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Dynamics of Sino Russian Cooperation: History and future Prospects

Abstract: *After the end of the cold war international politics had moved from bi-polar to uni-polar resulting in instability. The United States of America to achieve her geo strategic interests took aggressive action which made other states insecure. We have witnessed a rise in the number of wars happened in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. The Middle East is still facing the aftershocks of Arab Spring and the Europe is still divided the way it was during the cold war. To counter the hegemonic designs of the United States of America and its allies Sino Russian cooperation has tried to balance the dynamics of International power politics. This Sino Russian cooperation is based on an economic, strategic and political level. The very nature of this Sino Russian cooperation revolves around the integration of interests and inclusiveness of other likeminded states. In the second decade of the 21st Century this cooperation has evolved at the international level as an alternative to the Western political block led by the USA*

Key Words: Sino-Russian, USA, Arab Spring, Western Political Block

Introduction

We have witnessed numerous changes in the area of international relations over the first ten years of the twenty-first century. The prevailing force behind a foreign policy that shaped international relations trends was the USA's uni-polarity. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq ushered in the new century with renewed instability and multilayered threats facing the world.

Simultaneously, these events gave significant leeway in the global strategic domain to allow the rise of a renewed Sino-Russian alliance. This alliance between two major international players i.e. China and Russia has the potential to reestablish the balance of power that had come about as a result of the fall of the USSR in 1991 and also emerge at the same time as a new block. Both nations are crucial in

creating a more balanced international order by opposing the USA's hegemonic dominance.

Similarly, these resurgent giants are working to create their own spheres of influence. However, these spheres of influence are based primarily on economic interdependence and collaboration. The reforms that were started by the late Chinese premier Deng Xiaoping in the 1970's laid the foundation for the meteoric rise. It is indeed spectacular not merely in the manner in which it has brought its own population out of poverty but also in terms of how it has played a stabilizing role in its neighboring regions.. The regions of Central Asia and South East Asia were engulfed in economic and social turmoil. Chinese initiatives like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) paved the way towards creating synergy between the two great powers of the world. China has maintained

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steady economic growth in the first two decades of the 21st century and its global reach is evident from the presence of Chinese firms and influences throughout the globe.

At the moment, China is the most populous country in the world; however, it is one of the rare examples of turning this weakness of overpopulation into its biggest strengths. China is leveraged this population to become the industrial powerhouse it is today. This was made possible only through the well managed and pragmatic worldview of the Chinese leadership. Its global reach can be assessed by the fact that today, China has become the major trading partner of most countries of the world. Its trade with European Union (EU) alone exceeded 20 Trillion dollars per annum in 2018. (Larson, 2018)

Another, major development that has helped the Sino-Russian block is their sensible approach towards conflict resolution. Both these powerhouses ended their decade's long border disputes in 2004. The platform of SCO was also utilized to foster deeper economic ties between member states through the creation of free trade zones and economic enclaves. The Sino-Russian block in this sense was more apt in recognizing the shift in international power structure from geopolitics to geo-economics. China has been leading this race through its mega infrastructure projects that were initiated as Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and Maritime Silk Route (MSR). These projects are now commonly known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The countries that are part of this project will receive advantages such as infrastructure development, energy independence, economic growth, and the ability to connect with one of the largest trade networks in the world. This initiative will link countries from diverse continents such as Asia, Europe, and Africa into a synergized network of trade and interdependent economic community.

Historic Ties between Russia and China

There are many historic ties that serve to create a strong foundation of partnership between China and Russia. Along with sharing geographic boundaries and having a 4209.3 Km shared border between them, these countries were

having suffered from foreign invasions on several occasions including during the twentieth century. China suffered from a series of foreign invasions and ultimately occupation of many territories as a result of Japanese invasion in 1937 while the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) suffered an attack from Nazi Germany in 1941 during the Second World War.

Therefore, owing to their geographic proximity, ideological similarity and convergence of foreign policy goals, these countries were natural allies after the creation of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. These commonalities of interest laid the foundation of a strong partnership that lasted for several decades through several ups and downs. The Soviet Union gave its full support to the Chinese during the Korean War through technical assistance and supply of modern arms including the infamous MIG 17 fighter planes. The USSR was also instrumental in supporting the PRC diplomatically as well. The tumultuous decade of 1950s brought these powers even closer than before in terms of collaboration and shared objectives.

These two nations participated in the 1950–1953 Korean War. Then, as we have seen, both of these nations worked together throughout the first phase of the Cold War to promote communism throughout the world. Chinese proximity to the world's shipping lines boosts its significance, and the role it is currently playing in central Asia is equally crucial. Through the SCO Shanghai Cooperation Organization, both of these nations have helped to integrate the central Asian republics onto the path of development. Russia is influencing world politics due to her massive domination in Europe and Asia. No one should have any doubts about Russia's continued power after the acquisition of Crimea.

The principal driver of collaboration between the two nations was communism. A significant factor in bringing these two nations together was their shared ideology. Both of these nations collaborated to advance and propagate communist doctrine since they both viewed the West as an enemy. The establishment of a series of treaties in Europe, West Asia, and Southeast

Asia was seen as a threat to the survival of these two nations. These two nations pushed the communist philosophy to Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Laos, and North Korea as a response to the Western moves against them. Strong links between the two nations were established by the communist doctrine, and both nations benefited from it.

Given that China has the largest population and Russia has the largest land area in the world, it is not incorrect to refer to both nations as making up half of the globe. When these two factors work together, they frequently form an extremely powerful link. This area has been tremendously active politically and economically for the past seven decades. From China to Eastern Europe and from Malaysia to Japan, these two nations' peripheries contain all of the key economic hubs. We have seen that these two nations have historically been quite significant, both economically and militarily.

Partnership of Necessity

Since 1949, Russia and China have maintained a close relationship that has experienced several highs and lows due to shifting regional and international political environments. This cooperation is what is driving the majority of global politics in the twenty-first century. We may observe how this cooperation has affected all significant global events. Most scholars of International Relations should be cognizant of how fundamentally different this cooperation differs from the alliances of the cold war period. Rather than solely focusing on security cooperation and alliance-seeking, this collaboration is more on the route of economic interdependence, greater prosperity, and sustainable growth. Yes, there is security cooperation in between two states, but it primarily consists of technology sharing and development.

China gained its independence in 1949 and arose like a phoenix. With more than \$4 trillion in global trade and the largest standing army of 2.2 million soldiers, China has grown enormously as a military and economic superpower over the years. (Monaghan, [2017](#)) In addition to this, China rose to become the world's

largest exporter in 2009 as well. These two characteristics clearly convey China's significance as a global power and the role she plays. Another significant development, the recently established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), demonstrates the financial might of China. Economic assistance through this new bank will support the underdeveloped countries in the area with energy, transit, health, agribusiness, and telecommunication services, as well as other needs related to macroeconomic development. (AIIB, n.d.)

Strong economic and military ties with China interest both developed and developing nations alike. Communist China however, had a difficult beginning due to the start of the Korean War lasting from 1950 to 1953 as well as the Taiwan issue. The United States of America continued to pose a continual threat to China's existence due to her covert and open backing of anti-Chinese elements in Taiwan and the Korean peninsula. China saw the former Soviet Union as a partner and a communist foe in the eyes of the American leadership. Due to shifting international politics and the escalation of tensions between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, the United States of America was forced to alter this viewpoint over time.

In his well-known book "Seize the Moment," former US President Richard Nixon said that China is destined to become a major power both regionally and globally in the coming decades while playing a major role in the Pacific region. (Nixon, [1992](#)) The previous interactions with the Chinese leadership served as the basis for this prediction, which was realized. Due to China's large population and strategic location, Richard Nixon also predicted that no one would be able to prevent the country from becoming the world's dominant power.

China is present on all continents, and Chinese corporations conduct business all over the world. With its offer of lenient loans, China has a distinct incentive for developing nations. With strategic presence, this specific endeavor promotes healthy relationships and potential economic rewards.

As was already mentioned, China has the largest national army in the world and is growing her navy internationally. The Chinese forces are pursuing an ambitious modernization program since the early 90s. This program has seen the massive Chinese military juggernaut transform into a force to be reckoned with. Her air force is equipped with cutting-edge airborne early warning systems on a fighter as well as support aircraft while their force potential has been multiplied through the introduction of fifth generation aircraft. The greatest fleet of naval vessels in the entire globe is now owned by the Chinese Navy.

The global conquest of naval bases is being aggressively pursued by China. The PLAN currently possesses one aircraft carrier and is developing another. In addition, the PLAN has significantly bolstered the number of its operational submarines, which can be a problem for any navy that tries to challenge China. Virginia Maritadou (2014) stated that this policy will provide the PLAN with naval bases in important global locations and will have profound implications for the interests of the US and India within the Indian Ocean region, as this region is critical for maritime trade. (Marantidou, 2014) She also claimed that the expansion of Chinese naval bases in Pakistan is primarily meant to protect its vital energy interests, which are crucial to her economic progress. She has established this network of foreign bases not only in Asia but also in Africa and the Mediterranean region. The US naval interests in Africa and the Mediterranean will be significantly impacted by this. If we look at a world map, we can see that the Strait of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal are two important sea passages that connect the Mediterranean and Africa. The military and economic advantages of a strong presence in the Mediterranean and North Africa go to any nation. This expansion has two primary goals: first, securing important trade routes or ensuring economic stability, and second, attaining blue navy status.

In their well-known paper titled "The Chinese Military: Overview and Issues for the Congress," Ian E. Rinehart and David Gitter assert that China is bolstering its forces with the objective of influencing a favorable settlement of

the Taiwan issue within a limited timeframe through either diplomatic or kinetic means if necessary. (Rinehart and Gitter, 2015)

Additionally, they noted that the Chinese government had encouraged the remarkable growth of the PLA in order to protect the country from both internal and external threats. This growth is both qualitatively and quantitatively. The annual military budget increased by 9.5% from 2005 to 2014. This boost aided the PLA's transition from a low-tech to a high-tech military force. With UAVs, advanced defensive and offensive capabilities as well as superiority in domains of information and cyberspace, the PLA is now an army of the twenty-first century. As was previously said, geo-economics now takes precedence over geopolitics in the framework of the modern world. China has advanced rapidly over the past 25 years thanks in large part to increasing imports of oil and other energy sources. China needs trustworthy partners and safe sea routes for imports to maintain its present rate of economic expansion. If there were a confrontation in the South China Sea, the Horn of Africa, or the Strait of Hormuz in the future, this rapid rate of growth might be slowed. China is building port infrastructure in strategic locations to maximize economic benefits. China imports more than 70% of its oil via the sea, where it is now making investments to upgrade the infrastructure of the friendly nations' ports.

In 1991, the Soviet Union fell apart, and the west celebrated this as the triumph of capitalism over socialism. The world's map saw a significant transformation when the Soviet Union split up into 15 new states, creating the new Russian state. The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union surprised the west as well because they had not anticipated it. All of the great nations began changing their economic, political, and military strategies as a result of this fragmentation in the aftermath of these fresh developments. Following the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union was founded on the principles of socialism, and its leaders believed that socialism would aid in the integration of many nationalities through a centralized economic and political structure.

Unfortunately, this socialism-based philosophy evolved into communism over time, turning the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state. There may be a number of causes for the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the attempts of forceful assimilation of non-Russian ethnic groups which made up nearly half of the Soviet population was one of the major causes of this collapse. (Coldwar.org, n.d.) The second of many causes for the collapse of the USSR was its weak economy, which was mostly brought on by bad economic planning and a needless armaments race with the USA. Because of the financial, material, and prestige losses in the Afghanistan War, which badly shocked the principles of communism, this war was the last straw for the USSR.

Mikhail Gorbachev faced a variety of issues when he became the last President of the former USSR in 1985, including dismal economic conditions, domestic turmoil, and unsuccessful military policies. Mikhail Gorbachev believed that the ongoing war in Afghanistan was causing the Soviet Union a lot of issues. He started the Pravda policy, an effort to reduce the level of hostility between the two superpowers, to lessen friction between the Soviet Union and the West. To better the unfavorable circumstances at the time, he made numerous reforms. He introduces the most significant reforms under Glasnost and Perestroika. The foundation of Glasnost was speech freedom, allowing both supporters and detractors of the government to express opinions that had been pressed for more than seven decades. It's interesting how this Glasnost approach backfired because the Soviet Union's policies were severely attacked by the populace. (coldwar.org , n.d.) A further change he attempted was Perestroika, which was based on rebuilding the economy. This program also failed since economic improvements require years of planning before they bear fruit. Numerous nationalist movements demanded autonomy from the Soviet Union after these reforms failed. Latvia was the first nation to request autonomy in 1987. Then, many other republics began to demand autonomy, beginning with the Baltic region's states and then moving on to Georgia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and Central Asian Republics.

As the communist ideals fell apart and Russia became isolated in global politics after its birth in 1991, it was unclear what would become of her. The resurgence of the economy and the restoration of former military glories were just two of the numerous difficulties facing the new administration. The largest state-owned economy in the world's transformation to a market economy was not simple. Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, among other Russian presidents, put in a lot of effort to get Russia out of these crises. Russia had to deal with the Chechen conflicts between 1994 and 1996. Chechen rebels desired independence from the Russian Federation and the establishment of a free state.

Despite experiencing the greatest economic downturn in 1998, Russia's economy recovered as a result of rising oil and gas prices on the global market. The recovery of the Russian Federation from the economic, military, and political upheaval she experienced following the breakup of the Soviet Union was hampered by the aforementioned issues.

Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Russia was able to address these issues. Russia no longer experienced chaos or was prone to economic collapse under President Putin. President Putin explicitly dispelled fears of Russian competition with the west when he took office by leaving open the prospect of Russia joining NATO (North Atlantic Treaty organization). Under President Putin, the Russian Federation quickly recovered from its financial crisis by enacting new tax reforms that reduced taxes to promote entrepreneurship and re-nationalized key sectors of the economy.

The resurgence of the Russian Federation's economy and defense sector was significantly aided by the country's defense exports. Only in 2013 did Russia sell weapons worth \$13 billion, yet during the 2000s, Russia's yearly growth rate stayed at 5%, indicating sound economic development. After the economic depression of 1998, Russia's economy was steady thanks to smart economic measures, higher earnings from rising oil exports, and other factors. Luhn, Alec in his article admired this economic revival by pointing out that beginning from 1999; Russian

income had been doubled in less than seven years till 2006. Similarly, Russian GDP growth was equally astounding with total GDP increasing from 2096.8 Trillion dollars to 664 trillion dollars from 2014 to 2016. (Luhn, [2015](#))

In 2013, Russia and China agreed on the export of gas worth \$400 billion dollars. The two countries' current economic partnership is the largest to date. The 2500-mile gas pipeline will provide both nations with fresh opportunities for economic stability.

Economic Cooperation between China and Russia

Russia faced many problems in the decade of 1990s due to political and economic turmoil and then in 1998 economic breakdown completely choked her economy. Boris Yeltsin failed to bring economic reforms and as result Russian ruble lost her value at an alarming rate. Boris Yeltsin resigned and appointed Mr. Vladimir Putin as the new president. New President took the task for the revival of the Russian economy. Under Vladimir Putin Russian economic woes ended dramatically and at the moment Russian foreign reserves are standing at 368.4 billion dollars. (Wenhong, [2021](#)) He introduced many reforms for foreign investment including cutting the taxes on new businesses and foreign investments. In the year 2015, Russian GDP was of 14000 US dollars which showed the economic prosperity of the Russian Federation. (Stephen, [2015](#)) This figure shows the nature of her sound economy and its growth at a good pace. The employment rate in Russian Federation was under check due to the flow of foreign investments and the increasing exports in the last decade. In the year 2014 Russia was able to get a very lucrative deal for the supply of gas to energy hungry China. In November 2014 Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed a memorandum for the finalization of this project and both countries have already signed an agreement between Russian Gas Company Gazprom and Chinese CNPC (China Petroleum Corporation Limited) in this regard. This is 400 billion dollars and a very positive sign for the cash strapped Russian federation. Russia agreed to supply 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually

to China from the Altai region of Siberia. (Hedge, [2014](#)) Russia will start supplying gas in the year 2018 which will greatly improve the needs of the energy hungry China.

Chinese remained more focus on their economy after 1991 and showed interest in economic cooperation with all the countries. China avoided any military conflict and her sole focus remained on economic development. China understood this very well that in the last decade of the 20th century in future economy will be the biggest weapon and an asset to become a stable power. The biggest advantage China has is the world's largest population of more than 1.3 Billion. This huge population is a blessing in disguise for China because with such a huge population China is offering very cheap labor and it transforms in a low cost of productivity as a result foreign investment will come like a down pour. China's growth rate is one of the most fastest in the world, only in the year 2013 it touched the figure of 7.3. (World Bank, n.d.) China is a very fast growing economy with foreign reserves of 3.128 Trillion dollars in the year 2022. (TRADING ECONOMICS, [2019](#)) The most important thing for any industry is the cheap availability of raw material and cheap energy to cut down the cost of production. These factors invited major corporations of the world to come and invest in China. Besides this China is the biggest consumer of goods as well the biggest exporter of good as well. No country can match the number of factories present in China. Chinese industry is based on Steel production, automobiles, telecommunication, medicines and machinery. As mentioned earlier that China preferred the economy over the defense in the early 1990s and tried to build good and firm economic relations with the neighboring and other important countries. China has invested so far 6.4 Trillion dollars in foreign countries on different economic projects.

In the decade of 1990s foreign engagements increased which became a source of insecurity for both countries. As a result these both countries became more nearer. More over after the sad incident of 9/11 USA started acting more aggressively on important economic matters.

As a result of the volatility caused by the US-led war on terrorism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing crisis on its western frontier, Russia is plagued with its own set of challenges. Oil prices have fluctuated rapidly during the first two decades of the twenty first century in the Global market, thus taking its toll on the Russian economy as its principal export is linked to the petroleum industry. OPEC was unable to strike a comprehensive agreement on oil production. (The Economist, 2014) Oil price depends on supply and demand; if supply exceeds demand, prices will decrease. Similar to this, the use of renewable and alternative energy sources have decreased the world's demand for oil. More money is being spent by nations on nuclear, hydro, solar, and other energy sources. The United States of America has surpassed Russia as the world's largest petroleum producer, and she doesn't object to the fuel price falling since it serves her geopolitical interests because Iran and Russia will suffer if oil prices fall. Due to their substantial foreign exchange reserves, Saudi Arabia as well as the rest of the Persian Gulf nations can have a significant role in halting the decline in oil prices. However, in this scenario, countries like Russia, Venezuela, and Iran will also gain from this. Geo-economics is at the center of this entire story of falling oil prices. Russia generates nearly a third of her revenue from the export of oil and gas, so it's easy to picture how much money she lost as a result of the drop in oil prices.

Russia's takeover of Crimea in March 2014 provoked the anger of the Western countries. This was alluded to as the onset of a new Cold War by NATO and the EU. They thus brought serious sanctions on Russia in an effort to choke off her economy. Economic restrictions were imposed on the financial industry, the defense sector, and the energy sector. However, due to the excessive dependence of major European economies such as Germany on Russian energy, these sanctions were unable to deliver their intended results. The European economies are seeking to diversify their energy suppliers to minimize their dependence on Russian energy. In fact, the destruction of the NORD Stream 2 pipeline has perhaps forced the European economies to do so. To this end, Russia is also

seeking to diversify its potential clientele to include more reliable partners. Once again China emerges as a natural partner for Russia in this arena as well and both countries have signed a 400 billion dollar gas deal.

Conclusion

The emergence of a Sino-Russian is now becoming a key factor in international political, economic, and military spheres. These two nations suffered as a result of their historical shortcomings in the areas of geopolitics and geo-economics.

This collaboration is currently flourishing and enticing other regional actors to join it in order to benefit from it. The Chinese initiatives like AIIB have attracted even the closely linked US allies like UK and Australia to join in the venture for the potential benefits. Many projects linked with BRI are nearing completion while the Build back Better initiative which was the attempted countermeasure to the BRI by the western powers has already dropped dead in its tracks owing to the economic fallout of COVID-19. Due to these developments even traditional US allies like Australia and the United Kingdom have also become part of the Chinese backed AIIB.

As both the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China are integrating the regional and other countries in the significant financial initiatives they have launched, this collaboration is bringing about economic stability in the world. China is once again a significant stakeholder in the two banks that BRICS formed, including AIIB (Asian infrastructure and development Bank) and another. In a similar vein, the Silk Road Economic Belt (SERB) and the Maritime Silk Route (MSR), which are now referred to as the BRI (The Belt and Road initiative).

These two initiatives, which are stretched across three continents, will start a new phase in economic growth. Pakistan and India joined the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) as part of the organizations expansion. This action will broaden SCO's geographic reach. The world will become more politically and economically integrated as a result of these undertakings. As

we've discussed, economic prosperity will ensure global political stability, and nations will work to resolve their differences peacefully so they can benefit from economic cooperation and integration. Significant economic agreements were inked between Pakistan and the Russian Federation in 2013, thus marking a reengagement of these strategically important countries.

Russian Federation's shift in both the political and economic spheres will improve the stability and viability of the two nations' bilateral relations. Then there is the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), a 40 billion dollar initiative between China and Pakistan to build a trade road. If combined with SREB, this might completely alter the geopolitics and geo-economics of the area while also giving the Central Asian Republics direct access to the Indian Ocean's warm waters.

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