

## Three Main Challenges to China-Russian cooperation<sup>1</sup>

(Current Events 2022)

### **A Flawed “Marriage of Convenience”**

In February 2022, the Russian Federation led by President Putin and the leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), President Xi Jinping, issued a joint statement asserting their alliance, branded as “**The Sides**”.<sup>2</sup> Some (realists) argue that because nations act in their own interests, this “marriage of convenience” is strategically flawed.<sup>3</sup> I concur. The challenges of two historically scorned mates attempting to re-emerge as “great powers” is a telling façade. Why? Because the two separate nations that share Eurasia are pursuing the same objectives. China and Russia’s cooperation is challenged by each nation’s underpinning of historical humiliation, an unbalanced competition for limited resources, and a single point of leadership failure that is not sustainable because of its flawed perception of democracy. Democracies accept internal checks and balances, but this union’s history may not be receptive at demonstrating such trust.<sup>4</sup> Although the public narrative of *The Sides* is consensual, the needs and desires of each nation’s self-interest show an imbalance in sustaining its populace. This imbalance will surface, and the likelihood of “divorce” will have a global impact.

Just as a married couple assumes a common homestead, Eurasia is the geographic homeland of both the Russian Federation and China. Unlike the US, these major military powers have a history of romanticized dynasties and empires. They also hold dark pasts of war-torn defeats and territorial losses.<sup>5</sup> While both nations appreciated the military power-projection and quasi-alliances with the US during twentieth-century wars, they have now become adversaries of the US within the Great Power Competition (GPC) schema.<sup>6</sup> *The Sides* affirm support for democracy,<sup>7</sup> but exercise a repressive form of governmental rule: The one-(China) rule under the

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Russian Federation's *faux democracy under Putin*<sup>8</sup>. Interestingly, *both aim for a world order more supportive of authoritarian regimes that prize sovereignty and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs.*<sup>9</sup> As noted by Nye and Welch, "Russia has band-wagoned with China against the US... as a response to the deteriorating relations with the West".<sup>10</sup> Several discussions consider the economic woes of Russia and its diminishing population with the increasing growth of China's domestic standards as cause for global alarm. The need for resources is unbalanced. That global impact could also begin with the pursuit of limited resources in the Arctic Region where some NATO alliances have a say.

Both China and Russia are pursuing constrained resources in the same Arctic regional areas.<sup>11</sup> In April 2019, the two energy-focused nations announced a collaborative agreement using Russia's landmass advantage of energy (gas, oil reserves), its mining expertise, and its Northern Sea Route (NSR) with China's economic and railway expansion, known as the Maritime (or Polar) Silk Road Initiative.<sup>12</sup> Several argue that this was Russia's way to circumvent the enormous sanctions of the 2014 illegal annexation of Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> This "marriage could have offered favorable benefits for China with Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2021-2023. China's powerplay has been to gain legitimacy with "near-Arctic State" status, thus "inclusion into the (Arctic) club", beyond just "Observer" status.<sup>14</sup> China also needs liberal access to the region's fishing resources to support its 1-plus billion populace. But Russia's chairmanship is limited since the Arctic Council executes by consensus of all 8 (NATO and non-NATO) members and over regional participants.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the current "Strategic Pause" against Russia for its February 2022 aggressive behavior against Ukraine is a "pre-nuptial" agreement that likely halts China's ambitions of gaining favor while Russia is at the AC's helm.

China may see Russia's actions as economic strains and begin to demand greater leverage from Russia's resources using its own authoritarian, corrupt, and predatory practices against them.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Air University, the United States Air Force, the Department of Defense, or any other US government agency."

<sup>2</sup> [Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development • President of Russia \(kremlin.ru\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Michał Lubina, "Russia and China Book Subtitle: A political marriage of convenience – stable and successful", 21, referenced: D. Trenin, *From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente*, Carnegie Center, 09.04.2015. <https://doi-org.aufric.idm.oclc.org/10.2307/j.ctvdf0314.4>

and Paul Bolt, *Sino-Russian Relations in a Changing World Order*, Air University Press, Strategic Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 4 (WINTER 2014), 50. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26270816>. and Kadri Liik, "It's complicated: Russia's tricky relationship with China", The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) article, December 17, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/its-complicated-russias-tricky-relationship-with-china/>.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Gary Sharp Sr., *Democracy and Deterrence: Foundations for An Enduring World Peace*, Air University Press (Alabama), 2008, 158.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., and David A. Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed, Pearson (Boston) 2017, 136, 161. China's "100 years of Humiliation" is also described in Zheng Wang, *National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China*, *International Studies Quarterly* (2008) 52, 784 (used in the AWC IP2 R2 excerpt).

<sup>6</sup> Should U.S. Foreign Policy Focus on Great-Power Competition? Ask the Experts, Foreign Affairs publication, AWC repository: May 26, 2021, 9/34. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ask-the-experts/2020-10-13/should-us-foreign-policy-focus-great-power-competition>.

<sup>7</sup> Note: [Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development • President of Russia \(kremlin.ru\)](#) Russia and China (The Sides" assert in their joint statement that their "rich cultural and historical heritage have long-standing traditions of democracy, which rely on thousand-years of experience of development, broad popular support and consideration of the needs and interests of citizens".

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Nye jr., and Welch, 233, 283. Also – note: "What China's communist rulers contend is that, while "democracy is a good thing" for China, it must be culturally relevant, and democratic institutions and procedures must be appropriate for Chinese conditions. Western-style democracy, they contend, is a recipe for chaos and turmoil in China.

<sup>9</sup> [It's complicated: Russia's tricky relationship with China – European Council on Foreign Relations \(ecfr.eu\)](#): and the Joint statement of the Russian Federation and the PRC. Note: this is either an interpretation from several readings throughout the course and/or a published source that I can no longer locate due to my computer malfunctioning at the time of final development.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Nye jr., and Welch, 235-6.

<sup>11</sup> Ling Guo and Steven Lloyd Wilson, *China, Russia, and Arctic Geopolitics*, *The Diplomat* article, Mar 29, 2020, 3. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/china-russia-and-arctic-geopolitics/>

<sup>12</sup> Ingrid Burke Friedman, 2021. "China's Arctic Ambitions Could Make or Break US-Russian Relations in the Region", *In the Thick of It: A blog on the US-Russia Relation*, <https://russiamatters.org/blog/chinas-arctic-ambitions-could-make-or-break-us-russian-relations-region>.-- Maritime Silk Road -reference: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-maritime-silk-road>.

<sup>13</sup> [It's complicated: Russia's tricky relationship with China – European Council on Foreign Relations \(ecfr.eu\)](#) <https://ecfr.eu/publication/its-complicated-russias-tricky-relationship-with-china/><sup>14</sup> Matthew D Stephen, and Kathrin Stephen, 51.

<sup>15</sup> <https://russiamatters.org/blog/chinas-arctic-ambitions-could-make-or-break-us-russian-relations-region>

<sup>16</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*, New York Simon & Schuster 2014, 331.