hegemonic power; dislikes Western-led moral interventionism; and is hostile to the ‘encroachment’ of the United States and Europe in the post-Soviet space, but that means it wants simply to facilitate an external environment that supports the legitimacy and stability of the domestic political system (Korolev A, 2014).

- Russia’s two most important foreign policy goals are based on two elements:
- regaining the status of a global great power and maintaining the primacy in post-Soviet area.

The “near abroad” (or the post-Soviet area, though “near abroad” is a wider, yet more vague term) is considered the top priority. Russia uses various instruments – which include both bilateral and multilateral institutions and diplomatic and military means to control the ‘near abroad’. This area is the key foreign policy dimension of Russia. This is based on two factors: it serves as an influence zone surrounding the Russian territory as a buffer and the desire for great power status requires it to be used as sphere of influence.

This Foreign Policy of Russia has often been equated with the American Monroe Doctrine where other powers are not allowed to interfere in the domestic issues of the ‘near abroad countries’ without the consent of Russia²⁷. The concept of ‘near abroad countries’ emanate from a common history and claim for superior rights over all the former Soviet space (Keith R, 2013). Also this claim allows the Russian government to compensate its failures in the domestic affairs. The Great

²⁷ The Monroe Doctrine was a United States policy that opposed European colonialism in the Americas. It argued that any intervention in the politics of the Americas by foreign powers was a potentially hostile act against the United States.

power ambitions of Russia thus requires it to have its influence zone in the region where Russia is the core.

Other important areas of Russian Foreign Policy are the United States and the Western Europe. For strategic, political and economic reasons, Russia considers the two equally important. The global position of Russia is enhanced by its strong relations with the Europe. EU is economically vital for Russia a trade with EU makes up for almost 50% of all the foreign trade of Russia (Hongzhou Z, 2015). Also, other important reason is that Russia gets the best deal on its resources with the EU.

Another reason is cultural, where Russians consider themselves to be Europeans. As far as the Russian Far East, the people living there harbor such cultural sentiments and thus they demand to be recognized as Europeans. Russia has good relations with the Western European countries and prefers having bilateral relations with them than making a deal with the EU itself. Although Europe is criticized by the Russian authorities, it still serves as the benchmark (Huasheng Z, 2013).

It is not only the elites who culturally seek resemblance with the Europeans. Russian scientists work in Western universities and research institutes; IT specialists and programmers go to Silicon Valley; Russian companies have sought Western technology and know-how; and middle-class Russians see themselves as part of a superior European civilization despite the rise of Asia, the brain drain of young, ambitious Russians is to the United States and Europe, not to China and India. This has also raised the issue of brain drain in Russia where the migrated skilled professionals do not return to their native land.

Sino-Russian relations since 1991, has been friendly and cooperative and this has served Russian interests in two ways. First, it has provided Russia a strategic alternative to the West if and when the relations deteriorate and secondly, it has strengthened Russian self-perception in the international system as a global superpower (Suslov D, 2007). Also, China does not compete with Russia in the Post-Soviet space for special privileges which makes it a reliable partner for Russia. Although Russia views the growing economic presence of China with suspicion, China is careful enough to not compete with Russian aspirations in the region. Also, Chinese respect for regional aspirations of Russia makes it a 'lesser evil' than the West and a reliable partner. Russian desire of great power status in international system thus requires cultivating cordial relations with China.

Forging closer ties with China should also be analyzed from a geopolitical perspective where Russia needs to secure its eastern border and here China helps to do that. In its quest to reclaim its lost influence in the former Soviet space, Russia needs to have ‘peace from the East’ which China helps to secure it. Securing closer ties with China is one of the main pillars of Putin’s reintegration policy. After the Crimean crisis in 2014, Russia has realized that the Western attitude threaten its interests in the region and not the Chinese. The Russian integration projects is challenged by the West and that is why Russia opposes the West and by securing closer ties with China expects it to help.

2.4 The Objectives of the China’s Foreign Policy

The most important principle of the China’s Foreign Policy is “the multi-vector policy” based on multilateral fulfillment of Chinese interests and not on ideology; “peace, development and cooperation” that should establish a peaceful environment for China; “the harmonious world” (respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity), combined with domestic “harmonious society” (Hu Jintao’s leadership slogan) – the latter illustrates well the correlation between domestic and foreign policies of the PRC (Kakonen J, 2014).

Since Xi Jinping came to power, a new policy has come into existence – “the Chinese dream” and, recently, “the One Belt One Road”. The Foreign policy goals of China are based on securing its national interests: defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity, facilitating economic development and following independent global politics (Anderson D, 2016). Defending its territorial integrity and territorial sovereignty is paramount for China since it faces separatist movements in Xinjiang and Tibet. China vehemently opposes secessionist movements, annexations or any kind of military intervention from foreign powers.

The most important objective remains economic development. The economic agenda is central to foreign policy of China. Creating an international environment which is favorable for economic growth and modernization of China. Beijing’s approach to achieve these goals determine its behavior in regional and global spheres. Many scholars believe that stress on the modernization is also because it helps China to legitimize the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The economic logic calls for getting access to global markets and gaining foreign investments, especially in the field of advanced technologies. In other words, achieving the objectives of the foreign policy requires China to develop and become a great power while also building

connections with the world. This is highlighted by China on multilateral platforms that economic development of China is an opportunity for global market rather than a threat to it.

Other Foreign policy goal of China is to reduce the limitations of political actions. The fear is about hostile alliances and the China's encirclement threat. After the US policy of 'pivot to Asia', China is all the more apprehensive of it getting encircled by hostile powers²⁸. To counter this threat to its security, China has taken the route of multilateral policy. Other issues relate to Xinjiang and Tibet which are sensitive regions and Chinese concern is regarding the limiting secessionist activities of the ethnic minorities in these regions. Chinese government is also apprehensive of foreign interferences in Taiwan. The encirclement threat is also given importance by China as its economic growth is dependent on the resources and supplies from other countries (Gallagher M, 2012).

An important feature of the developmental model followed by China is the narrative that it has build that it is unique and may be effective only in China. The Chinese claim of its economic model being a result of the specific conditions in China and not wanting to export its achievements is indicative of an old Sinocentric approach to international relations (Glaser C, 2011).

The Chinese Foreign Policy has devised four pillars to achieve its foreign policy goals. First policy is to improve and build closer ties with the great powers; second is to build ties with its neighbors; maintaining relations with developing countries is crucial and the last is multilateral diplomacy. As per the Chinese perspective, the USA, EU, Japan and Russia are great global powers. Chinese approach since 2001 has been to go out or '*zou chu qu*' for economic cooperation through various instruments like multilateral forums, like G20, setting up of free trade zones, etc (Fravel M, 2009). Rather than opting for open competition, China has been using the strategy of attracting alliances. The way China has developed its Foreign policy in recent years is very diversified and taking multiple ways to use the possibilities offered by the current global structure.

The Chinese Foreign Policy categorizes the priority states in its formula of cooperation as 'strategic partners' (Facon I, 2013). Sino-Russian relations lie within this formula of Chinese policy. For China, Russia is an outstanding partner as it is a great power and also its strategic

²⁸ President Barack Obama's East Asia Strategy (2009–2017) represented a significant shift in the foreign policy of the United States. It took the country's focus from the Middle Eastern/European sphere and began to invest heavily in East Asian countries, some of which are in close proximity to the People's Republic of China.

partner. However, Russia is not considered as important as the USA, or its Asian neighbors like Japan, India and the ASEAN countries.

Due to its economic interests China is more committed to its relations with the USA, EU and East Asian countries. The energy deals have played an important role in forging closer ties between Russia and China. Although Russia is the most powerful neighbor of China, yet the stagnating economy of Russia has left little for it to offer to China. This has made some scholars to characterize Russia as ‘the most important secondary partner’ of China. Thus, Russia’s place in the Chinese foreign policy is full of contradictions.

Compared to what Russia receives in Sino-Russian partnership, China has limited usefulness in the partnership (Kugler J, 2015). Russia serves the purpose of assuring direct and reliable energy supplies to China, secures its strategic back up with advanced Russian military strength, and also providing ideological opposition to the democratic-liberal front led by the West.

Geopolitically, Russia-China strategic partnership has given many benefits to China. Russia guarantees stability in Energy supplies to China and also covers the strategic rear in the North. Although economy is the weakest area in the Sino-Russian strategic partnership due to lack of substantial economic basis, however Russia gives a leverage to China in its tactical games with the West. The limited economic usefulness of Russia is substantiated by its geopolitical utility in form of assurance of ‘peace from the North’ (Feng Y, 2015)

The most important concepts of Xi Jinping foreign policy, as outlined by Jin Canrong (2010) are as follows:

- promoting friendly relations neighbors
- good relations with Russia, the EU and the USA
- emphasis on resolving disputes with the neighbors
- promoting international engagement through channels like special envoys.

This distinction is hierarchical as we analyze Xi’s policy. The foremost priority is given to building relations with great powers, second in hierarchy is relations with the neighbors, third in criteria are the emerging economies of developing world and lastly using multilateral forums as a means of securing its regional and local agenda. China is thus seeking a dialogue among equals

with the USA while behaving with greater assertiveness in the neighborhood, especially towards its geopolitical competitors in the region.

China's policy towards Russia should be analyzed in this context of an assertive China. The new policy under President Xi is an attempt to construct a new model of bilateral relationship where the two sides respect each other's 'core interests'. Under this model, Russia is given the status of the 'most important strategic partner' of China meanwhile the partnership is not considered an 'alliance relationship' (De Haas, M :2013).

The present Sino-Russian relations is reflective of emerging foreign policy of China under President Xi. Although the two nations do not totally conform each other's core interests, they clearly understand the implications of crossing the 'thin-red lines' which does not serve their regional and global aspirations.

2.5 Summary

Sino-Russian relations have gone through significant highs and lows since the mid-nineteen century: the "unequal treaties" in the 1860s; the "unbreakable friendship" of the 1950s; the subsequent Sino-Soviet freeze; and, most recently, the evolution of "strategic partnership". The bilateral relation between the two countries has undergone considerable fluctuations. The acrimonious historical relations left a messy imprint which reflects in the heterogeneity of the Chinese attitudes. The partnership between the two countries is underlined by challenges of complexities of an ever more globalized world.

This explains the lack of uniformity and predictability in their actions with response to the different regional and international issues. Opting for historical determinism to assess Chinese view of Russia in the future does not give the real picture. Russia and China strategic partnership gets a strong boost when we analyze the complementarity of their economic and security interests. However, the difficult relationship the two nations have had through much of their history does leave a mark on their present state of relations. To believe that the two countries have totally moved on from the acrimonious past is a very simplistic view of their bilateral relations.

The Russia-China strategic partnership is outcome of domestic and external context which are in a constant state of flux. The factors which determine the growth and trajectory of this partnership does not lie in the history but future events which are often unforeseen and to assess their consequences is very difficult. Also, the Chinese Foreign Policy considers Russia as one of the

components of its vision of multipolar world order. The growth of the partnership between them does not depend on how the two countries view each other. The Russia-China interaction in the 21st century will very much be dependent upon how China and Russia adapt to the global environment which is unstable and in a constant state of flux.

CHAPTER 3

RUSSIA AND CHINA COOPERATION IN DEFENSE, MILITARY AND ENERGY SECTORS

This chapter examines the role of military, defense and energy in developing the Russia-China partnership and bringing a strategic alignment in these sectors. It will study the key treaties, summits and agreements between the two countries to develop a robust military and defense relationship. This chapter will analyze the evolving partnership in the energy arena and the economic and political differences over it.

3.1 BACKGROUND

More than two decades have passed since China and Russia formed a ‘Strategic Cooperative Partnership’ in 1996. Over the last two decades since then, it is important to assess the China–Russia ‘Strategic Partnership’. During this time China has stayed on its course to achieve strength and influence while Russia continues to be a major power. To analyze the official rhetoric of ‘good neighborly’ relations between the two countries, it is important to understand the inherent obstacles that may threaten the emergence of a genuine and lasting strategic partnership between them. The Sino-Russian strategic partnership at present has often been held by the two countries ‘at their best in history’. This claim does not reveal the real nature of this partnership, especially if viewed from a Chinese perspective. Moreover, Chinese foreign policy specialists argue that ‘calling the bilateral relations “the best in history” is relative as there are still important challenges (Karpov M, 2017).

3.1.1 The Strategic partnership

China and Russia share a long list of mutual and shared interests. These shared interests include maintaining domestic order and stability in the region, an anti-unipolar view of the global order which also urges them to curb US power. Moreover, the two nations have a common desire to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They also share a common stand regarding the militarization of cyberspace. Both the countries are ardent supporters of strong state sovereignty and tend to take a united stand for the principle of non-interference in other countries' affairs. The scale of cooperation has expanded in other dimensions as well, like in technological

and scientific collaboration and in areas such as energy and technological cooperation and joint initiatives in education, media and culture.

3.1.2 Converging interests

China and Russia share a border of almost 4000 kilometers between them and over last 40 years the two nations have maintained peace at the border. Given the frequency of wars and conflicts between the two countries over past centuries, maintaining peace and tranquility at the border is of paramount importance for both the countries. Along with the shared border, the two countries have also maintained contiguity with their respective ‘near abroad’, a joint neighborhood which both the countries want to remain peaceful and secure. Since the Chinese and Russian governments share a common internal security challenge to their national unity, they have been working multilaterally and jointly to prevent the regional spread of the ‘three evils’ in form of terrorism, separatism and extremism (Kakonen J, 2013). Limiting the sphere of influence of other nations especially USA in the Central Asian Region is also one of the shared concerns.

Along with the bilateral relations, China and Russia pursue their common interests in the Central Asian Region through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which was formed in the year 2001 after Uzbekistan became a member. Earlier it was known as the Shanghai Five, originally formed in 1996 to strengthen mutual military trust and facilitate the border demilitarization between the members. China and Russia consistently stress that the regional grouping is not a military alliance, but a political bloc.

Both Russia and China have an aversion to a global order dominated by the USA and its allies. Thus, both the nations cooperate on a number of global issues at international platforms. The Chinese and Russian diplomats cooperate in opposition to the position taken by the USA and its allies while insisting that they stand for a multipolar global order. In the words of Mei Zhaorong (2010) of the Chinese State Council’s Development Research Center:

‘It is very difficult to protect national interests by following others. Even if we adhere to multilateralism, protection of national interests should be our fundamental principle’. (Zhaorong, 2010)

In the 2008 Foreign Policy Document, multilateralism has been mentioned several times to stress its importance as a means to maintain International peace and security while protecting Russian

national interests²⁹. It is seen that both the countries use the concept of multilateralism more as a byword for discussing international issues at the United Nations where they possess veto power as the permanent members of the Security Council (Freeman C.P, 2018).

There is a common understanding between the two nations regarding the apprehensions about the expansion of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Russia is highly critical of any form of influence of the NATO in the region which it sees as an encroachment on its own sphere of influence. With respect to China, the fear is more about the underlying long held opposition to military expansionism and forging military alliances and blocs. Thus, as much as it appears that Chinese opposition to NATO is an expression of solidarity towards the Russian strategic interests, this is also driven by its own security concerns. Some in China are of the view that any form of expansion of NATO is actually a part of broader strategy of USA to counter rivals while forging alliances with the regional rivals of China, which include Japan and Republic of Korea (Xuanliang Li, 2015).

With regard to the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), both Russia and China hold similar positions as they are of the view that while non-proliferation efforts are very important, the most efficient way to stop the proliferation by countries is through dialogue (Nikolayev M, 2012). The two countries oppose the multilateral sanctions imposed on Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). One of the reasons is that companies in Russia and China have been at the receiving end of the unilateral sanctions imposed by the USA, thus hampering their business opportunities which neither government wants.

The 1972 Soviet- US Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) was supported by China as they viewed that it had the potential to prevent arms race. Thus, when USA withdrew from the treaty in 2001, both the governments criticized the withdrawal. Both the countries have also worked on a proposal for a treaty that would prohibit an arms race in the space. In 2008, the two countries presented a draft

²⁹ THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, Approved by Dmitry A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, on 12 July 2008, URL: https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf

on the above topic which despite unfavorable reception by the USA caught the attention international community on the topic³⁰.

Both the countries maintain and express similar view about the issue of the right of a sovereign state to determine its own political system. They dismiss any criticism of human rights as their own internal matter, an intrusion and sometimes also as an ideological offensive by the western powers. Their fear is that human rights campaign led by the Western human right groups have the larger motive of causing instability in their domestic sphere by igniting opposition movements. Both the countries were highly critical of the Western support provided to the so-called 'Color revolutions' in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan from 2003-2005³¹. Also, similar responses were shared when in 2011 Egyptian democratic movement took place, where both the countries were of the opinion that Egypt should decide on its own, independently about its internal affairs without any external interference (Kumachev V, 2016).

While both the nations have been critiqued on the accounts of human rights violations by the human rights groups, Russia and China have also been accused of ill treatment of their ethnic and minorities groups within their national borders. Thus, the two countries also defend a sovereign state's right to determine the status and treatment of its ethnic and minority groups within its domestic territory. China thus turns blind eye to the Russia's actions in the Chechnya while Russia reciprocates in the same manner to the plight of the Tibetan and Uighur minorities. In 2005, although both the countries supported the UN world summit endorsement of the 'Responsibility to Protect' which permits external armed intervention with the approval of the UN while the state is the primary authority to guarantee its citizens safety (Devyatov A, 2010). However, both Russia and China have been suspicious of the initiative whereby foreign groups could intervene in any kind of humanitarian crisis within their sovereign territory.

³⁰ China and Russia jointly submitted the draft Treaty on PPWT to the Conference on Disarmament, dated 12 February, 2008.

URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/jks_665232/jkxw_665234/t408634.shtml

³¹ From late 2003 through mid-2005, a series of peaceful street protests toppled corrupt and undemocratic regimes in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and ushered in the election of new presidents in all three nations. These movements, collectively known as the Color Revolutions.

3.1.3 Conflicting interests

Among the Chinese scholars it is popular to characterize China-Russia relations as warm on the governmental level and cold at the grassroots level, as politically mature and economically weak Russia's stagnant economy is one of the reasons which is to blame for such state of relations. Despite repeated pledges by the leaders of the two countries, over past several years in 2019, Russia ranked at number 13 with a share of just 2% among the China's trading partners (Blank S, 2019). However, economy is only one of the areas of strategic partnership.

There are fundamental issues in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The world view that the two countries have adopted differ. Russia views itself in European terms, an identity which is alien to China. Also, there is a belief among the Chinese analysts that Russia has historically looked down upon China as an inferior and it is demeaning for Russia to assume the role of resource provider for a junior partner (Bin Yu, 2014). There is also an assumption among the scholars that Russia wishes to be a part of Europe and thus any antagonism with the Western nations is not desired. However, this view is parochial as it does not take into account the debate within Russia regarding its role in Asia and complicated relationship with Europe. Many Russian analysts are of the view that Russian strategic interests increasingly require an 'Asian vector' and thus more attention is needed towards its eastern neighbors (Shevchenko A, 2015). There are different views on the Russian and Chinese Strategic interests among the scholars and policymakers, however one can locate some common threads causing the underlying weaknesses in the partnership between the two countries.

The first cause of this weakness in the partnership between the two countries is the pragmatism. The pragmatic approach towards their national interests by both the countries is one of the reasons of disagreement. Ideological solidarity can no longer help to overcome difference in the foreign policy. In 2008, Russia carried out air strikes in Georgia and recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which did not go down well with Chinese leaders since it undermined the fundamental Chinese foreign policy principle of respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in another country's affairs (Bellacqua J, 2009). China refused to recognize the two regions as it was aware of the fact that might set up a dangerous precedent for the independence movements in Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang.

Russian leadership could not generate support for their actions even at the SCO. Ever since Russia has been actively promoting multilateral organizations in the Central Asian Region (CAR) where China is not a member, like the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Also, Russia has been actively promoting itself as the main supplier of the regions' energy needs. On the other hand, China has been projecting itself as the economic partner integrating the region with trade and infrastructure projects. The one belt one road (OBOR) project is being projected as the solution to the connectivity issue faced by the Central Asian States (CAS).

Whenever Chinese and Russian interests coincide, bilateral collaboration is pursued. Russia and China sided together when Russia had a territorial dispute with Japan over the southern Kuril Islands (Ross R, 2018).

Second reason is the lack of trust. The political trust which is the very basis of strategic partnership is weak. Chinese scholars emphasize on the lack of trust while referring to the great power mentality of Russia and its global ambitions (Xiaochen C, 2016). Russian observers on the other hand point to the historic animosity and suspicion of Chinese intentions towards the Russian and Central Asian countries prevents genuine trust between the two countries (Swanstrom N, 2018). Russian liberal also sometimes use the 'China threat' to shift the Russian attention towards Europe and shifting away from Asia. Chinese scholars dismiss these Russian claims and are resentful of such debates about the risks of rise of China.

Among other things, China's growing presence in the economies of the CAS is making Russia wary of its advances in the region which has also led to a competition between the two countries over the energy resources in the CAR and political influence over the leaders of the CAS.

Many western scholars are of the opinion that Chinese and Russian rivalry in the CAR is inevitable. Chinese experts like Xing Guangcheng (2011) argues that China opposes Russia's dominance in the region, but it has not sought to displace it.

3.2.1 Military and Defense partnership

Russia China relationship has progressed from 'good neighborliness' in the post-cold war period to more recently in 2016, to "comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual support, mutual trust,

equality, common prosperity, and long-lasting friendship”³². This is symbolic of the consolidation in the ties of Russia-China and a calibrated response to the exogenous shocks. Following the Ukrainian crisis and ensuing economic sanctions on Russia and trade war between China and the USA and the South China Sea (SCS) dispute have resulted in an incipient alliance between the two countries. In 2014, President Putin termed the partnership between Russia and China as one of “natural allies and natural partners”³³. This is highly significant as the term ‘ally’ was used for the first time in context of China. Some scholars are of the view that China needs to form a formal alliance with Russia to shift the existing global order away from US dominance (Lukanin M, 2017). In this context of forging alliance, military and defense partnership between the two countries form the most visible aspect of the alliance. It can be seen as the glue of the bilateral relationship. In the 1990s this was the hallmark of relationship between the two countries.

Looking at the trajectory of the military partnership between the two countries it has not been consistent. After the Cold War the two nations established friendly relations. However, it was not until 2010 that the military partnership really became close.

In the last two decades one can see the opposite developments in the military strength of the two countries in the sense that while Russian military regressed from the earlier enjoyed position of dominance, at the same time the Chinese military, The People’s Liberation Army (PLA), has made significant development and has emerged among the most powerful armies of the world.

However, the Russian army still enjoys several critical advantages. The Russian military even today boasts of nuclear warheads and around a million conventional forces. While gauging at the attention China pays to its naval and air forces, it can be argued that its main focus lies in defending its interests in the SCS and Taiwan rather than Russia. Also, the modernization of the Chinese military is still underway if we compare it to the strategic depth that the Russia military has. There is an understanding in the Chinese defense circle about its strategic objectives which underlines the need to avoid risking any conflict with the world’s second largest nuclear weapon state (Huafei

³² Joint statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the development of a comprehensive strategic partnership for collaboration in the new era, URL: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/32618/Document/1481826/1481826.htm>

³³ Putin Says Moscow, Beijing Are 'Natural Allies', October 14, 2014, URL: <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-says-moscow-beijing-natural-allies/26637208.html>

Qiu, 2016). Thus, we see the growing cooperation between the two countries in terms of arms trade and coordinating joint military exercises especially from the mid 2000s.

3.2.2 Arms Sales

In the 1990s arms sales formed the most important part of the bilateral military relationship. The two sides met perfectly in terms of their military requirements. Russian military industrial sector favored intensification of relations with China. In the post-Cold war situation Russia needed financial means to pay its giant debts and deal with the internal economic challenges. The Russian military industrial complex was looking for financing the sector and arm sales to China was the possible solution in this case.

Between 1992 and 1999, defense enterprises produced 2 ships for domestic procurement and 11 for export sales, 31 tanks for domestic use and 433 for export, and 7 aircraft for the domestic sector and 278 for export; in 1996 military-technical cooperation with foreign countries provided work for over 400,000 employees of defense enterprises, while up to two-thirds of the working assets of enterprises of the military-industrial complex were produced by arms exports (Ziegler C, 2010).

Chinese defense experts are of the opinion that a significant part of their defense industry could function because of their exports to China as Chinese demands was financing their production (Aris Stephen, 2017). The considerable increase in this has led to dysfunctional reliance on the Chinese finance. Russian Sukhoi-27 which was treated as a symbol of Russian nationalism and Soviet pride now has one of the most important commodities to be sold to China. This defense equipment once represented the elite status of the Russian military, the highest technological achievement.

The Chinese finance was so attractive that the Russian military has been accused of adopting a distinct policy for China to sell their defense products. The financial desperation out of the rising debts in Russia would view a visiting Chinese delegation as shopping trips to sell anything to anybody (Brooke J, 2013).

The year 1992 is known as the year of no control in terms of defense trade between Russia and China (Blank Stephen, 2009). The Yeltsin era saw uncontrollable trade as the defense companies were allowed to

Fig 1: Russia's total GDP and Military spending, 1991-2013
 (value in USD Billion)



(Source: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/53,i.html>)

bypass the official channels and could deal directly to the Russian clients. After this phase the military industrial complex in Russia became the most important lobbyist for the military cooperation between Russia and China.

This situation was exacerbated by two other factors. Firstly, the cooperation between Russia and China was institutionalized later on and secondly the dominance of the military industrial complex in the Russia-China trade deals grew after this. In 1997 a Peace, Friendship, Development committee was established between Russia and China and a well-known lobbyist Arkadyi Volsky was made the chairperson from the Russian side. This arms trade was crucial in the early phase after the cold war to keep the military industrial running and solve the financial situation in Russia. This was supported by the political elite as Boris Yelstin himself accepted of the urgency to deal with the foreign currency crunch in the Russian economy (Borodavkin A, 2011).

After the Cold War, arms trade was one of the most technologically advanced commodities that Russia could offer for export. Here China emerged as its natural partner with abundant money power. Thus, the Russia-China partnership was initially centered on the military cooperation where arms sale became the niche product. The security needs of both the nations converged in this arena. After the Tianmen square incident in China in 1989, an arms and military embargo was imposed on China by the Western powers. In this context also, these arms purchase from Russia became vital. The Disintegration of erstwhile Soviet Union reduced the status of Russia as a potential military threat from the north. China thus changed its focus to the other side of its boundary which are SCS and Taiwan. It started a major military modernization campaign to ensure its maritime security. Thus, its military need became enlarged in the sense that it needed the most advance technology for its naval and aviation fleet. In the post-Cold war phase, after the arms embargo from the West, Russia was only nation it could look for a reliable defense partnership (Lijan Xing, 2012).

There were other advantages with this partnership. Firstly, China had earlier experience of the sophisticated Russian technology as in the 1950s its military industry was designed and built by the Soviet experts. Secondly, there is political cooperation between the two countries now, and thus there is no reservations about selling of weapons to China. Thirdly, because of the financial desperation on the part of Russia, the weapons were sold relatively cheaper and there was flexible price mechanism which also involved barter. Most part of the first contract of the Sukhoi aircraft and the kilo-class submarines were paid in the barter. However, in the late 1990s this situation changed, and the later military contracts were signed in the hard currency (Kramer Andrew, 2007).

The above factors show that the convergence of interests from the both the sides made Russia a suitable source for an adequate supply of arms and weapons. Since the volume of trade between Russia and China in this area was not made public it is difficult to have a proper estimation of the total volume. However, on the partial data which was made accessible to the public one can safely assume that Russia was the topmost arms supplier to China in the 1990s.

For Russia, the partnership was critical as well but for different reasons. Post the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the traditional market of Russian weaponry was lost and the free market realities of some of the new customers like Vietnam limited its exports. Although India was one of the most important market for Soviet weapons, gradually it was replaced by China.

In the early years of 1990s Russian experts and technicians would visit to China to impart training programmed to the Chinese military. This cooperation expanded as the 1993 military doctrine emphasized on the military technology transfer and rebuilding military industrial base as the key feature of the bilateral military policy. This doctrine created grounds for future military contracts and trade deals³⁴. The technology transfer from Russia to China was an important feature of the deal.

From a geo-strategic point of view it could be seen threatening and as a matter of fact many defense experts in the Russian circle were skeptical of this aspect. They were cautious of this part of the deal as it meant arming a potential enemy. However, the political leaders were of the view that the deal were necessary given the crumbling national military industry (Lukyanov F, 2010).

However, arms sales became the engine of long-term strategic partnership between Russia and China. This partnership was seen as an attempt by both the countries to be the new axis of balance of power in the region. Meanwhile China's focus on securing its western borders and need for Russian assistance made point for a deeper military cooperation and was seen as an advantage by Russia.

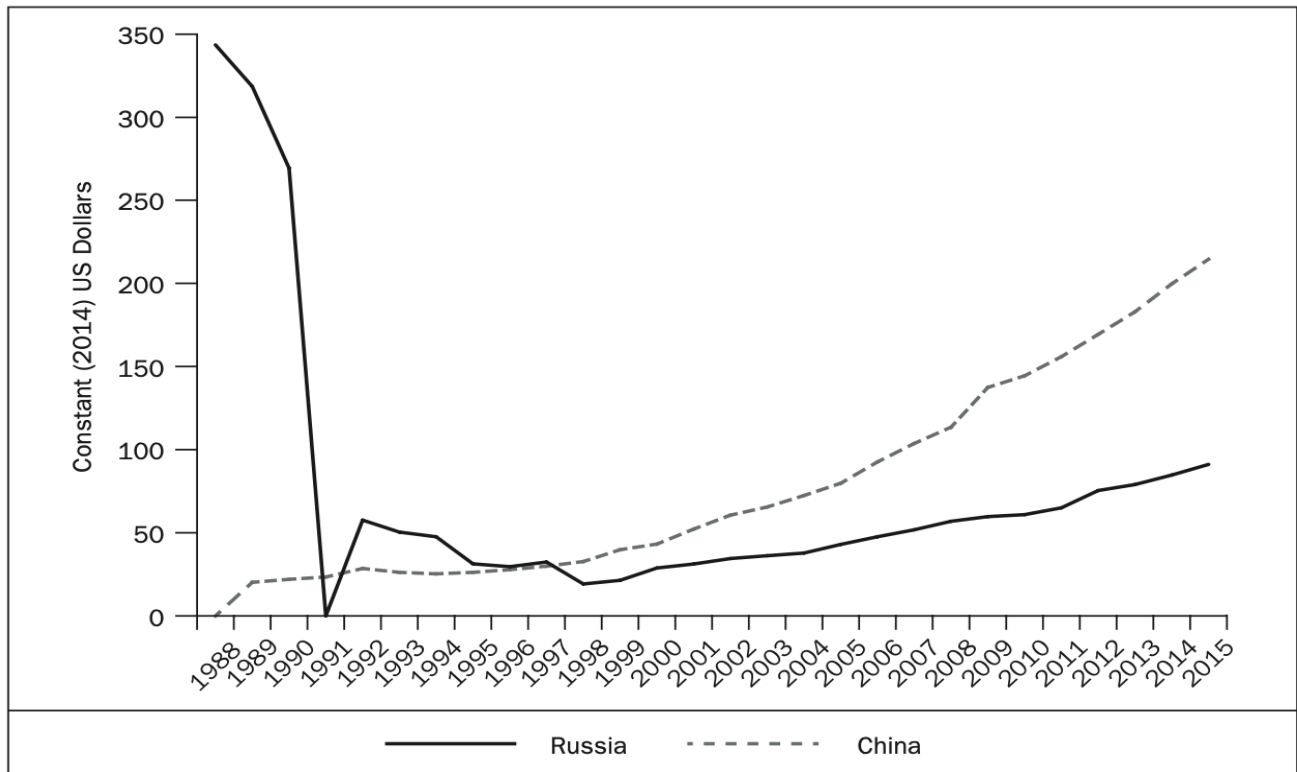
In the 1990s, the most important arms deal between Russia and China was done in 1992 for the Sukhoi multirole combat aircraft. Under this deal, China was to receive 26 Sukhoi-27s and Sukhoi 27 UBs. The contract also included training of Chinese pilots by the Russian military. In following years China received more planes and got the license for production of 200 Sukhoi -27s in Shenyang region. Also, China purchased air to air missiles, mig-17, Ka-27 helicopters, rocket engines for Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, rocket defense system, anti-tank systems, self-propelled artillery, multiple rocket launchers, 4 Kilo class submarines, rocket destroyers, and system for aerial refueling (Lukyanov F, 2010).

After Putin took the charge of Russia, this partnership has further strengthened. Compared to the earlier contracts and trade deals there were differences in this phase. Now the barter policy was

³⁴ The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" were examined at sessions of the Russian Federation Security Council held on 3 and 6 October 1993. The Russian Federation Security Council approved the finalized document at its 2 November 1993 session. The "Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" were adopted by edict No. 1833 of the president of the Russian Federation, dated 2 November 1993. The document consists of an introduction and three sections: the political foundations; the military foundations; and the military-technical and economic foundations of the military doctrine and conclusion.

stopped, and trade was normalized in the sense that the earlier apprehension about selling advanced technology to China was gradually eroded. The commercial and economic implications became much important than merely the strategic Russian political calculation.

Fig 2: Russian and Chinese military spending, 1988-2015
(value in USD Billion)



Notes: Russian data for 1988-91 is for Soviet Union; data is not available for 1991 for Russia or Soviet Union. No data is available for China for 1988. **Source:** SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2017

URL: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

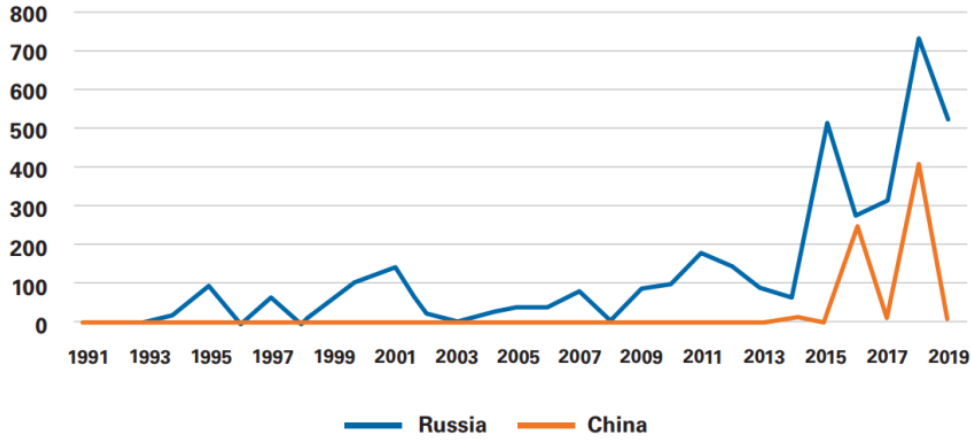
Russian leadership became more confident of their partnership with China as the security threat perception from China in the Far East gradually eroded. The military modernization of China stopped causing anxiety to Russian political leadership and the threat perception of its future aggressive moves did not deter Russia to become the biggest supplier of weapons to China. In the period between 2000-2010, Russia became the leader of arms sales to China (SIPRI database 2012)

Initially the major driving force of this exchange was the commercial needs of Russia; however later on this was changed. After the threat perception from China was eroded, Russia became more convinced of its military exchanges with China. The traditional fear that Russian weapons could be used against its own security in future, this argument has few buyers in the Russian leadership, and it is discredited by them. Moreover, the size of the Chinese demands also make up for the case of increased military exchange between them.

In the 2000s, Putin administration also contributed to diffuse such fear through its intensive re-centralization of arms sale. Earlier the defense enterprises could directly deal with the Chinese trade without any oversight of the official channels (Rozman Gilbert, 2012). However now this was changed as the Kremlin oversaw the arms sale. It made sure that the Strategic materials were sold to Chinese companies with the government consent and knowledge. Now the government was directly involved in these defense exchanges. The government reinstated its control over the trade deals in military weapons. One major aspect of this government control was that now the military industrial complex was not seen as a means to salvage the national economy but to regain the Great power status of Russia.

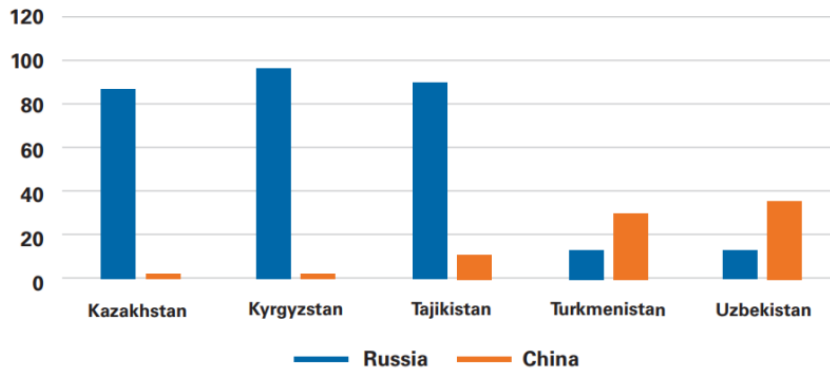
In the 2000s, the Russian and Chinese military cooperation had a setback. Since then, the Chinese companies have preferred buying the sophisticated technology from Russia rather than the weapon itself. This became a source of annoyance for Russia as China would use that technology to sell weapons to third countries. If we analyze the data, we can see that China has become one of the most important exporters of weapons in the region. Also, Moscow another concern is that China has been employing Russian military experts, technicians, scientists, legally or illegally to develop the most sophisticated technology. These relate to nuclear weapons, cruise missile, laser technology, space-based weaponry and nuclear submarines. It is important to note here that these obstacles to the development of the cooperation were commercial in nature rather than strategic (Lubina M, 2019).

Fig 3: Russia and China Arms Sales to Central Asia
(value in USD Billion)



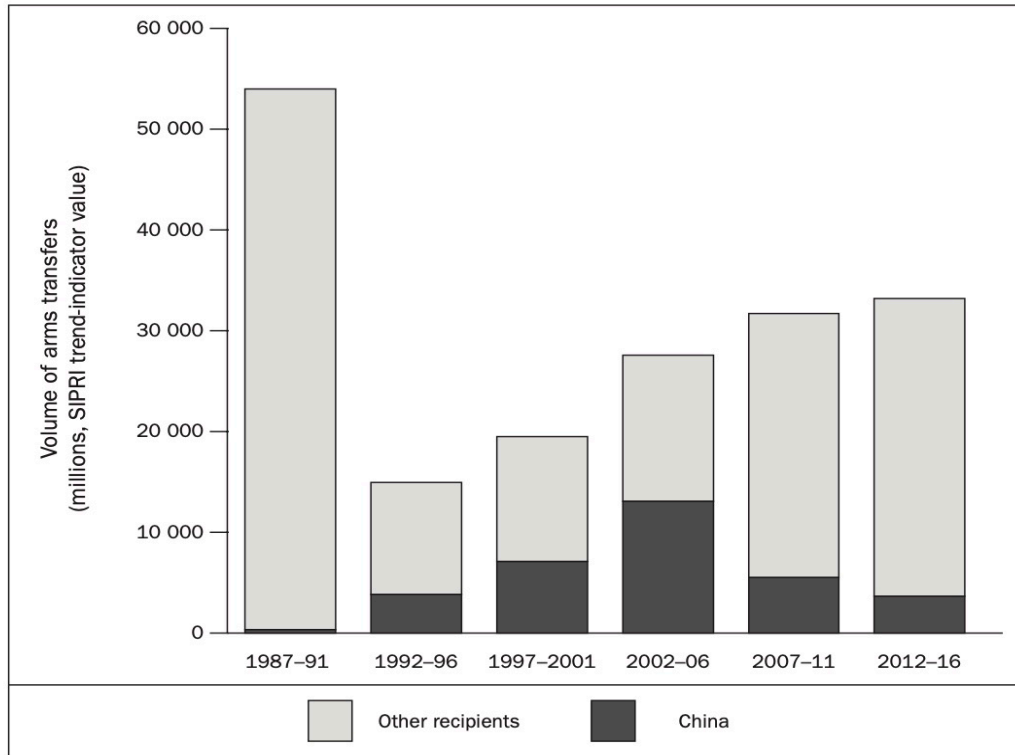
(Source: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/53,i.html>)

Fig 4: Import from Russia and China in the Central Asian countries, 2014-2018
(value in USD Billion)



(Source: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/53,i.html>)

Fig 5: Exports of major weapons by Russia to China, 1987 -2016
(value in USD Million)



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2017, **URL:** <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

Another problem which emerged was that Russia was not able to deliver the deals timely. There was lack in the fulfillment of deals on the agreed duration of time. In this period, Russian exports to China fell by 10% compared to the previous years. Simultaneous developments were happening in the Russian military structure as well since the dire need of money was no longer necessary to salvage the industry and the economy (Cabestan J, 2019).

In the next few years, in the late 2000s the military cooperation took another upswing as the Russian arms sale to China intensified, which accounted for almost 15% of arms sale profit to the Russian coffers. Russia sold thirty-two Mi-171 transport helicopters (in 2009), 500 jet engines (in 2010), ten Il-76 transport aircraft (2011), fifty-five Mi-171 helicopters to China (Wohlforth W, 2015).

Between 2009-2011, the military cooperation actively intensified with delivery of complete weapon system being replaced by exchange of advanced technology and weapon components and servicing of the earlier bought weapons. This phase also increasing Russian involvement in the training of Chinese military.

Table 1: Major Russian weapons exported to China, 1987-2006

Years	Combat aircraft	Helicopters	Warships	Long-range SAM system	Aircraft engines
2012-16	4	62	-	-	424
2007-11	11	106	-	16	202
2002-2006	145	72	8	4	70
1997-2001	79	55	4	-	4
1992-96	45	30	2	4	-
1987-01	3	24	-	-	-

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2017, **URL:** <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

In this period new purchases were made by China which were denied in the previous phase. These included negotiations on purchases for 24 Su-35 jet fighters, S-400 anti-aircraft missile system as well as 2 billion USD contract on four Amur 1650 sub- marines. The Sukhoi jet fighters are of particular significance here as these aircrafts are the most advanced weapon of Russia and till now it declined China from selling it to them. But the negotiation on these started because of multiple factors like how China might no longer need these weapons given the level of technological development it has been going through and also the financial benefits from it which is the traditional argument. Also, Russia needed to find itself a reliable market after its defense market in India and the Central Asian countries contracted (Wohlforth W, 2015).

In case of China, the need of these exchange arose after it realized that the technological challenge it has been facing in development of new weapons is a serious obstacle. Thus, acquiring the Sukhoi jets seemed to be the game changer in dealing with its adversaries in the region like Japan, Vietnam, and other countries involved in the SCS dispute. This dispute has been analyzed in detail in the later part of the chapter.

Thus, these exchanges are symbolic of the decline in the mistrust which Russia had in the previous arms deals. Russia departed from its former policy of not selling the most advanced weapons to China and modified its stance. This exchange also transforms the military cooperation between the two countries in a qualitative manner as among the Asian partners of Russia, it always favored India in terms of selling the most advanced weapons. But after India started diversifying the weapons supply sources from the Western countries, China now started to receive the same equipment. Selling of these weapons also reinforce the Sino-centric orientation of Russia in its foreign policy relation in the Asian region.

3.2.3 Joint Military Exercises

The early 1990s was a phase which was dominated by arms sale in the context of Russia-China strategic partnership. It formed the center of all bilateral visits and military exchanges. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this began to change. As the ties deepened, other areas of cooperation were explored. In this period of intensive cooperation high-level dialogue began to take place with regular meetings of army generals and military heads. A joint Commission on military-technical cooperation came into existence which became the major forum of arms sale and other military exchanges³⁵. This period also saw military political consultations, joint exercises and military technical cooperation. A hotline was established between the ministers of defense in 2008.

Joint exercises became an important part of the bilateral cooperation in this period. It emerged as the new stage of collaboration where every aspect of military cooperation coincided. Joint military

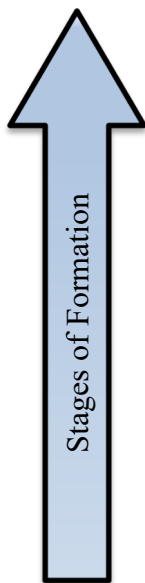
³⁵ In March 1992, a working group on Military-Technical Cooperation (MTC) was set up within the Committee for Industry and Power Economy headed by Deputy Chairman V. Ya. Vitebsky. This working group was composed of representatives of the Committees for International Affairs; Foreign Trade; Industry and Energy; Defence and Security; Budget Planning, Taxes and Prices.

exercises converged weapons, technological sharing and joint military practices. These were symbolic of the geopolitical message to underling the US hegemony in the region. Both the countries used these drills as a means of political tool to deal with the conflicting interests of Russia and China with USA.

The first of such exercises held in August 2005 called ‘Peace Mission’ under the aegis of SCO. The theme of these exercise was anti-terror combat practice and coordination of actions within the SCO countries (Shullman David, 2020). However, the West viewed these exercises as a political declaration. The weapons used and the nature of combat which were majorly about the sea blockades, amphibian landing etc were not related to the threats that the landlocked Central Asian states face in any way. These drills also mean a show parade to present the strength of the Russian military might. However, the main consequence of this joint military exercise was the geopolitical message to the West of emerging Sino-Russian strategic alignment in the Asia-Pacific.

After the Peace mission of 2007, there was a change in the security policy of Russia with respect to the CAS. Russia has been trying to forge another security arrangement in the form of Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). It was set up as an intergovernmental military alliance between the Russian state and some of the Post-Soviet states.

Table 2: Stages of formation



7	Common Military Policy	Advanced
6	Joint troop placement/ joint base	
5	Integrated Military Commands	
4	Regular Joint Military Drills	Moderate
3	Military-technical cooperation/ Personal exchange	
2	Mechanism of regular consultations	Early
1	Confidence Building Measures	

In 2010, another Peace Mission was organized under the aegis of SCO in Kazakhstan. In this drill Chinese military overshadowed Russian side in its performance which showed its capability to carry out long range military warfare against Russia. Thus, after this, Russia has sidelined this in favor of carrying out joint anti-terrorist combat mission which is the main concern of SCO.

Since 2012, there has been annual maritime drills which are an annual affair. These maritime drills have been organized in different locations like the first took place in the Yellow Sea. In 2013 it was organized in the Sea of Japan. Since then, naval cooperation has become the main part of joint military practice. The geo-strategic importance of these locations show that these drills were politically motivated against Japan.

The Sino-Russian cooperation demonstrated a strategic rapprochement with these joint activities. In 2014, the military drill was carried out in the SCS which involved Russian and Chinese vessels indicated the political agenda behind these socializing activities. After this exercise Japan imposed sanctions on Russia and it was viewed by experts as an act of repayment by Russia for China's neutral position on the Crimean crisis.

In 2015, two joint military exercises were organized in the Sea of Japan and in the Mediterranean Sea. The same year USA also led a joint drill of its NATO forces. The interoperability between the NATO forces overshadowed the joint drills of Russia and China. The conducting of joint drills in these locations were political rather than working on the interoperability. These drills also are indicative of the geopolitical significance of Sino-Russian defense relations.

In 2016, this drill materialized into the first ever joint anti-missile drills between the two countries. Under the banner of 'Aerospace Security', the two countries gave a strong response to the US statement of deploying the THAAD system in the Korean Peninsula³⁶. These drills were held remarkably very close to the contiguous water of Senkaku-Diayou islands which led Japan fuming over these exercises³⁷.

³⁶ Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) formerly Theater High Altitude Area Defense, is an American anti-ballistic missile defense system designed to shoot down short, medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in their terminal phase by intercepting with a hit-to-kill approach.

³⁷ Since 2012, tensions have increased between Japan and China over the disputed Senkaku islands in the East China Sea. Japan administers the eight small, uninhabited features, the largest of which is roughly 1.5 square miles. Some geologists believe the features sit near significant oil and natural gas deposits. China, as well as Taiwan,

Thus, there drills have helped the Sino-Russian relationship to deepen further and enhance their strategic understanding and counter their security threats the region. These have also led to minimization of the mistrust and overcoming of the differences between them harbored in the early decade of cooperation. Such high level of security understanding has definitely made this period the best phase of cooperation between them.

3.2.4. The mechanisms of Russia-China Military Relations

Over the last two decade the Sino-Russian partnership has established high level of dialogues between multiple levels of government structure including the topmost decision make, ministries of foreign affairs, security councils, border forces, military educational institutions, general staff and administration. One can see a consistent expansion of military-to-military cooperation. These multiple channels of cooperation also share understanding on issues of regional and global concern. The information exchange is related to wide range of issues about national security concerns, common security threats, technical cooperation and personnel exchanges, and other issues.

China and Russia military cooperation show an upward trend with increased frequency of meetings and holding new consultation process within the existing mechanism every few years. These processes have been formalized and institutionalized through routine dialogue process among the officials and ministers of both the countries.

Currently, the bilateral exchanges in the military arena are of four types which are organized in a time interval ranging from one year to less than two months. The number of such military contacts amount to 25-30 high-level meetings between the military army heads per year (Stronski Paul, 2017). Also, the number of joint drills which are small or medium in scale are also being organized more than twice every year. China has maintained such consistent military joint practices and dialogue mechanism with Pakistan only if we compare its regional military cooperation.

Russia-China military cooperation indicates increasing interoperability between their armed forces and the consistency of integrated military command display the elements of strong foundation for advanced form of military cooperation. The institutional framework has also been straightened and

contests Japanese claims of sovereignty over the islands, which Japan calls the Senkaku-shoto, China calls the Diaoyu Dao, and Taiwan calls the Diaoyutai Lieyu.

it is being used in responding to the changing regional security situation like the North Korea nuclear problem. The joint statement arising out of these dialogue processes and institutional mechanisms express their stand on the strategic issues which are in conflict with the US and its regional policy in the Asia-Pacific. Also, the chronology of these joint military operation suggest that these are being leveraged by the two nations to respond to the presence of external actors in the regional issues (Daksueva O, 2016).

The most important Sino-Russian military consultation is the ‘The mechanism of Regular Meetings the Defense Ministers of Russia and China which was established in 1993. This meeting is annually held and is of great strategic importance. This meeting is the main mechanism for Russia and China to work on their cohesion and joint effort towards shared perception of external threats. In one of such meetings in 2015, the Russian Defense Minister said that Sino-Russian partnership is moving towards conducting more land and sea joint military exercises than in previous years. The Chinese counterpart responded that the two nations share same understanding on the increasingly complex international security environment (Yilmaz S, 2017).

The second mechanism is ‘The Mechanism of Annual Strategic Consultation among Chiefs of the General Staff’ which was set up in 1997. This mechanism mainly focuses on the practical aspects of military cooperation and has demonstrated the joint security concerns of the two countries. In the 2016 meeting of this mechanism the two sides expressed a consensus on a wide range of issues and displayed solidarity with each other (Godement F, 2017).

The third mechanism is ‘Russia-China Consultation on National Security Issues’ which was set up in 2004. This mechanism is of very important significance since this is the first time that China created an inter-state consultation mechanism with foreign state on its national security issues. This mechanism is the platform on which China and Russia share their immediate national interests and is shows the transition of the country’s bilateral ties to a new level. This mechanism operates between the Heads of Security Council from both the sides. This mechanism is seen as the convergence of the Sino-Russian positions on major global and regional security issues. This communication channel was used to express joint policy to resist the ‘Color revolutions’ in the countries of the region and also to deal with the economic sanctions (Kumachev V, 2010).

The fourth mechanism is ‘The China-Russia Northeast Asia Security Dialogue’ which was set up in 2014. The main area of focus on this platform is the facilitation of enhanced security cooperation

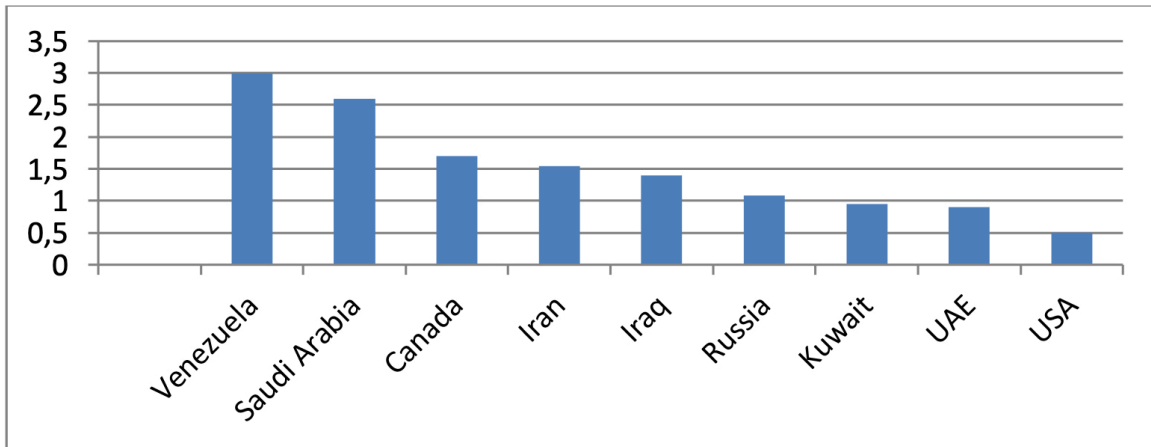
in the northeast Asian region. The meetings under this mechanism are held most regularly, occurring sometimes every two months. They are very tightly scheduled and dependent on the contingencies in the regional geo-political circumstances. In March 2016, the meeting was held in response to the US increasing interest in the regional power balance and use the complex situation to its own advantage. The North Korean nuclear missile issue and the response of the USA-South Korean alliance in the form of deploying THAAD missile shield in region was responded by condemnation of its overtures. The Sino-Russian stand was clearing this regard that they saw this massive missile shield as a continuation of the US led unilateral deployment strategy globally.

The list of mechanism is long given the minor diplomatic exchanges and military training and regional level security consultation within SCO and other inter-governmental Commissions regarding military technical cooperation. The point of argument is that the bilateral military cooperation between Russia and China has been expanding wide enough to respond to the Sino-Russian converging security interests.

3.3 ENERGY COOPERATION

China and Russia complete each other in this arena. In 2017, China surpassed the United States in annual gross crude oil imports. China is the second largest energy consumer in the world. China is also at the forefront in terms of energy producing country (Kuchma A, 2018). As its economy is expanding continuously the demand for energy is also equally rising. Here its need can be fulfilled by its neighbor, Russia which has enormous deposits of energy resources. Along with this complementarity there is the geographical advantage as the two nations share over 4000 kilometers of shared border which provide numerous transport options.

Fig 6: World oil proven reserve rankings



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy,

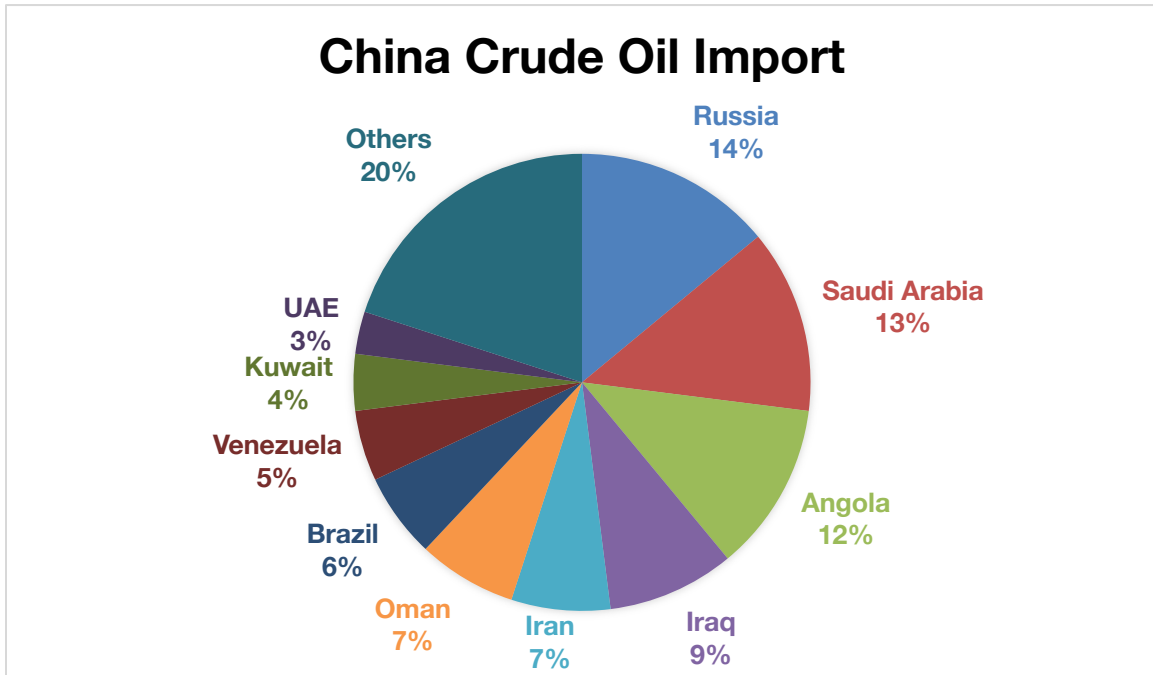
URL: <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html>

Russia is a world energy superpower. It has enormous reserves of oil and gas, accounting for 13% of world's total oil reserves. In a 2014 ranking of world's proven oil reserves Russia ranked at sixth (Kuchma A, 2018). Also, its natural gas, oil and other mineral resources are quite sufficient to satisfy the energy guzzling economy of China. Given their geographical proximity, Russia has emerged to be the major energy import preference for China.

In the year 2015, Russia became the topmost supplier of crude oil to China toppling Saudi Arabia as the leading supplier to China. With 14% of its crude oil from Russia, China has followed a policy of diversifying its energy sources. With the construction of tans Siberian pipeline, the transportation has flourished with less time taken and smaller cargoes. The expanded trans-Siberian pipeline is also expected to ramp up the supplies to China as shipments are much accessible to Chinese rising energy needs.

Fig. 7: China crude oil imports by source 2017

(custom data: in % volume)



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy

URL: <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html>

Ever since the signing of the Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly cooperation in 2001, the overall China and Russian relations have improved. The cooperation in energy, particularly in the crude oil arena has expanded considerably which involves energy related investments. Infrastructure development, ownership in equity and exchange of technology. In 2014, a major gas deal worth 400 billion USD was signed between the two countries for a period of 30 years³⁸. This has signaled that China prefers Russia as its leading natural gas destination as well. In the last decade significant developments have been made in the energy relationship between the two countries; however certain hiccups and policy divergence still exist.

³⁸ Russia signs 30-year deal worth \$400bn to deliver gas to China,
URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/21/russia-30-year-400bn-gas-deal-china>

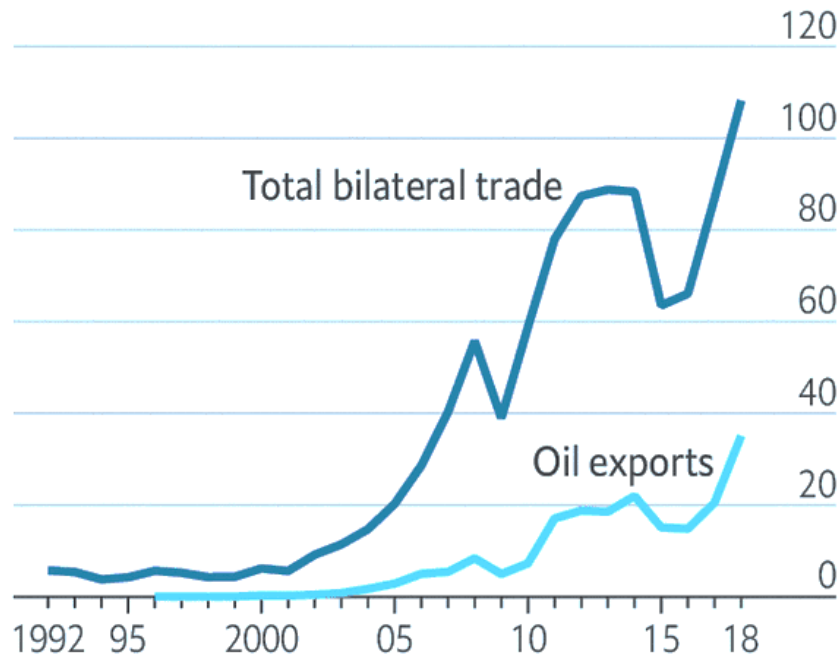
Energy has emerged to be a key instrument in boosting the economic relations between the two countries and it has occupied a central place in the strategic interaction between them. In the last few years energy has provided a significant factor for pragmatic cooperation in the Russia China ties (Shadrina E, 2018). Since the two countries have been working to reinforce their strategic partnership, energy provides a key policy instrument to work on other strategic issue are such as the Ukrainian crisis and South China Sea dispute. The energy nexus in the strategic relations between Russia and China guide the two nations in non-energy related issues and also provides an important ground to facilitate long term deeper interaction between them.

The energy dimension in the partnership between the two countries helps in aligning their strategies and adopting common grounds against the backdrop of the evolving geopolitical environment. Energy has emerged to be one of the important factors which helps the two countries to overcome the existing disagreements and seeking new areas of cooperation.

3.3.1 Energy as driver of cooperation in Russia-China relations

In the last decade the geographic and economic conditions have been favorable for facilitating Russia-China oil trade. Russia is a world energy superpower with its vast oil and natural gas fields in the eastern Siberia bordering Chinese north estates borders which is rapidly industrializing. The western part of the Siberian region borders the Tarim basin the north west China. There is thus a convergence if we see the resource-based economy of Russia and the manufacturing driven economy of China. The fuel and energy sector of China added to 27% in the Russia's GDP in 2015. Oil and natural gas accounted for 65% of total export earnings of Russia. Oil and natural gas sector also account for a major avenue for investment (Holtom P, 2018). China as is known is the world's manufacturing giant which has an ever-growing need of energy consumption and is the largest energy consumer of the world. There is an estimation that even though the energy intensity decreases in the future the national consumption would still increase.

Fig 8: Russia goods trade with China
(value in USD Billion)



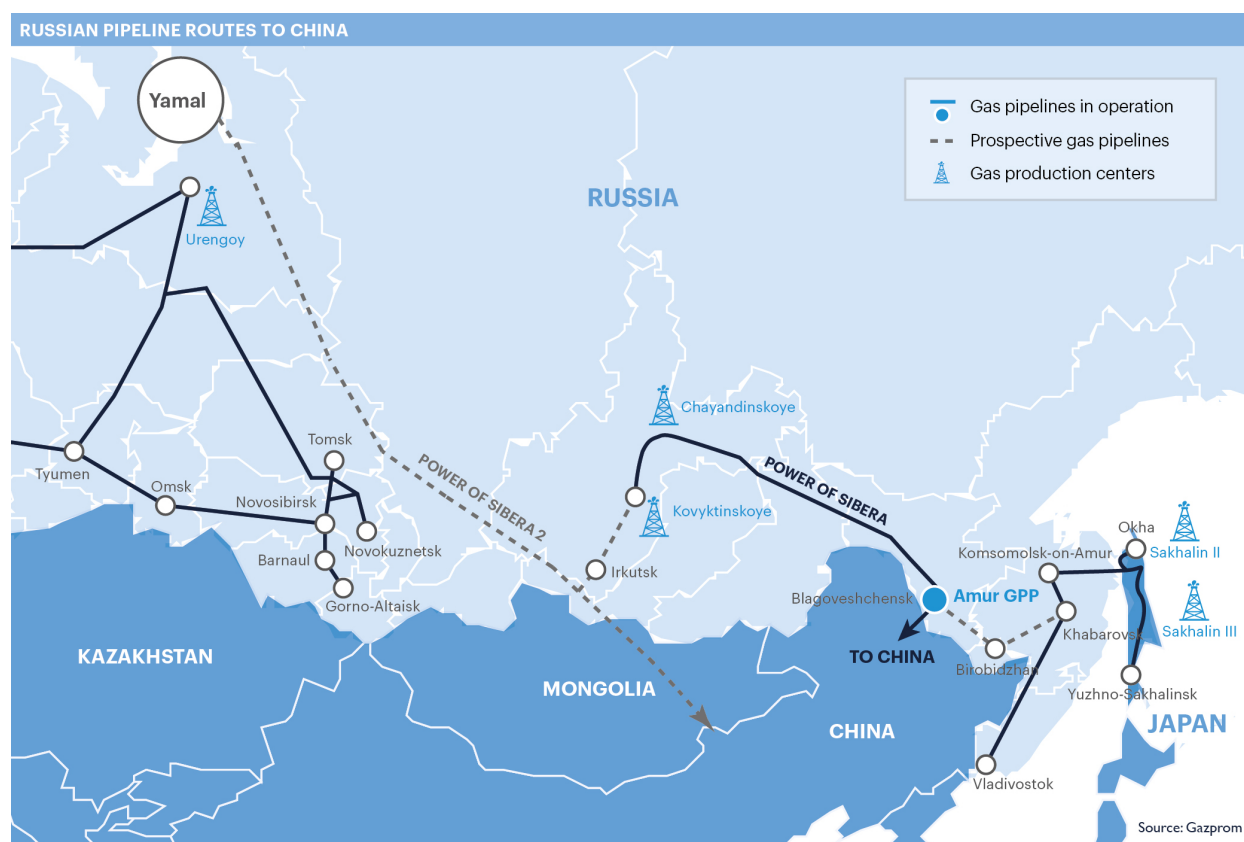
Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy

URL: <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html>

The progress of energy relations between the two countries since the 1990s was gradual. China became a net crude oil importer in the mid 1990s and its consumption has been ever rising since then. But Russia was nowhere near the top energy supplier to China until recently. In the beginning of the last decade the share in the total oil imports of China was just a meagre 2%. At the end of the previous decade, it increased to 6% and Russia became the fifth largest supplier to China. However, with the construction of the East Siberian Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline in 2011, the Amur region which share its border with China, in the next five years the exports more than doubled. This resulted in Russia occupying the top spot of largest supplier of crude oil to China in May 2015³⁹.

³⁹ Russia overtakes Saudi Arabia as largest supplier of oil to China,

Map 1: Russian Pipeline routes to China



(Source: <https://arcticportal.org/ap-library/news/2122-tension-escalating-around-the-northern-sea-route>)

After the normalization of relations between the two countries, a number of energy deals have been signed by the two countries. 2013 was a significant year in terms of deepening of ties in the energy arena. In June 2013, Russia and China signed a 25-year oil deal worth 370 billion USD. The same year another deal was signed between China's Sinopec and Russia's Rosneft to provide for 100 million tons of crude oil for ten years. At the same time Chinese companies are also buying equity stakes in the oil and gas fields in Russia. There has also been an agreement to jointly develop

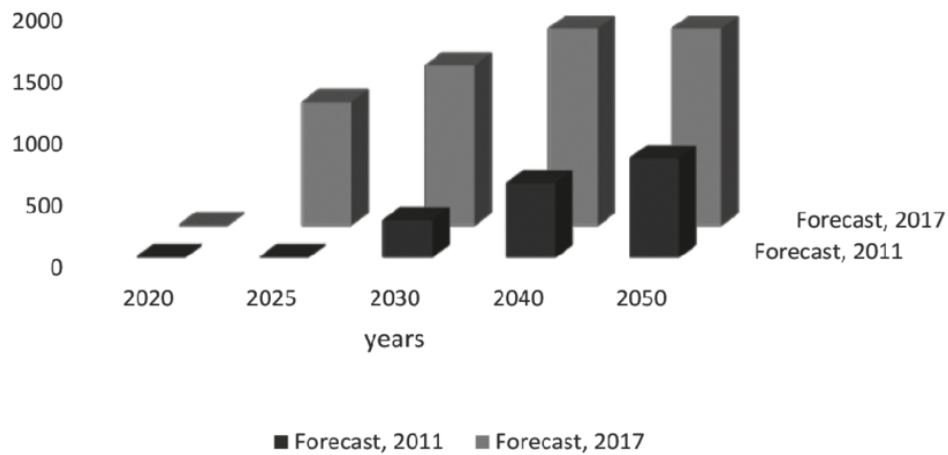
URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/datablog/2015/jun/24/russia-overtakes-saudi-arabia-largest-supplier-oil-china>

the Russkoye and Yurubcheno-Tokhomskoye fields. The fact that Russia has nationalized its energy industry and foreign investment is closed in the sector, this indicates the deepening of ties and strategic trust that the two nations have put in each other (Jacobson L, 2019).

Although China's natural gas consumption is very less in its total energy mix, it has been increasing at a rate of 16% in the last decade. Also, China has been focusing on cutting its coal consumption and shift to clean energy sources, it can be assumed that the demand for natural gas will grow. Russia on the other hand has world's largest reserves of natural gas and holds the second position in terms of production (Downs E.S, 2018).

The 2014 gas deal between the two countries is expected to be the most significant development between the two countries in the natural gas area. Despite the complementary position, the trade in this area remains insignificant. Under this deal Russia's objective is to occupy a meaningful place in the China's natural gas landscape. China imports its LNG shipments from Russia via sea routes. This deal will have the Power of Siberia pipeline carrying the gas to the pacific coasts of Russia which connects the Chinese border at many points. Besides serving the economic interests of the two countries, the deal is also significant from geopolitical perspective. Geopolitically, the deal is symbolic of a coordinated diplomacy between the two nations in the face of major global challenges. It also signifies the mutual strategic support that the two nations are providing to each other. There is also political willingness to take advantage of the geographical proximity and leverage the resource-market compatibility (Trenin D, 2017).

Fig 9: Forecasts of Russian gas pipeline import to china



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy, **URL:** <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html>

3.3.2 Geopolitics of the energy nexus

Both China and Russia have been facing a number of adversities in the regional periphery. Russia after the Crimean crisis has been embroiled into a deep conflict with the USA and its allies. The consequences have political and economic ramifications. Russia has been facing number of economic punitive challenges. It has been excluded from the western controlled political platforms and financial regimes. The punitive measures include severing of trade ties, sanctioning Russian politicians and businessmen among other things.

China in the meanwhile has been engaged in its maritime dispute in the South China Sea (SCS) with its neighbors and territorial disputes with India and role of external actors in the Asia-Pacific. USA has reinforced its military footprint and security alliance in the region under its 'Rebalancing towards Asia' strategy. To counter this, China has been working extensively to enhance its defense capabilities and promote the mammoth 'one belt one road' (OBOR) project. The project is aimed to enhance the connectivity of China to distant parts of Europe, Africa and Asia. It involves a territorial belt and maritime road connecting which has strategic benefits for China. Thus, the region has been very unstable and contentious with aggressive postures and muscle flexing of regional actors and increasing interest of external actors in the regional politics

(Chen A, 2018). In this scenario, Russia and China consider deepening of energy ties as a viable strategy to respond to the geopolitical challenges.

While China has been following policy of diversifying its energy sources since mid 1990s, Russia has also been aiming to follow the suit as its highly dependent on the European markets from supply side perspective. This also contributes to the development of closer ties. The Sakhalin islands of Russia has many European companies carrying out the exploration activities. In the last few years, the dependence on the western companies has increased because of the fall in oil prices. The Russian national budget has a major chunk of its revenues coming from the export of natural gas and oil. The Russian foreign trade is dominated by export to the European Union of which oil and natural gas forms almost 50% of its share (Snyder M, 2018). Thus, this aspect is both an asset and liability for the Russian economy. Given the international situation prevailing, it is not an overstatement to say that it is more for Russia needing European foreign exchange than European countries depending in the Russian oil and natural gas. Thus, in terms of export diversification, China offers a term market for Russian energy sources.

China has been the world's largest energy consumer since 2011. Middle eastern countries have been therein source of oil for China as the region accounts for two-third of the total import. However, in the area of natural gas China has been less reliant on the region which is 40% of its total natural gas imports. However, the politically volatile region has made case for China to look for other sources to satisfy its energy demands. China is also apprehensive of the maritime route via which its energy supplies are transported. The Malacca strait accounts for 80% of all the crude oil imports to China⁴⁰. Thus, any conflict in the South China Sea is bound to affect its energy security. This facilitates the export and import diversification strategies of Russia and China respectively to be complementary (Grattan R, 2017).

Economically also, energy cooperation is an effective way to be independent of the US Dollar dominated global trade. Russia and China have a long-term goal to decouple from the dependency on the USD by replacing with trade in domestic currencies. The major constituent of Russia's revenue from exports comes from the energy sector, thus, to offset the loss accruing from the

⁴⁰ The Strait of Malacca is a narrow stretch of water, 580 miles in length, between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. As the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, it is one of the most important shipping lanes in the world.

financial sanctions and falling oil prices, Russia needs to look for new markets which can save it from the vagaries of uncertainty.

In this scenario, countries in the Asia-Pacific are the most approachable and reliable markets and China emerges as a natural destination for Russian oil and gas. Given the fact that China's energy demands are ever increasing, and its financial strength can allow for large trade deals between the two countries. The economic and technological capabilities the two nations complement the logistics, construction, maintenance and cooperation in the projects. The geographical proximity is another enabler for speedy execution and timely completion of projects contributing to the financial viability of the projects. The ongoing Power of the Siberia pipeline project which posed huge engineering and technological issues owing to thorough terrain and extreme climatic conditions is a successful example of the joint cooperation between the two countries (Henderson J, 2019). Cooperating at the technological level is important for both the countries sanctions from the USA and its allies also limit the possibility of technology transfers. In the last few years, there has been an increase in scale and scope of technology transfers between the two countries involving wide range of projects like nuclear energy projects, acquisitions and loans, shale exploration and arctic offshore explorations formal and gas.

3.3.3 Existing challenges

Although the geo-political and geo-economic factors account for a better prospector strategic cooperation between the two countries, certain challenges affect the energy relations negatively. The main issues relate to price structures, loans, volume, equity ownership, and location of the supply sources. The negotiations over the price structure and pipeline routes have dragged the disagreements for more than last ten years. The disagreement over pricing is that Russia wants to sell the gas at a price somewhat similar to what it used to sell to its European customers. While China is of the view that it does not want to buy the products at a price which is more than the price it pays for the gas imported from the Central Asian countries.

Even though the relation between the two countries is on upswing, the energy cooperation sector has been facing number of prolonged negotiations. There have been some talks related to the Power of Siberia pipeline-2 which has been stalled over issues related to the joint production and sale of gas from this project. Also, there is the issue of some external factors which are unfavorable like

fall in the global energy prices, increasing cost of pipeline construction, decrease in the domestic consumption of Chinese market. Thus, the deadline to supply Russian gas to China has been postponed and deadline has been extended.

Also, the fact that in this case, Russia is at a disadvantaged position in trade deal owing to the economic sanctions and fall in the oil and gas prices, China can wait for better terms of trade and keep Russia waiting at the negotiation table. China is strategically less constrained and thus there is unequal benefits for each side in the present scenario. External factors are also causing uneven interdependence for both the countries.

There is also a political hesitation because of over dependence which limits the broader energy interaction. There is an apprehension about a potential shift in the balance of power. Bobo Lo (2014) talks about this dilemma in his 'axis of convenience' theory that China-Russia partnership is not guided by like mindedness. There is a convergence of interests because China established energy trade ties with Russia after it already secured the oil and gas reserves in the Central Asian states.

There is also a view that China wants to utilize the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project to widen the power parity in the Central Asian and East European region. Thus, there is a mutual distrust over the spread of regional influence and rebalancing of power in the region which might prevent energy trade as an effective strategic policy instrument. This can prevent the deepening of ties between the two countries.

In the post-Cold war era, the relation between the two countries has been shaped by a number of internal and external factors. Internal factors mainly involve the challenge to survive in isolation from global geo-political considerations. There has been a debate between the foreign policy makers over the strategic orientation of the state. The debate is between following deeper regional integration and establishing political and economic ties with the West (Dibb Paul, 2017). Among the two foreign policy approaches, the policy toward regional integration was adopted by both the nations. Thus, both the nations shaped their foreign policy influenced by the global conditions and prevailing domestic sentiments.

Over the last decade, both Russia and China have been at the forefront of numerous geopolitical challenges. China has been dealing with the South China Sea dispute, nuclear proliferation in North Korea, and trade war with the USA. Meanwhile the western and south-western boundaries

of China is faced with the security alliances that USA is forming in the region. In the aftermath of the Crimean crisis, Russia has been facing economic sanctions which is another major challenge. Also, USA is also in the process of establishing anti-ballistic missile systems in the nearby Eastern European Countries. Thus, the immediate challenges which Russia has been facing include economic hardships, political fallout after Ukrainian crisis, the growing proximity of NATO and domestic instability.

This geo-strategic situation has led the two nations to build cooperation on broader issues in which energy has emerged to be one of the important factors to reinforce the strategic partnership between them. The geo-strategic alignment can be strengthened with prospects for deeper energy cooperation. The energy ties between the two countries provides solid fundamental to create synergy in the partnership.

Although in the post-Cold War period there has been policy discrepancies between the two countries on the ground of conjectural development, strategically the two nations have maintained alignment on conceptual lines. In this scenario, energy ties present itself as a strong material linkage to support the common stand on ideational issues and the policy formulations on those issues. The energy sector provides an effective and flexible policy tool to enhance ties on other issues and seek further alignment while responding to the global issues like the SCS dispute and Ukrainian crisis. Although there has been strategic divergences and disagreements over policies adopted by the two countries on certain issues, energy ties have helped to maintain policy convergence and bring ideational alignment.

In the following sections, two issues will be examined which are of great geopolitical significance where Russia and China have been assisting each other and using energy trade between them as one of the diplomacy related tools to directly or indirectly cooperate with each other.

The two issues are South China Sea territorial dispute and the Ukrainian crisis. Here, we will analyze how energy diplomacy is being used by the two countries to make case for each other and support each other on other strategic issues. In these two cases, Russia and China have leveraged energy as a versatile diplomatic tool to deal with these challenges and use them to their own advantage. Here, energy ties serve as an effective policy instrument to reinforce and the strategic cooperation between them. Energy diplomacy is being used a multi-pronged diplomatic tool to

rationalize the strategic understanding on territorial disputes that China and Russia have been facing with other countries.

3.4. The Ukrainian crisis

In the late 2013, Ukraine was embroiled in a massive political crisis against its pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich⁴¹. The crisis resulted in the inclusion of the former Crimean autonomous region into Russia after a referendum was held. Throughout the crisis, China maintained strict neutrality on the issue. China maintained a low-profile strategy while the conflict deeply affected the regional stability.

Economically China sees Ukraine as a gateway to the European markets. After the 2016 Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement signed between Ukraine and the European Union, China has pursued economic ties with Kiev with much vigor than ever before (Roy J.S,2018). This association benefits China as it provides traded investment opportunities owing to the geostrategic location of Ukraine. The same year China proposed to build a new branch of Silk road which will bypass Russia. The manufacturing potential of Ukraine and financial strength of China make this project a lucrative one. Thus, China continued to develop close economic ties with Ukraine along with Russia while maintaining neutral position on the territorial crisis.

After the crisis, China has been sensitive towards Russia's concerns and it can be seen in terms of the pro-Russian diplomatic efforts that it adopted in the bilateral relations. After the punitive economic sanctions imposed on Russia, China through its bilateral relationship has been balancing out the regional and global interest and expectations. The Crimean crisis did not deter China to deepen the ties with Russia even though China was not satisfied with the way the whole crisis played out leading to secession of Crimea and a separatist civil war.

At the UNSC meeting on Ukraine, China maintained its position on the issue and its statement drew attention to thereupon of the crisis rather than criticizing any of the involved parties (Chase M.S, 2016). China asked the world community to critically observe the root cause of the crisis and reiterated its foreign policy principle of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

⁴¹ Ukraine protests after Yanukovich EU deal rejection, Published on 30 November 2013, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25162563>

This shows that China has been sensitive towards Russia's concerns and also as an attempt to make space for future contingencies. On March 15, 2014, while a voting was being held at the UNSC on the draft resolution on not recognizing the referendum held in Crimea, China abstained from the voting signaling that it did not want to get involved in the crisis.

The dominant view in the Chinese foreign policy experts has been that the Crimean crisis spiraled out of control because of the Western forces. Their main aim was to instigate the crisis and use the opportunity to reduce the sphere of influence of Russia in its periphery. It was seen as a larger objective of NATO to militarily encircle the country and force its own agenda in the East European Countries (Weitz R, 2017).

Jingle Zhao (2016) is of the view that the Crimean Crisis actually played out in the hands of Western forces as a fertile ground for a proxy war among major powers. Although the root cause of the crisis was a resentment against the ruling power and therefore asking for change in the national system, but eventually they were influenced by foreign elements who used it to cause a regional crisis. Thus, here we can see that China, guided by its long-term strategic goals, determined its stand on the Crimean crisis.

After the economic sanctions on the Russian companies and trade was intensified by the US led global economic system, China became more vocal in its support towards Russia. China took the stand to seek out a compromised solution since it urged the West to look into why of the crisis and the strategic concerns of Russia. Apart from this, China also officially pledged to financially assist Russia if needed. On various platforms China expressed its support for financial assistance to Russia. After this, we can see the jump in energy trade and investment between the two countries. It became an important dimension of economic and political relations between the two countries.

The increase in oil imports from Russia which made Russia the largest crude supplier to China can be seen as an indication of support. Since it relieved Russian energy companies from the negative implications of the economic and trade sanctions. China has been engaged in the acquisition of the Yamaha LNG and Rosneft and other equity share deals in Russia. Also, Russian energy companies have been banking on the loans from Chinese government after they were barred from raising loans from the western markets.

In March 2016, Germany was replaced by China as the top importer of oil from Russia (Dibb Paul, 2019). Also, around the same time the long pending natural gas deal between the two countries

was successfully concluded. The earlier mentioned 400 billion USD deal between the two countries came up only a few days before the Crimea was annexed by Russia. The deal had been in negotiation process for more than two decades. The deal opened the Russian natural gas fields to the Chinese market for the first time. This deal can be seen as an indicator of support that China showed for Russia in response to the sanctions imposed by the West. Thus, if we see this in the larger context of the expanse of the China-Russia cooperation it has more than the symbolic meaning to it. It has wide political and economic implications as well since it came around the time of the Crimean crisis and search for a diverse source of natural gas and oil by the European market.

The energy politics has thus proved to be an important element in solidifying the China-Russia relations while also guiding the bilateral relation in other regional and global issues. However, a possible disadvantage for Russia in the long term could be the over reliance on the Chinese market. Nevertheless, a neutral position on the regional political issues and long-term strategic goal of energy security have helped China to adopt more practical approach in its economic and political relations with the regional powers. China has maintained a strong noninterference policy in the internal matters of regional powers which has enabled its role as an impartial economic actor in practical terms.

Thus, the energy nexus in the Russia-China strategic partnership has opened new doors for cooperation in non-energy issues also. Energy has become one of the most fundamental diplomatic tools to reinforce the complementarities in a comprehensive manner.

3.5 South China Sea dispute

The disputes in the SCS involve the disagreement over the ownership of the island groups in the sea and the delimitation of territorial waters among the regional countries who have put forward claims over these islands. These countries include China, Indonesia, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei who claim their territorial sovereignty over these islands either individually or as a whole. There has been an overlapping claim by these countries which are non-identical in nature.

The strategic significance of the Pacific Ocean also involves external actors like USA, India, Australia, etc. Involvement of external players thus make the dispute more protracted and increase the stakes for each power.

Dominance of USA with its naval powers in the Pacific water poses a primary challenge for China. The fears and apprehension of China regarding US naval incursion in the region is greatly enhanced by USA efforts to seek military alliance with the states party to the dispute. Over last few years China has been actively ramping its military presence in the Pacific Ocean with its claims of 'Nine dash line' which covers almost 90% of the total SCS. China has been increasing its military buildup and naval bases on the disputed islands to solidify its claims over them. Thus, China sees the SCS islands as strategically very crucial for its security and thus the diplomatic support from Russia in this matter is very important (Kocamaz S.U, 2019)

Moscow has generally followed a policy non-interference on this issue. Its interests mainly lie in the traditional industries which involves energy and defense. Russia's engagement on the regional institutional framework has been limited. The bilateral relationship is majorly constituted of arms trade and oil and gas exports. Regarding the territorial dispute in the region Russia has maintained a silent stance which indicates an indirect approval for Chinese strategic maneuvers in the region.

Russia and China have been involved in carrying out joint military exercises in the SCS which can be seen as a significant step symbolizing its support for China. Also, in July 2016, at the 11th Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) Russia voiced its objection against the internationalization of the SCS dispute arguing that it is a regional dispute and external players must not treat it as a ground for proxy war and deter from interference⁴².

This shared stand by both the countries can be explained in terms of their strategic alignment in the SCS. The traditional allies of Russia in the region like Vietnam are being pursued by the US led NATO forces and this deepening ties between them force Russia to share the understanding with China. Russia also sees it as a way to counterbalance the growing influence and interest of USA in the maritime disputes. Also, the growing defense partnership between the US and regional

⁴² "Did Russia Just Side with China on the South China Sea? Analyzing Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's recent remarks on the South China Sea", by Anton Tsvetov , April 21, 2016.
URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/did-russia-just-side-with-china-on-the-south-china-sea/>

actors has put a dent in the weapons trade which Russia used to have with them. Vietnam which has been a traditional security partner of Russia has seen lifting off arms embargo by the US. Vietnam has been one of the most important defense markets for Russia, thus now China becomes more critical in terms of its defense and energy trade and supporting China in this issue will ensure a deeper strategic relation (Broeders Noor, 2017).

Another aspect of the energy nexus in the strategic partnership is the energy security for China. The “Malacca Dilemma” is an important strategic concern of China. Since China imports most of its energy trade from the middle east the access to sea route becomes very important. The trade mostly happens via the sea route through the Malacca strait. Thus, securing the sea lanes becomes important for its economic and energy security. Thus, the energy cooperation with Russia is also aimed at reducing this dependence on sea lanes. Thus, solving this issue will be enable China to ease up the energy chokehold and have greater maneuver for asserting its claims in on the disputed islands. The recent military buildup by China involving deployment of its military and naval bases in the SCS can be seeing this light. Thus, the strategic challenges faced by the two countries in the SCS is being dealt with energy diplomacy.

Thus, a number of factors guide the strategic alignment between the two countries. These factors can be categories in the geo-political and geo-economic categories. Economically both complement each other as Russian market and Chinese money and investment provide long term ground for cooperation. Politically, the regional power politics and territorial conflicts form a solid ground for deepening of ties and pivot towards each other (Popescu N, 2016). Energy diplomacy here acts as an important diplomatic tool to reinforce the convergence between the two countries.

In the context of Russia-China relations, Energy definitely changed the view with which the two countries looked at each other. The resource diplomacy has expanded beyond considering energy trade as mere economic trade rather energy is shaping the other non-energy issue areas like ninth case of Ukrainian crisis and SCS. To analyze the role of energy as a contributing factor in the deepening of ties between Russia and China, one must look at how effective it is to deal with urgent challenges faced by the two countries. On these parameters, it can be said that the feasibility of energy as a diplomatic tool depends on the desired strategic outcomes.

The recent improvement in this area is also reflective of the role of the external players in the regional issues which threaten the security of the two countries. Also, here energy more than a

commodity forms an important instrument in the broader diplomatic spectrum. One can monitor the energy nexus between the two countries within the larger context strategic partnership and the evolving external surrounding of the two countries.

3.6 Cybersecurity and Strategic partnership

This aspect of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is entirely new given the changes in advancement in the technological arena and changing global space dynamics. Russia China have emerged as serious competitors of USA in the cyberspace. There is convergence in their cyber threat perceptions and between their interests. However, this aspect of partnership remains very limited as of now. This is restricted to defensive postures directed at improving controls on the domestic internet. One cannot find any evidence of a coordination on any offensive operation. Russia and China have maintained inherent secrecy about it.

The most visible part of coordination in this area is that the two nations have been sharing views and taking joint stand on the issue of having greater state control on the flow of information and on the internet. On various multilateral platforms and also at the United Nations the two nations have voiced for regulation of internet. China and Russia promote ‘Cyber sovereignty’ over their content and consider it vital for maintaining domestic stability. Cyber sovereignty refers to the rules and regulations which govern internet functioning and the rights that the states possess to manage the contents flowing within their territory (Makocki M, 2016).

In 2011, China and Russia coordinated at the United Nations to submit their first letter promoting ‘information security’ as an international norm⁴³. The two nations have been aggressively pushing for the adoption of an international code of conduct for information security at the UN. They argue that internet regulation by the state at the national level is critical, particularly so in their case as it was being used to instigate terrorist activities and extremism, thus undermining the socio-

⁴³ China and Russia submitted a letter at the UN General Assembly outlining a proposal for an International Code of Conduct for Information Security. The proposal was supported by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, The Chinese-Russian proposal discussed the security challenges cyberspace presents to the international community and would establish rights and responsibilities of states in protecting information networks and cybernetworks. The proposal says states should respect domestic laws and sovereignty, but also calls for a multilateral approach within the framework of the United Nations to establish international norms and settle disputes about cyberspace.

economic stability. While advocating for greater state control on the dissemination of information, the two nations have also expressed their opinion to make change in the International Telecommunication Union.

This joint coordination effort is viewed by the political leadership in the two countries to overcome the competition from the US. The shared understanding and putting a joint step at international platforms are aimed at shaping a global governance structure in the cyberspace. By calling out for a need of a 'new cyberspace order' the two nations have advocated a change in the current internet governance which is dominated by the American companies and thus directly hampers their national security.

At the Group of Government Experts on the issue of Telecommunications and developments in the information structure, the two countries have worked together to frame norms for international security. They came up with two reports 2013 and 2015 where they advocated that state sovereignty applies to cyberspace and information and communication technology structures within their territories come within the national jurisdiction. However, they faced stiff opposition from the US and the western powers. Thus, after this push back, in 2017 China and Russia set up a working group open to all the countries who advance the concept of cyber sovereignty. This idea was criticized by the western democracies that it was a covert way to legitimize internet surveillance and suppress online dissent (Gabuev A, 2017).

US stand is that there should be open access to internet irrespective of state boundaries and that governments even though have a right secure cyberspace from physical threats, internet access should not be curtailed by the countries. Thus, US supports the existing internet governance structure which is based on the 'multistake holder' model which advocates the right states to secure their network integrity but prevents state interference in the accessibility of information to anyone. The Sino-Russian alignment on the view that state must police the content on internet is thus in opposition to the view held by the USA (Cooley A, 2016).

There has been a sustained confrontation over last many years between US on the one hand and Russia and China on the other regarding the limited access to global technological sphere. Thus, a Sino-Russian combined stand gives an edge with competition from US. Also, China alleges that Chinese companies are denied the European markets within the existing rules and technological structure over security threat concerns. Also, the political leadership in the two countries want to

reduce their dependence on the western technology and thus use each other's support to offset the western cyber front led by the US.

There is another dimension to this shared interest in partnership. Opposition to US leadership in the current internet governance is not the only factor forging an alignment between Russia and China. There is a shared worldview about bringing information revolution and preventing the usage of digital tools to undermine politico-economic stability (Shaloei F, 2016). The two nations are of the view that the use of digital tools should be a prerogative of national governments and thus regulation is extremely important to maintain regime stability. Russia and China are apprehensive of the digital space being used by the western forces to spread their influence in the region and serve as a source for power for them.

Along with the above-mentioned drivers of cooperation in the cyberspace there is the complementarity in terms of the Russian advanced technology and developed science and engineering industry and China's huge market, resources and efficiency in marketing the scientific developments.

In 2015, a bilateral agreement was signed between Russia and China on cybersecurity reinforcing their understanding on protecting territorial integrity and stability from cyber threats, mutual non-aggression and to mobilize international cooperation on cyber sovereignty norms⁴⁴. Under this agreement the two nations have been jointly developing technology to strengthen state control on information flow and internet. They have also been working on an agreement to contain illegal internet content.

In this area, Russia and China have implemented domestic legislation to combat the cyber threats and have an independent root server system. Like China's Great Firewall, Russia also came up with 'RuNet' which will provide internet service domestically⁴⁵. This is intended to limit US

⁴⁴ GOVERNMENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ORDER on April 30, 2015 No 788-p Moscow, On signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on cooperation in ensuring international information security

URL: https://cyber-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/RUS_CHN_CyberSecurityAgreement201504_InofficialTranslation.pdf

⁴⁵ Internet in Russian is known as RuNet. It is a part of the Internet that uses the Russian language. Geographically, it reaches all continents, including Antarctica but mostly it is based in Russia.

hegemony in providing internet access. Thus, the domestic response to cyber threats is also in tandem in the two countries reinforcing each other's interests. The joint response to the threats emanating in the cyberspace have brought a cyber alignment as a new dimension of strategic partnership between Russia and China.

3.7 Summary

The Sino-Russian military cooperation has been increasingly expanding after the Cold War period. There have been many drivers of cooperation in this bilateral relationship. Also, the convergence can be seen as an outcome of the external threat perception by both the countries. Setting up of Comprehensive military mechanisms at various levels correlate to the confidence and reliability in bilateral relations. The inter-military consultations have resulted in advanced format of strategic alignment. In the last decade there has been a number of confidences building measures between the two countries which have enhanced the interoperability between armed forces of the two countries. Other than these, the international security environment has provided a significance push to these efforts.

CHAPTER 4

GEOPOLITICS OF STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CHINA

The chapter focuses on the geopolitical construct in the Russia-China strategic partnership in a new world order. It will examine the nature of this bilateral partnership that has developed and transformed in the increasingly complex web of global interdependence. The chapter analyses the regional dynamics of this partnership as they stand today and the future prospects underlying them.

4.1 BACKGROUND

China and Russia are strong advocates of a pluralistic world order where the dominance of the West is limited and a better enhanced role for them is guaranteed. In the post-Cold War order Russia and China push for multipolarity together, however their views on the current international order, global governance and national sovereignty do not necessarily coincide. This is reflected in their approaches towards the changing international order.

Russia considers a multipolar world order is in its national interest where role of the US is diminished, and the power is balanced in the international system among the global powers. Moscow considers that the current West-dominated liberal order has neglected Russia's national security and interests especially in the post-Soviet space.

Its recent foreign policy objectives suggest that Russia has greater ambitions regarding its role in the international system which has been overshadowed by the liberal values that the US-led West has been allegedly trying to impose on other states. Russia views that its rightful role in the international system has been denied and thus seeks to challenge the existing international system. After 2014, Russian Foreign Policy has adopted a revisionist and offensive stance to the existing global order which highlights its greater ambition to weaken the power of the West within the international system (Bennett K, 2017).

China on the other hand differs from this radical revisionist stance of Russia. Looking at the Chinese Foreign policy in the last decade one can find that China has benefited from the current

international politico-economic structure. The rules based international order has boosted Chinese economy. The process of economic liberalization and globalization has given a major uplift to the Chinese industries. However, China has aversion to the Unilateral policies of US on some of the international issues and the West-led crusade against its national interests in the veil of human rights violations and suppression of democratic values (Alexeeva O, 2012). China definitely wants to reform the system to enhance its status in the global governance structure in accordance with the size of its economy. In the post-Cold War order, the meteoric rise of the Chinese economy has been spearheaded by the rules based international system.

Chines goods and services have found worldwide market with the global leadership that the US has provided in the existing international system. This is one of the reasons which has led China to work on its internal development in all those years. China wants to increase its representative agency in the existing global international system, indicating that an alternate form of governance and development can also be a model to follow. Thus, China does not envision at a radical transformation of current world rather it wants to enhance its own role within the existing global order.

The Chinese leadership has called out on various multilateral platforms for an enhanced role for China in the global governance and leadership. Russia on the other hand does not seem to be interested in such a role. Russia main concern is regaining its historic superpower status. China has time and again expressed its dissatisfaction over the functioning of international system, but they are mainly commercial concerns and most of them are in regard to the unfair trade rules and economic globalization. China has expressed its willingness to assume the leadership in economic inclusivity and globalization while also taking stand on other global challenges like environmental issues.

China has taken the aggressive stand mainly in the Asia-Pacific region where it claims to have a historic role as the center of power. A radical dismantling of the current global order does not favor China even when it seeks change in the distribution of power. China has instead focused on creating parallel governance structure like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and

other regional organizations to present to the world an alternative and seek leadership at the global level and have a greater say on international issues⁴⁶.

The Sino-Russian geopolitical interests however intersect in the Central Asian Region, the Russian Far East and the Arctic. These are three important regions where their individual interests and ground realities have intersected testing the bilateral strategic alignment and have created the potential for both conflict and cooperation. These regions are locations of great balancing act of Sino-Russian competition and cooperation. However, nowhere this aspect is more complicated than in the Central Asian Region (CAR). The politics of mutual accommodation between Russia and China is most apparent in this region. Their policies in these regions indicate how much of their differences can be managed and sustain the strategic partnership between them. Thus, a closer look is needed.

4.2 Sino-Russian Relations in the Central Asia

Central Asia is the region which includes the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The region is of vital strategic significance historically as it has been the centre stage of the ‘Great Game’ (1830-1907) which is a term used to refer to the rivalry between the Russian and the British empires (Armijo L, 2007). It has been a region which has seen a volatile period of migration, annexation, destruction and independence. The region still finds significance as the hotbed of geopolitical and geo-economics issues like religious extremism, energy and trade politics, regional connectivity, etc. The geo-strategic relevance of the region has pushed Russia and China to engage in a re-balancing act over asserting influence in the region.

Central Asia is considered by both these countries as their ‘strategic backyard’. China and Russia forged their partnership for the first time in this region and analyzing the Sino-Russian partnership in this region can help to understand the trajectory of the bilateral relation at the global level. The region has been very important for its strategic location and regional connectivity. Thus,

⁴⁶ The **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** is a multilateral development bank that aims to improve economic and social outcomes in Asia. The bank currently has 103 members as well as 21 prospective members from around the world. The bank started operation after the agreement entered into force on 25 December 2015, after ratifications were received from 10 member states holding a total number of 50% of the initial subscriptions of the Authorized Capital Stock

understanding the strategic dimension of the Sino-Russian partnership requires us to analyze the role played by the two countries in the Central Asia region.

Central Asia has been witnessing a major change in the geopolitical superiority enjoyed by the two powers in the region. China has emerged as the most influential player signaling a major re-balancing of power in the CAR. Russian presence has been declining in the region compared to the Soviet times. Chinese interests in the CAR are divided into a number of spheres. Energy resources of CAR is one the most important reason. Another area is regional connectivity and China's own financial strength which has found vast market in the CAS via loans, investment and other commercial ventures. Here, China has an advantage over the West since it does not condition its loans and advancement to demands for political reforms by the CAS, unlike the West. Unlike Russia, China does not appear to have any political agenda towards the CAS, leading to its particular appeal among the CAS (Aris S, 2011).

Map 2: Central Asian Countries



(Source: www.worldatlas.com)

Chinese presence in these countries is mainly viewed from the commercial perspective giving China an edge over other competitors in the region. That is why Chinese presence in the region has been growing in the post-Cold War period. China's presence in the Eurasian region can be understood by looking at its increasing geopolitical and geo-economic influence in the region.

China's engagement with the CAS is mainly in the economic sphere. Chinese diplomacy has avoided getting into the politics of the region and only keeping it to strict business and so far, they have been successful in doing that. China has also been successful in managing Russian concerns in the region. With increasing the soft power of China, it has been successfully utilizing the gained trust in implementing its own project of BRI, i.e., Belt and Road Initiative. This project is a vision of Chinese leadership to expand its influence in the Eurasian region by economically connecting all the countries in the region (Ying F, 2017). China has also been promoting greater people to people exchange with these countries.

Economically, Russia has been unable to match with the Chinese commercial investment in the region. Also, politically, the Ukrainian crisis has made the CAS suspicious of Russian policy. However, Russia and China share interests as well which are regional stability, economic development and limiting the spread of influence of the West and restricting them out of the region. China's foremost concern in this regard to promote economic and political stability in the region given the boundaries that China shares with these states. Development is the course that China has adopted to mitigate these security threats emanating from these countries. Both nations fear the threat of popular protest and thus coordinate in the issues of painting status quo politically⁴⁷.

The concern is also about the security threats in form of extremist forces making roads to the CAS via Afghanistan and middle east (Xie K, 2016). Thus, the two nations find a symmetry in their security concerns in the region but the approach that they have taken to deal with it differ in many ways. While China has been more inclined towards bringing economic development and thus thwarting radical extremism, Russia on the other hand has adopted an approach of hard power in

⁴⁷ Russia and China use preemptive measures to counter popular protest in their domestic territory and seek to diffuse the threat to their regime stability.

the form of promoting Central Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)⁴⁸. Under the SCO the two countries have been coordinating on joint counter-terrorism operations.

For China using its geopolitical influence in the CAR is not of much significance to its foreign policy objectives compared to its concern for South China Sea. Securing the maritime claims in the SCS is far more important to the Chinese security concerns. Thus, showcasing its power in the CAS is never have been its main agenda. Creating a zone of stability in the CAR is seen by the Chinese government as one of the most effective ways to maintain its internal security threats in the Xinjiang region (Zha D, 2014). The Xinjiang is an autonomous region which is home to the ethnic Uighur community. China believes that its boundary can be secured by promoting economic prosperity the neighboring countries.

China is also keen to improve its commercial relations with the CAS in its quest for finding markets for its infrastructure and investment industries. This is important to create opportunity for its market and workers abroad and reduce the excess human resources domestically. However, the CAR is a major competitive ground for many other countries as well, like Japan, Korea, turkey, etc (Weissmann M, 2010). Thus, Russia and China avoid any direct conflict over commercial, investment in the region.

For Russia, the linkages with the CAS are politico-cultural and is crucial to reclaim its political influence in the region. Russia also wants to retain the Soviet era infrastructure in the CAR as part of its historical legacy and also logistically it helps to have control over the CAR energy supply to external markets. The oil and gas infrastructure provides a leverage in the hands of the Russian leadership to consolidate its political power as well. A resurgent Russia needs to retain and strengthen its economic and political-cultural heritage in the region to make its project of ‘Greater Eurasia’ a success (Allison Roy, 2012).

Traditionally Russia and Central Asia have enjoyed exclusive trade in the past. However, in the last decade the economic ties between the CAS and Russia have dwindled. Compared to China in 2016, Russia bilateral trade volume with the CAR was around 18 billion USD and China’ s share was close to 30 billion USD in the same year. After the Crimean Crisis in 2014, the economic

⁴⁸ The Collective Security Treaty Organization is an intergovernmental military alliance in Eurasia that consists of selected post-Soviet states. The treaty had its origins to the Soviet Armed Forces, which was gradually replaced by the United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

conditions of Russia have further deteriorated and has weakened its position in the CAR. In 2016, Kazakhstan cancelled Russian projects on Hydropower plants on account of the inability of the Russian companies to secure financing. The same year Russia pledged to increase its troop presence and promised an amount of 1 billion USD for security assistance to the country but none of the two have been fulfilled yet. This has raised questions about the Russian capacity and true willingness to address the security crisis in the CAR and maintain its influence there (Turner S, 2016).

Except for the economic assistance, Russia has been using its soft power in the CAR to maintain its influence. The dominance of Russian language in the television, film and other media, the historical and cultural linkages in the CAR have given a certain advantage to the Russian interests. Preserving its military and political influence in the CAR is also aimed at limiting the role of European Union in these areas. This has found resemblance with the Chinese interest which also seeks to limit the influence of EU in the region. However, China has refrained from making security its main point of interaction with the CAS. It has left the security concerns to Russia to deal with it with its military power.

The most prominent part of bilateral cooperation in the security issues are the ones on the terrorism and extremism issues. For China the main issue is the alleged extremist tendencies from its Uighur community bordering the CAS. This is addressed under the aegis of the SCO which places Russia and China at the dominant position. However, SCO is not a security organization in the traditional sense. It has been set up as a training, coordination and discussion forum focusing mainly on Non-traditional security threats emanating out of terrorism, cyber issues, narcotics and human trafficking, environmental issues, etc⁴⁹. The Sino-Russian partnership within the SCO has been analyzed in the next chapter.

China's increasing presence in the economies of the CAS is encouraged by the regional countries as they view it as a stabilizing factor in the geopolitics of the region. The Chinese investment in the economies of the CAS has diversified them and helps in the promotion of broader economic development and creation of jobs. The CAS economies are mainly dependent on the extraction of

⁴⁹ Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

URL: <http://eng.sectsc.org/documents/>

the natural resources and remittances from its diaspora which are mostly migrant laborers. Thus, they view the BRI project positively which will improve the regional connectivity. Barring Kazakhstan however none of the CAS have officially laid out any internal infrastructure projects to modernize their economies and avail benefits from extending them to the BRI. Thus, this raises a question where these economies will be sustainable on their own or rather serve as a mere transit hub under the BRI (Tonnesson S, 2016).

Russian economic interests in these economies lie in preventing the reduction of its influence in the supply chain of the CAS energy exports. China also is not in favor of Russian monopoly as it wants to benefit from the jump start that BRI is projected to provide to its industrialization targets in underdeveloped western provinces of the Chinese territories. The western provinces of China are being projected to develop as major industrial hubs in next few years. These economically underdeveloped region is also politically volatile. Thus, China wants to resolve the situation by giving the region an economic boost and improve the regional standard of living (Tsvetov A, 2016).

Chinese integration with the economies in the CAS is nontransparent. It generally is carried out in cooperation with the political elites of the CAS and it has been one of the reasons fueling corruption in the system. China's model economic development favors hiring its own workers and taking them to these countries for work. This has caused protest and rage among the local workers who are facing high levels of unemployment. This has prompted scholars to ask questions about Chinese investment purpose for the long term in the CAS. This has robbed the chance for the local population to have an increase in living standards and availability of job opportunities, which has led to socio-economic dissatisfaction in the region (Steffens A, 2014).

One other consequence has been that the local workers have been migrating to other neighboring countries, most of them migrate to Russia. This has also increased the risk of radicalization among the youth at home. Thus, lack of economic opportunities in the region is not just an internal matter of concern rather it needs to be seen within the broader security aspect where Russia, China, and European countries may have to face the implications arising out of it.

However, the CAS view China as a stabilizing force for the regime security. The local governments view its presence as a potential guarantor of regional stability. As earlier mentioned, China does not put condition on the CAS for any form of political liberalization that might hamper the power structure in these countries. China avoids any conflict with Russia over its claim in the region,

avoiding this zero-sum dynamic like Russia faces with the West in the CAR, has prevented any political tension between China and Russia.

The local governments in the CAR view China as a hedge against any potential act of aggression from Russia. The interdependence between Russian and Chinese investments in the CAR prevents any kind of aggression which might destabilize the ruling regimes of the CAS. It raises the costs for Russia as its dependency increases on maintaining good relations with China in the region (Solomentseva A, 2014).

China does not yet view the CAR as its place for political influence and thus it avoids political footprint in the region. With the CAS, China has conducted some small arms deal and security assistance, but these are restricted to limited areas of the CAS. These are mostly confined to the border areas between China and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, compared to Russian military assistance to these two nations, Chinese assistance is much smaller. Russia has military bases in both these Central Asian States.

Map 3: Russian and Chinese Military Presence in Central Asia



Source: <https://www.asia-pacificresearch.com>

With Turkmenistan, China has upgraded its bilateral relation in energy trade over last few years. It has also provided arms and weapons to the country. Russia has a history of conflict with Turkmenistan, but Russia has refrained from any interference between China and Turkmenistan close economic ties. China has also provided security assistance to Afghanistan in its counter terrorism efforts.

In December 2017, China strengthened its security presence in Afghanistan by building a base for Afghan armed forces in the Badakhshan province⁵⁰.

This province of Afghanistan borders the Xinjiang region of China. Because of the impassable Wakhan corridor between them, this route is not taken for transportation and an alternate route via Tajikistan is taken. Setting up of this base will certainly increase security presence of China in the country.

This move of China suggests that it is willing to take leadership in combating the security threats especially in the weaker countries bordering the Chinese territory. This is primarily aimed at combating terror threats and act as a stability provider for the region. While analyzing Chinese actions in this regard one can find that China is directly involved in military assistance where its troubled western border in Xinjiang comes into the picture rather than taking up the security in the whole of the CAR. It appears China has deferred this issue to Russian forces on a larger level. Russia's political, historical and cultural linkages thus seems to create synergy with the commercial needs and security concerns of China (Simon S, 2018).

⁵⁰ The curious case of Chinese troops on Afghan soil, By Franz J. Marty, 3 February 2017.

URL: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13424-the-curious-case-of-chinese-troops-on-afghan-soil.html>

Map 4: China's Military facility in Central Asia



(Source: <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-secret-chinese-base-becomes-slightly-less-secret>)

However, it is yet to be seen how Russia is going to keep up with its security and military assistance to the CAS given its overstretched national budget. Also stabilizing the CAR is not the main concern of Moscow rather it is about protecting its own influence in the region by limiting the role of other players from the west. It has a poor track record in maintaining peace among the diverse ethnic communities of the region. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan was faced with many ethnic clashes, but Russia could not stabilize them despite the much sought-after help by the Kyrgyz government at the CSTO (Muraviev A, 2013). During the crisis Russia failed to intervene. Nonetheless, China appears to limit its interests in the CAR to commercial and follow soft power politics over hard power. This approach has successfully kept competition between Russia and China at bay in the CAS.

4.2.1 Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

It is a transcontinental connectivity project of the Chinese government which was announced in 2013. It aims at creating infrastructure and regional connectivity network between Asia and Europe. It is a vision of the Chinese government for economic integration of the countries along the proposed route. It consists of multiple land-based belt and maritime road which are directed at the long-term economic cooperation and infrastructural development in the Eurasian region. It consists of within itself six main economic corridors connecting China to Europe, Africa, Central Asia and the middle east (Katz M, 2019).

China is also hugely interested in the region given the centrality that CAS enjoys in its BRI project. This project is crucial for Chinese export flow and it provides a transportation hub for Chinese exports. This project is considered very important to develop its western provinces which are underdeveloped compared to its eastern provinces. This project is comprised of railway and road connections which will link the CAR to the key global markets in the coming years. In 2017, China involved Russia in this project by declaring the China-Russia-Mongolia economic corridor⁵¹. This corridor is also planned to connect to the arctic. This network of railways and roads will contribute in the modernization of the infrastructure and the lead to development.

This is an ambitious plan to connect the CAS with the Europe which has been seeing a rise in the Chinese investments. The transportation and the logistics sector have particularly been an area of expanding Chinese investment. Installation of fiber optics and telecommunication network have also been developed by China to improve digital connectivity across the region. The BRI is also aimed at linking it to the other important infrastructure projects in the Europe and if it becomes a successful venture, the Sino-Russian partnership will definitely seek the transfer of global influence from the West to the East.

⁵¹ Mongolia–China–Russia Economic Corridor Infrastructure Cooperation by B. Otgonsuren ,
URL: https://www.erina.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/se12710_tssc.pdf

Map 5: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia



(Source: <http://srcic.org>)

Kazakhstan is a very important country through which the BRI passes. Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the project in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan in 2013⁵². This prominence in the transit route is because of its central location in the CAR and an important link in the railway part of the network. Kazakhstan is comparatively more stable than the other countries in the region through which China could construct its project.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) remains problematic given the political volatility of the region, thus here Kazakhstan provides a better alternate router for BRI. Connecting to the European and the West Asian markets with railway lines has much more potential via Kazakhstan than through the CPEC, which remains one of the world's most insecure regions (Karpov M, 2018). Since the project has enormous potential for development and infrastructure modernization, Kazakhstan leadership is very receptive of this initiative. The construction work has been undergoing and some of them have already been completed. The three lines of China-Central Asia pipeline which link the gas reserves of Central Asia to China markets were completed by 2014.

⁵² President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries at Almaty, 2013/09/07

URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml

China has also been working on the railway pipeline connection between Kazakhstan and North-west China and using

Map 6: Khorgos as key logistics hub for Belt and Road route



Source: Russian Ministry of Economic Development 2018

URL: <http://government.ru/en/department/79>

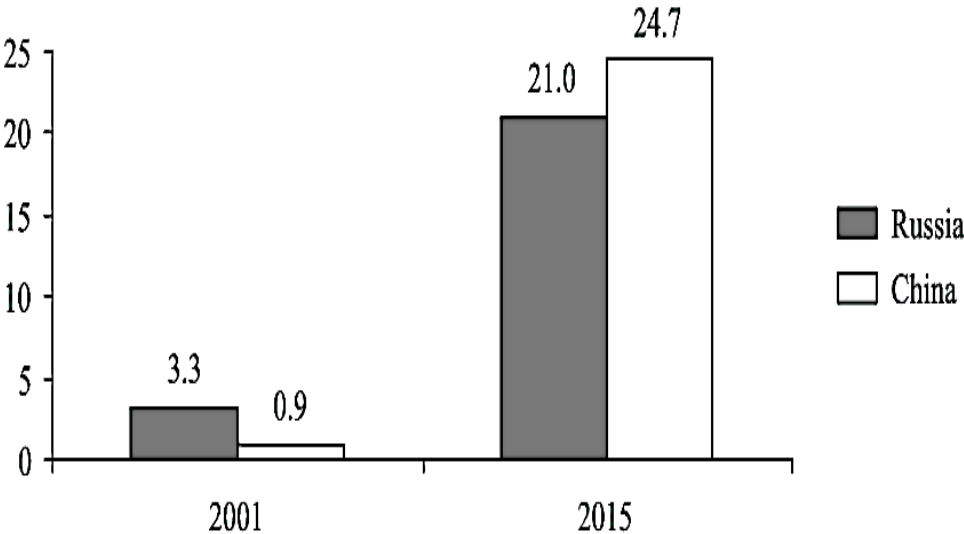
Alas Hankou as an important outpost for the BRI. This project has led to a rapid increase in the population density of the place and more than thousand trains have crossed this outpost in 2016 on the way to Europe. Another transit hub in Kazakhstan is at Khorgos Gateway, which is a dry port facilitating Chinese goods to the Western market. Rail freight takes half amount of time as compared to the transportation of shipments via ocean routes (Holslag J, 2016).

The BRI has becomes the main economic structure within which China sees its present and future economic investment in the region. Trade is the main concern of China in its relationship with the CAS. While in the 1990s the trade was almost around 350 million USD to 750 Million USD

annually, this increased to the tune of 30 billion USD in the year 2016. If we compare this to the Russian share in the CAS trade structure, China is way ahead (Glosny M, 2018).

Bilateral trade between Russia and Kazakhstan have been particularly very strong which involves billions of dollar worth of energy related infrastructure projects and investments in its energy assets.

**Fig 10: Central Asia's total trade with China and Russia
(Value in billion USD)**

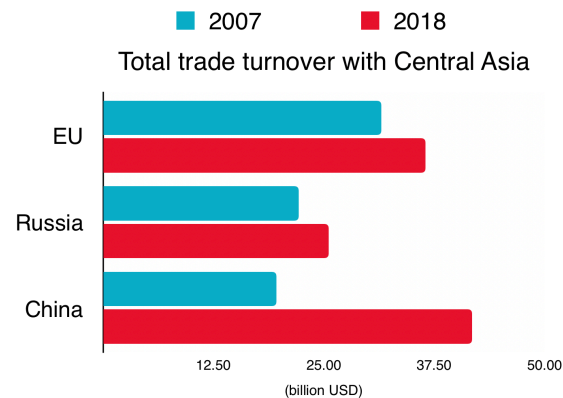


Note: Total trade is a sum of exports and imports.

Source: *Trade Map of the International Trade Centre* (data for Central Asian countries),

URL: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-and-central-asia-bilateral-trade-relationships-and-future-outlook/>

**Fig 11: Total trade turnover with Central Asia
(Value in billion USD)**



Note: Total trade is a sum of exports and imports.

Source: Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs, “Central Asia Data-Gathering and Analysis Team,” in the Regional Security Conference, OSCE Academy,

URL:<http://www.osceacademy.net/en/research/cadgat/?fbclid=IwAR21tCAGtxwYtPukNAPAueOSJbE4VV3JWVPzYhRVc3PUYga6c-L8ZgFz7qI>

China economic growth in the CAR is astonishing as to how it has left Russia and the West behind in terms of the pace of its push into the CAR energy market. For example, in Turkmenistan, China has become the most important importer of its gas reserves and in return it has become the largest foreign capital source for the country. Turkmenistan now has become very much dependent on its sales to the Chinese market which started only in 2007. Also, Chinese companies have been enjoying exclusive rights in these gas reserves.

The China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) is the first and the only foreign company to acquire such exclusive rights. China here has outplayed Russia in the region’s energy and infrastructure sector which up until 10 years ago was totally dependent on Russia for the export of its goods and natural resources in the international markets (Fravel M, 2016). It used to provide a strategic leverage to Russia to maintain a strong hold over what it considers its ‘sphere of

influence'⁵³. The Russian monopoly on the CAR export routes for energy was thus broken by China and not the West. Thus, the BRI has found a greater traction in the CAR in terms of linking the region to the external non-Russian markets.

4.2.2 Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

It is an International organization of regional economic integration which was set up by Russia in 2015. Its members include Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Belarus. It follows the EU model, and the main objectives are to facilitate free movement of goods, capital, services, and labor within the countries boundaries and create synergy for deeper economic integration among the members. The member states however do not share a common currency.

EAEU is projected by Russia as an answer to increase its economic influence in its backyard. This economic integration model led by Russia can be seen as an expression of a greater Eurasian partnership. The strategy of 'greater Eurasia' formulated by the President Putin is seen as an effort to replace the concept of 'Greater Europe initiative'. It entails a geopolitical significance in as it is being projected as a harmonious economic community spread across Vladivostok to Lisbon. It aims beyond the regional connectivity, and commercial aspects of trade and investment.

This strategy enables Russia to reclaim its centrality in the global politics. This vision places Russia within the core of the Eurasian geo-economic picture. It repositions Russia away from the dual periphery of East Asia and Europe and helps in articulating a new international identity. It also helps in expressing Russian vision of a multipolar global order. This greater Eurasian partnership is aimed at formulating a multilevel network of integration and creation of free trade areas across the Eurasian space (Facon I, 2018). This partnership also aims for an alignment with the BRI to create an alternative model of geo-economic regime where Russia has greater influence.

However, this bloc has been facing economic troubles since its establishment. The Russian currency devaluation in this period has reduced the migrant worker remittances from Russia to the CAS. Also, the food and petroleum producers from Russia are cutting the market of the producers

⁵³ In the field of international relations, a sphere of influence is a spatial region or concept division over which a state or organization has a level of cultural, economic, military, or political exclusivity.

from the CAS. This raises questions about the sustainability and long-term viability of the EAEU (Swanstrom N, 2014).

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are yet to show interest in joining the integration project. While the existing members do not seem to be happy with the progress under the project. Without the presence of the most populous nations of the region in this project, it is unlikely that the EAEU members will benefit much. With the Russia led EAEU facing difficulties and the increasing economic presence of the Chinese companies in the CAR, the Sino-Russian leadership have pledged to coordinate their Eurasian economic vision.

4.2.3 Prospects for coordinating the BRI with the EAEU

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have on different occasion emphasized about the Russia-China partnership in Central Asia where they want to put commercial interests at the center.

While understanding the coordination between Russia and China at the BRI and EAEU, we can find that the economic vision at the two platforms is complementary in their aim to economically integrate the region and port transportation corridor facilitating infrastructure and trade. Idea of a Eurasian transportation corridor is where their interests coincide.

For Russia, its goal of alignment between the EAEU and BRI matches its desire for a greater Eurasia and linking its geo-economic interests to its political quest of reclaiming its international status. Integrating the BRI and the EAEU has the potential to make Russia the center of this integration and would generate funds for the Russian investment in the infrastructure of the region. Another positive outcome for Russia would be that this coordination would allow it to have a grip over the increasing economic influence of China and counterbalancing it in the CAR.

If we analyze nature Sino-Russian partnership in the CAR, it is based on a positive sum cooperation, where the two nations have strategically preferred cooperation over competition.

For China, the integration of these platforms is less advantageous as it can independently carry out the economic investment and creation of critical infrastructure. Its vision of BRI is to enhance its regional power and connecting industries in CAR which do not depend on the Russian project. Thus, for China this alignment is not so crucial. China has mostly preferred bilateral trade deals

with the CAS which gives it a strategic edge over Russia. Russia has been repeatedly projecting the EAEU as a unified trade bloc. However, the Central Asian States have been opposing this since it also includes preventing them from having third party agreements (Ziegler C, 2016). While BRI aims to connect multiple markets, EAEU is mostly aiming to create a Russia-led single closed market.

This is one of the reasons why the CAS have been resisting this alignment and little to no progress in coordinating the two projects. The EAEU principles are protectionist in its nature and thus do not economically help the CAS. China is also skeptical about the policies of the EAEU and it prefers other multilateral regional organizations in the region, like the SCO to build a greater Eurasian partnership than just connecting the BRI and the EAEU.

This apprehension on the part of China also explains why this integration project has not materialized yet and has been stagnant since it was announced. The asymmetry in the economic capacity of Russia and China diverges their interests in the CAR. In the post-Cold War period, China has significantly improved its trade and investment in the CAS. It has become the major investment partner for some of the CAS. For example, in Kazakhstan, the Chinese investment projects is worth a billion USD and it is still increasing (Stent A, 2017). The Russian investment in the nation is limited to its energy supply network which in comparison to China is very less. The economic situation of Russia which is plagued by many problems has led Russia to pivot to the Chinese economic power in the CAR to maintain its influence in the region.

At the same time, even as the balance of regional economic power currently appears to be in China's favor, the Sino-Russian economic dynamics are expected to be increasingly shaped by the regional governments, the growing voice of the Central Asian public and the growing economic ambitions of other powerful actors like the EU. The mutual promise of coordinating the two projects suggest that China wants to placate the Russian economic concerns in the multilateral forum, but in reality, it does not push for any real effort for integration of the Eurasian vision of the two nations on equal terms.

4.2.4 Implications of Russia-China relations in the CAR

In Central Asia, 'balance of power' is the rule of game which pushes the two most important powers of the region. Looking from this perspective, the Sino-Russian partnership is not surprising.

This rapprochement is directed at countering the influence of external power mainly the US. Here, Sino-Russian partnership has taken a coordinated stand to limit the influence of the US in the CAR. In the current geopolitical scenario, this partnership is more likely to flourish and is unlikely to change soon. The China-US trade war has made China to pivot toward Russia even though China is economically more dominant in the CAR. However, a Sino-Russian economic alliance is bound to give more positive results than a rift between them. This partnership counterbalances the Western interests in the region. Russian economic situation is such that it needs Chinese demands for energy to offset the economic sanctions imposed on its exports by the West. Thus, China is Russia's best economic bet in the current geo-economic scenario. The Sino-Russian rapprochement in the CAR is aligned to exclude the common threat apart from the complementary politico-economic interests (Valencia M, 2013).

Also, the ruling regimes of the two nations see the Western model of governance as a threat to their authoritarian leadership. Resisting external interference thus is also directed at saving the ruling regime from existential threat. Here comes the mutual agreement between the two countries on the policy of sovereignty and non-interference and supporting each other on this issue on international platforms.

Despite the alignment of interests in the CAR, the two countries have been pursuing their individual agendas as well, which in minor ways are detrimental in deepening this partnership, though both have been very careful about each other's long-term interests in therein. This realization is borne out of the Chinese understanding that antagonizing Russia would not pay in securing its interests in a long term. Russia's isolated position in the current international platform pushes it to assuage the Chinese concerns. This partnership is thus based on needs of both the sides and is fragile in the sense that any asymmetrical development of power between the two nations might relegate one of them to a lesser power status.

As economically China is getting stronger, there is suspicion among some Russian security experts that China might want to overpower Russia (Lo, Bobo 2014). Even though militarily Russia is the dominant nation in the region, economically China is in a position to change this dynamic in next few years. This military dependence of China on Russia has kept the competition in the CAR from escalating into a conflict.

However, there is a realization among the political leadership in the two nations that they have more to gain from cooperation than from competition or even conflict. Role of an adversary and the balancing act keep the two nations realistic about their long-term vision in the region. It seems that as long as this scenario of common security and politico-economic interests remain between the two countries, the Russia-China strategic alignment is unlikely to disappear from the CAR any time soon.

4.3 Sino-Russian relations in the Russian Far East (RFE)

In the post-Cold War order and especially in the last decade or so, China has changed from a threat to a crucial partner for Russia in the region. In the APEC Forum summit of 2017, President Putin asserted that the development of the Russian Far East is a ‘national priority for the 21st century’⁵⁴.

Russia considers the development of this region as vital for the overall development of Russia and a necessity in strengthening the national security. Russian Far East plays an important role in defining Russia’s position the northeast Asia.

The RFE accounts for 36% of the total territory of Russia and its geopolitical significance is because of its connectivity to the Asia Pacific and the vast reserves of natural resources which includes oil and gas, precious metals, iron ore etc. The region is however undeveloped compared to the rest of Russia. The Far Eastern Federal District contributed 5.5 percent to Russia’s gross domestic product in 2015, while outmigration since 1991 has reduced the population by 20 percent. The 6.3 million inhabitants of the Russian Far East now face 110 million Chinese in the three provinces of Manchuria on the other side of the once fractious border. This demographic imbalance has been causing a sense of vulnerability among the people in the RFE. The immigration from China to Russia has also undercut the local employment opportunities in the Chinese investments (Agtamel, V 2017).

⁵⁴ 25th APEC Summit in Da Nang: “Together for Prosperity and Harmonious Development”, Putin V, 9 NOVEMBER 2017, URL: [HTTPS://FORUMVOSTOK.RU/EN/NEWS/V-PUTIN-DLYA-ROSSII-RAZVITIE-DALNEGO-VOSTOKA-YAVLYAETSYA-NATSIONALNYM-PRIORITETOM-XXI-VEKA/](https://forumvostok.ru/en/news/v-putin-dlya-rossii-razvitiye-dalnego-vostoka-yavlyayetsya-natsionalnym-prioritetom-xxi-veka/)

Map 7: Russian Far East



(Source: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org>)

The region was under the Chinese control until the nineteenth century when it was transferred to Russia after a number of treaties. Because of the economic and demographic dominance of China in the region, Russia has had suspicions of Chinese ambition in the region. Increase in the Chinese economic activities and the inbound migration in the RFE might change the political dynamics of the region and eventually lead up to territorial claims by China. Sometimes termed by the Russian political leadership as ‘excessive Expansion’ by China, fear in the Russian circle is mostly about the RFE becoming a raw material appendage for China without any real development on the ground (Sutter R, 2018).

In 2012, Russia set up the ministry for Development of the RFE (MINVR) recognizing the vital importance of RFE and the need for its development. The ministry in its reports has expressed the need of Chinese investments to revitalize the region. To tackle the economic and territorial insecurities of the region, it emphasized that new jobs and economic opportunities must be

generated.⁵⁵ This will not only solve the outbound flow of the local Russian population, but it will also enhance the exports to the nearby Asia Pacific countries.

There has been a growing demand for a sustainable model of development in the region, which is not solely based on the resource economy rather it also involves expansion of secondary production capabilities. This will need infrastructure development and investment for the non-resources-based exports from the region. China has expressed its interest investing in other areas like tourism, agriculture, etc. In this regard, Russia and China have set up some cooperative mechanisms to facilitate the Chinese investment in the development of the region.

China's demand for the natural resources is ever increasing given the fast economic development being carrying out domestically. The Sino-Russian economic cooperation is majorly driven by the Chinese needs for oil and gas. Energy can term as the pillar of the bilateral economic cooperation. The Chinese investment in the Russian oil and gas fields have led to exploration of the energy reserves in the region and its unlocking has increased exports of Russian oil to China.

In 2009, Russia and China agreed to construct a spur pipeline of Russia's Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline to Daqing, China, for which Rosneft and Transneft borrowed \$25 billion from the China Development Bank for construction. Negotiations around the ESPO-1 pipeline demonstrated that China could at once assist but also corner Russian parties into acquiescing to its terms. Disputes around the commercial terms of oil supplied through ESPO-1 after which Rosneft and Transneft relented to a “country” discount for China revealed Russia's vulnerability vis-à-vis China, a monopoly buyer (Skalamera M, 2018). At the same time, however, China has also provided Rosneft with billions of dollars of financial assistance to service its debt burden in the form of advanced payments for future oil supplies. From 2013 to 2016, Russian oil exports to China more than doubled, with Russia overtaking Saudi Arabia to become China's top crude oil supplier in 2016.

⁵⁵ URL:<http://government.ru/en/department/462/>

Table 3: Cooperation Projects in Russia's Far East

Russia-China Investment Fund to provide up to USD 724 million support for NE China and Far East Russia		
Major ongoing projects:		
Serial Number	Project	Status
1	Tongjiang-Nizhneleninskoye	Railway Bridge to open in 2019
2	Heihe-Blagoveschensk	Road Bridge under construction
3	COFCO STO Express	TO develop agriculture, e-commerce in Russia's Far East
4	China-Russia natural gas pipeline	To be completed by 2020
5	E-Visa, Visa-Free	Scheme for Chinese visitors to Kamchotka, Far East

Sources: Xinhua, Ministry for the Development of Far East Russia

URL: https://www.erina.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/naer21-2_tssc.pdf

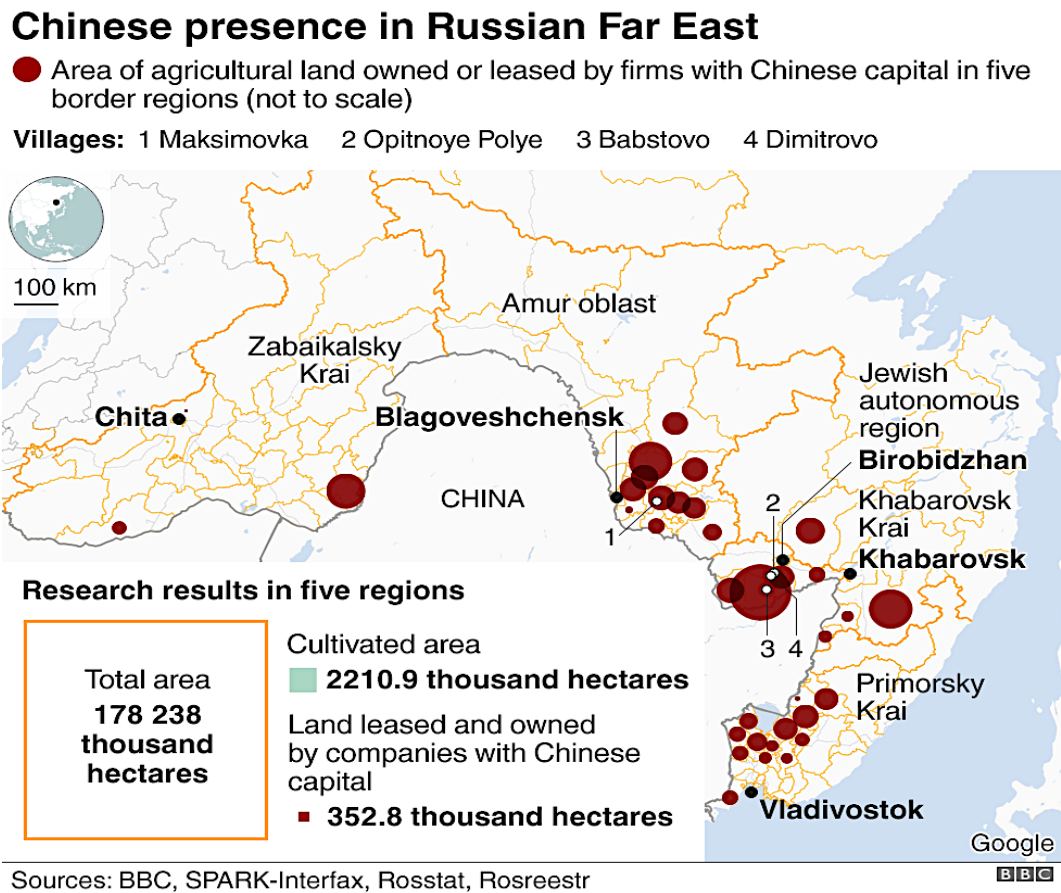
Concurrently, major Chinese equity investments in energy assets and oil fields have also increased, with a Chinese energy company most recently purchasing a 14.6 percent stake in Rosneft for \$9 billion in September 2017⁵⁶.

Chinese investment is vital for the RFE beyond the oil and gas sector to develop non-hydrocarbon-based industries. These industries are required as a part of the second prong strategy of the development of the region (Pincus R, 2017). This approach is required to promote non-hydrocarbon exports to the Asia-Pacific region. It would be the region for Russia to move its economy away from the status of exporter of oil and gas to China. To promote long term and sustainable development of the region, it needs to facilitate production of non-value-added

⁵⁶URL: <https://www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/2110417/chinas-cefc-buys-14pc-russian-oil-company-rosneft-us9-billion>

products. Russia has set up special mechanisms to promote domestic and foreign investment in the region. In 2014, the Priority Development Areas (PDA) was set up which facilitate smooth processing of investment processes. Russia has stuttered offering fiscal incentives to the companies investing in the RFE along with this free customs, deregulation of the process etc. are also being offered to provide incentives for investment.

Map 8: Chinese presence in Russian Far East



(Source: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org>)

There is strong political push from both the sides for Sino-Russian cooperation in the RFE, but some barriers are hampering the realization of the mutual understanding. These barriers are mainly the increasing cost concerns, lack of proper infrastructure, distrust and lack of knowledge (Lai H 2019). The participation of the Chinese business communities in the region is adversely affected when local political dynamics come into the picture. As of September 2017, only some of the projects that were pledged by the Chinese government have been implemented.

Chinese investments in the region primarily deal with the low value-added products like chemicals, petrochemicals, etc. of the total realized investments in the region by China, the majority is in the primary sectors of the economy. This has caused RFE to be called as the resource appendage of China. Beijing has been very much involved in the exploration efforts and views its long-term interest in the region in securing the energy reserves and its supply chain.

This has the potential to serve as an alternate and reliable source of energy which could later work as a hedge against the rising threat from the US in the Asia-Pacific which directly affects its oil and gas supply through the Malacca strait. Thus, the RFE provides a reliable source for resource diversification for China from its northern borders. The RFE is also a huge reserve of rare earth metals which is required in the development of modern weapon technology and space devices.

Russia has given exclusive equity stakes to the Chinese companies in its energy sector. China has reciprocated by financing the exploration projects and unlocking the oil and gas reserves. Also, China has been providing with technical know-how, cheap labor and modern defense equipments for these projects. In 2016, Russia and China signed an MoU to relocate the Chinese companies to the RFE from a number of sectors. These included agriculture, metallurgy and metals, textiles, shipbuilding, etc. China had other benefits apart from expanding its industrial base in the region. Shifting these industries to the RFE protected these industries from domestic overproduction. The investment in the RFE also benefits China in providing it an access to the Russian market. Also, the RFE does not force stringent environmental regulations which Chinese companies have to deal with in their own country. Also, the devaluation of the Ruble has given positive push for the investment because it costs lower overhead (Rahman K, 2016).

These economic overtures of China are seen with resentment from the local population. This divergence of understanding between the local populations and the Russian ruling regime reflect

the inherent dislike by the local people over demographic imbalance with the Chinese immigrants. In 2015, such protests took protests against the leasing of land to Chinese companies in the Baikal region. These protests were fueled by the concerns of locals over the Chinese takeover of the fertile lands of the region. To address these concerns, the Russian local administration announced that the local contractors and suppliers will be given priority over others (Kuhrt N, 2016). The locals also protested against the environmental damage to the land and water by the polluting industries set up by the Chinese.

Chinese companies have accused the Russian administration of red tape and complicated rules and procedures while implementing the commercial projects which impedes investment. They also complain of absence of rule of law, insufficient protection for investors, the unpredictability of judicial system and laws etc. These factors prevent growth of investment in the region. These factors have also led China to opt for joint investment projects with Russia so as to prevent the bureaucratic hassles and delay in the completion of projects. Chinese investors also allege that the macroeconomic stability of Russia and the devaluation of Ruble have been major obstacles in generating investor interests in the region.

Another barrier in this regard is the lack of transportation infrastructure in the region which has rough terrain and remote areas. Regional accessibility is a major challenge. Setting up of new railway lines and better infrastructure for supply and production chains will improve the export capacity of the industries in the region. Also, it might have the effect of attracting Chinese interest beyond resource extraction and promote more cross border trade and local development. The Russian government's plan for the development of the region has given the modernization of the transportation infrastructure the highest priority (Lo Bobo, 2014).

Russia-China have coordinated to set up some large infrastructure projects which have been stalled because of the permit difficulties and the bureaucratic hurdles and rent seeking rules. These projects are realized could yield substantive benefits but are facing implementation problems. The Primorye 1 and 2 international transport corridors (ITC) are ambitious projects which have the potential to revitalize the region and the neighboring north eastern provinces of China. The two nations have a strategic rationale behind setting up of this ITC. However, because of differences over their economic interests from these projects have kept these stalled so far (Korolev A, 2019).

Currently, cargoes from China's landlocked northeast are transported long distances to the Chinese ports of Tianjin and Dalian for shipping, but the Primorye ITCs envision providing rail and highway links at significantly shorter distances from Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces to ports in Russia's Primorsky region, for example, the Russian port of Zarubino, on the Primorye-2 ITC, is only 18 kilometers from the border. For China, the ITCs would provide long-coveted direct access to the Sea of Japan and ease the burden on China's overloaded internal railways and ports, allowing China to export larger cargo volumes.

MINVR has estimated that the ITCs could increase revenues for port operations and transportation companies by \$1.6 billion annually. The cost of infrastructure improvements for both corridors is at least \$5.3 billion, and Russia expects that China will provide 80 percent of the required financing. But Chinese investments have not substantively materialized for the projects, even though both governments and the Export-Import (Exim)Bank of China have expressed their interest in the project. Despite the shorter transit routes via the ITCs, unless Russia improves its customs procedures, the ITCs may not yield substantial cost savings for Chinese cargoes. Successful implementation of the ITCs also relies on Russia modernizing its roads, railways, ports, and logistics infrastructure along the route. Russia's mediocre track record on implementing Sino-Russian infrastructure proposals, however, has dampened Chinese enthusiasm for Primorye.

China has projected its image in the region as that of a less threatening neighbor which wants to invest and benefit itself and the local economy. However, Chinese investments have been delayed or slowed down by political opposition from the locals. The delays from the Chinese side is more about political reasons rather than commercial reasons. Russian experts believe that this Russian strategy of assuaging Chinese interests in the region to reduce its own vulnerabilities is a risky affair and it is uncertain that when this will pay off (Korostikov M, 2019).

Thus, a very important measure needed to make these projects succeed is to change the local perceptions and alter the messy bureaucratic processes. This is very difficult to change on the ground because of the historical factors behind them. To secure the region's security it is vital for Russia to promote viable economic and social development in the region. If this aspect is not dealt with properly, the current situation in the RFE will persist and could amplify the security concerns of the country.

Russia has little to gain from outright confrontation with China, while China prefers a secure northern border; so in the near term, the risk of any escalating tensions is close to zero. However, as it is not clear what China's long-term intentions are with Russia, the Kremlin's insecurity in Northeast Asia could increase if the Far East remains underdeveloped. Both countries may continue to exercise patience, in the short term, concerning expectations for development of the Russian Far East, but eventually, Russia could feel compelled to find an alternative means to demonstrate its presence in Asia.

4.4 Russia-China partnership in the Arctic

As a result of climate change and global warming, the snow in the Arctic is melting and thus unlocking new commercial and human activity in the region. Subsequently it has given rise to international interests in the region. The countries encircling the ocean as well as the non-Arctic countries have expressed interests in the economic activities and exploration of mineral reserves in the region.

The Arctic region consisted of according to the assumptions, almost 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and almost 30% of the undiscovered gas. This gives the region a starting importance, especially for Russia since its economy is primarily dependent on extraction of hydrocarbons (Feng H, 2017).

The Arctic council, which is an intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic, has been giving observer status to non-Arctic countries since 2013 - like India, China, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, South Korea etc. This has increased the international participation in the region's governance and development process.

China has also expressed its willingness to join the countries in exploration and investment in the region's natural resources. Its interests are mainly driven by its need to promote exports through new transportation channels and markets for its telecommunication and logistics business houses.

This increasing external presence in the region is viewed as a potential security threat to Russia. This region is viewed in Russia's foreign policy as its 'privileged sphere of interest'. As an Arctic nation, Russia has often projected itself as an important player in front of the local as well the global audience.

It famously planted its flag in the Arctic seabed in 2007 as a sign of its ambitions for the region. In 2015, Moscow made additional territorial claims to a larger portion of the Arctic Ocean through the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas.⁵⁷ Russian fighter jets frequently buzz Canadian, European, and US Arctic territories, while Moscow is building up its military infrastructure across the region. Most of these actions appear to be the Russian leadership posturing to domestic audiences, although the military ones highlight Moscow's desire to shore up its growing sense of vulnerability in the region, where ice melt is eroding the country's natural defenses along its northern coast (Cooper Z, 2018).

Russia in the current political situation globally prefers to keep issues related to the Arctic states among themselves only. Moscow has preferred for a smaller and more exclusive forum for discussion of Arctic issues at the Arctic Five Format. This forum consists of only those states which share borders with the Arctic Ocean- Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States. The Russian ruling regime has in fact openly opposed the aspiration of non-Arctic states using their economic and political prowess to make it to the inner circle of discussion on the Arctic issues. This can be understood as veiled reference to Chinese growing presence in the region. Russian state policy on the Arctic region is articulated in the 2009 policy under President Medvedev which emphasizes on using the Arctic resources as a 'strategic reserve base'⁵⁸. It mentions about using these resources to solve the national socio-economic development issues. This policy also directs the state to gain accessibility to these resources and create transportation and communication linkages along the Arctic coast which were be known as the Norther Sea Route (NSR) or the Northeast Passage.

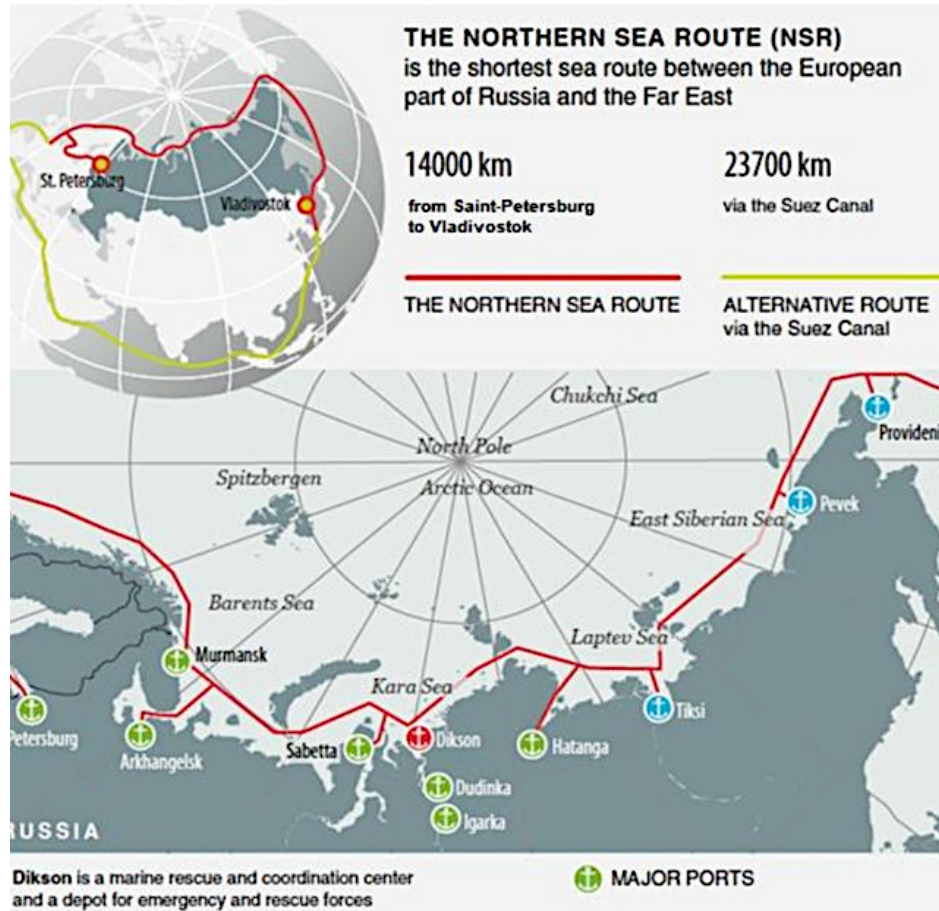
⁵⁷ The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, also called the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty, is an international agreement that resulted from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which took place between 1973 and 1982.

URL: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdfRL:

⁵⁸ In late March 2009, the Kremlin publicly released the full text of its new Arctic strategy. That document, first issued on September 2008, lays out a dramatic expansion of official Russian sovereign interests in what was previously agreed-upon as part of the so-called "global commons."

URL: http://www.arctic.or.kr/files/pdf/m4/rusia_eng.pdf

Map 9: The Northern Sea Route



(Source: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org>)

Another policy which was promulgated in 2013 by the President Putin elaborates on the need for promotion of economic development and employment opportunities in the region. The socio-economic development of the region will prevent the out migration of the local population in the search of better work opportunities and living standards. Thus, the policy highlights the need to create regional communication networks and transportation routes in the region. Expansion of icebreaking capabilities is also required for operational purposes. The policy also focuses on ensuring the combat readiness of the Russian military to secure and protect the national interests in the region. The Russian government's November 2017 proposal to assign the task of developing the Arctic to Rosatom, the powerful yet financially struggling Russian state nuclear company, suggests a new policy approach toward the region may be in development (Cheng J, 2018).

However, the rough terrain of the region and treacherous weather have prevented Russia to make this policy a reality. The harsh environment of the region has so far delayed any significant investment from outside. The sparse population of the region prevents rapid development of the region. Russian state has found itself struggling to keep the supply chains to the towns of the region active. The region is isolated and except for Murmansk, the economic development and industrial growth is underdeveloped (Dibb P, 2017).

The Russian state policy of combat preparedness and militarization of the region is worrying to the other Arctic states. Russia has deployed short range missile systems in the region which highlights the defensive strategy in the region. Russia has been renovating and building up the Soviet era military establishments in the region which were closed. This has alarmed the international community. However, Russia claims that it has been using these installations for search and rescue purposes and to facilitate the creation for a viable Arctic shipping lane.

Economically, Russia' Northern Sea Route (NSR) has not served many benefits as it is passable for only a few months and also it is not a cheaper route. Using icebreaker support raises the total costs of transportation and thus does not attract much International interest in using the route. The number of international ships sailing along the NSR has declined from a 2013 high of seventy-one per year to nineteen in 2016. Only six vessels of those nineteen, however, made the entire voyage in 2016, raising questions about the route's feasibility (Clarke M, 2020).

The most useful purpose for Russia in creating NSR is that it facilitates the Russian ships to reach to the most isolated and route Arctic cities and promotes exploration of oil and gas reserves which are found in Arctic shelves. These two endeavors are vital for Russian strategic interests. The interest of companies from other states have declined because of the fall in prices of oil in the last few years. Russian entities have often taken the help of technological advances of the outside countries in exploration projects, and thus its commercial interests in the region also demands that it collaborates with other states. Fearing the isolation after the Crimean crisis and economic sanction imposed by the West, Russia changed its stand on the non-inclusion of the non-Arctic states in the Arctic forum, since 2013 (Wohlforth W, 2016).

The ongoing struggle in its economic and security interests in the region have led Russia to pivot towards Asia which is a significant turn for a nation conventionally opposing the opening up of the Arctic territory to other states. However, here Russia has been facing the same situation as in

the Russian Far East. The actual investments done in the Arctic regions does not match with the rhetoric of the Russian outreach to Asia. In 2016, Russian President Putin and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to expand energy cooperation in the Arctic and Siberia (Kaura V, 2016). The main focus of Russia-India energy cooperation is an Indian investment in a Siberian oil field. Other countries who have been approached by Russia to invest in the oil and gas resources in the region include Japan and North Korea.

However, Russia has not received an enthusiastic response from them. The reasons find it risky to invest in these resources as there is fear of antagonizing the United States and the trade through the NSR does not seem to be much profitable. The officials in Russia also approached Singapore, given its potential for developing drilling platform technologies. Singapore expressed its willingness to join in harnessing the hydrocarbons of Arctic region but it is also wary of the Russian agenda to develop the NSR. This undercuts Singapore's status as one of the key logistical and shipping centres connecting Asia and Europe (Shaheen N, 2011).

Among the non-Arctic states, the greatest interests have been shown by China. But the barriers in form of rising cost because of inadequate infrastructure, distrust between Russia and China business houses and the complicated Russian bureaucracy have made the realization of actual projects very slow. The Yamal LNG project is the highlight of the Chinese investment in the Arctic. The sanctions imposed on the western companies by the Russian government gave Chinese companies stepped in the projected lent over two third of the financial needs. The Chinese company National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) owns 20% of the stakes in the project. This gas field is also one among the many Silk Road Fund's investments (Berger E, 2019).

This project is a big achievement for the Chinese companies as till now it had been facing difficulties in gaining access to the energy projects in the region and also having access to the natural resources of the region. Apart from this project, the Chinese shipping companies are also making inroads in the transpiration sector of the region. The state owned COSCO has secured half of the stake in the total shipping carriers active in the Yamal LNG basin. China has also deployed its engineers and workers in the Yamal field to construct a polar drilling rig and other infrastructure. China is on its way for becoming the most influential investor in region. The Chinese companies have been supplying Russia with 60% of its oil and rig supplies. Chinese government has been projecting the success of Yamal as an example of the technological advancement in the

transportation sector and how Arctic where China has been excluded so far has been making inroads with its technological and engineering prowess. In lieu of the Chinese financing the Yamal project, the Russian company Novatek which is the main shareholder of the project announced that the first shipment from the project will be transported to China. Novatek, a company which is viewed as being close to the Moscow top leadership was imposed with sanction from the West has been contributing to make China a key player in the project as in a way to find an alternative source of technology and financial investment (Roseth T, 2017).

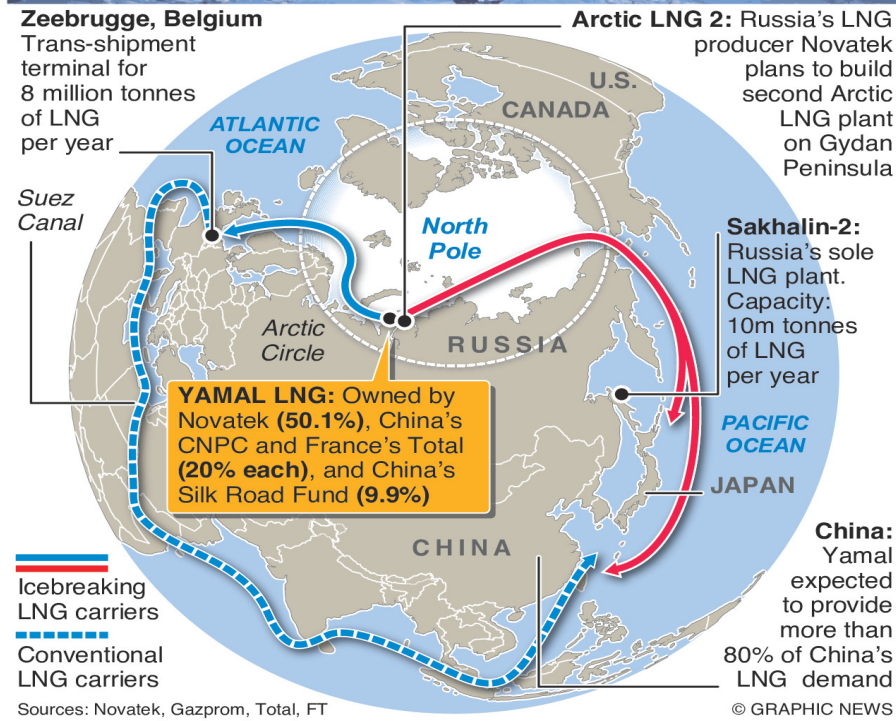
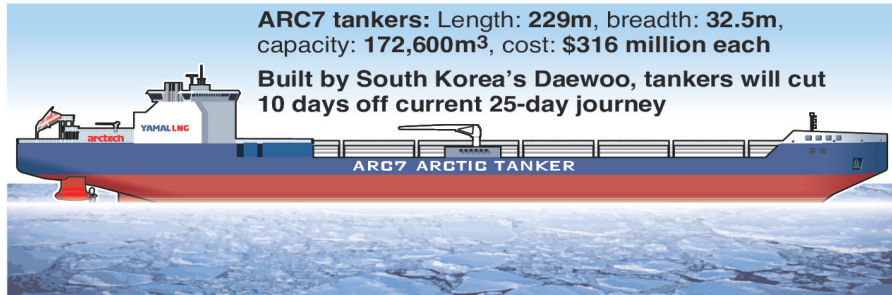
Although other Chinese investments in the region have not been as successful as the Yamal project, in 2017, China announced the addition of an Arctic component to its BRI project. It symbolizes that China wants to get more involved with the development and infrastructure projects in the region. In July 2017, the Russian Prime Minister Medvedev and the Chinese President Xi Jinping called for a 'Silk Road' to be built through the Arctic. The Joint project was reflective of the complementarity of the BRI and the NSR. These two projects promote a common goal of encouraging greater trade between the East and the West. The actual integration of the two projects have not yet taken place but the aspiration for this project has often been expressed by the officials from the two countries. In December 2017, President Putin highlighted role of China in fostering transportation projects, development of infrastructure and energy exploration in the Arctic during a televised press conference.

China has been actively involved in the construction of a deep-water port in the town of Arkhangelsk. The local government praised China as a 'key partner' in the development of infrastructure sector in the town. This port will be connected to a railway project called the Belkomur railway project, which has till now got delayed. Now China has revived the project and this project will reduce the distance travelled by the cargo by 800 kms. This project will provide accessibility between the Arkhangelsk port in the north west Russia and the Siberian region via the Ural Mountains and Komi republic. The Exit bank of China has been financing the project (Odgaard L, 2019).

Map 10: Yamal gas super project

Russia launches Yamal gas super project

Russia's Yamal project aims to produce 16.5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) a year, delivered to Europe and Asia by 15 purpose-built ships capable of breaking through two-metre-thick Arctic ice

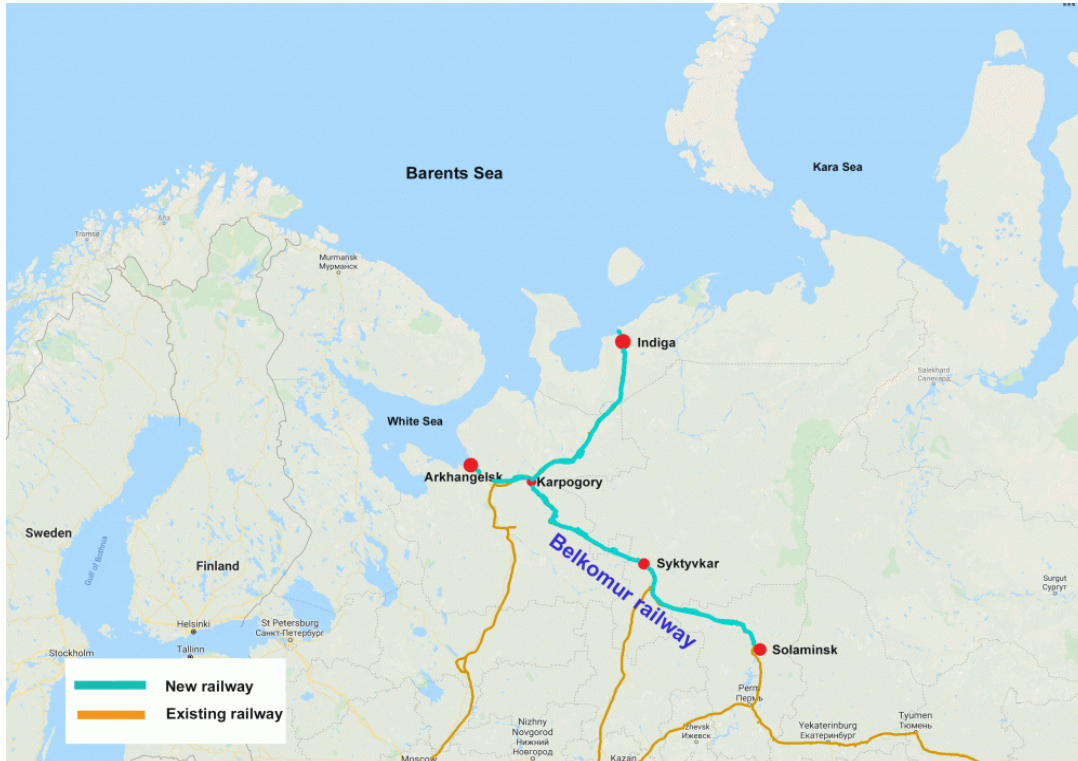


Sources: Novatek, Gazprom, Total, FT,

URL: https://www.gem.wiki/Yamal_LNG_Terminal

COSCO will be the operator of this deep-water port once its active. Talks are also on about the inclusion of the deep water port and the Belkomur railway project to merge in the BRI project.

Map 11: Railway line (existing and new line)



(Source: <https://thebarentsobserver.com>)

The Russian government is skeptical of the linking of Belkomur and the Arkhangelsk projects if we go by the Russian actions taken in this regard. The Russian government share of financing has not yet been completely fulfilled and in a recent statement from the Russian Transportation ministry it was announced that the financing will be done by a public-private partnership. With revenue crunch and the stagnation in the Russian economy it is highly unlikely that the Russian government would be able to provide its share to the project implementation. The statement also indicated that the total duration for completion of the Belkomur railroad project be increased to over the next decade. The consortium working on Belkomur, however, envisions that the project will be operational by 2023, if a concession agreement is signed in early 2018 and construction then proceeds on schedule (Katz M, 2020).

China in the last few years has been identifying itself as a ‘near Arctic state’. It has become quite a visible player in the region by reaching out to all the Arctic states and advancing its ambitions in the region. A white paper was published by the Chinese government in January 2018 regarding

Arctic region which highlights that the non-Arctic states do not enjoy territorial rights in the region, but they do have the right with respect to the exploration activities, scientific research, oversight, navigation, fishing, access to the high seas and other connected areas in the region. The paper also mentions the right of non-Arctic states to lay down the submarine cables and lease resource exploration and exploitation. It underscores the Chinese policy goal to contribute to the Arctic governance and cooperate with the Arctic states on a bilateral as well as multilateral level (Izhak O, 2017).

To advance these goals, China has been focusing to become a visible player and to enhance relations with other states in the region, trying to look beyond Russia. It has expanded its reach to all Arctic states and has been actively engaging the political leaders at the bilateral, multilateral and at the local level. China now holds biannual polar scientific expeditions to the region on a Chinese-flagged, Ukrainian-built icebreaker. China is also working on its own fleet of icebreakers and with foreign assistance constructing its second vessel in China itself.

Beijing has also set up research station in some of the Arctic states like Iceland and Norway and carrying out its research activities in cooperation with these states. Another research facility is being planned for Greenland. The main purpose for these research institutions, as claimed by the Chinese authorities is to understand the impact of climate change (Kakonen J, 2015). There is also a commercial agenda behind this with respect to the Arctic states. To achieve this objective, China has been much active than Russia in terms of creating transportation routes, exploration of natural resources and telecommunications in the region. Arctic digital connectivity now is to be part of Beijing's broad BRI vision for the Arctic to link China with European markets in the high north (Tukamadiyeva M, 2020).

In April 2017, the Chinese President Xi Jinping stopped at Alaska during his visit to the United States to meet the governor of the state over trade issues. With over 1 billion US dollar, in 2016, China became the topmost export market for Alaska. Subsequently, in November 2017, Chinese companies signed an LNG project in Alaska of worth 43 billion US dollar. The Chinese engagement with Alaska indicates an attempt by the Chinese authorities to mediate potential fallout from trade war between the US administration and China. The approach adopted by the Chinese leaders and officials with respect to Arctic showcases that China has been conducting a

careful diplomacy on issues of the Arctic on the national as well as the regional level (Simon S, 2018).

Internationally China's role as a stakeholder in the region is being gradually recognized as China has diversified its Arctic outreach policy and has been successful in creating commercial ties with the nations on the Arctic. These states also attract the Chinese interests because of the better investment climate and infrastructure in the region. After sanction were imposed on Russia, there is greater necessity on the part of the Russian government to have better commercial relation with China. But in the Arctic region, China has been able to go beyond Russia to fulfill its commercial agenda. Thus, Russia needs to offer more favorable and better investment opportunities to China which in the long term is vital for securing its ambitions in the Arctic region. This highlights the growing economic power asymmetry within the Russian-Chinese partnership and mandates that Moscow accept China's ambitions for the Arctic, however begrudgingly.

While analyzing the implications of the Russia-China cooperation in the Arctic and its implications on the other powers in region, we must understand that this partnership will be limited in coming years given the constraints on the implementation of the projects. The expansion of the BRI northward is still in the planning stage and it might take more time given the mistrust that Russia has towards China's grand ambitions in the region. The high costs of operating in the region and the extreme climate prevent significant infrastructural development. Operating the North Sea Route is highly treacherous since the window for shipping is very small because of the weather.

The future of shipping in the Arctic looks bleak in the near future as the risk of damage to ships passing through the Arctic and the costs incurred for the icebreaker escorts will cause the total expenses to increase even more. Countries will find it easier and cheaper to trade through the Malacca strati and the Suez canal rather than taking a route through treacherous Arctic.

The Chinese companies have also been delaying plans to modernize and build new infrastructure in the Arctic because of the competing interests within the Russian government. The economic condition of Russia also raises questions about the expansion of land-based routes in the Russian Arctic (Bin Y, 2019). The economic slowdown also causes China to delay the investments in the Arctic region as the potential returns out of these projects remain uncertain. To reap dividends from investments in the oil and gas sector in Russia, China is working to improve its technological

proress. The idea behind doing this is that China could use its technological advancement in the oil and gas extraction to market itself in the energy sector at the global level.

4.4 Implications of Russia-China regional cooperation

The Russia-China partnership is underpinned by their compatible economic conditions. For Russia, China provides a source for financing and major market. Also, China does not put any conditions on Russia, unlike the West for expanding partnership or investment. After Crimean crisis, Russia has been under enormous pressure from the West for some political reform, but the resistance by Russia has got it under economic sanctions as a consequence. Chinese dependence on Russia is growing because of its incessant demand for energy sources and need for newer markets for investment. Russia is in great need for external sources of financing and it views China as a potential investor to fill the vacuum given the enormous financial strength of the Chinese economy. China has been able to make inroads to those economic sectors of Russia which were unreachable earlier, like in the upstream oil and gas and other projects in the RFE and the Arctic. The current political leadership in the two nations have been encouraging further progress in their bilateral relations at public platforms.

The fact that China's economic presence in Russia is expanding rapidly suggests that Chinese companies have outdone the Western competition in Russia. In the Russian Far East, the Chinese company Huawei got an open tender bidding process after beating Nokia to lay down an internet cable project in the region. However, the Western companies have alleged that Chinese companies have not been following market principle and critics their unfair trade and investment practices. The European Union has earlier noted the Chinese practice of providing large scale subsidies to their domestic companies. This has emboldened the Chinese companies to outbid their global competitors in Russia (Pradhan R, 2019).

After the economic sanctions on Russia were imposed, the relation between Russia and China has received another boost and cemented the partnership. The asymmetry between the two nations have been managed well by the political leadership of the two nations in the sense that China remains deferential to the political interests and legacy of Russia in the region. Chinese companies have also invested strategically to those projects which are very important to the Russian leadership like the Yamal, Gazprom, Rosneft and the NSR. China has avoided building up

significant security establishments in the Central Asian Region and has pledged to assist in the economic development of the RFE. This economic partnership has not only helped Russia in dealing with the economic sanctions, but it has also generated goodwill for China in the Russian leadership. The power dynamics in the region is also managed by this economic partnership. However, in the lesser-known regions which are also undeveloped and devoid of significant hydrocarbon or other natural resources, the Chinese investment is limited.

Chinese presence in the CAR is seen by the regional countries as a reliable counterbalance against the aggressive tendencies of Russia (Shullman D, 2021). This has been all the more fueled after the Crimean crisis. Thus, the Central Asian States have been steadily reaching out to China to make it a key part of their security dynamics. Also, the West has been disengaging with the CAS on a broader level. This has led to the expansion of Chinese influence in the region and reduced the dominance of the Moscow. The prospect for Eurasian Economic Union in the region does not seem bright as the organization is being viewed as one dominated by Russia that is also financially not yet quite viable. The BRI project of China on the other hand has received positive feedback as the CAS expressed willingness to join the project. Even though Russia is losing out to China in the economic sectors in the region, the historical and cultural elements are visible through Russia's soft power politics in the form of language, films, food, music, opera, literature, education etc. China has till now has not majorly spent on the securitization of the region and let Russia take upon the role of security provider.

Despite all the imbalances, the two nations share the common goal of keeping the region away from the influence of the West. This has reduced the bilateral tensions on regional issues and brought them together to form a stable partnership between them. Russia-China partnership in the region is also about taking benefit of the vacuum created by the West in the Eurasian space after the closure of two American bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The Central Asian States have however generally shown a tendency to favor the presence of all major global players in the region to get leverage from them in their national development (Kendall A, 2020). Pursuing a multi-vector policy has the best outcome in gaining maximum aid and assistance as well as investment from all the major players in the region. Also, security-wise it limits the dominance of any one single nation in the region. Thus, the CAS have been very keen for building relation with the EU and the US to help create sustainable economies and create

maximum investment and employment opportunities for their population. The CAS have tried this approach to create regional stability for a long term.

China as the main investor in the region has however been accused of exploiting the region economically. The CAR has backward educational and health sector where the development output needs to trickle down. Thus, the concerns of Central Asian countries relate to the need for socio-economic investments as well. The reduction of socio-economic tensions is important to develop the CAS economies in sustainable form. These would prepare the CAS to participate in a more globalized economy.

From the Russian security perspective, the increased role of China in the RFE and the Arctic makes Russia vulnerable in the region (Lo Bobo, 2020). It is important for Russia to keep hold on to the region to bolster its position in the region as its isolation on the global scale is mounting after the sanctions and increasing pressure from the US on the European powers to disengage with Russia. Economic development of the Far East region and a dense population will help Russia to establish an important outpost in the region and help it to engage more actively. However, this aspiration of Russia has to be complemented with foreign assistance in the form of capital investment in the region.

The Chinese companies have been wary of the situation in the region and have not expressed as much enthusiasm as for the other hydrocarbon rich areas. Also, wherever China has invested in the RFE it has negotiated deals which have cut profit for the Russian government. Local resistance to the Chinese companies has reduced compared from the earlier times. However, some mistrust still exists where the Chinese companies have got agricultural land from the locals on lease. There is a palpable fear among some sections of locals who are wary of Chinese laborers colonizing the region. In Russia's North eastern region, China has come out as the most important foreign investor. But Russia does not want China to be its only option there and want to reduce its dependence on China in the region.

4.5 Summary

The common desire of Moscow and Beijing to contain US power, their mutual interests, Russian financial needs, have allowed these two nations to strongly engage in the Eurasian region. The status quo in the Sino-Russian partnership is likely to endure in the coming years. But there are

many factors which can pose challenges to stability in the partnership. The Global ambitions of China are such that it might put its power into practice, thus forcing China to play a greater role in regional and global affairs. China's vision of becoming the most powerful Asian nation calls for an assertive China that might require bypassing Russia, whose security could be at risk if this were to happen. Thus, rising global activism by an assertive China could shape the course for Russia-China partnership that may not necessarily remain in the current form.

However, Sino-Russian strategic partnership will continue to grow in the near future as both find each other useful at the international level. Also, Russia's dependence on China will continue to grow barring an unlikely scenario where Russia improves its relations with the West. Russia when cooperating with China has more to gain. China on the other hand avoids direct confrontation with the US and Europe by leaving space for Russia to take the lead on contentious global issues. This benefits China as direct spat with the US and Europe will harm its economic interests who are its most important trading partners. Rather than considering each other as threats, the two nations consider West as the greater security threat. This being said, the Russia-China bilateral relationship is unlikely to suffer from the shifting power dynamics in the relations. Russia and China clearly understand the benefits of working together to contain the West which is considered a threat to their security by both the nations. This reality must be taken into account by the Western policy makers.

CHAPTER 5

MULTILATERALISM AND MULTIPOLAR ORDER: SCO AND BRICS

5.1 Background

This chapter analyzes the foreign policies of Russia and China and the fundamental ideas, goals and priorities in dealing with each other. The chapter also discusses the initiatives and cooperation at multilateral level to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The post-Cold War order is dominated by the US and its Western allies through control on various international financial and political institutions. However, this dominance is being questioned by emerging powers, most significant being China and Russia. Among the joint cooperation measures, the Sino-Russian partnership gave rise to new multilateral institutions like the SCO and the BRICS which also include other nations of the region. These two institutions aim to provide another alternative for economic development and regional security, while reducing the US influence. These institutions serve as important tools to balance the influence of the West by adopting soft balancing measures. This chapter highlights the contribution of these two institutions in promoting Russia-China strategic partnership. The chapter also examines the capabilities of the SCO as a regional security organization and influence of Russia and China in the security area. While focusing on the SCO and BRICS as platforms for Russia and China Strategic partnership in geopolitical balancing, this chapter also deals with their conflicting interests at these multilateral institutions.

5.2 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The Shanghai cooperation Organisation is a regional organization which aims to target non-traditional security challenges. While countering these threats, the organization serves many interests and power games providing a new ground for East-West confrontation in the Central Asian Region. The formal objectives of SCO are countering the three evils in the region, which are international terrorism, religious extremism and ethnic separatism. Other aims include resolution of regional issues and promoting economic and trade exchanges, cultural cooperation, educational collaborations etc. In 2001, China, Russia and the Central Asian States (CAS) of

Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan set up this organization mainly aiming to counter the internal security challenges in the region⁵⁹. However, the regional platform gradually evolved as more than just a regional organization. The Chinese revival and Russian resurgence in global international order changed the vision of SCO. Along with the official objectives of the organization, the SCO has evolved as an effective institutional tool to pursue soft balancing policies against the external powers trying to carve greater roles in the CAR.

Taking the leadership role in the regional organizations like the SCO, Russia is in effect trying to create a geopolitical pluralism which reflects the emergence of multipolarity that can be used for interactions at the regional and international level (Turner S, 2018). Through its emergence SCO has tried to promote a multipolar world order to replace the current disorder, an outcome of an unbalanced unipolar world order led by the US.

Compared to Russia, China has taken a more pro-active role in regional integration through its regional interactions like in the ASEAN (Bin, Yu 2012). China has used its economic strength to push for greater regional integration and to create an alternate form of international politico-economic order. SCO has proved to be an important diplomatic and institutional tool for Russia and China to pursue an active regional integration under a broad arch of security in the Central Asian Region. Russia and China have been working to improve their connectivity and strategic coordination with the CAS in the last decade through multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements and by assisting the CAS with strategic loans and credit facilities.

An important aspect of the functioning of the SCO is to create norms which differ from the Western norms (Lijan Xing, 2009). Russia and China have taken a coordinated stand about SCO being a platform for creation of norms which are anti-Western and differ from the established Western normative preferences. This highlights the attempt to create an identity at the international level as resurgent global powers. After the Cold war the global order came to be dominated by the US and thus the international order was based on the Western norms. Russia-China partnership has strengthened in the last decade as they share common understanding over issues like non-interference, preserving the status quo, state security, territorial integrity, and state sovereignty.

⁵⁹ DECLARATION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION
URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cetur/eng/zt/shhzzz/t162011.htm>

Under the SCO the two nations have tried to create a collective identity that is anti-Western. The two nations share a common preference for regime stability. This shared preference for regime stability and non-interference in sovereign states can be understood in the context of Crimean crisis and Syrian crisis.

5.3 Conceptual framework: SCO and Soft Balancing

The precursor of SCO was set up in the year 1996, which was known as the 'Shanghai Five' formed to resolve the border issue between China and four former Soviet republics. It consisted of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. SCO as a multilateral security organization came into effect after signing the 'Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Region'. In 2001, when Uzbekistan became a member of the organization, it was renamed as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. After 2001, the SCO gained much international visibility. The SCO has been instrumental in establishing mutual trust and cooperation among the member states. The CAS have promoted SCO as a security framework to secure their regimes. Some scholars however view SCO as an organization dealing with internal security challenges (Stephen Aris, 2016). Their perspective on SCO is that it has no strategic and secret objective to counter US interests and influence in the region. The major problems which the SCO has to deal with are the three evils of the region. The fundamentalist, extremist and separatist movements in Chechnya, Andhijan, Xinjiang etc. are the major challenges before the SCO members. It is vital to the member states to prevent these internal problems and secure their regimes. SCO has been defined as a multilateral security organization which is rooted in the concept of multilateral security cooperation as the most effective foreign policy tool (Yeungmi Yun and Kicheol Pork, 2013). Given the inadequacies in the capacity, conflict in the interests, enlargement problems and differences over the national strategies of Russia and China, SCO has not proved to be the most effective organization in the security dimension. The SCO, however, has evolved to an important institutional tool for Russia and China to engage in geopolitical balancing behavior. The organization has evolved as a symbol of unity between Russia and China.

The post-Cold War world order was viewed as a unipolar world order dominated by the US and thus it appeared that the other powerful nations were not in favor of traditional hard balancing against the US. It seems that the pursuit of hard balancing based on arms buildup and forging

counter alliances were not the most appropriate ways to secure the regimes. The traditional hard balancing against the US was seen as a risky and costly affair and thus the other powers did not use military balancing. The power disparity between the other powers and the US was enormous and thus hard balancing was not a rational approach.

In this context, Soft Balancing appeared more rational and convenient than traditional forms of hard balancing. Soft Balancing refers to the non-military alignments of two or more states that are designed to reduce or remove the military presence and external influence of an outside power from a specific region (Pape R, 2010). In the context of Russia and China at the SCO it can be understood as a conscious coordination between them to get favorable outcomes which are contrary to the objectives of the US. These outcomes would not have been possible without mutual support. It would not have been possible to counter the US on a systemic level.

Because of the nature of the current international order, the second-tier major powers came up with the new ways of balancing the superpower status of the US. The unilateral aggressive activities by the US and its hegemonic status have led the emergence of other ways to balance the US power.

United States under the President George W bush started to pursue a new security strategy. This security strategy was demonstrated in the US invasion of Iraq which had significant consequences on the international relations since then. The unilateral security strategy followed by the US has triggered a number of measures adopted by nations which can be categorized as ‘soft balancing’ : economic statecraft, setting up of international institutions and diplomatic means. This has led to other powers going for institutionalized alliances as a response mechanism to the US unilateral preventive war strategy. According to Pape (2010), the main purpose of balancing is limiting the superpower’s future ambitions through coalitions against the unipolar leader. It will also help in establishing a foundation of cooperation in hard balancing measures in the future.

The SCO thus evolved as an effective platform for Russia and China to manage great power relations and deepen the diplomatic and military cooperation leading to boosting of strategic partnership between them. It has helped the two nations to enhance their economy by opting out of trade blocs and promoting regional integration by multilateral diplomacy.

This has also reduced the presence of US in the CAR and has limited the presence of other regional powers going for forging alliances with the West. Promotion of Cultural relations with shared norms and common values has reduced the Western cultural influences in the region which is a

very important part of strategic partnership. Strategic partnership is based on a broader framework of cooperation. China and Russia hope through promoting multilateral cooperation and maintaining the principle of non-intervention among like-minded countries in the SCO to create a balance against US unilateralism and interventionism. In this context, Central Asia, through the SCO, provides an opportunity for China and Russia to exercise multilateral leadership. Their strategic ties are a response to Western pressure and US hegemony (Nikolayev M, 2012).

5.4 Russia and the SCO

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia's reduced ability to continue its influence in the post-Soviet space meant that it had to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the former Soviet Republics. The Foreign policy approach that Russia adopted in its 'near abroad' was called as non-imperialist or post-colonial attitude. Russia however responded by accusing the Western states of deliberately threatening its strategic interests in the region and creating hurdles in the process of integration of the newly formed states.

However, Russia has not rejected the presence of China, an extra-regional actor deepening its roots in the former Soviet space. This involvement of China in this geopolitical space is interesting. Russia and China have promoted their bilateral cooperation into strategic partnership in last two decades. The partnership between the two countries has grown by leaps and bounds in these years and this geopolitical space is one of the regions which has brought out this dynamic in the relationship.

China has made a significant foothold in the neighboring CAS. The growth trend in the economic, military and security arena is noticeable where China has consistently been involved with energy projects, setting up military facilities, signing trade deals and other strategic moves. The SCO is perceived to be dominated by China and presence of its secretariat in Beijing gives China another advantage. Russia meanwhile has not expressed resentment toward this increase in influence of China at this organization, rather it has been promoting the SCO on the world stage as a major security organization.

Russia, it appears, gives many concessions to China and has attached high stakes to the SCO. This approach of Russia is guided by the strategic goals in its foreign and security policy post the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

These goals are (Kocamaz A, 2012):

- The ambition to maintain its influence as the most dominant power in its ‘strategic backyard’ or the Former Soviet Republics without the Baltic states.
- The desire to promote ‘strategic partnership’ with China, which offers tangible benefits for Russia. Here SCO has been used as a diplomatic tool to straighten ties with China
- Russia wants to restore its status of global power and since the early 2000s this goal has driven its foreign policy. Here too SCO has proved to be a convenient multilateral platform to serve its purpose.

From the Russian perspective, the SCO has been important to check the increasing influence of the Western powers and to prevent instability in the southern periphery. These security concerns are central to Russian security policy. Russia sees the instability in the CAR and the interference by the Western powers in the region as correlated. Russian defense and foreign policy experts are of the view that the regional involvement of the Western countries can cause destabilization in the CAR and thus have implications for the security of Russia. The security risk could be in terms of losing control over the military-industrial facilities, power plants, energy export routes, uranium sites etc. Under the SCO, Russia wants to have closer ties with the Central Asian States to maintain its influence in the region. Also, the SCO is a platform which is guided by the principle of non-interference in sovereign state’s affairs. Thus, Russia views SCO as an important institutional tool to limit the risk of potential instability in the CAR as well as to reduce the threat of regime change.

As an institutional set up, the SCO makes a unique place for Russia. The three basic features of the SCO in combination highlight the uniqueness of the SCO in the historical legacy of Russia in the CAR (Mikhail Troitskiy , 2011):

- The member states of the SCO share common security concerns and converging policy approaches for socio-economic stability
- The SCO is not a defense or collective security bloc, even though it has a strong security dimension
- Among all the member states of the SCO, Russia is one of the two most powerful states, apart from China.

The post-Cold War collective security treaties do not have all these features. The existing Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) do not consist of all these criteria. After the Cold War, Russia was not in a position to create military blocs as was during the Soviet era times like the Warsaw Pact. Also, if Russia wanted to develop such highly integrated institutional engagement, it could only be done with another great power and here SCO provided that platform. At SCO, China and Russia are the only two great powers.

The Russian foreign policy community does not view SCO as a collective security arrangement, nor they view it as a random group of states with the aim of countering Western influences in the CAR. The most popular view is that of a middle position between these two which is to regard SCO as an institutional attempt to converge the common security concerns of the states in the CAR which are both internal as well external in nature. The SCO has provided a strong institutional setting to all the member states for interactions to deal with their own security challenges. The establishment in September 2004 of an inter-agency commission on Russian participation in the SCO was widely interpreted as evidence of the significance that the SCO has attained for Russia.

5.4.1 Russia as a Co-founder of SCO

Russia is one of the founding members of the SCO. It spearheaded the growth of the organization as the main forum to deal with the common security concerns of the region. As the other major power of the region, China wanted to resolve the border disputes with the Central Asian States and the ruling elite of China realized that engaging Russia at the SCO will provide legitimacy to this process of boundary resolution. Also, the CAS felt that Russia within the SCO will protect them from the Chinese pressure (Allison Roy, 2012). This also gave Russia and China to resolve their bilateral border disputes and demilitarization of the border between them. The Sino-Russian border disputes were resolved, and the two nations have become strategic partners even though some Soviet era anxieties still have not been completely alleviated.

The participation of Russia as one of the co-founders of the SCO has given a much-needed legitimacy to the organization. It also has allowed Russia to retain the prestige and influence in the CAR. Thus, Russia has its interests in preserving and promoting its credentials as a co-founder of the organization and playing a major role in deciding the goals and missions of the SCO. It was

helpful for maintaining this image, when the SCO Charter was adopted at a summit in St Petersburg in June 2002.

Russia and China have maintained cordial and united stand at the SCO. Russia acted in tandem with China in initiating the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), launched in 2004 and now based in Tashkent. The two nations have carried out security exercises under the aegis of the SCO. The first SCO military exercise was held in 2003 at two locations in China and Kazakhstan. Under 'Peace Mission' the two nations have been co-organizing security exercises since 2005. This has been discussed in detail in the third chapter as part of the Russia-China military cooperation. Conducting these exercises dominated by Russia and China and the locations of these exercises which were held in the high seas indicated the conference of traditional security policies between the two countries.

Economically, the Sino-Russian approach at the SCO has not found convergence. China views CAR as a vast market for its export of goods and services as well as a source for hydrocarbons. However, Russia views the members of the SCO which were part of Soviet Union as a part of its historical and cultural legacy, as its backyard. Chinese ambitions of Free trade agenda have not found resonance in the Russian foreign policy approach to the CAS.

In September 2003, Russia endorsed a framework agreement for SCO members on enhanced economic cooperation. In September 2006, Russia prepared an extensive list of joint economic projects to be promoted through the platform of SCO. The list consisted of projects like transport corridor connecting the Caspian Sea with China through Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia; expanding telecommunication network in the Eurasian region; constructing infrastructure for transportation of hydrocarbon, etc. in June 2006, at the Shanghai summit, China called for creating a Free trade area among the SCO members but the Russian vision of enhanced economic cooperation within the SCO does not include Free trade area (Lukyanov F, 2008).

5.4.2 SCO and the Comeback Strategy of Russia in the CAR

Russia pursuing its strategy to rebuild its status in the CAR started giving more prominence to the political leadership of the CAS by arranging Presidential trips to these states. After 1999, Russia adopted a strategy which favored the CAS over other countries. As part of this stagey, Russia used SCO to this advantage.

As Benjamin Gonzalez (2012) says:

“The Shanghai Cooperation Organization offered a different way for Russia to pursue its interests in the region, reassert some of its influence, and counter the challenges to Russian foreign policy in Central Asia.”

Russia has behaved along the lines of Andrew Hurrell’s (2015) observations about regional organizations, which sometimes

“can be beneficial to declining hegemony by allowing them to pursue their interests while sharing burdens, pursuing problems held in common with other members, and [. . .] generate international support and legitimacy for their policies.”

Russia wants to reconnect with the CAS which have been distrustful of the Russian support for their sovereignty and integrity. This perception is because of the historical factors and doubts over the genuineness of Moscow’s support for the policy of non-interference. Russia wants to use the SCO to reconstruct its ties with the CAS and convey the message that mutual cooperation is beneficial for regional stability and economic development. In this light, the presence of another major power within the SCO serves as an assurance for the Central Asian Countries. Chinese presence within the SCO has played an instrumental role in assuring the CAS that through the organization they can balance the influence of the two dominant powers within the SCO.

For Russia, being a member of the SCO has provided it with conditions to use its financial resources and political influence for making a comeback in the CAR. Existence of SCO has provided Russia an additional entry channel in its ‘extended neighborhood’. SCO has consolidated the regional initiatives led by Russia in the CAR. It has facilitated the Russian interaction with the CAS and thus helped it in making a comeback in the Central Asian policy mechanism (Rozman G, 2015). Presence of China has provided Russia the much-needed economic strength and political dynamism to facilitate this comeback and supplement the Russian efforts in this direction. Overall, SCO has enhanced Russian strategic influence in this geopolitical space which was being questioned after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

5.4.3 Russia and SCO: Countering the ‘Extra Regional Powers’ in the CAR

Since the early 1990s, the Russia has two priorities in the CAR (Ross, R.S. 2007):

- To keep the region free from the presence of what the Foreign Policy experts and defense analysts in Russia call ‘extra-regional powers’

- To maintain regional stability in the region, particularly the Caucasian areas

These goals are related to containing the Western presence in the region. In a broader perspective, Russia views that there is a deliberate strategy of NATO forces for its enlargement in the former Soviet Republics like the Baltic states, Georgia, Ukraine, among others. Russia is of the view that NATO's invitation to countries like Georgia, Ukraine etc. to join its forces in the future is a deliberate attempt to strengthen its influence in its 'near abroad'. The Western support to the oil and gas pipelines bypassing the Russian territory to export the natural resources to the world market is a threat to Russia. Thus, SCO is being used by Russia as a tactic to counter this threat and secure its historical and strategic concerns.

However, one section of the experts is of the view that SCO should not be seen as an Eastern NATO, but they do not deny the joint military exercises conducted under the umbrella of SCO since the last decade were only about counterterrorism (Manicom J, 2009). Official declaration for these joint military exercises mentions terrorism as the main security threat in the region. Russia through its actions and public documents have been at the forefront to send this message to the global community. Russia rationalizes the presence of SCO in the region by projecting its strength and indispensable presence to deal with the regional security challenges. SCO is being advertised as the most effective and collective platform to deal with the regional challenges and thus 'extra regional powers' are not needed in the CAS.

5.4.4 Russia and SCO: Politico-military primacy

SCO's main purpose after its formation was to solve the border problems between the member states. Here, Russia and China found an opportunity to fill up the void in the region and take up the leadership role. In 2005, the two nations signed the 'Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation regarding the International Order of the 21st century'⁶⁰. This joint statement was an expression of the mutual understanding between the two countries regarding the foreign policy principles to be followed at the SCO. The underlying theme of this joint statement was to address the process of building a 'new global order'. There was fundamental

⁶⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China (2005), "China–Russia Joint Statement on the International Order of the 21st Century", Moscow, 1 July 2005. [Online: Web] Accessed 13 June 2020 URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceee/eng/dtxw/t203102.htm>

agreement between the two nations in their opposition to the hegemony of a superpower and change the unipolar global order.

After the US military operation in Afghanistan, and the increase in the US military presence in the CAR and eastward expansion of the NATO forces, the main agenda of SCO saw a transformation. Russia wanted to US to stay out of the region. It marked a turning point in the focus of the SCO. It highlighted that the insecurity in the region is related to the role of external actors and their interference. The intra-regional character of the SCO policies was transformed. The operation of NATO forces and the increasing US military forces in the region led the SCO to enhance its military capacity and activity.

Russia took a leadership role in coordinating the activities of the SCO with that of the other regional organizations like the CSTO. This will help Russia to leverage itself and be seen as a Global power, as well as help Moscow reclaim its lost status in the international power politics. Coordinating the different regional organizations, Russia wants to present an institutional challenge to the Western organizations led by the US. The defense and security aspect covered by the CSTO, the intra-regional integration by the Eurasian Economic Union and the amicable relations with the CAS under the SCO provide Russia to comprehensively integrate the Central Asian region and maintain its dominance.

US set up two military bases - the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan and the Karshi-Khanabad air base in Uzbekistan - claiming that these are to be used for maintaining stabilization in Afghanistan. Subsequent closure of these two US military bases indicated the intent of Russia to get rid of the US forces from the region (Bellacqua J, 2017). Russia and China view the presence of US troops with suspicion and especially after the NATO's persuasion to the Baltic states to join it. Also, the Color Revolution in some post-Soviet states was supported by the US, which was seen by Russia as a step to cause regime instability in the Eurasian region including in Russia. Any escalation of regional crisis is bound to have negative effects on Russian establishment. The mutual suspicion was exacerbated by the Russian attack on Georgia and annexation of Crimea. The geopolitical implications of these incidents led Russia to resent the presence of US forces in the region.

Almost a decade and half ago the request for withdrawal was made. SCO made a declaration in 2005 that demanded the US to set a timetable for its withdrawal from the region. The US military contingent were based in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. At that point of time, US was the biggest

supporter of the Kyrgyz economy. However, after Russia offered the Kyrgyz government of financial support and credit, it asked the US government to vacate the base in 2009. In return US tried to persuade the Kyrgyz state with an increase in its lease amount for the base. After this offer was made public, as did some of the domestic corruption cases in the then Kurmanbek Bakiyev government, a series of public protests resulted in nation-wide movement. The ruling regime was not in favor of shutting down the US base and alleged that the Russian government was behind these protests. There was a speculation among the regional foreign experts that Russian support for the rival candidate Rosa Otunbayeva was largely based on Bakiyev-led Kyrgyz government's decision to extend the lease of the US air base at Manas in 2009 (Skosyrev V, 2011).

After the fall of the Bakiyev government, a new Kyrgyz government was formed under Almazbek Atambayev who's considered pro-Russian. He cancelled the extension of the lease. Following this incident, US closed its base in Manas. This incident marks the resurgence of Russia in the geopolitical space of the region. Kyrgyzstan later on joined the Eurasian Economic Union and deepened political ties with Russia. The Kyrgyz political dynamics has thus been changed post this event due to shift in political priorities.

Uzbekistan however did not become a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. Till 2005 it maintained close relations with the US but following the Andijan Massacre. The incident was highly criticized by the human rights activists and governments across the globe. The US was also critical of how the Uzbek government infringed the human rights of Uzbek citizens. Thereafter, the Uzbek government rescinded the US air base rights located in its territory. Meanwhile it did not stop the US government to provide financial aid and military weapons to the Uzbek government. Simultaneously the Uzbek government was being showered with offers from Russia. The Russian government wrote off Uzbekistan's debts of around 865 million USD. Since Uzbekistan continued to maintain good political and military relations with Russia and China, it has expressed apprehensions time and again regarding the evolution of the SCO into a politico-military alliance (Wendell M, 2019).

Although the CAS have been trying to maintain good relations with Russia and US, the change in political priorities is influenced by the fact that Russia is their neighbor and for good or bad, they cannot afford to antagonize Russia. These nations understand that the US influence in the region mainly depends on its interests and which may or may not be permanent. This reality makes the

closure of the US air bases in the CAS important from the point of view that US influence in the region is being challenged by Russia.

Under the SCO, the joint military cooperation and making it the main regional security organization in the region, is a way by Russia to indirectly balance the US influence in the region. Russia and China through the SCO have assured the CAS that their security concerns will be protected and the reliance on other 'extra regional powers' is not needed. At the Ufa summit of SCO in 2015, the Russian Defense minister Sergei Shoigu proposed to make SCO a more formal alliance of the member states so that any kind of revolutions such as the Color revolutions in the Eurasia could be prohibited in the future. Although Russia was assertive in this proposal China did not express much enthusiasm for this (Mcdermott R, 2017).

After the 'Orange Revolution' which witnessed a regime change in Ukraine, 'the Peace Mission', joint military exercise of Russia and China in 2005. It was carried out in the Yellow Sea. Experts are of the view that following the 'Orange Revolution', Russia made a change in its policy of military cooperation with China and started conducting joint military operation with China to strengthen the relations between them (Jacobson L, 2010). Russia believed that the protests under the garb of 'Orange Revolution were backed by US and the EU. The Russia-China joint military operation was again conducted in 2007 in Chelyabinsk Oblast. These joint military operations were a part of the counter-terrorism measures and for operational cooperation between the member states.

So far, the Peace Mission held in 2014 was the largest military exercise under the SCO. This military exercise was a counter-terrorism exercise which included a number of air defense missile, ground and air forces, light aircraft, tanks, war planes, etc. China also contributed its control aircraft, J-10, J-11 fighters, WZ-19 attack helicopter among other weapons. The main purpose of conducting this joint operation was to counter the threat of terrorism as an effect of growing terrorism in neighboring Afghanistan, Iraq and other states of the region. The Central Asian member states of the SCO also joined in with their forces.

The 2014 Peace mission greatly improved the joint operation capability of the member states which was earlier missing (Kramer, A.E. 2019). Multilateral security approach under the SCO was a great achievement in the support and deployment of joint military forces. The enhanced interoperability was appreciated by the member states to cope with the scourge of terrorism in the

region. It also acted as a way of confidence building measure and build mutual trust among them. The spirit of mutual cooperation under the aegis of the SCO is essential to create an integrated economic and security agenda and counter the flow of security threats emanating from the Afghan borders.

The increased interoperability among the member states of the SCO also makes for a possibility for these states to go beyond combating ‘the three evils of the region’ and coalesce the cooperation opportunities into a more solid alliance, build on the parameters of the Western kind of organizations. The Russia-China understanding at the SCO and the shared interest in excluding the West, makes this partnership threatening for US.

The surface warfare activities of China have considerably improved after Russia sold its conventional weapons to China. The Russian military capabilities are advanced and has significantly contributed to the military prowess of China. This threatens the US interests in the region and secures Chinese interests especially in the South China Sea. Russian sales of weapons and technology have made China to enhance its defenses against the US air strikes and long-range missile attacks. This capacity has potential to affect the future of US-China conflicts in theatres such as on Taiwan. At its current strength, the Chinese navy has a very tough task at their hand to keep the US forces out of the contested maritime boundaries.

The Russia-China partnership at the SCO has another important dimension, which is fighting terrorism. The setting up of the ‘Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure’ (RATS) was an important development in this area. In the CAR, RATS has emerged to be the most important structure to deal with the issue. Russia tries to create this as a sub-unit with a militarized anti-terrorist structure parallel to the CSTO (Ying Fu, 2016). The cooperation between the CSTO and SCO may not in future take the form military alliance in the CAR. From the Russo-Chinese perspective, the close ties between the SCO and CSTO, however, will give them an edge over the NATO to balance it and to promote and institutionalize a common set of norms and assumptions across the CAR. Also, the CAS are more comfortable with the existing security set up of CSTO and the SCO which is without the onus and restrictions of an Alliance structure.

5.5 China and SCO

China established close links with the CAR almost 2000 years ago through the Silk Road trade. At present, the neighboring CAS are strategically very important for China, especially because China is witnessing rapid economic growth and the accelerated demand for Energy. The SCO has helped China to build strong political, cultural, economic and security relations with the CAS (Hofstee G, 2020). Here, SCO has played an active and constructive role in this aspect. SCO as a multilateral institution has provided China an opportunity to avoid conflict and friction with its neighbors in the pursuit of securing its national interests. In the evolution of SCO, China has played an enormous role, which highlights the importance of this regional institution in the CAR. SCO in effect represents the change in the diplomatic principle of China to move towards multilateral interactions. It indicates the arrival of Chinese diplomacy into a new stage.

5.5.1 China and SCO: Strategic Significance

SCO has enormous significance for China. The most important is the reducing of mistrust and suspicion between China and the CAS. Also, it has led China and the member states to work on confidence-building measures. Peace at the extensive border of China has helped Beijing to focus on its domestic and internal challenges. The member states and observer states of SCO make up for about three-fourth of the total land border of China and thus securing these extensive border areas helps China to concentrate on other areas like the eastern and south-eastern part of its coasts. SCO has provided a multilateral framework to combat the threats of terrorism, separatism and extremism in the region and to cooperate closely to deal with other cross border illegal activities (Rumer E.B. 2014). Also, China has been able to ramp up its efforts to deal with other non-traditional security threats causing disruption to Chinese stability and development. In these initiatives China has tried to leverage SCO to serve its interests.

Under the SCO, economic cooperation between the member states is conducive for China as it finds this important to develop its western provinces and also to develop the energy trade infrastructure in the region. For the energy security of China, SCO serves as a critical diplomatic tool to secure its interests and for its overall development.

Since the member states and observers of the SCO constitute almost 50% of the total world's population and includes regional powers like Russia, China and India, it has the potential to exert a greater influence beyond the Eurasian region. The expansion of cooperation and closer ties among the members of SCO could build a zone of stability and development creating a favorable neighborhood to achieve what China calls 'peaceful development'.

The SCO also has led to a change in the diplomacy of the Chinese in the 21st century. This can be understood as following:

- The 'Shanghai Process' has made China to adopt a new approach to security which can be achieved by mutual trust, cooperation and disarmament (Bellacqua J, 2016). This approach has led to the resolution of decades old border problems between Russia and China. Also, it has the potential to assist in the other outstanding border problems like between China and India, the South China sea dispute etc.
- The SCO has adopted a very broad perspective of security cooperation that has also included issues like cross-border crime, drug trafficking etc. Under the SCO, the mass media is being used as an effective mechanism to deal with these threats. The member states have also signed a joint declaration to achieve information security. The SCO has also kept the dialogue process open for new challenges like the environmental protection, depletion of freshwater resources, etc. which are chronic issues the CAS have been dealing with. Such an approach provides China to play an effective role in the global security architecture.
- SCO also highlights the emergence of new form of state-to-state relationship which is more of partnership than an alliance. Led by Russia and China, SCO symbolizes a set of new rules different from unilateralism and expansion of military blocs which are characteristics of a cold war mentality. SCO endorses new rules to regulated inter regional interactions among the states in the post-Cold War global order. The Russia-China partnership and the CAS at the SCO constitute a partnership which is characterized by constructive interactions while not forming a military alliance. The Russia-China treaty of 2001, 'The Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation' symbolizes a new beginning in the bilateral relations between Russia and China which was based on genuine equality. It is not a military alliance. Chinese diplomatic circle has borrowed a leaf out of their success story at the SCO in terms of dealing with other regional organizations like at the ASEAN, EU, AU, Arab League, among others.

- The SCO process has led to the growth of a new model of regional cooperation which is quite distinct in the way that the small and the large powers have taken a common stand and joint initiatives to pave the way for security cooperation. The focus is more on mutual benefits, collaborations and facilitation for cultural complementarity. The model which SCO has been practicing is one of mutual learning and exchange, reciprocity and cultural exchanges. China gets the benefit in the form of utilizing the increased cultural exchanges with the CAS to reduce the mistrust and using it to improve its economic relations with them.

Thus, the SCO process symbolizes a transformation in the Chinese diplomacy from focus on bilateral relations to multilateral interactions. This new approach has helped China to resolve its bilateral disputes with the CAS and has given greater confidence to China in playing an active role in a multilateral institution. We can understand this by analyzing that in the 21st century China has adopted a more open approach to play an active and constructive role at multilateral platforms.

Even though Russia and China outweigh the other member states in the SCO, the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ is about all the members states being equal and it is a key component of the SCO. However, Russia and China have undeniably played most important role in driving the growth of SCO and thus the partnership between Russia and China is invariably vital for the development of the organization.

5.5.2 Security: China’s main concern at the SCO

The Chinese interests at the SCO is almost synonymous with its interests in the CAR. China is in a process of developing cooperative institutions in areas like security, energy, and economic development. China has taken upon itself as a natural duty to promote the SCO as the main regional security platform in the region. China has been the one of the two main political and economic contributors of the SCO, other than Russia. China considers the SCO as a unique instrument to serve its interests in the CAR. The SCO has evolved as a tool to serve its Central Asian diplomacy since its inception, although with various policy shifts (Chase M.S 2017).

The SCO has served as the setting to contain the ‘East Turkistan’ in the CAR and has enhance the China-CAS relations. Also, it has alleviated the potential conflict of interests between Russia and China in the region. It thus has played an important role for China to enhance its status in Central

Asian Region and beyond. Here, SCO serves the purpose of addressing its security concerns in the region.

According to the experts there are different opinions among them regarding the motive of Chinese interests in the SCO. There is a difference in opinions among the academic circles. One section of the academics is of the view that security challenges emanating from the CAR is the most important concern for China. While the economic issues regarding the regional economic integration and trade with the CAR do not directly affect the Chinese economy. The other group disagrees with this assessment and argues that economic aspect of the SCO is vital to China. They are of the view that promoting economic cooperation among the SCO member states is central to the resolution of regional security threats. They are of the opinion that the major cause of terrorism and extremism is the prevalent widespread poverty in the region. The economy and security do not exclude each other, and both are primary interests of China in the region (Lukin A, 2018)

If we go through the historical relation between the CAR and China, the former has often been perceived by the Chinese regimes as ‘troublemaker’ and a constant source of security threat. In the present situation, China faces the same kind of issues. At the SCO, China has often voiced its concern for security challenges in its ‘Eastern Turkistan’ region’. This is the primary target of the Chinese anti-terrorism campaign in the region. In its campaign against them, China has found support in the member states and the observer states of the SCO.

The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has political connotations as it is used to amplify the separatist forces who want to separate the Xinjiang region from China. It has origins in the 19th century when the Russian and Western scholars used the term to refer to the present-day Xinjiang region. This region is currently called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Initially it did not have any ethnic or political relation and was only a geographic term to refer to the place.

The origin of the ‘East Turkistan’ separatist movement lies in the 20th century Xinjiang which was linked to the spread of the Turkism and Islam from the neighboring regions into the Xinjiang region. This led to a group of separatists declaring the establishment of the ‘East Turkistan Islamic Republic’ in 1933 in the southern part of Xinjiang. However, this new regime collapsed shortly. The movement establish a Turkistan state has time and again resurfaced and the 1933 event serves as the inspiration and model for the ongoing separatist movement in the Xinjiang region (Sutter R, 2016).

China alleges that the separatist groups in the region have close connections with the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban groups in neighboring Afghanistan. They organize training camps for the separatists. Currently, “East Turkistan” terrorists continue to fight a guerrilla war in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. In April 2012, China made public the third list of names of the terrorists affirmed by the Ministry of Public Security. It included six who were activists in the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. All of them received terrorist training in South Asia and found shelter in the region. According to Indian information, a few weeks before the death of Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda appointed Abdul Shakoor Turkistani, the chief of the Turkistan Islamic Party, as the new commander of its Pakistan forces and training camps. The Turkistan Islamic Party is committed to carrying out jihadist activities against China in Xinjiang. According to the source of the information, this shows the extent to which the terror group’s associate outfits have joined al-Qaeda central (Rumer E.B, 2019).

5.5 China and SCO: Trade, Energy and Economic Cooperation

Although, Russia has dominated the military dimension of the SCO members of former USSR with some assistance from China, but the economic and energy aspect has been dominated by China. In the last decade China has significantly consolidated its relations with its neighbors through trade deals, infrastructure projects, aid and assistance, increase in the trade volumes, etc. China has used this neighborhood policy to develop close relations with its neighbors. From long term perspective, this collaboration and mutual beneficial cooperation creates stronger partnerships. This also leads to a kind of soft balancing as it excludes the role of external powers in the region.

China, Russia and the CAS have achieved remarkable results in the area of economic relations. Particularly China’s growth in the region has been systemic and has expanded continuously. Economic cooperation is the most dynamic aspect China and CAS. With the Central Asian States, China has achieved different stages of economic relations. With Turkmenistan, China has become the most important investor. Tajikistan is on its way to become China’s biggest debt receiving partners. Uzbekistan and China have signed numerous trade deals. Kazakhstan commodity trade volume has been on a rise with China.

It is being assumed that after the completion of the OBOR project, the dependency between the CAS and China is going to see a rise. From this perspective, OBOR does not appear to exclusively focus on the economy rather it appears as a political strategy to reconstruct the global order in a Sino-centric way. This also marks China's entry into the global stage and a shift in its Foreign Policy regarding its regional neighbors. This project has led to the rejuvenation of Chinese nation. It indicates the growing Chinese ambition to become the preeminent power in the region. It is not just an economic initiative but an ambitious endeavor to improve infrastructure and connectivity in the region.

This project has received funding from the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). The project will open new markets, new sources for natural resources and new areas will be accessed. Since this project contains pipelines, roads and bridges, this will enhance the energy and security cooperation in the CAR.

China treats SCO as an 'energy club' in terms of the energy trade between Russia and the CAS. Unlike Russia whose main concern is security, China's foremost priority is energy access in the CAR. The energy security of the Chinese economy is very important because of the industrialization process. Since the domestic production of Chinese energy is inadequate in meeting the rising demand, China wants to use the transport corridor in the CAR to secure this concern.

It is apparent that through the OBOR project China wants to dominate the CAR. Economic relations are going to be the way to do that. From this perspective, it can be understood why China pushes for SCO to be a non-security framework. China has also proposed to make SCO a free trade zone in 2016. Russia meanwhile is not so keen in using SCO to economically integrate the regional neighbors (Weitz R, 2019). However, coordination of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with the SCO has mitigated this stand of Russia. The agreement on economic block-building indicates the deepening of Russia-China cooperation and the SCO has served to be an effective framework to enhance their partnership.

Russia simplified the mutual investment procedures for coordination of the EEU and the BRI project. In 2015, the two nations signed a deal to formalize the cooperation between the EEU and BRI. The most important aspect this deal was the initiation of bilateral talks on the issue of free trade zone between the EEU and China.

“The joint declaration on joining the construction of the EEU and the OBOR stated that the two sides would work jointly in bilateral and multilateral frameworks, above all the SCO. This document posed serious questions for the SCO, requiring concrete mechanisms of cooperation of the EEU and with the OBOR and the SCO. Russian and Chinese experts are now working on this. In Russia, experts at the influential Valdai Club are putting forward ideas for the leadership of both countries to adopt. In accordance with their proposals, the SCO should become the umbrella organization for coordination, which will significantly strengthen its economic role.” (Lavrov S, 2015)

This becomes significant since here SCO is being visualized to serve as an economic bloc to strengthen economic cooperation between Russia and China, thus leading to stronger strategic partnership between them. Also, forming an economic bloc under the aegis of SCO serves as a soft balancing mechanism for Russia and China. This cooperation is an example of a potential ‘win-win’ economic model. However, this cooperation is not without challenges. The prospect of economic hegemonism by China is a looming threat for Russia and the CAS. The increasing reliance of CAS on China does not favor the interests of Russia in the region. Thus, despite the remarkable achievements of the two nations under the SCO in different areas, the two nations face numerous challenges in their path for future cooperation.

5.6 Challenges for Russia-China cooperation at the SCO

In the last few years, China has been increasingly present in the financial, economic and infrastructure investment in the CAR, while Russia does not have the political and economic strength to resist the deepening of Chinese influence. The Chinese economic advances in the CAR is a cause for concern for Russia as it sees it as a kind of economic hegemonism. In the context of economic and financial crisis in Russia, it cannot but feel nervous about it. At the SCO, China has been actively providing preferential loans to the Central Asian countries. It has Also been promoting the setting up of a SCO development fund and committing finances for it. It is also advancing the creation of a free trade zone on a similar basis in this region.

The fear in the Russian political circles is that the economies of the CAS would start depending on the Chinese assistance so much that in case of a financial crisis, the states will be constrained in their political and economic relations with China. This is one of the reasons why the Russian government is in favor of creating the SCO fund which consists of both the private and state money (Kocamaz S.U. 2019). The infrastructure projects financed by China in the CAR lie in the border

areas of China with the CAS and hence Russia is also apprehensive of the fact that it might lose out of the benefits accruing out of the projects. Also, creating a unified economic space where China is in the leading position undermines the influence of Russia in the region.

In this context, Russia has also used SCO to counter this fear. Russia is trying to balance the power of China in the region by including India as the new member in SCO whose inclusion in different projects can help balance the rise of China. Also, another approach of Russia in this context is to engage China as closely possible to check the rise of China in the CAR through dialogue mechanisms and a network of agreements. In this context, SCO can be used as a convenient instrument.

As Gonzalez (2012) argues

“A benefit of the SCO [for Russia] is that it ties Chinese influence in the region, at least to a degree, to Moscow and this helps ensure that Russia at least has some say in Chinese regional policy. Without the SCO Russia would not only be competing with the US for influence in Central Asia, but likely also with China, and this would make Russian influence in the region much harder to preserve.”

Russia has consistently been opposing the creation of a free trade area which will give China an advantage over Russian interests. Also, Russia has been trying to play a more dominating role in shaping the agenda of the SCO which after its establishment has been largely driven by China's initiatives. In 2010, Russia proposed that the SCO must chalk out a road map for the next 10 years which will guide the organization in its vision (Stent A, 2017).

Although SCO has helped in the development of mutual understanding and reduction in the mistrust between the two nations, the two nations have diverse interests and understating about regional and global security issues. This has prevented the two nations to form a formal alliance between them. The deeper cooperation between them is prevented because of these differences which have existed traditionally. Russia and China have been cooperating through arms sales, trade deals, cultural exchanges etc. but they remain traditional rivals in the Eurasian region, from Arctic to the Central Asian Region.

The foremost conflicting interests lies in their relations with the CAS. The issue of energy and bilateral relations with these states have been a cause of tension between the two countries. China wants to change the character of the SCO from a mainly regional security organization to a fully functional organization. China has been importing oil and gas from the CAS and thus it has been

in the process of constructing infrastructure for energy transportation to its western provinces. However, Russia has not been enthusiastic about it, as it does not want another big power in its backyard. There is still some mistrust between the two nations as both have aspirations to become the dominant regional power and increase influence in the CAR. Although Russia joined the OBOR, it does not view positively the growing economic relations of CAS with China.

In the security arena, Russia and China are not natural allies rather it is just a strategic support that they have for each other to expel the US from the region. Russia's close relations with Vietnam is another point of mistrust between the two countries. China and Vietnam are at loggerheads over their territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Russia has been assisting Vietnam in building submarine bases and dockyards and thus China dislikes Russian military relations with Vietnam (Budrich V.B. 2018).

Another significant hindrance is terrorism and the security issues in the region. Since 1996, transnational terrorism and extremism have caused serious problems for member countries. Thus, SCO was being used to cooperate on the issue. After the 9/11 incident and the US war on Afghanistan, SCO was increasingly being viewed as the organization to deal with the terrorism issue regionally. However, the threat still persists. The regional instability and security concerns threaten the Chinese infrastructure projects in the CAR.

In addition to the above, other challenge is creating a common normative identity. This is extremely vital for coordination among member states under an organization. Although functional coordination has been achieved by extending regional cooperation in different sectors like energy, security, humanitarian cooperation, however more is required to balance external influences and values. SCO will be able to construct its own political agenda and identity if there is some normative approach to joint efforts rather than only a pragmatic approach. For example, trying to solve specific issues of security and options for economic benefits from cooperation is pragmatic approach. But to develop SCO as an alternative to the Western bloc, Russia and China must develop cooperation and constructive work on a normative or value basis. Experts like Dadabaev (2016) claim:

“Although confidence-building and creating an identity takes a long time but a common identity could be established on the anti-Western model of social development and anti-colonial model.”

It is obvious that this organization currently lacks the capacity to generate a real new model. It is a difficult task for Russia and China to create a common identity at the SCO. Thus, any expansion in the vision of SCO is risky without no clear set of common identity. A fallout of this has been that Russia and China have differing opinions regarding the inclusion of new members in the SCO. Russia has time and again argued for expansion of the SCO and bring other nations as members of the SCO; however, China has been wanting to work on deepening of cooperation among the existing members. Russian stand on inclusion of new members in the SCO can be understood from the view that this could evolve SCO as a potential anti-Western bloc. In 2017, the SCO expanded its membership when India and Pakistan became full members of SCO. This was a strategically calculated membership expansion, where Russia supported India's membership and China supported its rival force Pakistan to balance each other's strength inside the organization. It indicates a kind of power game between Russia and China. The territorial rivalry between India and Pakistan could potentially complicate the regional cooperation under SCO.

The SCO is a very unique regional organization which combines the strategic interests of two of the most powerful nations of the world. However, the mutual distrust continues to exist between them. Along with this, the members from the CAS also tend to have differences over the path of economic development, common vision regarding the future of SCO, security concerns, etc. Thus, creating a common identity required to form an alternative to Western bloc does not look possible in near future. The member states are not ready to give priority to a mutual defense pact over diplomatic and economic interests. Also, the CAS resent the development of SCO into a supranational organization that would leave little scope for autonomous maneuver.

5.7 Future Prospect for Russia China cooperation in the SCO

SCO is being used by the two nations as one of the institutional tools to consolidate their forces to counter the post-Cold War world led by the US. The emerging global issues and convergent interests have played important role in pushing the two nations to strengthen their cooperation and become strategic partners. Here SCO serves the purpose to provide a regional institution to oppose the US-led global order. At the regional level, SCO has done remarkably well to bring the member states together a create a joint security framework to deal with the security issues and counter them.

The SCO has evolved to provide the two nations a forum to voice their position in the areas of regional politics and security. It is indicative of the Russia-China strategic convergence and deepening of cooperation in the CAR (Laruelle M, 2019). A consensus has been created between them regarding the global structure and the need to transform that. The convergence of mutual interests has pushed them to take a joint stand on many issues of regional integration. However, to transform into a formal alliance it has still very far to go. The traditional rivalry between Russia and China does impact their strategic equations in the CAR. There is a conflict on the issue of being a hegemonic power in the region and the historical lack of solidarity. The different interests and asymmetry in the power structure of the member states of the SCO complicates its institutionalization process.

However, if the problems and mutual distrust is removed, Russia-China partnership in the SCO can develop as a challenge to the other powers. While analyzing the future prospect of the their partnership in the SCO, following points must be looked into:

- Regional cooperation needs resolution of discrepancies in relevant regional and international laws and regulations. It needs to be steadily institutionalized.
- A ‘comprehensive security approach’ is required for regional security cooperation. Also, traditional and non-traditional security threats need to be combined for a successful regional security cooperation.
- Regional economic and cultural cooperation is a precondition for regional security and stability. Also, cultural and economic cooperation provides a solid foundation for political and security cooperation.

5.8 Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS)

The BRICS acronym came into being after the then Goldman Sachs chairman Jim’o Neil coined the term in 2001. He talked about the idea of the four growing economies as promising investment opportunities for the global investors⁶¹. The initials of these four countries - Brazil, Russia, India

⁶¹ Building Better Global Economic BRICS, by Jim O Neil,

URL: <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/archive/archive-pdfs/build-better-brics.pdf>

and China - made the acronym BRIC. In 2009 this group made its arrival as an institution in the global politics. The first full scale diplomatic meeting was held at Yekaterinburg in Russia in 2009 upon Russia's invitation. The head of states of these countries participated at the summit. In 2011, South Africa joined the group at the Sanya summit held in China and thus the acronym changed from BRIC to the BRICS.

The BRICS members are growing economies and thus the discourse at the organization is mostly economic. After the global financial crisis of 2008, the traditional centers of world economy have witnessed slow growth or stagnation which provided the BRICS members to concentrate on the economic issues. The first report by the BRICS in 2012 was about the state of global economy and the economic situation in the BRICS member countries (BRICS Report: 2012)⁶².

Although there is disagreement on the sustainability of the growth of BRICS economies, it seems to be clear that BRICS countries will occupy a leading, if not a dominant, position in the world economy in the years to come (Wansleben 2012:7). But it seems justified to say that at least individual BRICS countries, if not BRICS as an institution, are "part of [the] global geopolitical landscape" (Laidi 2011, 1). Furthermore, BRICS members understand themselves as actors in a world that is "undergoing far-reaching, complex and profound changes" (Joint Statement by the 3rd BRICS Summit 2011).

The BRICS nations constitute for 40% of the world's total population and have 20% share in the global economic output (BRICS Report:2012). However, when we look at their representation at the global economic institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, they are not represented correspondingly. This is one of the reasons that BRICS countries are calling for change in the voting rights. The World Bank and IMF have made some changes after these demands of BRICS, but they do not totally meet their demands.

⁶² The BRICS Report: Executive Summary Ministries of Finance, Central Banks and Economic Institutions of BRICS Nations New Delhi, March 29, 2012

URL: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/120329-brics-report-summary.html>

5.8.1 Russia and BRICS

It was surprising to categorize Russia as a growing economy in the BRICS. Russia was a world power prior to the disintegration of the erstwhile USSR. Compared to the other members of the BRICS the advancement that Russia had experienced in the Cold War was second only to the US. The living standard, industrial and technological advancement, the level of education and economic development in the Cold War was highly developed and thus joining a group of developing nations came as a surprise (Roberts C, 2018).

It was an enormous challenge for Russia to come to terms with the huge decline in its significance after the disintegration of the erstwhile USSR. Although it was recognized as the successor of the USSR at the UNSC, its political influences have decreased. After the Cold War, Russia has been actively trying to change the unilateral global order. Russia wants to be a part of the international system where it will be a rule maker.

5.8.2 Russia's Great Power Politics and the BRICS

When President Putin took over as President, Russia started to make a comeback on the global scene. Putin pursued a sound financial policy to deal with the severe economic crisis that the country had been facing since the early 1990s. This led to improvement in basic conditions in Russia and made some room for it to focus on its international image.

Putin's foreign policy has aimed at bringing Russia back to the global stage and create a multipolar world order (Lubina M, 2017). Russia's emphasis of turning the BRICS from an economic union to a political organization can be understood from this perspective. Russia has been a leading proponent of transforming the BRICS from an instrument to promote investment strategy into a recognized coalition of emerging global powers having significant say on global and regional issues.

In June 2007, Russian President Putin called for the creation of a new global economic order where regional economic institutions will have a greater say and having other currencies as an alternative

to the US dollar and Euro⁶³. He called for ending the western dominance over the global economic structure which he criticized as archaic and undemocratic. Russian officials and ministers have been calling for this systemic change at every international platform.

Among all the BRICS members Russia is the most eager to maximize the potential of BRICS as an international organization. BRICS is central to the Russian multi-vector foreign policy which is not dependent only on the Western dominated international institutions. In 2013, President Putin called for transforming BRICS into a mechanism for strategic cooperation and expand the dialogue process from limited number of issues. It is mentioned the Concept of Participation of the Russian Federation in BRICS. Identifying the organization as a ‘key long-term foreign policy vector’ for Russian policy, it listed the strategic objectives of the country in BRICS as follows (Lo Bobo , 2016):

- Reform of international monetary and financial system to facilitate economic growth of Russia.
- To progressively expand the foreign policy cooperation with the BRICS partners.
- Use BRICS participation to enhance the multi-vector character of Russian foreign policy and strengthen international positions of the country.
- Through BRICS, promote bilateral relations with member states.
- To widen the Russian cultural presence in the world.

At the Ufa Summit in 2015, significant effort was put in by Russia which reflects in the number initiatives that were adopted at the Summit. The most important being the setting up of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA). The Ufa declaration also mentioned about strategy for interbank cooperation, strategy for economic partnership, the business council, anti-corruption cooperation and a network University. Although

⁶³ Russia calls for new economic world order By Oleg Shchedrov, URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-forum-putin-idUSL1010473120070610>

the member states did not opt for a bureaucratic structure for functioning of the BRICS, they agreed to ‘better coordinate the cooperation’ and work for creating a virtual secretariat⁶⁴.

Russia’s eagerness to identify with the BRICS can be understood if we take a closer look at the political leadership in Russia (Huasheng, Z 2015). BRICS not only provides better prospect for improving its image on a global level, it also is helpful domestically. BRICS provides a positive image to Russia as belonging to a group of countries which have great global potential. Also, from the point of view of countering the dominance of the West, the diverse membership of the organization will be helpful. It is among the very few global organizations not dominated by the West which can explain the reason why Russia is attracted towards it. Being a non-Western structure, it provides Russia an opportunity to play a leading role.

BRICS also has other dividends for Moscow. Russian influence at the BRICS is greater than any other international platform, which also includes the UNSC. Being the main player in BRICS gives it an opportunity to decide on the agenda, shape the operating procedures and have influence over the policy outcomes.

Also, Russia taking the leadership role in the BRICS does not threaten other members who appear happy to let it assume that role. Chinese concerns lie somewhere else. Indian status at the BRICS has been deliberately kept low owing to its strategic concerns to keep the partnership with the US intact. The geographical constraints and economic weakness of South Africa limit its influence.

BRICS grouping promises a success by association. Co-leadership with China in BRICS provides Russia the heft to gain dynamism in the international politics (Nojonen M, 2016). It will help Russia to counter the narrative of the West to internationally isolate it after the Crimean crisis. It will help Russia to showcase to the international and its own citizens that it shares bonhomie with the rising powers of the world, sharing the same platform on global economic issues. In this view, BRICS has emerged as a symbol of Russian defiance, that it is unto the West to adapt to the new world order where Russia has an influential place.

⁶⁴ VII BRICS Summit: 2015 Ufa Declaration Ufa, Russia, July 9, 2015

URL: http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-ufa-declaration_en.html

Also, BRICS is being viewed by Russia as a driver for its economic development. After the economic sanctions and restrictions on trade were put on Russia following its integration of Crimea, BRICS provides an opportunity through its initiatives like the NDB. It will help Russia to facilitate large scale investment in its territory and make up for the space left empty by the European companies and investors.

BRICS symbolizes a form of ‘south-south’ cooperation and Russia sees a potential here which is geopolitical. Economy is one of the important concerns for Russia here, but a post-American global order is a timeless project for Russia where BRICS can play very important role.

5.8.3 Russia and BRICS: Ambitions for a multipolar world order

Russia’s motivation to actively promote BRICS can be understood as its effort to push for an anti-Western coalition. It wants to use the BRICS to counter the US and create a new multipolar world order with Russia as one the leading centers in the global power structure. However, the economic situation of Russia and Chinese vision of the global order pose significant questions regarding the global and regional ambitions of Russia, including in the BRICS structure.

The deteriorating economic and financial structure of Russia do not provide solid foundation to its ambition of Great Power status. It limits the diversification and modernization of the economy which are important to project influence on the international level. This has led to questioning of inclusion of Russia in the category of ‘emerging powers’ since it has not been able to reverse its economic and financial decline and this has greatly reduced its power status.

The Russian foreign policy expert Dmitry Trenin argued in 2002 that Russia is on the ‘border between geopolitics and globalization’, but later on he conceded that Russian foreign policy had returned to hard core politic (Trenin D, 2012). This can be understood in the context of Russia gradually withdrawing from a closer relationship from the US and the West. Russian participation in the BRICS also indicates that its geopolitical interests can be achieved by band wagoning with the regional powers than by integrating with the unilateral and hegemonic US. The Munich Security Conference speech by the President Putin in 2007 underlines this anti-Western agenda⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, Feb 10, 2007.

Under the President Dmitry Medvedev, for a brief period Russia tried for a reset in its ties with the West by developing numerous parallel partnerships which included countries like China, the US and multilateral organizations like the EU. The effort was modernization of Russian economy and administration. However, this had limited success as the political interests of the ruling elite in Russia was not in favor of any modernization except in the technical domain. Thus, the diversification of the economy to change the resource-based economy, dependent on the exports of raw materials and energy trade, could not materialize. Interventions from the administration to improve the economic governance and making it transparent while moving towards a rule of law-based system eventually failed. Efforts to improve conditions for foreign investment also was implemented half-heartedly.

In 2012, when President Putin returned to become President again, it was expected that Russia would be following a policy of economic sovereignty and greater role of state in the national economy. It was considered to be the only way to serve the political and security interests of the country. Closer ties with the West were discouraged by the state as it could undermine the system and destabilize the regime like the ‘color revolution’ in the Russia’s ‘near abroad’.

In the subsequent years the Crimean crisis, economic sanctions imposed by the West on the Russian companies and Russian counter sanctions led to strengthening of this process when it was extended to sectors like agriculture. Fall in the oil and gas prices has further declined the Economy of Russia as it depends for more than 50% on the income from the energy exports (Swaine M. 2018). For the Russian claim to Great Power status, it is very important to have a sound and strong economy.

To deal with the consequences following the Crimean crisis in 2014, Russia went on to adopt certain strategies to shield its economy from the Western influence and strengthen its policy of economic sovereignty:

- It started following a policy of pivot to Asian countries and especially towards China.
- Increasing economic integration with the OPEC members and the oil producing states like Saudi Arabia with an aim to stabilize the world oil prices

URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

- To check the outward flow of the capital, Russia embarked on a policy to ‘re-nationalize’ the strategic sectors of the economy
- Started cooperating with other countries to encourage currency swap in bilateral trade deals. Its aim is ‘de-dollarization’ and develops payment system to replace the international SWIFT banking system. In this context BRICS could be extremely helpful to bring into existence an alternate international banking structure.

However, many experts on Russian economy are of the view that such policies can only be partially successful and only to a limited extent as association with non-Western countries could only compensate for the economic sanctions and financial losses. But for now, the energy trade is very much dependent on the European customers. Thus, eventually Russia will have to go for economic modernization and would have to work on improving its relations with the West. Such recommendations however do not find recipients in the Russian Foreign policy circle (Koshkin P, 2015). Since the Russian economy has been on the path of stabilization after increase in economic relations with China, Russia does not consider reopening of its territory for Western influence a worthwhile option.

Russian ambition to use the framework of BRICS for the revival of its economy can be understood, as it cannot deal with the present conditions on its own. Under the present reality Russian quest to be regarded as a Great Power is hard to sell as it lacks a strong economic base to support this. The Great power thinking of Russia originates from its ambitions to create a multipolar global order and its resistance to a hegemon dominated unilateral global order. It has stimulated the Russian Foreign Policy to pivot towards the non-Western partners and its quest to reshape the global order. Thus, to re-emerge as a Great Power on the global stage and to become one of the key centers of power in the global order, Russia is looking to strengthen its ties with the states which are considered to be emerging economies (Lukyanov F 2016).

This vision is reflected in Russia’s actions to create its own zone of special influence in its ‘near abroad’ and also its pursuit for seeking equal status with other powers. Thus, a conflicting situation is always palpable in the ‘shared neighborhood’ where the countries between the European Union and Russia are located, Crimean crisis can be viewed as one of the ramifications of such contested geopolitical spaces.

BRICS as a regional economic framework has only been able to create an ‘illusion of convergence’ as Sino-Russian interests are different here and a parallel power game is being played by the two nations with their diverging agendas. The ongoing conflict between Russia and the West has made it an urgent task for Russia to seek regional partners and non-Western allies. This is underlined in its strategic ‘pivot to Asia’ policy and building strategic ties with China, which has been its traditional rival. This has particularly changed the Russian policy of seeking integration with a Greater Europe. Now Russia has eyes on ‘Greater Eurasia’ where Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) would be the central building blocks (Simes D, 2019).

To reshape the global order, Russia’s main thrust has been to promote the strategic partnership with China. This has also been favored by the Russian political regimes to compensate for the economic and financial effects of sanction imposed by the West and to counter the underlying power shifts. The ambition for Great Power status finds both an opportunity and a major challenge from the China’s project for OBOR. In this respect, the BRICS has played comparatively limited role in deepening Russia’s ties with China. The Russian global agenda has not found much support inside the framework of BRICS, since Chinese interests are slightly different than Russia when it comes to maintaining relations with the West. China has to maintain its relations with the West even when it opposes the US hegemony and seeks non-interference by the West in its internal politics.

While Russian agenda has been completely about anti-Western and anti-American global order. Chinese challenge to the Western dominated financial institution like the IMF and the World Bank (WB) has been in the form of setting up of parallel institutions like the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), but at the same time it seeks more say or wants more influence within the IMF and the WB. China wants these institutions to recognize a stronger China rather than totally cut off from these institutional frameworks. In this respect, the BRICS creates just an ‘illusion of convergence’ between Russia and China as Bobo Lo (2015) argues. To forward the geopolitical ambition of Russia, among all the BRICS members only India could play a substantial role, but its power game is complicated because of the US and China. All these indicate that Russian claims for Great Power status is not finding many takers in the existing situations and it is a secondary player in the South-West Asia as of now.

The strategic partnership with China, however, has brought limited success financially and economically for Russia. Moscow also feels threatened by the rising economic and financial integration of China with the CAS. This has led Russia to change its focus from the BRICS to the consolidation and development of the EAEU. Here the Russia-China partnership is limited and free trade deal between the two is not on the anvil. Also, there is a fear among some sections of the Russian Foreign policy experts that Chinese rise in the region might reduce Russia to a junior partner in the bilateral relations, making it asymmetric in nature (Lukin A, 2016). Thus, Russian approach has been in the last few years to hedge and balance the Chinese influence in the geopolitical space spanning the Post-Soviet states, especially through multilateral groupings where China is not a member. The rise in the preponderance of China economically in the CAR causes asymmetry in the power relationship between the two nations. Thus, the China dominated SCO finds its counterbalance in the CSTO and EAEU which are mainly security and economic groupings respectively.

In this context BRICS is only one of the several different organizations where the two nations are members, and which could be used to promote their respective strategic interests and agenda. Thus, BRICS has not been very effective in pushing for the anti-western agenda of Russia, although Moscow sometimes uses it to challenge the existing global financial structure. It has only been successful in a limited way. The Russia-China strategic partnership is more prominent in other multilateral institutions like the SCO, UN and the EAEU. Also, the economic and financial vision of BRICS as the alternate for emerging economies has not been fully realized. Russian economy is on its path of recovery with Chinese assistance. However, it will have to choose the path of economic modernization and must improve its relations with the West. To reclaim its superpower status, Russia's relations with China is crucial. Russia understands that it will have to maintain strategic patience and rebuild on its resources to balance out the rising Chinese economic and financial presence on the global level. Multilateral frameworks, like BRICS, have only a limited practical value in Moscow's views and are mainly useful in projecting an image of Russia as a global power (Mattlin M, 2017). In this respect, BRICS summits are mainly a public relations exercise.

5.9 China and BRICS

China identifies BRICS as an opportunity for strategic cooperation with emerging powers. In the last two decades, China has increasingly been making efforts to gain a stronger voice in international organizations. For many years, the international attention was on the meteoric growth of Chinese economy. However, as a regional and global power China has built its standing in the international comity. Chinese policy of ‘peaceful rise’ emphasizes the peaceful and benevolent character of China’s development. Gradually China’s vision for becoming a regional and global power has shifted the global attention towards China.

Chinese association to the ‘club of rising regional powers’ emphasizes its willingness to forge alliances that would facilitate China in its multilateral negotiations. The Chinese vision of creating a counterweight to the unilateral International system dominated by the US calls for it to be voice of the emerging nations and thus we find China pulling the strings among the BRICS members. It accounts for 85% of the total trade within the BRICS thus driving the economic agenda of the group. The ‘going out’ strategy of the Chinese companies have pushed for greater investment and greater interests in the global market (Person R, 2015). China has thus successfully adopted the role of a key player in the BRICS. However, the geopolitical conflict with India and Russia undermines the Chinese interests at the institution. Its role in the BRICS is being viewed with skepticism by other BRICS members. The Chinese geo-strategic initiatives in the form of AIIB, OBOR, and NDB are manifestations of the economic and strategic ambitions of China.

5.9.1 China and unipolarity: Structural incentives for Cooperation

Many international relations scholars found it difficult to predict the dynamics of international relations after the end of the Cold War and emergence of a unipolar global order. A section of these scholars began to use the balance of power theory and the tenets of structural realism to understand and analyze the international dynamics and they predicted that unipolarity would not be last long. This analysis was based on their theory that new powers would emerge to balance the dominance of the US and multipolarity would soon replace the unipolar international structure. However, after few years in late 1990s, when the international system remained unipolar, the scholars came up with new theory, called the theory of unipolar stability. This theory explained the lack of balancing and the implications of a unipolar distribution of power on global politics.

According to this theory, the power of the Unipole prevents other states to gain more power and limits them. At the same time the Unipole remains free from constraints. The massive power of the Unipole is so much that even then combined efforts of other major powers would be unable to challenge the Unipole. Thus, the act of balancing is not useful here and may also turn out to be counterproductive, as the attempt to counter the Unipole might lead it to retaliate. Thus, the dominant state is so powerful that the other states find it more useful to cooperate with it rather than antagonize it. The theory explains the structural constraints on other states potential strategic choices given the dominance of one major power in the international system (Blank S, 2015).

At the same time, the Unipole may perceive relatively minor challenges as particularly threatening. Goldstein persuasively argues that in response to a rising power, the Unipole "has strong incentives to remain vigilant against this possibility of the rise of a potential peer competitor." Applying this argument to the rise of China, he suggests: "Unipolarity provides strong incentives for the United States to pay close attention to increases in China's capabilities inasmuch as it is one of a small handful of states that may have the necessary ingredients to emerge one day as a peer competitor; arguably it is the leading candidate for this role." Structural constraints should be especially tight for a rising power as the Unipole is likely to be very sensitive to changes in relative power and likely to be vigilant in responding to potential competitors, hoping to eliminate them before they become legitimate challengers (Chan M, 2013).

Chinese analysts recognize the structural constraints of unipolarity. According to Peking University Professor Zhu Feng (2011),

"The unipolar American system' and ongoing U.S. efforts to make its hegemonic position 'unchallengeable' have reduced China's balancing options and compelled China to bandwagon with the United States."

Chinese experts also explicitly recognize the added difficulty of being a rising power in a unipolar world. Jia Qingguo (2010) observes,

"A unipolar system poses the greatest challenges for a rising power."

5.9.2 China, BRICS and International order

The history of rising powers challenging the international order and waging wars has given rise to an assumption that history will repeat itself. This assumption is being made in the context of emergence of China and other new powers in the international system (Gelbraa V, 2011). In this scenario, China's increased cooperation within BRICS has raised questions regarding its agenda

and whether it is to disrupt and challenge the current international structure. However, China has tried to reform the international structure by accepting the order and trying to reform the issues from the inside of international order.

Although China has expressed displeasure with some of the aspects of the existing international order, Chinese actions do not suggest any grandiose plan to overthrow the Order. Within BRICS, China has tried to undermine the US dollar as the reserve currency and called for making the international order fair, representative and more inclusive. This was met with the West willingness to accommodate the demands made by the BRICS. This indicates the limited efforts by the BRICS as a group to undermine the existing international order and rather act as responsible stakeholders to protect it. The cooperative behavior of China and its acceptance of the international order might also be a short-term plan to make space for China to get stronger and once it does there is a possibility that it will be in a position to challenge and replace the existing international order with a new one suiting its own interests.

Chinese government officials and experts have accepted the existing international order, decided to participate in it, and recognized that China has benefitted from this participation (Korolev A, 2014).

One of the most prominent Chinese criticism of the existing international order is that after the end of the World War II, the Western powers set up the international order to suit their own interests and the concerns and needs of China and other developing countries was not taken into account. Also, in the current scenario, the international institutions have not yet evolved to accommodate the rising economies within those institutions giving them greater voice and influence. For example, despite the Chinese economy being larger than that of France and Britain, their voting rights are more than China's at the IMF and the World Bank (Simes D.K. 2019). Thus, China finds it highly problematic and unjust treatment and thus criticizes the international order for not being representative. In the context of emerging new challenges and threats in the globalized world, many argue that the existing international institutions do not reflect the current reality and thus need to be reformed. The criticism is also about the rising gap in the North-South and the international order is focused on serving the interests of the West and leaving the developing and poor countries behind.

China often criticizes certain US behavior which it finds reflective of the Western-led order. For example, US interference in the domestic affairs of China and other countries is often criticized by Chinese officials and experts (Shambaugh D, 2017). In case of Taiwan, China has been very much vocal about it considers it an internal issue and the American support for Taiwan and other separatist movements is a deliberate attempt by the US to export democracy and western values and settling disputes by using force. From this perspective one can understand the Chinese support to other countries in criticizing the existing international financial system which lacks regulation, information and supervision. The global economic crisis has also put in open the Chinese discomfort of holding enormous amount of dollar-denominated assets and the vulnerability arising out of it in a condition of global economic crisis.

5.9.3 China's economy and BRICS

China's economic policies in last few decades have been able to pull out its people from absolute poverty and has helped China to secure its place among the leaders of the global community if measured by the sheer size of economy. However, the rapid growth that China has its negative aspects as well. Apart from the massive inter-regional disparities within the country, the widening rural-urban gap, the brunt of the lopsided economic growth has been faced by the environment. The Chinese economic development model is highly unsustainable in terms of its environmental impact (Ryan K, 2015). In the last few years this malice has been recognized and the Chinese government has come up with its 'green development' model which has been declared as a part of its national development strategy. The reforms have also directed to change the economic pattern from being labor intensive and environmentally damaging to targeting for moderate economic growth and promoting domestics consumption and the service sector.

China has used the regular BRICS Summits and its permanent working groups to achieve its geopolitical objectives. It has been seen that the ability of the BRICS to shape economic policies is at its best whenever Chinese interests are involved. China has been using the platform of BRICS as a stepping-stone for its move towards the global leadership role. BRICS provides China a regional platform to assume leadership role which it wants to translate at the global level. China has been calling for stricter regulation of the global financial structures. It rallied for the IMF to carry out the governance reforms and corresponding quotas. Through coordination in the Euro

Crisis of 2012, when China was prepared to tie up an IMF bailout package that would involve BRICS nations alone, Beijing contributed 70 billion U.S. dollars (China's share was to be 43 billion U.S. dollars) (Wang W, 2018). So, there are a few examples of firm, coordinated action under the leadership of the BRICS countries.

China and the BRICS have taken up the role of the 'lawyers of the south' when they represent the demands of the developing world. This can be seen from the demand for 'common but differentiated responsibility' (CBDR) in the context of the climate change while emphasizing the historical role played by the developed countries in polluting the environment and their responsibility towards the international community to share advanced technology to mitigate the impact of the climate change. However, the underlying socio-economic conditions among the member states differ as is their different roles within different regional groupings and varying abilities to shape the global politics. The BRICS as a group has come out strongest when there is an issue revolving around Chinese interests. This was visible when the Chinese currency Renminbi was to be internationalized which gained its first partial success when it joined the basket of currencies used by the IMF in 2015.

To secure its geopolitical and geo-economic interests China has been increasingly working to project itself as the leader the Global South, especially when it has to counter the influence of the US (Bowen A.S. 2016). The global attention that BRICS receives has been effectively used by China to have greater say and louder voice on debates on global issues and casting of votes in international organizations.

5.9.4 China and BRICS in China's Foreign Policy

Among the preference given by the Chinese government to the multilateral BRICS occupies a secondary position. This is because of the reason that Chinese preoccupations lie elsewhere. China's preference for bilateral diplomacy also explains this. The strategic development in the East Asian region, its relations with the US, and the ongoing economic modernization are some of the concerns that have been given priority by the Chinese policy makers and BRICS does not help in any of the above-mentioned concerns.

In the last few decades China has shown greater interests towards multilateralism. China has been actively engaged at the UNSC, has been one of the most important players in the regional security

organization SCO, the Asia Pacific Economic Council and the East Asian Summit. However, the interests at these organizations vary according to Beijing's regional and global concerns. But this activism indicates the Chinese desire to project the country as a good regional and global actor (Skak M, 2015).

In this context BRICS appears as only one among the diverse organizations where China is a member. Also, the significance attached to the BRICS is less than that of the above-mentioned organizations. Here it is different than Russian approach to the BRICS which wants to promote itself as influential on the international level. China in fact wants to counter the existing view and portrays that its bandwagons on global public goods. China wants to change the view in the West that it has limited capacity to contribute at the multilateral forums.

It is hard to find the Chinese media and the government criticizing the BRICS which is mainly due to the fact that China has been the main driver of the recent initiatives that BRICS has taken such as the New Development Bank, and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement of 100 billion U.S. dollars. However, after the initiation of the OBOR project and the setting up of the AIIB, Beijing has downplayed the role of BRICS in securing its strategic interests. Compared to China's role in the G20 and the regional organizations like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the BRICS has been lagging behind.

There are many reasons behind this lack in the interest:

- The OBOR project and the AIIB allow more control and serve directly to achieve China's geo-strategic goals in the region. Also, these projects allow more central role for China compared to the alliance forged under the BRICS.
- Also, China wants to concentrate more on the regional institutions where the members are geographically closer rather than oceans apart like in case of BRICS, South Africa does not have a semblance for China's direct regional strategic interests.
- China's efforts are towards creating a stable environment around itself which will help it achieve its long-term goals.
- Also, since the BRICS members are also the members of G20, whose functions are also economic, the importance given by China to the G 20 grouping can be understood.

There are many obstacles in the path of the BRICS to achieve greater integration. The most important being the economic weakness of Russia, Brazil and South Africa. Other factors include that Foreign policy moves adopted by Russia like in Crimea, leading to its international isolation. The economic sanctions imposed on Russia also create hindrance for China to project the BRICS as an effective regional economic grouping. The political chaos in Brazil and the dysfunctional state in South Africa also are some of the factors which stand in the way of intensifying the significance of BRICS.

However, China is going to hold on to the membership of the BRICS as Beijing believes that initiative at such regional groups where the partnership is unequal tend to provide positive result. Also, the strategic expansion and the success of BRICS largely depend on the initiatives led by China. As China is expanding its international ties and relations with other non-regional states, common interests may make way for the agenda and may produce a positive outcome.

China has other purposes as well behind acting as a leading power among the BRICS members (Blagov S, 2017). Beijing does not want to antagonize Russia as it understands the value President Putin attaches to the organization. Also, in the context of deterioration in the Russia and US relations this assumes significance for China. Since Russia and China have elevated their relations to Strategic partnership it is important to support this through multilateral regional organizations as well. It is also a way of flattering to the Russian sensibilities as President Putin considers BRICS as his own personal achievement.

BRICS is a framework for Russia to project itself as a Great Power and China wants to express support for Russian self-image. It also helps their bilateral partnership which has been described by the two nations as ‘Comprehensive Strategic partnership of Coordination’.

However Chinese interests in the BRICS is not only about economy and good relations with Russia, but also to give a message for the West to be more responsive towards Chinese concerns at international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. China, unlike Russia, wants to have greater say on global issues while not wanting to radically transform the global power structure. Chinese involvement in BRICS and other regional organization is indicative of its ambitions; if West does not pay heed to its concerns it would go for regional multilateral institutions and leverage them to secure its global ambitions.

The Chinese interests in the BRICS is also driven by its regional development agenda (Kynge J 2015). Although here OBOR is the core of this agenda but the BRICS can also help in an effective manner. The NDB has been financing the regional infrastructure projects despite having a modest funding base. Also, the political dimension cannot be neglected. Participation in the BRICS is also important to secure the regional stability especially in the CAR since securing cooperation from the emerging economies can always help to do that.

5.10 Russia-China Conflict possibility and New world order

Sino-Russian relations is underlined by frictions in many areas. The misgivings in the relationship is rooted in the nineteenth century when Russia encroached the Chinese territory and the Chinese claims of unfair treatment by Russia. During the cold war period China felt betrayed when Russia abandoned the Sino-Soviet alliance, the border war on 1969, and military confrontation between the two countries in the 1970s and early 1980s.

After the Cold war the relations have considerably improved but there was a minor setback when Russia moved quickly to restore its ties with the US after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Also, after the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), China was disappointed with the mild response from Russia. Thus, from Chinese perspective one can feel repeatedly abandoned by Russia as a response to the international events.

The Chinese policymakers also complain of the delays and tough bargaining over the weapons deal with Russia and its plans to construct an oil pipeline exclusively for China. The rise of China as economic giant also makes Russia apprehensive of its role as a provider of raw materials and nothing more. The underlying tensions in the Sino-Russian partnership however have not prevented the development of the BRIC grouping but growing economic asymmetry with limited trust might limit the real potential of the BRICS.

The differences between the Russian and Chinese approach and value attached to it emanates from their contrasting perceptions of the US-led global order (Amirov V.B 2018). The Russian ruling regime has major negative views about it. In the Russian political narrative, in the post-Cold War era, the US has led the agenda to impoverish Russia and reduce its power status and exploit its geopolitical and economic concerns. It is of the view that the existing international structure reflects this inequity and deprive Russia of its rightful status in the global power politics.

Thus, for Russia, BRICS is a framework which provides it a foundation for a new global Order where it has the most prominent role to play and US no longer is the sole dominant power. It represents a form of governance which has a concert of global power and immense importance is given to sovereign norms and prerogatives. It limits the Western liberal internationalism and thus BRICS provides Russia an opportunity to overturn the current global Order.

Chinese perspective on BRICS and its purposes are not so radical, since the US leadership of the global Order has benefitted China enormously in the last two decades (Huafei Q, 2019). This has transformed the status of China from an impoverished nation to the next superpower in waiting. The trade liberalization has benefitted Chinese economy in so many ways that what once was a regional backwater has now earned its seat in the group of big powers. Thus, Chinese economic interests do not want destruction of the liberal global order, though it certainly wants reforms to benefit its emerging status.

China coordinates with Russia as long as it wants to counter the dominance of the US and to challenge the liberal universalism. However, China does not share the vision of a global Order on the lines of which envisaged by Russia. Probably Chinese leaders recognize the fact that one could secure its interests by playing not the role of a hegemon, it rather prefers to be the main benefactor from the Hegemonic policies of the US (Bloom O, 2014). Seeking the role of the global hegemon brings with itself the risks of provoking envy, suspicion and anxiety among other nations and can cause instability. Also, China needs to focus on its internal security threats, which leaves limited resources at its disposal to play the role of a hegemon. The lack of global experience and backwardness in many aspects restrict China's ability to assume this leadership role at the global level.

Most fundamental to this difference in ambitions at the BRICS is related to their vision of a new world order (Lo Bobo 2020). Since President Putin aspires for a tripolar world order where Russia, China and the US are the three major centers of power, China does not share this view. China sees US as its only true global counterpart. Thus, it can be said that Russia can be a partner to China but not an 'equal partner' like the way it can be only one of many partners and not 'the partner'.

While mitigating these challenges the BRICS provides a structure where it allows the member states to work on their common interests which is to restrain the US and change the rules of global governance. The issue is that the underlying differences among them is not conducive for decision-

making. To make a sustainable discourse and to develop as an effective multilateral organization it is imperative that BRICS members do not downplay the differences and work on it. Thus, there is a dilemma among the members states that bringing their bilateral disputes on the BRICS platform might risk the existing solidarity among them which is extremely important to project its public unity.

Here also the risks which Russia and China face are different. For Russia the main issue is that differences among members will undermine the BRICS status as a group of rising non-Western economies and prevent the eventual emergence of a multipolar global order. Bringing such issues where there are substantial differences among the member states will risk the bonhomie generated over economic issues (Brooke J 2018). Thus, it will threaten the projection of BRICS as a leverage against the West.

For China, the priority is to avoid confrontation with the West. China wants to maintain cooperative relations with the US. The bilateral relations between US and China may have serious disagreements; however, China does not desire to have total rupture in their relations like the Russia has done with the US. Thus, it is important for China not to project the image of BRICS as an anti-Western coalition which is why China wants to raise development issues over geopolitical issues on BRICS platform unlike Russia. This approach serves two purposes, first being less provocative and second it complements the regional strategy of China in Eurasia where its priorities are mostly economic and developing infrastructure.

The most visible difference between Russia and China in their interests at BRICS reflect in the financial resources they have put in the organization (Song S 2019). Undoubtedly China is the Banker of the BRICS. Without its economic and financial leadership and funding it would not have been possible for BRICS to take up the development agenda. The setting up of the NDB and the CRA was possible because China has underwritten their operations. This is indicative of the implicit truth that BRICS without China does not have many resources to pledge for regional development. Being the economic leader at the forum, China is the major force to decide which agenda to take up and what priorities to be followed, where to invest and also the nature of public pronouncements.

Russia on the other hand is more of a supplicant in the development agenda of the BRICS. President Putin has been mostly interested in promoting funding for those projects which

contribute to Russian infrastructural development especially in the regions like the Far East and the Siberian provinces (Lukin A 2016). Although Russia has projected itself as an international donor in the BRICS but after the economic sanctions and less investment from the European nations, Russia has been taking this approach of infrastructural development more visibly. The focus on its eastern borders is also one of the consequences of these sanctions by the West. Russia also wants to aim for Chinese funding for its national projects through Chinese-led AIIB and the Silk Road Fund.

It is not a new phenomenon for Russia to seek investment from China. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the European countries have been the major investors in Russia and there was an asymmetry in that kind of cooperation which prior to the Crimean crisis survived many political downturns and financial crisis. The economic issues have geopolitical implications as well. Russia, even though it does not accept publicly, is wary of the growing imbalance with China. It is a matter of concern for Russia about the level of strategic dependence and economic reliance on China. On one hand the partnership with China is crucial for reshaping of the global Order, but it is also apprehensive of the fact that excessive reliance on China might lead Beijing to dictate the terms of economic cooperation between them. Russia need Chinese support to legitimize its standing on the global platform while it is also apprehensive that increasing Chinese economic expansion will reduce Moscow's influence in the CAR and across the entire post-Soviet space.

Thus, BRICS could be helpful in mediating these concerns like the SCO has been in the security area. The two nations are of the view that the Russia's Eurasian Economic Union project and the OBOR project of China are complementary in nature (Kuchins 2016). However, the geopolitical anxieties regarding Chinese ambitions in the region will not die down among the Russian political elite. China's ambition to emerge as the global leader could undermine the basis for accommodation in the Eurasian space which consists of Russian geopolitical leadership and economic primacy of China.

5.11 Sino-Russian Strategic accommodation and BRICS

BRICS since its inception may not boast of a landmark achievement at this stage. BRICS is a platform where for Russia and China articulate their priority rather than achieve any breakthrough

moments. It is too early to say that BRICS symbolizes the emergence of a new coalition with strategic and normative consensus.

From economic point of view it is apparent that there is no significant drive within the BRICS members to pose a challenge to the West or the West-dominated IMF and WB. Also projecting BRICS as an alternative world order is far away from reality where only Russia has such ambitions. China's stand is that BRICS can complement the existing international structures but not take their place.

Also, Chinese interests in the BRICS is limited. This is primarily because China believes in creating its own mechanisms for its geo-strategic interests owing to its vast economic and financial strength. Also, China has put greater stakes in other multi-lateral institutions like the G20, APEC etc. and increasing its influence in the US-dominated institutions. If one goes by the amount Chinese promised contribution to the NDB, it is less than the loans and financial assistance it has promised to its neighboring Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan.

Also, from the actions taken by the China it can be said that Beijing does not want to make BRICS its primary focus for a model of global governance. It does not believe that the BRICS can fill up the regional economic space. The fact that China went for setting up of AIIB and the OBOR is indicative of its little faith in the efficacy of BRICS. The Russian agenda of driving the group in an anti-US direction has not found positive response from China, as any strategic confrontation with the US is not positive for the Chinese economy. Thus, Chinese vision of BRICS is mostly about regional and international economic development and not the creation of a geopolitical identity. This orientation has also been supported by other BRICS members except Russia.

The proponents of the view that the BRICS is an engine of development projects show the NDB and the CRA as examples to support their argument (Peterson A 2018). However, compared to the investment China has made in the OBOR and AIIB, its financial commitment in BRICS is nominal. This raises the question of whether the BRICS could function as new kind of development agency in the long term and expand its future operations. For it to function properly, NDB and the CRA need to increase their level of funding. Also, the priorities need to be clearly marked out about where the development funds are to be invested.

The most successful achievement of the BRICS as a regional framework has been in the area of Sino-Russian bilateral relations. Although the difference between the two countries preceded their

participation as BRICS members, they have been able to contain their differences and tried to accommodate each other concerns on most issues (Arbatov A 2018) The Crimean crisis did cause tension in the Chinese political circles and the Russian political leadership was disappointed with the low level of investment by China in Russia. However, Russia considers this far less important than the facade of strategic unity which it wants to project within the BRICS. The Russia-China convergence of interests is being reinforced under the aegis of BRICS with a narrative of emergence of the non-West countries. Russia wants to present this unity to the international community and legitimizes the platform as an alternate model for global Order.

This strategy has found support from the Russian defense experts as the Sino-Russian strategic axis has become a topic of debate there. One section of the experts has been calling to desist from deeper defense cooperation as the real threat in the future is China and it needs to be contained. For Russia, the intimacy of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is of utmost importance as it improves its prospects for bypassing the Western economic sanctions over Crimea. China meanwhile is going with the flow as a disruptive Russia is not desirable and thus it promotes active cooperation with Kremlin.

5.12 Summary

The BRICS and the SCO are here to stay and may even grow. The two groupings have promoted the Russia-China convergence in the club of rising economies. They have helped China to promote its interests in the post-Soviet Eurasian space at the expense of Russia under the garb of ‘win-win’ diplomacy. The two institutions also provide platforms to promote their ‘near identical’ stand on global issues and shared vision of an equitable global Order. However, if analyzed properly one can find that Russia and China have been pursuing their separate national agenda with the help of these institutions. Since the two nations have a very different world view and the aspirations for their respective places, the bilateral cooperation is directed by their specific national and strategic interests and not because of a deeper like-minded vision of the future world Order.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Russia-China strategic partnership has become one of the most discussed issue in the contemporary international politics. The two nations have emphasized that the comprehensive strategic partnership is aimed at the promotion of a new international relations based on mutual respect, fairness and justice. The partnership is aimed at promotion of new era and a step towards the win-win cooperation. The cooperation between the two nations is mutually beneficial. The two nations are also critical of the existing international order. The ongoing tensions between China and the USA and the spiraling crisis in the Russia-US relations along with the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic have led to a renewed focus on the Russia-China Strategic partnership.

Against this background, this thesis titled “Russia-China Strategic Partnership, 2001-2017” examines the nature and different aspects of Strategic partnership between the two countries until 2017. The study tries to answer the questions which has been raised, on what is the nature of Strategic partnership between Russia and China and how it evolved in the post-cold war period? The study also probes into the factors which are responsible for Russia and China sharing a geopolitical alignment? How does Russia envision the Sino-Russian partnership within the context of Great Power relations? The study also examines the hindrances which undermine this partnership. The study also explains how a multipolar global order provides a strategic opportunity for a cohesive Russia China partnership. The study also examines what are the implications of this partnership on the security and stability of the region? Based on the above research questions, the study has tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The strategic partnership between Russia and China reflects new geopolitics characterized by flexible and opportunistic arrangements.

The Russia-China strategic partnership is an example of pragmatic interests-based relationship. The bilateral relations between the two nations have been strengthened by shared values and common worldviews and the nature of this bilateral relations can be understood through the lens

of mutualism where both parties gain by cooperating with each other. The two nations have primarily adopted a rationalist approach towards each other.

The Russia-China partnership has brought dividends in many areas. The most significant is in the political arena. The regimes in the two countries share a political empathy towards each other in the sense that they look up to each other for support on many regional and global issues. The two nations also promote such foreign policies which aims at creating international support for their ruling regimes. The shared apprehensions towards the spread of western liberal influences also plays an important role in bringing political comfort to their bilateral partnership. Mutual solidarity between the two countries is also shaped by emerging issues like anti-China sentiments across globe after the corona virus pandemic, in case of Russia, its military interventions in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and poisoning of the opposition leaders have deeply undermined its moral standing.

The bilateral partnership also brings dividends in the security arena since the deepening of Russia-China strategic partnership also discourages attacks from any third party. The strategic calculus in this partnership with regard to the USA has played a significant role in bringing the two nations closer. The two nations view USA as the real threat to their geopolitical interests. For Russia, closeness with China acts as a force multiplier to its influence in the region as well as on the global platform. The global profile and political leverage of Russia is enhanced with its strategic partnership with China. For China, the partnership with Russia is more about achieving its Foreign policy objectives than looking for enhancing its global profile. As discussed in chapter 4, the successful implementation of economic projects like the BRI requires China to cooperate with its largest and most powerful neighbor. Irrespective of the fact that Russia's power has declined, it still remains a nuclear superpower and holds the capacity to counter the objectives of the most powerful states of the world. Thus, the two nations find a clear interest in deepening of their strategic partnership.

Hypothesis 2: The dynamism between the two countries is one of strategic partnership rather than strategic convenience.

The Sino-Russian partnership can be considered as one of the most successful bilateral relationships in the current global scenario which remains volatile and everchanging. The two nations share views on international issues which are most of the times identical or near identical. On issues like cyber-sovereignty, North Korea, Iran, vision of a Greater Eurasia and opposition to missile defense system, the two nations share identical stand.

The Sino-Russian strategic partnership presents an exemplary model of how bilateral differences can be managed. In 1992, the two nations declared that each would regard the other as a “Friendly Country” and ever since the bilateral relations have deepened and gradually improved. Despite having significant differences over growing influence of China in the region, the two nations have successfully managed to keep long term goals as the priority. In this aspect the two nations have actively spoken against any speculation of the two nations drifting apart. The two nations have been able to acknowledge their differences over regional and global issues while at the same time working on expanding their areas of consensus. As discussed in chapter 3, the Syrian and Crimean crisis showcase as examples of how the two nations successfully avoided strain in the bilateral ties. China’s support for Russia in the United Nations and its stand against sanctions imposed on Russia have played an important role in legitimizing the actions of Russia in Syria and Crimea.

In the post-cold war period, the two nations have been able to develop a robust partnership. This partnership provides clear benefits to both sides and is not ad-hoc in nature. The trajectory of the bilateral relations between the two nations provides an optimistic view of the future of this partnership. The geopolitical and economic factors play significant role in coming to such analysis. The two nations have seen the greatest growth in their strategic and military cooperation. Since 2014, an analysis of the bilateral relations between the two countries indicates that along with an increase in the military cooperation the two nations have taken a coordinated stand on many international issues. The two nations have supported each other on international and regional platforms. The two countries have also worked together to establish new regional institutions to counter the influence of Western dominated institutions.

Both sides have clear understanding of what they want and have confidence to achieve their objectives which make this strategic partnership resilient and provides real strength.

Hypothesis 3: The strategic partnership between Russia and China is a model of positive sum cooperation, aiming at a more equitable world order.

Sino-Russian strategic partnership is based on an understanding between the two states regarding the need for a polycentric global order sans the dominance of the USA, the centrality of the state in international affairs and the significance of the sovereignty of the state. As discussed in Chapter 5, in 2005, the two nations released a joint statement on “the international order in the twenty-first century” which was aimed at making the international system more just and following the rules and norms of international law.

The two countries share the belief that existing international order is unfair to their interests and stature in international comity. Thus, there is an inherent agreement regarding a change in the existing international political and economic structure. They both support a global order which is polycentric, and which is ‘post-Western’. They favour the creation of an international structure where USA is not the most dominant player. The desire to create a new global order manifests in the setting up of regional economic and security institutions like the BRICS and SCO where Russia and China play the most decisive role and USA remains excluded. As discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, EAEU, BRICS and SCO are some of the multilateral groupings which promote this aim of creating a multipolar global order.

All the chapters are based around these themes and seek to analyze the strategic partnership between Russia and China. After the end of Cold war, Russia and China have been moving towards closer cooperation ever since. This trend of bilateral relationship has been closely examined from strategic angle. This partnership is marked by cooperation as well as competition. The long-term interests and shared understanding on global order persuade the two countries to deepen their partnership where both gain by cooperating with each other. Although the rise of Chinese economy and a decline in the Russian economy make for an asymmetrical relationship but the two nations have adopted a very pragmatic approach to make gain out of it.

The Second Chapter, “*Historical Background of Russia-China Relations*” focuses on the historical background of Russia and China relations. China and Russia present one of the most peculiar examples of neighbors which are so different, yet they have interests which have been overlapping at different stages of history. The relations between these two nations are of immense importance for regional and global security. Thus, it is of utmost importance to trace the historical linkages between the two countries that have led up to the present situation.

The initial part of the chapter discusses in brief the evolution of bilateral relation between Russia and China from 1850s to end of 1980s. A major part of the Chapter focuses on the present state of the Russia-China relations which evolved from the early 1990s to 2017. The chapter traces the gradual improvement and the evolution of the strategic partnership between the two countries. The factors which have played an important role in shaping of this partnership have also been discussed in detail.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century the relations between the two countries remained weak. By the end of the 1850s the relation between the two countries grew more dynamic. However, between the 1850s and 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, there were two distinct phases of cordial relations between the two countries, which were followed by a sharp deterioration in the relations.

During the earlier period at the beginning of the 20th century the relations deteriorated very rapidly, and the bonhomie of the preceding period was replaced with mutual suspicion and distrust. After an interlude of about three decades when Soviet Union backed China against the Japanese and then the Communist takeover in Beijing, the subsequent phase of nearly two decades again witnessed serious strains in the relations between the two Communist powers.

Post disintegration of the Soviet Union there has been clear signs of rapprochement between Russia and China. As discussed in the Chapter, in 1996, Jiang Zemin and Boris Yeltsin met for a bilateral summit in Beijing where they released a joint statement calling the relations between the two countries as ‘strategic partnership’. It was indicative of the emphasis being put on their foreign policies towards each other. In the context of the West and especially the USA, it was an expression of countering the influence of the US. This summit acted as a catalyst in the development of the relations between Russia and China in the post-Cold War world. In 2001, a Treaty on “Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation” was signed in Moscow which was an evidence of the strategic interests that the two countries had in developing their bilateral relations much further.

This Treaty provided a legal basis for strategic partnership and mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries.

The last part of the Chapter discusses the Foreign Policy objectives of the two countries. The importance of foreign policy in both countries is different – in China domestic policy considerations prevail over foreign policy (the latter fulfills the overarching goal of economic development, a fundamental source of legitimization for the party); in Russia the opposite is true, as foreign policy is a source of legitimacy for the current regime. The most important principle of the China's Foreign Policy is 'the multi-vector policy' based on multilateral fulfillment of Chinese interests and not on ideology.

One of the key findings of the study has been that the historical relations between the two nations do not determine the current state of relationship between them. Russia and China have endured a difficult relationship marked by highs and lows, but the present state of relations indicate that the two nations have moved on from the historical misunderstandings and their foreign policies are guided by the increasing convergence of their economic and security interests. These factors point to an optimistic future, of a genuine and lasting strategic partnership between the two countries. However, the fluid and unstable nature of global environment will also play an important role in determining the prospects of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership in the 21st century.

The Third Chapter titled "*Russia and China Cooperation in Defense, Military and Energy Sectors*" examines the core areas of strategic partnership between Russia and China. The Chapter examines the role of military, defense and energy in developing the Russia-China partnership and bringing a strategic alignment in these sectors. The study also analyses the key treaties, summits and agreements between the two countries to develop a robust military and defense relationship. The last part of the Chapter discusses the evolving partnership in the energy arena and the economic and political differences over it.

The strategic partnership between Russia and China has progressed from 'good-neighborliness' in the early 1990s to more recently in 2016, to 'comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual support, common prosperity and long-lasting friendship'. This indicates a consolidation of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The military and defense partnership between the two countries form the most visible aspect of the alliance. It can be seen as the glue of the bilateral relationship. In the 1990s this was the

hallmark of relationship between the two countries. Looking at the trajectory of the military partnership between the two countries it has not been consistent.

After the Cold War, the two nations established friendly relations. In the 1990s arms sales formed the most important part of the bilateral military relationship. The two sides met perfectly in terms of their military requirements. Russian military industrial sector favored intensification of relations with China. In the post-Cold war situation Russia needed financial means to pay its giant debts and deal with the internal economic challenges. However, it was not until 2010 that the military partnership really became close. Through the use of data, the arms sales between the two nations and the military spending of the two nations have been analyzed and its contribution in the deepening of the strategic partnership between the two countries have been studied.

The Joint exercises between Russia and China emerged as the new stage of collaboration where every aspect of military cooperation coincided. Joint military exercises converged weapons, technological sharing and joint military practices. These were symbolic of the geopolitical message to underling the US hegemony in the region. Both the countries used these drills as a means of political tool to deal with the conflicting interests of Russia and China with USA.

The Sino-Russian cooperation demonstrated a strategic rapprochement with these joint activities. In 2014, the military drill was carried out in the SCS which involved Russian and Chinese vessels indicated the political agenda behind these socializing activities. After this exercise Japan imposed sanctions on Russia and it was viewed by experts as an act of repayment by Russia for China's neutral position on the Crimean crisis.

These Joint exercises have helped the Sino-Russian relationship to deepen further and enhance their strategic understanding and counter their security threats the region. These have also led to minimization of the mistrust and overcoming of the differences between them harbored in the early decade of cooperation. Such high level of security understanding has definitely made this period the best phase of cooperation between them.

Over the last two decades, the Sino-Russian partnership has established high level of dialogues between multiple levels of government structure including the topmost decision make, ministries of foreign affairs, security councils, border forces, military educational institutions, general staff and administration. One can see a consistent expansion of military-to-military cooperation. These multiple channels of cooperation also share understanding on issues of regional and global concern.

The information exchange is related to wide range of issues about national security concerns, common security threats, technical cooperation and personnel exchanges, and other issues.

One of the key findings of the study has been that increasing interoperability between their armed forces and the consistency of integrated military command has contributes in the development of strong foundation for advanced form of military cooperation. Also, the study highlights how the joint military exercises are being leveraged by the two nations to respond to the presence of external actors in the regional issues.

The last part of the Chapter discussed the role of energy cooperation between Russia and China in the deepening of strategic partnership between them. The cooperation in energy, particularly in the crude oil arena has expanded considerably which involves energy related investments. Infrastructure development, ownership in equity and exchange of technology. Through the help of data, the share of crude oil import by China has been analyzed which highlight how Russia has become its topmost supplier of crude oil to China.

Energy has emerged to be a key instrument in boosting the economic relations between the two countries and it has occupied a central place in the strategic interaction between them. In the last few years energy has provided a significant factor for pragmatic cooperation in the Russia China ties. Since, the two countries have been working to reinforce their strategic partnership, energy provides a key policy instrument to work on other strategic issue are such as the Ukrainian crisis and South China Sea dispute. The energy nexus in the strategic relations between Russia and China guide the two nations in non-energy related issues and also provides an important ground to facilitate long term deeper interaction between them.

Here I have explained the geopolitics of the energy nexus between Russia and China by examining the role of energy in determining the Russia China understanding on issues like the Ukrainian crisis and the South China Sea dispute. The Chapter also discusses the challenges in the path of energy cooperation between the two countries.

The Chapter also discusses the Sino-Russian cooperation on the issue of Cyber security. This is an evolving aspect of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership which has been given special mention as Russia and China have been increasingly taken joint stand on the issue of Cyber security.

The Fourth Chapter titled, “*Geopolitics of Strategic Engagement: Russia and China*”, mainly studies the geopolitical construct in the Russia-China strategic partnership in a new world order.

Herein, I have tried to examine the nature of this bilateral partnership that has developed and transformed in the increasingly complex web of global interdependence. The chapter analyses the regional dynamics of this partnership as they stand today and the future prospects underlying them.

China and Russia are strong advocates of a pluralistic world order where the dominance of the West is limited and a better enhanced role for them is guaranteed. In the post-Cold War order Russia and China push for multipolarity together, however their views on the current international order, global governance and national sovereignty do not necessarily coincide. This is reflected in their approaches towards the changing international order.

In the Chapter, I have analyzed the Sino-Russian relationship in the Central Asian Region and the issues which are cause of conflict and cooperation between the two nations. Here I have discussed in detail the implications of the BRI project on the strategic partnership between the two countries. The discussion also highlights the prospects for coordination the EAEU with the BRI. With the help of Maps and Figures I have tried to answer the challenges that the two nations face in the region.

In Central Asia, 'balance of power' is the rule of game which pushes the two most important powers of the region. Looking from this perspective, the Sino-Russian partnership is not surprising. This rapprochement is directed at countering the influence of external power mainly the US. Here, Sino-Russian partnership has taken a coordinated stand to limit the influence of the US in the CAR. In the current geopolitical scenario, this partnership is more likely to flourish and is unlikely to change soon. The China-US trade war has made China to pivot toward Russia even though China is economically more dominant in the CAR. However, a Sino-Russian economic alliance is bound to give more positive results than a rift between them. This partnership counterbalances the Western interests in the region.

Also, the ruling regimes of the two nations see the Western model of governance as a threat to their authoritarian leadership. Resisting external interference thus is also directed at saving the ruling regime from existential threat. Here comes the mutual agreement on the policy of sovereignty and non-interference and supporting each other on this issue on international platforms. Despite the alignment of interests in the CAR, the two countries have been pursuing their individual agendas as well, which in minor ways are detrimental in deepening this partnership, though both have been very careful about each other's long-term interests in therein. This

realization is borne out of the Chinese understanding that antagonizing Russia would not pay in securing its interests in a long term. Russia's isolated position in the current international platform pushes it to assuage the Chinese concerns. This partnership is thus based on needs of both the sides and is fragile in the sense that any asymmetrical development of power between the two nations might relegate one of them to a lesser power status.

The Chapter proceeds to discuss the Sino-Russian relations in the Russian Far East and the Arctic region. From the Russian security perspective, the increased role of China in the RFE and the Arctic makes Russia vulnerable in the region. It is important for Russia to keep hold on to the region to bolster its position in the region as its isolation on the global scale is mounting after the sanctions and increasing pressure from the US on the European powers to disengage with Russia.

The Chinese companies have been wary of the situation in the region and have not expressed as much enthusiasm as for the other hydrocarbon rich areas. Also, wherever China has invested in the RFE it has negotiated deals which have cut profit for the Russian government. Local resistance to the Chinese companies has reduced compared from the earlier times. However, some mistrust still exists where the Chinese companies have got agricultural land from the locals on lease. There is a palpable fear among some sections of locals who are wary of Chinese laborers colonizing the region. In Russia's North eastern region, China has come out as the most important foreign investor. But Russia does not want China to be its only option there and want to reduce its dependence on China in the region.

Despite all the imbalances, the two nations share the common goal of keeping the region away from the influence of the West. This has reduced the bilateral tensions on regional issues and brought them together to form a stable partnership between them. Russia-China partnership in the region is also about taking benefit of the vacuum created by the West in the Eurasian space after the closure of two American bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The Fifth Chapter titled, "***Multilateralism and Multipolar Order: SCO and BRICS***", discusses the initiatives and cooperation at multilateral level to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries. The Sino-Russian partnership has given rise to new multilateral institutions like the SCO and the BRICS which also include other nations of the region. These two institutions aim to provide another alternative for economic development and regional security, while reducing the US influence. These institutions serve as important tools to balance the influence of the West by

adopting soft balancing measures. The chapter highlights the contribution of these two institutions in promoting Russia-China strategic partnership. The chapter also examines the capabilities of the SCO as a regional security organization and influence of Russia and China in the security area. While focusing on the SCO and BRICS as platforms for Russia and China Strategic partnership in geopolitical balancing, this chapter also deals with their conflicting interests at these multilateral institutions.

Some of the key findings under this topic are that Russia and China seek to create an identity at the international level as resurgent global powers. After the Cold war the global order came to be dominated by the US and thus the international order was based on the Western norms. Russia-China partnership has strengthened in the last decade as they share common understanding over issues like non-interference, preserving the status quo, state security, territorial integrity, and state sovereignty. Thus, SCO and BRICS provide institutional tools to achieve these objectives.

The Chapter also discusses the concept of soft balancing and how SCO here serves the purpose of soft balancing. In the context of Russia and China at the SCO it can be understood as a conscious coordination between them to get favorable outcomes which are contrary to the objectives of the US. These outcomes would not have been possible without mutual support. It would not have been possible to counter the US on a systemic level.

Because of the nature of the current international order, the second-tier major powers came up with the new ways of balancing the superpower status of the US. The unilateral aggressive activities by the US and its hegemonic status have led the emergence of other ways to balance the US power.

One of the key findings of this topic is that Russian focus is on security dimension within the SCO while China's main concern is economic trade and energy deals. The chapter discusses the challenges the two nations face within SCO and how it impacts the two nations as strategic partners.

The two groupings have promoted the Russia-China convergence in the club of rising economies. They have helped China to promote its interests in the post-Soviet Eurasian space at the expense of Russia under the garb of 'win-win' diplomacy. The two institutions also provide platforms to promote their 'near identical' stand on global issues and shared vision of an equitable global Order. However, if analyzed properly one can find that Russia and China have been pursuing their separate national agenda with the help of these institutions. Since the two nations have a very different world view and the aspirations for their respective places, the bilateral cooperation is

directed by their specific national and strategic interests and not because of a deeper like-minded vision of the future world Order.

To conclude, the future of Russia-China partnership is dependent on the capacity of the two nations to repack and reinvent itself. The two nations must come out of the traditional geopolitical constructs and address the real global challenges. The two nations need to think beyond their national interests and must develop a generous vision of world order. One of the main weaknesses of Sino-Russian partnership is that anti-Western stance gives it a negative image. The domestic and foreign policies followed by the two countries in recent years have done reputational damage to their position in the international order. However, the strategic partnership between Russia and China is not temporary as the two nations resolved all border disputes between them and over the last three decades the foundation for long term partnership has been strengthened. Irrespective of the acrimonious historical relations between the two nations, they are now strategic partners and have been consolidating their partnership. The long-term dynamic cooperation however depends on how Russia and China coordinate their Foreign policies based upon similar positions in global issues, regardless of the differences in the implementation.

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