



University
of Glasgow



Master Thesis

The Sino-Russian military relations: why not yet an alliance? A neoclassical realist approach

Master of Arts, Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies –
University of Tartu

International Master, Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies –
University of Glasgow

Master in Sociology, World Politics, Central and East European, Russian and
Eurasian Studies - Lobachevsky State University of Nizhniy Novgorod

Cyriel Margaret Wilson Lise Kubala – Student n° 2409253K (Glasgow)

Supervisors: Dr Marcin Kaczmarek and Dr Alexander Korotyshev

September 2020 – 20 032 words

Author's declaration

I have written this master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

07/09/2020

C. Keubala

Acknowledgments

Throughout the writing of this dissertation I have received a great deal of support and assistance.

I would first like to thank my supervisors, Dr Marcin Kaczmarek and Dr Alexander Korotyshev, for sharing the expertise and knowledge. Your feedback really helped me and greatly improved the quality of my work.

I would also like to thank the IMCEERES university staff for their dedication and their patience, in particular Ms Clair Clarke and Dr Ammon Cheskin. You were always here to help me us and answer our numerous questions, thank you for your support.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my friends, who were of a great support, motivated me and cheered me up.

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public

I, Cyriel Margaret Wilson Lise Kubala,

1. herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to reproduce, for the purpose of preservation and making thesis public, including for adding to the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright, my thesis entitled:

‘The Sino-Russian military relations: why not yet an alliance? A neoclassical realist approach’
supervised by Dr Marcin Kaczmarek and Dr Alexander Korotyshev

2. I grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the work specified in p. 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives, until the expiry of the term of copyright.

3. I am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in pp. 1 and 2.

4. I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons’ intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Done at Lyon on 07/09/2020

C. Kubala

Abstract

The Sino-Russian military relations have attracted a great deal of attention since the 21st century. They have strengthened into a strategic military partnership but did not evolve into a full military alliance. The goal of this paper is to analyse how has the international environment pushed Russia and China to improve their military relations, and to underline which factors prevented the formation of a full military alliance. This study relies on the neoclassical realist theory, considered to be a relevant theory to explain foreign policy behaviours. The Russian-Chinese military relations are explored through different indicators such as arms trade, military exercises, top brass meetings and border relations. The paper then analyses the international systemic factors that reunited Russia and China. It then goes down to the unit level of analysis to underline the factors that prevented a Sino-Russian official military alliance. These factors are the disagreement between Russian elites, the persistent security concerns from the Russian government and the security issues in Central Asia. They explain the current ambivalence in the Sino-Russian military relations.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I. Analytical structure: neoclassical realism	5
Chapter II. A strategic ambivalence: Sino-Russian military relations	8
Section 1) The Sino-Russian strategic partnership at the official level	8
Section 2) Russo-Chinese military cooperation on the ground..	9
Section 3: Hybrid warfare operations, a possible future Sino-Russian military cooperation	14
Chapter III. Pushed together: Sino-Russian relations and the international environment	19
Section 1) The 21st century and the global competition for power and security	19
Section 2) Russian and Chinese visions of the international order	21
Section 3) Russia's Pivot to Asia in 2012	24
Section 4) The Shanghai Spirit, an alternative approach to multilateralism.....	25
Section 1: Disagreements between Russian elites	27
Section 2: Persistent security concerns from the Russian government.....	30
Section 3: Security issues in Central Asia.....	42
Conclusion	47
Bibliography.....	50

The Sino-Russian military relations: why not yet an alliance? A neoclassical realist approach

Introduction

Russia and China announced in August 2020 that they are collaborating on a new generation of non-nuclear submarines (Osborne 2020). This announcement is another example of the growing collaboration between Russia and China in the military domain. This dissertation will study the Sino-Russian military relations to explain the main drivers of their collaboration and to underline the specific factors that have prevented the formation of a full military alliance.

The Sino-Russian military relations have improved step-by-step since the mid-1980s. Russia's rapprochement with China has been one of the longest trends in Russian foreign policy. Since the end of the Cold War, Russian-Chinese relations have improved regularly through several agreements. Their collaboration went from 'good neighbourliness' in the 1990s to the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation in 2001. Russia and China upgraded their relations in 2012 to the level of a 'comprehensive strategic partnership and coordination', until raising again the partnership in 2016 to the level of a "comprehensive strategic partnership of equality, mutual trust, mutual support, common prosperity and long-lasting friendship" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Slovenia 2017, cited in Korolev 2018: 26). The Sino-Russian strategic partnership is one of the most interesting phenomena to study nowadays in international relations, as this partnership has important repercussions for the equilibrium of the international system. Russia and China are both great powers, they are nuclear states with permanent member seats at the United Nations Security Council. This study chooses to focus on their military relations as they are a good barometer of the general level of their bilateral relations, as it is a sensitive area of collaboration between states, which it makes it adequate to measure the deepness of their partnership. The study period of focus is after 2008 until 2020. Prior to 2008, Russia and China collaborated on military issues, but in a very pragmatic and limited way. The changes in the international system pushed the two countries to forge a closer alliance. The downfall in Russia's relations with the West was a big push for her rapprochement with China. 2008 was the first step in this downfall with the Russo-Georgian War that antagonised Russia and the Western nations. After that, the Ukrainian 2014 crisis pushed them further away, leading Russia to focus on its eastern relations, especially with China. China, on her side, has been increasingly opposed to the US on a number of issues, from their commercial war to the Asia-Pacific region or

their vision of the international order. Russia and China have found their strategic interests to be converging, which has allowed them to build their strategic partnership on a solid foundation. Their partnership is characterized by their participation in various regional forums, economic relations, common foreign policy views, energy relations and their military relations. The treaty establishing their partnership is based on five main principles: “mutual respect of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence” (Weitz 2019: 5). Their military relations are characterized by treaties, arms trade, joint military exercises, institutionalized meetings and cybersecurity relations among other instruments. The existence of a common adversary – the United States (US) – has brought together Russia and China closer, as they wish to establish a more multipolar world and to reverse the US hegemony that has prevailed in the international system since the end of the Cold War. They have established some similar views about what the international order should be. Nevertheless, several factors have prevented their military relations of deepening further into a full military alliance. The main questions that this study will answer are: how has the international environment pushed Russia and China to improve their military relations? How have domestic and regional factors hindered these relationships?

The relations between Russia and China have been a focus of interest for scholars all around the world for a long time. During the 20th century, Sino-Russian relations were studied through the scope of the relations between the USSR and China’s People Republic, comparing the two different communist models and analysing the reasons of the Sino-Russian Split. A focus of interest has emerged in the recent years on the subject, following the rapprochement of Beijing and Moscow and the downfall of Russia’s relations with the West. Within the existing literature on Sino-Russians relations, opinions are divided among authors about the nature of the Russian-Chinese relations and the resilience of their strategic partnership. Some authors believe that the hurdles existing between China and Russia are too strong for the partnership to last long (Wilson 2016). Various Chinese analysts have described the partnership as stable and profound, but as one which would not and should not transform into an alliance (Ying 2016). Experts also point to the fact that an alliance is unlikely to materialize between the two nations as their partnership is more based on practical considerations than on a similar long-term vision of the world order (Bolt 2014). There are several scholars who remain cautious about the future of this strategic partnership, noting the visible closeness of the two countries while observing the remaining signs of mistrust (Røseth 2018). Some other analysts believe in the opposite that despite the existing misunderstandings, the two countries will manage to overcome their differences and to build a strong and lasting relationship (Wishnick 2017). In fact, some scholars believe that just a few more

steps are needed before the formation of a full alliance (Korolev 2018, Blank 2016). Analysts note the impact of the systemic pressure on the Chinese-Russian relations, arguing that their level of cooperation will depend on the pressure from the United States (US) (Korolev and Portyakov 2018). In definitive, scholars are divided about the nature and the future of the Sino-Russian military relations. The existing studies often insist rather on the systemic factors or the internal factors to explain the current state of China's and Russia's military relations. It is sometimes difficult to find analyses attached solidly to an international relations theory about these questions, explaining both the systemic incentives of the relations and the unit-level variables, to explain the foreign policy behaviour of the countries. This article wishes to contribute to fill this gap and to advance the neoclassical realist framework as a relevant theory of international relations, by analysing how the pressure of the international system interacts with the unit-level factors to influence the formation of a specific foreign policy.

This study aims to underline the factors that have prevented the formation of a military alliance by using the neoclassical realist framework. As mentioned above, Russia and China are both great powers and are thus heavily influenced by the trends in the international system. A systemic analysis is necessary to understand the positions of Moscow and Beijing. They also have complicated internal politics and complex geopolitical environments that require a unit-level analysis to complete the systemic one. Systemic-level and unit-level analysis can be done through the prism of neoclassical realism. The Sino-Russian military relations (the dependent variable) are influenced by the pressure and changes from the anarchic international environment (the independent variable). This systemic factor is counteracted by unit-level factors that shape the foreign policy behaviour of the states in another direction. These unit-level factors are disagreement between Russian elites, persistent security concerns from the Russian government, and security issues in Central Asia. Neoclassical realism acknowledges that internal and regional factors can have an impact on the formation of a state's foreign policy. The study will analyse how the internal politics of the Kremlin have influenced the formation of Russia's foreign policy. The persistent security concerns from the Russian government refer to the internal situation of Russia and the disparities that exist between the regions, especially in the East, as well as other factors such as the nuclear issue, the Chinese military, the Russian and Chinese territorial claims, and China's internal situation.

This research is going to use the research design of single-case study – the effects of systemic pressure and the unit-level factors on the Sino-Russian military relations. The goal is to explain the causes of the level of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and how it evolves. This single case study is going to be a hypothesis generating case study, as I will study an event and

search to explain it by determining its causes and roots. This study is going to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. The Russian-Chinese military relations will be operationalized by measuring the arms sales relationship, the numbers of joint military exercises, the border relations and top-brass meetings. The data comes from official Russian documents, secondary literature, news material. The limits of this study are that it cannot explore all the aspects of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership and chose to focus on military relations. Plus, even though most of the data is available and declared by the governments, there is still the possibility that some might be classified or unavailable for national security reasons. Another limit of this study is that, as it cannot explore everything, it will mainly focus on the Russian side and explore the military relations mostly at a state-to-state level.

The analysis starts by defining the analytical structure of the study, that is neoclassical realism. After, I define the level of the Sino-Russian military relations (the dependant variable). Then, I examine how the pressure and changes from the international system (the independent variable) influence the Russia-China military relations. The analysis continues by underlining how the disagreement between Russian elites, the persistent security concerns from the Russian government and the security issues in Central Asia (the intervening variables) have prevented the formation of a military alliance.

Chapter I. Analytical structure: neoclassical realism

The first chapter of this study will describe the theoretical structure in which the study inscribes herself.

Realism is not a unique theory but more a research program about the main factors and processes explaining the international relations. Numerous sub-schools exist within realism, as neorealism or neoclassical realism. Two famous founding books of realism are The Twenty Years' Crisis (Carr 1939) and Politics Among Nations (Morgenthau 1948). Realist theories as well as their sub-school are built on different postulates, the main ones are the following. For realist theories, the building block of the international system are sovereign states, despite the existence of non-state actors like international organisations or non-governmental organisations. They evolve in an international system that is characterized by its anarchy and its instability. This anarchy provokes security dilemmas for states, pushing them in a quest of power to ensure their security. Here realists divide between two groups, those who think that states only seek to survive, so that they will adopt a defensive realism by looking to preserve their territory and sovereignty. Other realists think that states want to maximise their power to ensure their security, pushing them into a global competition for wealth, power and resources. These are the offensive realists. Realism is also popular in the Chinese traditional strategic culture. One of the oldest Chinese strategic books is The Art of War by Sun Tzu (5th century B.C).

Neoclassical realism is a sub-school of neorealism. This well-known school of international relations postulates that the international system is anarchic and that the priority of states is survival. States fight for power and resources under the pressure of the anarchic international environment (Kropatcheva 2018: 43). The main point of neorealism is that it insists in the importance of the international balance of power on the behaviour of states. However, neorealism aims more to explain general theories within the international system and their global effects, rather than a specific foreign policy behaviour. This is often referred to as the black box of neorealism, as it does not study the internal conditions of states. (Kropatcheva 2018: 45).

As the goal of this study is to explain a particular foreign policy behaviour and not to make general assumptions, neoclassical realism is particularly convenient here. As in neorealism, the pressure of the anarchic international system (the independent variable) is viewed as the main explanatory factor of the foreign policy of states. States, in function of the relative material power capabilities and their position within the international structure, try to maximize their power to have the maximum chances of survival. However, neoclassical realists then explore the internal

conditions of states to see how they react to the systemic pressure (Rose 1998: 154). Neoclassical realism explores variables from different levels to see how they interplay between each other and how they influence the foreign policy of states. A neoclassical analyst study thus begins by defining a behavioural model that a state would have if only the systemic level was taken into account. Then, it goes to the unit-level, also named as state-level, to see how the internal factors can influence the systemic factors (Korolev and Portyakov, 2018: 416). These internal factors (the intervening variables) can be domestic factors (power division within the elites, ideology, personality of the leaders, etc) or geopolitical features related to the immediate geopolitical neighbourhood. The systemic factor is considered the most important one, but the innovation of neoclassical realism is that it also considers that domestic factors can have an influence on the foreign policy of a state either by reinforcing or counteracting the systemic incentives (Kropatcheva 2018: 46). It is particularly useful to explain ambivalent behaviours such as in this study.

A neoclassical realist analysis is acutely adapted to explain the Sino-Russian military relations. Russia's foreign policy objectives have often been explained through the scope of realist concepts: expansion, the power and status aspirations, the Near Abroad policy and concept of zones of influence, the reliance on hard power and others. Russia and China can be both described as great powers with primary role in international affairs. As an example, they both have a permanent seat the United Nations Security Council. The systemic pressure is thus of primary importance to study if an explanation of their foreign policy wants to be credible. However, due to their size and internal complexity, as well as their immediate geopolitical neighbourhood, their internal factors have to be taken into account to explain their international policy the most accurately possible. If only the systemic factors or the unit levels were analysed, it would not be sufficient to correctly explain their foreign policy.

This analysis starts by the study of the systemic incentives on the foreign policy behaviour of Russia towards China. The pressure and changes of the anarchic international environment (the independent variable), if it was the only factor taken into account, would make one suggest that Russia would have deepened its military relations with China, possibly conclude a military alliance. However, this has not happened, as the study of the internal factors (intervening variables) helps to understand. The domestic factors in Russia have created a counterincentive to the systemic factors and prevented the formation of a formal military alliance. The disagreement between Russian elites, the persistent security concerns from the Russian government and the security issues in Central Asia (the intervening variables), have resulted in the formation of ambivalent military relations between Russia and China, as this study will further demonstrate. The analytical structure of this study can be illustrated with the schema below.

Figure 1: Neoclassical realist analytical structure



Chapter II. A strategic ambivalence: Sino-Russian military relations

The first step of the analysis is to define the dependant variable, that is the level of the Sino-Russian military relations.

Section 1) The Sino-Russian strategic partnership at the official level

Since the breaking of the political relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), also known as the Sino-Soviet split (1956-1966), the bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing have greatly improved. This is particularly noticeable after 2008. Before this date, even though Russia and China were linked by a strategic cooperative partnership since 1996, some mistrust remained persistent between the two great powers. Moscow was worried about the rapid growth of China's capabilities, especially in military and economic terms. The situation of the Russian Far East particularly worried the Kremlin, due to its small population, Chinese working immigration and its relative defencelessness (Røseth 2018: 3). In 2008 the Russo-Georgian war marked a significant deterioration in Russia's relations with the Western world. The same year, China and Russia signed an action plan to improve their relations based on the treaty of 2001 (Bolt 2014: 48). Finally, in 2011 their bilateral relations received the level of a "comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership". Moscow's and Beijing's bilateral military relations are a good barometer of their level of cooperation in general, as questions relative to national security are an area to which the Kremlin is particularly attentive. According to Tom Røseth, a strategic partnership "is a broad, long-term relationship based on trust that allows for in order to obtain benefits through the partnership, but may imply concerns about the other's relative power" (Røseth 2018: 3). The strategic partnership is in-between neutral relations and a formal military alliance.

This increased cooperation can be observed in the official declarations and the treaties signed. By looking at the official speeches, the Sino-Russian military relations seem to be under a bright sky. Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, characterized the relations between Russia and China as being at the highest level in 70 years (TASS 2019b). The Russian strategic documents do not mention potential threats coming from the Chinese side. The official documents, like the National Security Strategy (2015) and the Military Doctrine (2014) stated the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as being the main threat for Russia. Concerning China, Russia officially does not consider Beijing as a national security menace and rather emphasizes the opportunities of collaboration with her partner (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation

of 2014). Russia's image in China is also positive, Moscow does not appear as a threat in the Chinese discourse or publications. China neither does not consider Russia as an imminent threat or in a negative aspect (Jinghan and al. 2015: 264).

The Chinese-Russian strategic partnership has been characterized by regular meetings by the top leaders, cooperation on international issues, energy and military cooperation, economic agreements and more. As many as nearly fifty agreements have been signed by the two countries since 2001 (Bolt 2014: 50). The conflict in Ukraine in 2014 further parted away Russia and the West. Their relations came down to an unprecedented level since the end of the Cold War. Russia proclaimed a "turn to East" in 2014, officially giving priority to China over Europe. Another important treaty between the two countries was signed in 2015: the Sino-Russian Cybersecurity Agreement. One of the main components of this agreement is a mutual assurance of non-aggression in cyberspace (Nocetti 2018: 192). Moreover, on international security issues Moscow and Beijing have coordinated their responses. For example, they both vocally opposed the presence of the US's THAAD missile system in South Korea. They were also against the American missile shields in Europe (Kuhrt 2018: 264). Thus, the official declarations and the treaties signed in their overwhelming majority aim to demonstrate a good level of military relations between Russia and China, giving the impression of reliable partners. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Russia and China are not formally allies, as the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation of 2001 does not contain a defence clause (Røseth 2018: 10). Another important observation is that the Foreign Policy Concept published by Russia in 2016 voices doubts about whether the military alliances are really useful to solve the modern-day challenges (Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2016).

Section 2) Russo-Chinese military cooperation on the ground

The official discourses and the treaties have been followed by an increased military cooperation on the ground. The level of military relations can be measured with arms trade, top brass meetings, bilateral exercises, and border relations. The measurements of the military relations show that they globally have followed the official discourse and have generally improved. However, some attitudes from Russia and China demonstrate that there is still some mistrust between them and that their military relations can be characterised as ambivalent.

➤ **Arms trade:**

The first measurement used to evaluate the level of the Russian-Chinese military relations is the arms trade. Chinese leaders, on their long-term development plans for China, have sought to develop the country's military for several decades. In this context during the 1990s China became the main client of Russia's military industry. After the fall of the USSR, Russia saw her revenues diminish drastically and was in need of revenues. China started to buy a lot of Russian weapons, being banned from the Western arms trade, and Russia was eager to sell its weapons to Beijing. The arms sold were mainly standard weapons in large quantities. Among these weapons, there was missile systems, helicopters, SU-27 and Su-30 fighter aircraft, destroyers and others (Bolt 2014: 56). Russia traditionally refused to sell her more advanced weapons systems to China and was reluctant to technology and research transfer. Among different reasons, the Kremlin feared that China would do reverse-engineering on its most advanced weapons systems, which would have allowed China to produce its own weapons. Moscow was also worried about keeping a relative balance of power in Asia. In this perspective, India and Vietnam were the privileged recipients of Russian technology transfers during the 2000s, over China (Røseth 2018: 6). Arms sales dropped in 2005, dropped again in 2008 due to the financial crisis, as China was now able to produce most of the weapons she used to purchase from Russia. The ones Beijing wanted to buy, the most advanced weapons systems, Moscow was not yet ready to sell them. In 2005 Russia's arms exports to China were worth 3.2 billion US\$. Between 2010 and 2018 Russian arms exports to China had dropped to an average of 816 million US\$ per year (<https://chinapower.csis.org/>). However, following the degradation of Russia's relations with the West in 2014 due to the Ukrainian crisis, things began to change. The Russian arms exports to China went under a change, the market moved from quantity to quality. Russia agreed to sell to China her most advanced weapons systems such as S-400 missile defence systems or SU-35 fighter jets (Kuhrt 2018: 262). Russia thus favoured China over its traditional Asian partners, India and Vietnam. These new Russian weapons have been crucial for China's air defence and naval defence. China wants to protect access to her territorial waters and sensitive areas such as the South East China Sea. The SU-35 fighter jets have increased the Chinese army's defence capabilities against the American navy ships (Weitz 2019: 2). This acceptance from Moscow to proceed to technology transfer to China is a consequence of their improved strategic partnership. It shows that a certain level of trust has been attained. Arms trade indicates a good level of the Sino-Russian military relations.

➤ **Top brass meetings:**

Top brass meetings will be used as the second measurement to define the level of Moscow's and Beijing's military relations. The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership is characterised by frequent meetings each year between each country's top officials. The top brass meetings have become more organised, more frequent and more institutionalized. They allow the Russian officials and their Chinese counterparts to discuss and collaborate on transnational issues, to issue joint statements and learn more about each other (Weitz 2019: 3). The foreign ministers, prime ministers and chief of states have met regularly in the past years and continue to do so. Since Xi Jinping became the Chinese president in 2013, the foreign leader he encountered the most is Vladimir Putin. From 2013 to 2019 they met more than 30 times. Xi Jinping said about Putin: "He is my best and bosom friend. I cherish dearly our deep friendship." (TASS 2019a). Moreover, numerous Russian military personnel have studied at the National Défense University of China, while their Chinese counterparts came to Russian faculties to learn too (Fu 2016: 98). The military contacts between Russia and China are of an average of 30 top brass meetings per year. Besides Pakistan, Russia is the only country with whom China has such a military cooperation. The main bilateral military meetings between Moscow and Beijing are at the number of 4:

1. "The Mechanism of Regular Meetings between the Defence Ministers of Russia and China". The Chinese and Russian defence ministers meet once a year to exchange and coordinate their views about international security.

2. "The Mechanism of Annual Strategic Consultation among Chiefs of the General Staff"

3. "Russia-China Consultation on National Security Issues"

4. "The China-Russia Northeast Asia Security Dialogue" (Korolev 2018)

These meetings have grown both in frequency and in deeper cooperation. They serve as an indicator of good military relations between Russia and China.

➤ **Military exercises:**

Military exercises are another indicator that is useful to measure the level of the Sino-Russian military relations. Russia and China have conducted bilateral military exercises in the past years, both on land and on the sea. The goals of these joint military exercises are to enhance their interoperability, to learn new techniques, to improve each other's operational interoperability. The Chinese military in particular needs to train in these large exercises as China has not been engaged in any big war abroad since World War 2 (Weitz 2019: 3).

Their first combined exercises were organised through the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the multilateral organisation of which they are both members. Beijing and Moscow collaborate within the SCO to maintain security in Central Asia and fight separatism and terrorism. In 2005 Russia and China held the Peace Mission exercises, which were officially about fighting terrorism. However, given the number of soldiers and military involved, some analysts pointed out that it was also a demonstration of force to the other Asian states (Bolt 2014: 58). The level of military cooperation on these land exercises, which have been conducted several times since 2005, was quite low. Russia and China started a new type of naval exercise in 2012: The Joint Sea exercise. These exercises were held annually in the Southern Asian Seas, for example in the Sea of Japan in 2013 and in the South China Sea in 2016 (Korolev 2018: 35). They are particularly relevant for China, as Beijing seeks to expand her influence in the Asian seas and has several maritime disputes with other Asian states. China has territorial claims on several archipelagos of the South China Sea, like the Parcels Islands, and is in conflict over these territories with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia among other states. The fact that Russia agreed to organise the Joint Sea exercises in these locations indicates a stronger level of military cooperation than before, as it risks appearing like a political support to China. However, Russia has not openly supported China on these disputes and preferred to remain neutral (Bolt 2014: 58). It appeared that for Moscow the message conveyed in these exercises was more an opposition to the US hegemony than an approval of Chinese territorial claims (Korolev and Portyakov, 2018: 423). The level of military cooperation under these bilateral maritime exercises, even if it remains under the political anticipations, corresponds to improved military collaboration. Indeed, information exchanged within maritime exercises is quite sensitive and complex (Korolev 2018: 36). The Joint Sea exercises have raised concerns in the Asia-Pacific region, notably among Russia's other partners in Southern Asia. It can be considered as another signal that Russia's Pivot to Asia also means that priority is given to China by Russia over its traditional Asian partners such as Vietnam. China also took part in the 2018 Vostok military exercise, which showed a certain degree of cooperation as this exercise was organised by the Russian Eastern Military District, and Eastern Siberia is a sensitive area for Moscow in its relations with China. Russia was for a long time suspicious about China's intentions in this region, so inviting the Chinese army in this exercise is an important signal for the Russian military.

However, even if their bilateral exercises have been held more frequently and with more inter-operability, Russia and China also held unilateral military exercises that demonstrate that there is still a degree of upholding between them and that they are not full allies. In particular, in 2013 a few months after the Joint Sea exercise, Russia held its biggest military exercise since 1991. It took

place in the Russian Far East, not very far from the Chinese border. More than 160 000 troops took part to the exercise, as well as cruisers from the Pacific Fleet (Bolt 2014: 58). The goal of this unilateral exercise was to show the readiness and preparation of the Russian armed forces to defend the Eastern territories. Moscow also wanted to demonstrate its independence and the fact that Russia was ready to defend its territories against any enemy, including China. Moreover, Russia held also the Vostok military exercise of 2014 in the Russian Far East. The Russian armed forces trained to move quickly on long distances, with some scenarios that were mainly general but could also include China as a threat (Røseth 2018: 14). As for China, some military exercises included in their scenario a confrontation with more equipped enemy (more technology and with nuclear forces). This scenario can include Russia. Hence, Russia cooperates with China in several land and maritime exercises, sharing knowledge and demonstrating their good relations. However, the unilateral military exercises held by Russia demonstrate that the Russian military continues to include the possibility of a Chinese threat in its scenarios and do not fully trust Beijing. The military exercises of Russia and China demonstrate that their military relations are sometimes cooperative but other times tainted with mistrust. Thus, they can be defined as ambivalent.

➤ **Border relations:**

Finally, border relations are also an indicator of the Sino-Russian military relations. The border between Russia and China was heavily militarized during the USSR period, following the Sino-Soviet split. An undeclared border conflict eventually opposed the two communist countries in 1969. Since the fall of the USSR, Moscow and Beijing have been working to solve this border dispute. A first bilateral agreement was signed in 1997 which solved issues about the Eastern side of the border. It was followed by a Complementary Agreement in 2004 which solved the last border dispute and marked the resolution of the border issue between Russian and China (The New York Times 2004). Apart from this border demarcation, Russia and China sought to de-militarise partially the border where numerous soldiers were stationed during the Cold War. Between 1993 and 2016, the Russian armed forces stationed near the border went down from 290 000 to 65 000 military personnel. China also reduced her arm forces on her side of the border (Røseth 2018: 12). Since 2008 the Russian army has been under some big modifications. Russia reorganised and modernized her army in order to adapt it to the modern-day challenges. The Maritime Doctrine of 2015 defines as a strategic objective the reinforcement of the Pacific Fleet, the key to Russia's power in the Pacific. Thus, Russia has strengthened her naval forces in Vladivostok, while underpinning her military forces in the Far Eastern district, next to the border (Kuhrt 2018: 261). This appears to be slightly in contradiction with the official declarations which, as mentioned before, do not state

China as a threat. While the leaders emphasize regularly how good the bilateral relations are, the facts on the ground tend to show that there is still a degree of distrust between the two countries. The Russian deployment of armed forces next to the Chinese border shows that the Kremlin is still attentive to not lower its defence against China. For example, in 2017 the Russian military deployed S-400 systems in the Russian Far East, officially to protect the Pacific Fleet from an exterior attack and as an answer to the instability provoked by the North Korean situation, but this could also be a strengthening of the local Russian army against China and a signal that Moscow is not lessening its guard (Stronski and Ng, 2018: 24).

Moreover, the Far Eastern District forces, reinforced and reorganised, have participated in some unilateral exercises that can include China within their scenarios. Thus, even if the border dispute has been solved and the total number of troops stationed near the border has been reduced, in the past years Russia has reinforced her military in the Far East. The facts appear to be in opposition to the official narrative, which indicates that by considering the border relations, the Sino-Russian military relations appear to be ambivalent.

The arms trade and the top-brass meetings indicate a strong level of military cooperation, that has increased since 2008 and continues to increase. Russia has shown China trust by selling its most advanced weapons, and the meetings have grown both in frequency and number. As for the bilateral exercises and the border relations, there are too some elements of strong collaboration between Moscow and Beijing. However, some moves on the ground show that there is still mistrust from the Russian side and contradict the official story. Thus, the military relations can be defined as ambivalent.

Section 3: Hybrid warfare operations, a possible future Sino-Russian military cooperation

This section will cover hybrid warfare operations, as it has become an integral part of the military studies today.

Nowadays, large direct military conflicts between great powers are unlikely to happen, particularly due to the nuclear dissuasion. Great powers mostly compete in third countries, either through military operations in proxy wars, or in non-military operations involving the use of economy or other means of competition. These new form of mixed operations as been named hybrid warfare. Frank G. Hoffman has defined hybrid warfare as “any adversary that simultaneously

and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour in the battle space to obtain their political objectives” (Hoffman 2009, cited in Cordesman 2020: 3). Hybrid warfare therefore means the use of different methods, conventional tactics as well as unconventional ones, in different locations and spaces, to politically influence an event or an opponent. The Russian General Valery Gerasimov described the hybrid warfare in these words: “The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures – applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population. All this supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special operations forces” (Gerasimov 2013, cited in Cordesman: 4). Gray zone operations have been increasingly used in the past years by the great powers (principally the US, Russia and China) to compete with each other without requiring the use of armed forces. They especially happen in the cyberspace and in information warfare, using the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to destabilize a foreign country by influencing on her internal affairs or her public opinion.

Russia has accused the US of launching hybrid warfare operations against her, through Washington’s regime change policy in the post-soviet space and the suspected information war against Moscow. The American foreign policy is perceived in Russia as aimed to destabilize the country through unconventional and hidden tactics, notably by organizing and supporting popular revolutions movements around Russia’s territory, to destabilize the Russian political regime. The Russian military worked to integrate these perceived threats into its new military doctrine (Simons 2018: 211). The Kremlin believes that Russia is in a state of neither war or peace with the West, an intermediate state where each side will try by any means to discredit and weaken the other side. Information warfare is an essential part of this war. The US and Russia have regularly accused each other of propagating fake news. The Russian media has often denounced the ‘Russophobia’ that they believe to be widespread in American politics and society. Information has become a political tool for global influence. This new vision of information has been integrated by the Russian government in the new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation published in 2014. The Doctrine considers information as being a fundamental part of the new forms of conflicts and as a part of the national security instruments. According to the Military Doctrine, information can be used as a way to reach directly to a country’s population, to form in its public opinion a negative opinion of the political leaders and to encourage mass protests and even revolutions. Information is thus treated as a threat that needs to be controlled and included in Russia’s military tools (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2014). The cyberspace has become an arena where

great powers continue their competition for global hegemony, leading to the militarization of information. Russia sees ICTS and the cyberspace as a tool for other countries to threaten its political regime, its regional stability and its sovereignty.

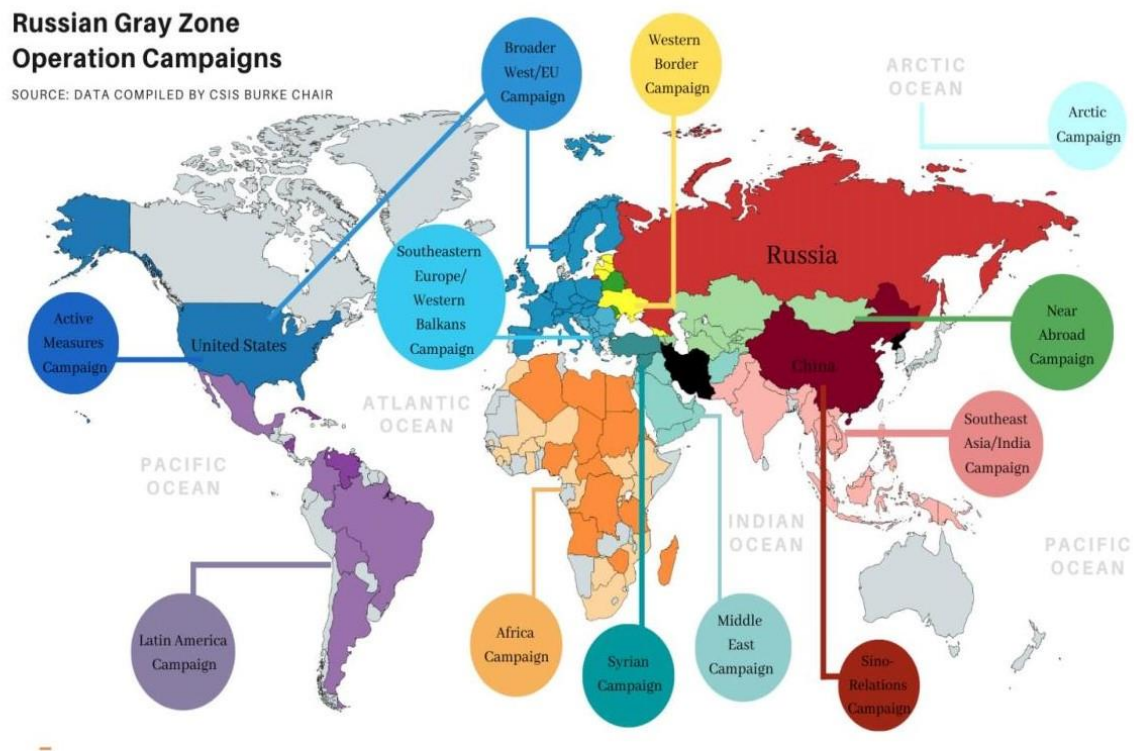
Nevertheless, Russia has also used gray zone actions to compete against its political opponents. In February 2017 Information Troops were officially created in Russia, regrouping various profiles such as hackers, cybersecurity experts and information experts. Russia has used the cyberspace and information warfare, in addition to traditional foreign policy tools such as the military, to launch cyberattacks in other countries or influence their public opinions, engaging herself in the competition for power in the cyberspace (Nocetti 2018: 189). Coercive diplomacy is an essential tool for Russia. Charles Ziegler defines coercive diplomacy as “efforts to persuade an opponent to stop and/or undo an action he is already embarked upon” (Ziegler 2018: 123). Moscow uses coercive diplomacy as a tool in its gray zones actions, mainly through disinformation campaigns or cyber-attacks.

The US hegemony on the Internet has been criticized by many nations, including Russia and China. Most of the internet resources are in fact based in the US, such as the domain names systems, the major infrastructures or the capacity to regulate the web that is mostly under control of the American government. The American government has been under the fire of critics also because while promoting the deregulation and freedom of the Internet, security agencies such as the Central Information Agency (CIA) or the National Security Agency (NSA) have been collecting data about people in the US as well as about foreign citizens and governments, as revealed through the Edward Snowden scandal, the NSA’s former employee. Russia felt the dominance of the big US companies over the Internet as a threat for her national security (Nocetti 2018: 188). In reaction to these perceived threats, Russia launched her own hybrid warfare campaigns. It is important to note that in the cyberspace and the ‘cyber war’ between the US, Russia and China, every story has different versions according to its narrator, as each country has accused the other of organising disinformation campaigns and propagating fake news.

Hybrid warfare operations involve a large spectrum of operations that imply various means of organisation. They can be orchestrated on a governmental level or by lower actors or organisations. An American report has listed Russia’s main gray zones actions, and established that Russia and China coordinated cyber actions such as disinformation or propaganda to discredit the US internationally or to influence the public opinions of the US’s allies, such as in Eastern Europe country or the post-soviet space. These tactics are called *aktivnye meropriyatiya* in Russian. According to this report, Russia has launched several hybrid warfare campaigns around the world to target the

US influence and tarnish their image. Moscow has also, still according to this report, collaborated with China within the SCO to keep the Central Asian states under Russian and Chinese influence and away from the US (Cordesman 2020).

Figure 2: Russian hybrid warfare operations around the world



Russia's campaign in the USA involves attempts of influencing the 2016 election by creating fake accounts on Twitter and Facebook, in order to delegitimize the American democratic system and divide the public opinion. In China, Russia's actions aim not to destabilize the regime but on the contrary to consolidate ties with Beijing in order to counteract the US hegemony in the world (Cordesman 2020). Again, such hybrid warfare campaigns are not the prerogative of Russia, as the US and China, along with other great or regional powers, have too been involved hybrid warfare operations.

Therefore, the cyberspace is nowadays seen as an essential component of national security policies. It is the fourth battleground where great powers compete for influence and power, along with the earth, the sea and the sky. As evoked before, as the Internet is mostly dominated by US companies and norms, Russia and China have started to cooperate in recent years in the field of cybersecurity, as a part of their strategic partnership and to fight back US hegemony. One of the

organisations through which they have collaborated in cybersecurity is within the SCO. They are required within the SCO to share their information and their cyberspace policies. Moscow and Beijing have used the SCO to promote an Internet based on state sovereignty rather than freedom. Another important step in hybrid warfare collaboration between Russia and China is their cybersecurity deal signed in 2015. The main aspects of the deal are a clause of non-aggression in the cyberspace and the promotion of cyber-sovereignty (Nocetti 2018: 192). As the international community has not yet managed to agree on a global text about cybersecurity, this deal can be seen as a rapprochement of the Russian and Chinese cybersecurity policies and views. They both consider information security as a full part of the cybersecurity and insist more on the necessity to control the information for national security interests rather than letting the information circulate without barriers on the Internet in the name of freedom. Thus, Russia and China have converging views about how the Internet should be regulated, a vision which is opposed to the US conception of the Internet and that has brought them together closer in cybersecurity cooperation.

At the same time, Russia has not been the main priority for the Chinese cyber policy. China also signed in 2015 a non-aggression deal with the US about the cyberspace. The US are the priority for Beijing's cybersecurity policy, and the cyber competition is more played between the US and China rather than the US and Russia, which has raised some concerns in Moscow. On cybersecurity issues, Moscow and Beijing have collaborated on a number of issues, creating the conditions for a further cooperation in this domain. But this collaboration has not yet been pushed to the level of a shared cyber policy and this does not appear to be the priority in Beijing. Consequently, as the cyberspace is a fundamental component of military policies, the evolution of the Sino-Russian military collaboration on this subject is an indicator that needs to be followed to assess the evolution of their general military collaboration. As for now, Moscow and Beijing have collaborated in an effective but limited way on this matter, reflecting the general ambivalence of their military relations.

Chapter III. Pushed together: Sino-Russian relations and the international environment

The second step in the neoclassical realist approach is to analyse the influence of the independent variable on the dependant variable, that is the effect of the pressure and changes of the anarchic international environment on the level of China and Russia's military relations.

Section 1) The 21st century and the global competition for power and security

Neoclassical realism, as structural realism, postulates that the international system is characterized by anarchy. States constitute the main entities of the international system, notwithstanding the emergence of non-state actors due to globalization and the growing importance of international economy. Evolving under an environment ruled by anarchy, the states try to maximise their security and to accumulate as much power as they can. The distribution of power is fundamental in realist theories, as it will influence the international behaviour of states. The distribution of power between the states is measured with hard power indicators such as the GDP or military spending. States will compete in the international arena for power. If one state accumulates too much power, other states can form an alliance to reverse the unequal distribution of power and protect themselves. States will thus engage in balance of power to re-establish the equilibrium if one state becomes too powerful compared to the other ones. Since the end of the Cold War, during the 1990s and the 2000s the international system has been characterized by the dominance of the US. This situation is called unipolarity, which is a "global systemic structure constituted by the material balance of power based on relative military and long-term technological/economic capabilities" (Barkanov 2018: 148). In 2000, Kenneth Waltz predicted that the global powers would try to reverse this equilibrium and to counter-balance the US's power by forming alliances between each other (external balancing) or enhancing their internal resources (internal balancing) (Waltz 2000: 28-29, cited in Korolyev and Portyakov 2018: 424). The only states able to engage into the balance of power are great powers, as the power and resources necessary to involve into such a competition are important. Russia and China are both great powers in the international system and, as Korolev defines them "they are, in fact, important building blocks of that system" (Korolev 2018: 27). After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia lost its stature as a

global superpower and the international system undertook a transformation: it went from a bipolar to a unipolar system. During the 1990s Russia was mainly focused on improving her internal situation, as her economy was struggling to recover and to transform into a market economy. Russia's situation started to improve in the 2000s and Moscow progressively re-engaged on the international stage. Russia can be defined as a great power. Russia is one of the five officially recognised nuclear-weapon states in the world. In 2019 Russia had an estimate of 6.490 nuclear warheads, while the USA had an estimate of 6.185 nuclear warheads, making Russia the country with the largest nuclear arsenal in the world (Kristensen and Korda, 2019). Russia is also one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. As for China, the country was focused on developing its economy during the 1990s and 2000s and took a more active role in international affairs as her economy grew to be one of the world's largest economies. China too can be defined as a great power: China is also recognised as one of the nuclear-weapon states and has a permanent seat at the United Nations in the world. Moreover, in 2014 China had a GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) of \$18 344.50 billion. The same year, the USA had a GDP (PPP) of \$17 521.7 billion (Statistics Times 2019). This economic wealth (China is ranked as the first or the second largest economy in the world depending on the measurements) is another indicator of China's status as a great power.

Since the end of the 2000s, a series of events has deteriorated even more Russia's relations with the West: the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, the war in Syria since 2011 and the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. When Vladimir Putin came back to power in 2012, he proclaimed for his third term a new vision of Russia in civilisational terms. As Tsygankov writes it, "Putin's new vision of Russia as a state-civilisation with distinct interests and values since 2012 sought to compensate for the weaknesses of Medvedev's cooperative and West-centric approach" (Tsygankov 2016; 28, cited in Simons 2018: 203). Russia has engaged in a geopolitical competition with the US, with the objectives of restoring her regional power, a respect of her interests in her zone of influence and her recognition of her status as a global power. China is also engaged on a commercial war with the US, as well as a geopolitical competition for influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States are fighting to retain their position as the unique superpower and to stay in the situation of unipolarity that has benefited them since the end of the Cold War. The US cannot ignore however the emergence of other great powers, principally Russia and China, that contest the international order as it is established. The geopolitical competition has become even more intense since the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. The United States still retain their position of world leader and superpower, as neither China or Russia or any other country has the capabilities to take over this role or to become a second superpower, which would take the world back to a situation of

bipolarity. Nevertheless, China and Russia have engaged in a hard balancing with the United States, challenging the United States' hegemony and demanding a more multipolar world. The character of international relations is changing, as Simons resumes it well: "within-structure processes means unbalanced unipolarity is giving way to balanced unipolarity" (Simons 2018: 148).

The changes in the international environment have pushed together Russia and China, but also the level of pressure that they feel from the same environment. Great powers are likely to form a close relationship or an alliance when they feel existential threats by another great power. China and Russia are only susceptible to feel threatened on such a level by the United States, so to understand their behaviour between each other it is important to observe their relations with the United States (Korolev 2018: 27). Russia as well as China see their main threat as coming from the United States (and NATO). As mentioned before, their respective defence ministers meet annually to share their positions on international affairs. In 2014, China and Russia's defence ministers designated the United States as being their countries' main threat, denouncing the American involvement in Central Asia, who they believe are responsible for the colour revolutions in the region. They also denounced Washington's lack of respect for territorial integrity (Korolev 2018: 30). China and Russia are mainly concerned about the USA interfering in their internal affairs or disturbing their immediate geopolitical neighbourhood.

In summary, the changes in the international environment as well as its pressure, have pushed Russia and China to reinforce their collaboration. Russia and China also share a similar vision of the world order and both want to revise the international order.

Section 2) Russian and Chinese visions of the international order

Since the 19th century Russian political leaders have been divided into three groups: Westernisers, Statists and Civilisationists. During Dimitri Medvedev's term as president of Russia (2008 – 2012), as he belongs to the Westernizer group, he tried to improve relations with the West. The "reset" of relations between the Obama administration and Russia in 2009 was an example of this policy. However, since Putin's return to power, Russia has adopted a more civilisationist approach (Feklyunina 2018: 5). This means that instead of pursuing integration with the West, Russia pursues its own special path, with its own values and identity. The Russian regime's doctrine has been that it defends traditional values at home (orthodox Christianity, traditional family, etc) and the interests of the Russian world abroad (March 2018: 85). Under Putin's first mandate, the Russian diplomacy had a more multilateral and collaborative approach than after 2012, when her

approach was more assertive. To understand these changes, one must look at the importance of status recognition for Russia. This need of recognition can be traced back at least to Peter the Great and the Tsarist period. The great power discourse was then already important for the Russian Empire and continued to be so during the Soviet period as well as the post-Soviet period (Feklyunina 2018: 10). The importance for Russia to be recognised as a great power is partly because it has always been considered as a subaltern empire by the West, while Russia was the hegemon in her own region. This particular way of economic development has pushed Russia's quest for recognition as a great power, according to Morozov's world-systems theory (Morozov 2015, cited in Feklyunina 2018: 11). Putin's assertiveness towards the US and NATO can be also explained by this theory. Much of Russian griefs against NATO come from the feeling that during the 1990s Russian interests were not respected, especially during the Kosovo war of 1999. Putin denounced the US hegemony in his Munich speech of 2007, feeling still that Russia was not treated as she should be. Thus, after his return to power in 2012 he decided that Russia would pursue her own path as Moscow felt Russia's status was not recognised at its true value. As Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign affairs minister, stressed it "Russia should be perceived as an essential element of any new global equilibrium" (Lavrov 2016, cited in Ziegler 2018: 126). To be recognised as a great power is thus one of the key goals of the Russian foreign policy. In general, Russia's foreign policy is considered by many as based on traditional realist principles, such as the search for power, sphere of influence and security (March 2018: 81). Being a great power is therefore important for Russia's identity as well as her security. Russia has enough state capacity to participate in the international security competition race, as it was demonstrated during the Crimea crisis. John Mearsheimer explained Russia's actions by saying that "This is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory" (Mearsheimer, 2014: 82 cited in Berryman 2018: 71). The concept of zone of influence is indeed very important for Moscow, who demonstrated that it would not hesitate to use military actions to protect its influence in the Near Abroad.

Russia's long-term geopolitical strategy is to establish a modern version of the Great Power Concert that prevailed in the 19th century Europe. Russia would like the end of the US unipolarity, which would be replaced by several regional great powers who would collaborate on the most important international issues while maintaining security in their proximate geopolitical environment. These great powers, evolving in a multipolar international environment, would more or less be the US, Western European states, Russia, China, Brazil and India (the BRICS) (Weber 2018: 110). This international order can be based on the cardinal Westphalian values that Russia promotes: non-interference in internal affairs, territorial integrity, sovereignty. Russia is hesitant with the concept of global governance, as her attitude towards the Responsibility to Protect

principle demonstrates (Ziegler 2018: 124). In sum, Moscow wishes to protect its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space and to establish a multipolar balance of power. Russian foreign policy is a combination of *realpolitik* and of the promotion of Russia as a distinct civilization. The Russian diplomacy mainly promotes realist ideas.

China is a land empire with a multinational but unitary state, and a heavily centralized administration. Internal sources of vulnerability in China include minorities, notably in the Tibet and Xinjiang regions. More than 90% of the population belongs to the Han ethnicity. Until the 1970s, China had a state folded in on itself, with a planned economy and collectivisation. The country has developed since the 1980s and the arrival to power of Deng Xiaoping, who modernised the economy into a market economy. During the 1990s China's growth was more than 10% per year, until she became the world's first economy in GDP in purchasing power parity as mentioned above in 2014. These economic changes have fundamentally changed the Chinese foreign policy. Before, China was living in autarky and was centred on her internal economic development. China developed her foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century with the arrival to power of Hu Jintao, who promoted the concept of peaceful rise of China. The principle of this policy was to break with China's previous autarky without entering into competition with the other great powers and to focus on the economic development. When Xi Jinping arrived in power in 2013, he developed a more affirmative foreign policy. Beijing's objectives were to be recognised as a great power, to consolidate its influence in the Asia-Pacific region and to constitute a pole of power in an international order less centric and more multipolar. As for Russia, the recognition of her great power status is fundamental for China. The 19th and 20th centuries were perceived as humiliating centuries for China, which was then under the influence of the Western powers who had established colonies in the Middle Empire.

China's geopolitical vision can be explained in concentric terms. In this Chinese geopolitical vision, China is the centre of the world and is surrounded by different circles more or less important for her national security. The first circle is the area inhabited by the Han ethnicity. The second circle is the Chinese regions non-inhabited by the Hans, such as Xinjiang, they represent a buffer zone between China and the rest of the world. The third circle are the territories outside of the Chinese territory but fundamental for the Chinese strategic interests, such as the South China Sea. The fourth circle are the sovereign nations around China, where Beijing wishes to exert some influence, such as Mongolia. The fifth and final circle is the rest of the world, which China does not want to dominate but interact with it to booster her economic and commercial interests. The main area of interests for China are the first, second and third circles. Beijing considers to have an historical right of influence in this region. The fourth circle acts more like a buffer zone region

(Dufour 1999). In definitive, this geopolitical vision considers that China has a historical right in a particular region, which joins Russia's vision of the Near Abroad. Both countries have the same objectives of promoting a more multipolar world order; of preserving their influence and interests in their geopolitical environments and of being considered as great powers. This conception of the international system divided in different poles dominated by one regional power reunites them in opposition to the US hegemony. The US considers in fact democracy and liberalism as universal values that should be implemented everywhere in the world.

Section 3) Russia's Pivot to Asia in 2012

Following the degradation of Russia's relations with the West, when Putin took office for the third time in 2012 he proclaimed Russia's pivot to Asia, meaning that the Russian diplomacy would seek to focus on the Asia-Pacific region and focus its efforts on this region. It was not really an abrupt decision but more the gradual process that had been ongoing for several years. It is noteworthy to remember that it took place at the same moment as the Obama Administration's pivot to Asia (Clinton 2011). This shows the importance of great power politics on Russia's ties with Asia and especially China. The 2012 Russian pivot to Asia was also the year when the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit took place in Vladivostok. It enhanced the importance of this regional organisation, and the other multilateral Asian organisations, for Russia. The Russian diplomacy in fact recalibrated its network diplomacy towards the Asia-Pacific region. The concept of network diplomacy is to "move beyond the bloc politics of the Cold War and engage any combination of states based on coincident interests" (Ziegler 2018: 131). Sergei Lavrov had been promoting network diplomacy as an effective tool for Russia to achieve its foreign policy interests. Under the context of Russia's pivot to Asia, this meant that the Russian diplomacy would focus on the Asian organisations Moscow was a member of, the most important ones being the SCO, the BRICS, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). These organisations are of the utmost importance for the Kremlin, as they represent a non-Western approach to collaboration. China is also a member of all of them. They represent China's and Russia's wish to implement a more multipolar order and to develop international organisations that are not dominated by the US or the Europeans. As diplomacy is one of the hard power tools, it needs the support of the other tools that are economy and the military to be credibly implemented. The reform of the Russian forces after 2008 and the military interventions in Syria (2011) and Ukraine (2014)

demonstrated that the Kremlin was ready to support its foreign policy objectives with the military if needed and a clear commitment to the objective of a more multipolar world.

This new foreign policy, which designated NATO and the US as Russian's main enemies and enhanced the need for collaboration with Moscow's Asian partners, was supported by several Russian official documents. The first document is the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation published in 2014. It listed the expansion and enlargement of NATO as the main external threat for Russia. The second one is the National Security Strategy (NSS) published in 2015. It blamed the war in Ukraine on the United States and its Western allies. They were also accused of acting against the independence of Russia's foreign policy. A special attention was also given to the biological arms and the threat that American labs could constitute for Russia (National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2015). The third document is the Russian foreign policy concept published in 2016. This document underlined the instability of the international system due to the international tensions between countries, as well as the growing use of force as a tool in foreign policy (Foreign Policy Concept of 2016). These documents draw the general vision of Russia that the current international order is dominated by the US hegemony and that a more multipolar world would be preferable. Putin has several times stated that the US and their Western allies refused to recognise Russia's status as a regional power in Eurasia, as well as its right to have its zone of influence in the Near Abroad. Following the Ukrainian crisis, the Kremlin has looked in the East for a new and alternative international order that is not based on Western standards (Roberts 2018: 248).

Section 4) The Shanghai Spirit, an alternative approach to multilateralism

China and Russia generally agree on most of the international issues, especially about non-interference, the importance of sovereignty, territorial integrity, their opposition to regime change and colour revolutions. Their strategic partnership is defined by their shared Westphalian principles, a coordination on some international issues, a network of bilateral mechanisms and same strategic interests. Beijing and Moscow had the opportunity to experiment their vision of multilateralism in the SCO. This organisation is dedicated to a collective management of the security in Central Asia by the regional states, with Russia and China as the de facto main political leaders of the organisation. Through the SCO, Moscow has been able to implement its own ideal of governance: rather than global governance, the Kremlin prefers a great power concert based on practical shared interests and not on specific values. China also promotes the same vision of pragmatic

collaboration. Therefore, the SCO can be seen as a new vision of Eurasian continentalism that China and Russia wish to instore, with a multilateralism based on their own terms (Lukin 2018: 391). This non-western form of multilateralism, also known as the Shanghai Spirit, is a fundamental characteristic of the SCO and of Russia's and China's vision of the international order in general. The Shanghai Spirit can be defined as "centred around the idea of multilateralism sustained on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and mutual non-interference" (Freire 2018: 400). Hence, Moscow and Beijing have tried to develop an alternative model to the Western model of governance, one that better fits their strategic interests and their own vision of how the international system should work. Hence, the pressure and the changes of the international order have pushed Russia and China to increase their bilateral cooperation, as they felt a growing threat from the same external actor (the US) and shared the same vision of the international order. If only the systemic variable was taken into account (the pressure and changes of the anarchic international environment), one would expect Russia and China to have developed their strategic partnership into a military alliance. However, as we analysed before, their military relations remain ambivalent and have not developed into a military alliance. The unit level factors have influenced their military relations in a different way and prevented the formation of a full military alliance.

Chapter III. Why not yet an alliance: Domestic and regional factors, preventing a close military alliance

The next step of this analysis is to look at the unit-level intervening variables to see how their interplay with the independent variable (the systemic factor). They counteract with it and influence the dependant variable (the foreign policy behaviour). In this case some domestic characteristics of Russia as well as the geopolitical neighbouring environment influenced the attitude of Russia and China as well as their military relations. The intervening variables are disagreements between Russian elites, persistent security concerns from the Russian government and the Russian fear of Chinese hegemony in Central Asia.

Section 1: Disagreements between Russian elites

The Russian elite surrounding Putin at the Kremlin has been relatively divided about which attitude Russia should adopt towards China. To understand how these disagreements have influenced the Russian foreign policy, it is important to first analyze how foreign policy is made in today's Russia. Across the post-Soviet space, patronal politics are spread in different political regimes. Hale describes them as "patronage networks defined by illiberalism and punctuated by color revolutions" (Hale 2014, cited in Weber 2018: 104). Patronage politics shaped Russia's modern politics today too. They are inherited from the Boris Yeltsin era (1991-1999). In this system, the president maintains around him a circle of economic, political, security (or other resource) leaders that pledge him loyalty in exchange for privileged wealth or power positions. The system is generally stable because the political leader will use the state's resources to prevent a competition for the political power. Revolutions happen when the future is not clear or when some members of the power coalition feel that they may lose their privileged position. When Vladimir Putin became president of Russia in 2000, he inherited of a particular situation. In the last Yeltsin years, the president had a relatively weak position while the power coalition around him was quite strong. His objective during his first two mandates (2000-2004 and 2004-2008) was too create a *vertikal vlasti*, a vertical of power in Russian, which would concentrate power in a top-down system centered in the Kremlin and neutralize opposition to his leadership (Weber 2018: 110). He managed to build a small coalition of devotees around him, to re-centralize the Russian state and eliminate any serious political concurrence. The center of foreign policy decisions is now located in the Kremlin, around the president and his counsellors, in a centralized process that can evoke the role

of the Politburo in the formation of the Soviet foreign policy (Ziegler 2018: 128). It is important to note that in the super-presidential Russian system inherited from the 1990s, the president enjoys a lot of freedom in the foreign policy decision-making. Strong leaders are also generally popular in Russia, thus the president's role must not be underestimated (Roberts 2018).

Nevertheless, Putin needs his coalition to stay faithful to him to maintain in power, so he has to take into account their interests. The political and economic resources in Russia are concentrated in the hands of a small group of people, either oligarchs or long-term politicians. The coalition around Putin has changed over the years, either in numbers or in composition, with groups from different backgrounds. The composition of Putin's coalition influences Russia's foreign policy in function of the interests of its actors. Thus, Russia's policy towards China has been influenced by the power coalition around Putin.

During Putin's first and second term, the *siloviki* gained in power in Putin's coalition, outreaching other actors. *Siloviki* designs the officials that come from the security services, the law-enforcement and the military. Putin has a background in the security services, as he is a former Soviet KGB (Committee for State Security) officer as well as the former director of the FSB (Federal Security Service). This has influenced his worldview as well as his entourage. A lot of his most trusted advisors come from security services agencies or the military. Here is a non-exhaustive list of the main security and military agencies in Russia. The FSB is the agency generally interested in foreign political and economic issues. The agency which deals with military intelligence is the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate) which is part of the Ministry of Defence. The role of the *siloviki* in Russia's foreign policy, and particularly of the *chekisty* (officials with a background in the security services), is linked to the proximity that their leaders have with Putin and to the role they occupy within the political system, as patronage politics theory suggests (Strokan and Taylor, 2018). The Ministry of Defence is another agency that has a relative influence in foreign policy. During the Soviet era, the Ministry of Defence generally had more influence and power than today. Nevertheless, it still maintains influence in the issues of disarmament and national security, notably because they are areas where a lot of technical expertise is needed (Konyshov and Sergunin, 2018: 174). Military is just one of the tools of Russia's foreign policy, thus the influence of the Ministry of Defence is not very broad. So from 2000 to 2008, *siloviki* officials were the most important group in Putin's power coalition. When he decided to focus on improving relations with the West and the fight against terrorism after September 2001, the members of his coalition did not protest much. In fact, the *chekisty* officials did not trust Beijing, and they have been among the most

suspicious about China's intentions since that time, especially the FSB. The arms manufacturers were also satisfied as arms sales towards China were good. The military had an ambivalent relation towards China, as they saw the possibility of cooperating with China against the US but also feared the quick build up of the Chinese army (Kaczmarek 2014: 399). The geopolitical environment however changed, pushing Russia away from the West and closer to the East. Following its 'pivot to the East' in 2012, the Kremlin initially sought to pursue a multi-vector policy in Asia, and to collaborate not only with China but also with India, Vietnam or South Korea. Putin's power coalition also went under some changes at the beginning of the 2010s. If the *siloviki* officials remained powerful, they were fighting over resources and other groups emerged, in particular coalition members with economic resources. It was in their interest to collaborate closely with China, given the country's spectacular economic growth. The growing importance of the members with economic and energy resources in Putin's coalition had also an influence on the fact that Russia's Asian policy started to focus principally on China, to the expense of her other Asian partners. Indeed, they had more to gain by collaborating closer with China, especially within the energy sector (Kaczmarek 2014: 401).

Nevertheless, the *siloviki* officials remained important members of Putin's power coalition and still had some influence in the foreign policy realm. The *chekisty* officials, especially the FSB, and the Minister of Defence, have been since the 2000s the more concerned about the sale of advanced technological weaponry to China. They were worried that Beijing would engage in reverse-engineering if Russia sold to China its most advanced weapons, and suspect China to have already done that in the past. The FSB particularly objected to the sale of the S-400 missile-defence system to the Chinese army, as it is one of Russia's most advanced weapons systems (Røseth 2018: 8). The sale of the SU-35 fighter jets is another example of the mistrust that the Russian defence sector officials have towards Beijing. This transaction necessitated many years of negotiations before it was concluded. Beijing was wary that Moscow was overpricing the planes, while the Russians thought that China was going to copy the model due to the fact that the initial Chinese offer was for four planes (Schwartz 2017). The arms manufacturers, another component of the *siloviki* group, are also reluctant to sell such technology to the Chinese. The J-11B Chinese fighter jet has been accused by many of being a copy of the Russian SU-27 (Bolt 2014: 57). On the fighter jets market, the Russian MiG-29 is in competition with the Chinese JF-17, which uses the RD-39 engines from Rosoboronexport as one of its components. Rosoboronexport received a letter from the United Aircraft Corporation to limit its sales of RD-93 to Chinese companies due to the competition between the JF-17 and Su-27 fighter jets (Page 2010). Yevgeny Livadny, the director

of intellectual property projects at Rostec company, has accused in March 2020 China of copying Russian technology: “There have been 500 such cases over the past 17 years. China alone has copied aircraft engines, Sukhoi planes, deck jets, air defence systems, portable air defence missiles, and analogues of the Pantsir medium-range surface-to-air systems” (Livadny 2020, cited in Cordesman 2020: 21).

This is another demonstration that many officials among the *siloviki* are reluctant to collaborate too closely with China in the sphere of defence. It depends on which organisation the officials belong too, as some will see more advantages in collaborating with Beijing while others will see that as a threat to Russia’s national security. As the *siloviki* officials retain important power positions within Putin’s winning coalition, the opposition of a group of them to a too close military relation with China can be seen as one of the factors that has prevented the formation of a full military alliance.

Section 2: Persistent security concerns from the Russian government

The next intervening variable that this analysis will look at is the persistent security concerns from the Russian government, and how they had an effect on the Sino-Russian military relations.

a) The Chinese military

As mentioned before, the official discourse from the Kremlin is that China is not a threat for Russia’s national security. Despite these statements, the Russian army still sent more military forces to its bases in the Far Eastern district, along the 4 200 kilometres border that Russia shares with China. At the same time, the Pacific Fleet has been reinforced. In the last decade, the People’s Liberation Army has indeed undergone under big transformations. The Chinese military has modernised and acquired new technology; partly thanks to Russian arms sales, and the number of troops has increased. Hence the military power of China has surpassed Russia’s one, in a historical change in their bilateral relations has during the 20th century the Red Army used to be much superior to the Chinese army. Russia cannot ignore this change in power positions. The troop reinforcements mentioned before show that even if Moscow will not speak about any threat, some preventive measures have been taken to ensure Russia’s security (Bolt 2014: 56). The Russian conventional forces are now inferior to the US ones as well as to the Chinese ones. For example, in 2015 Russia had 2 700 main battle tanks, while the US had 2 384 and China 6 540. Russia is also spending much less money for its military expenditure than China and the US, which contributes

to increase the military gap. The Chinese conventional forces are now superior to the Russian ones, which creates a national security concern for the Kremlin.

Figure 3: Russian, U.S. and Chinese military capabilities, 2015

<i>Item</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>China</i>
Military expenditure, U.S. \$bn	65.6	597.5	145.8
Military personnel			
Active	1,013,628a	1,381,250	2,333,000
Civilian	889,423a	14,850	—
Reserve	2,000,000	840,500	510,000
Conventional forces			
<i>Army</i>			
MBTb	2,700	2,384	6,540
RECCEc	1,200	1,900	250
AIFVd	5,400	4,559	3,950
APCe	6,000	16,377	5,020
ARTYf	4,180	5,923	13,178
<i>Navy:</i>			
Tactical submarines	49	57	57
Principal surfaces combatants	35	98	74
Aircraft	186	1,123	346
Helicopters	185	563	103
<i>Air force:</i>			
Aircraft	1,090	1,442	2,306
Helicopters	669	129	53
Strategic forces			
Submarines	13	14	4
Bombers	76	90	62
ICBMg	332	450	-

a – 2017

MBTb – main battle tank

RECCEc – reconnaissance vehicle

AIFVd – armoured infantry fighting vehicle

APCe – armoured personnel carrier

ARTYf – artillery

ICBMg – intercontinental ballistic missile

Sources: The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2016; Interfax 2017

<https://news.mail.ru/politics/29239264/?frommail=1>

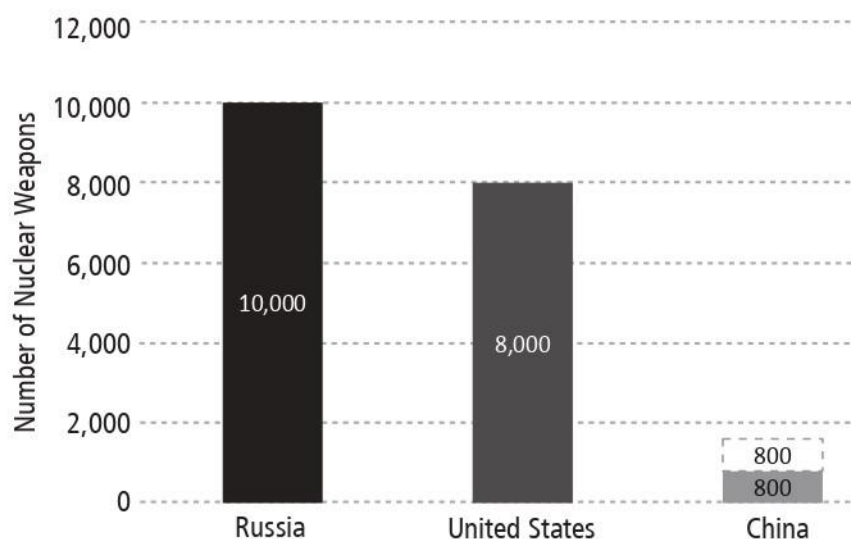
b) The nuclear question

The main forces Russia relies on to dissuade other great powers from attacking her are her strategic forces, which regroup her nuclear weapons. On this aspect, Russia has a much larger arsenal than China. Thus, the Russian army counts on its nuclear weapons to guarantee the country's national security against the US but also against China (Konyshev and Sergunin, 2018: 176). This nuclear question is also a part of the Russian army concerns towards China. In fact, China's traditional posture towards nuclear arms is to maintain a small nuclear arsenal but without revealing the exact number, which is kept secret. From Beijing's point of view, the US and Russia must agree to diminish their nuclear arsenal first, then only China will accept to engage discussions about arms control. While Russia and the US have indeed lowered the number of their deployed strategic forces, China has been suspected of augmenting her own nuclear forces (Bolt 2014: 64).

The nuclear question is particularly strategic in the Asia-Pacific region. In this zone, China, the US and Russia form what has been called by experts the Great Strategic Triangle. The Asia-Pacific region is fundamental for international security nowadays. The centre of international relations has moved from the Atlantic in the 20th century to the Pacific in the 21st century. In international security though, the traditional strategic equilibrium of the Cold War continues to play a fundamental role. The USSR and the US signed their first disarmament treaties in the 1970s. Russia inherited the international juridical personality of the USSR and continued to apply those treaties, as well as negotiating new ones with the US. The actual treaty regulating the nuclear relations between the US and Russia is the new START treaty, which ends in 2021. The key principles that regulate the nuclear questions between Russia and the US are the following: nuclear parity and nuclear deterrence (United States Department of State, 2020). Nuclear parity means that they maintain relatively the same number of active nuclear weapons and that they are limited on the maximum number that they can possess. Nuclear deterrence means that if a state A launches a nuclear attack on the state B, the latter possesses enough nuclear weapons to retaliate, which would destroy the state A too and assure the mutual destruction of both states. It is the so-called equilibrium of terror.

However, China does not take part in this equilibrium. In fact, China is the only state among the five nuclear states officially recognized by the UN to not reveal which exact number of nuclear weapons she possesses. Beijing has repeatedly refused to engage in arms control negotiations before that both the US and Russia agree to diminish their number of nuclear warheads. China's official position has been that it maintains only a small number of strategic weapons active for her national security, but doubts about the veracity of this doctrine have emerged in the recent years. Several experts have on the contrary suggested that China is reinforcing her nuclear arsenal. Of course, the overall number of nuclear weapons that Russia, the US and China possess is in a huge favor of both Russia and the US, and Russia is not threatened per se by a nuclear asymmetry (Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2013).

Figure 4: Comparative figure of the US, Russia and China nuclear arsenals



Note: Dotted lines represent possible number of weapons in tunnels

Sources: Viktor Esin, "China's Nuclear Capability," *Prospects of China's Participation in Nuclear Arms Limitations*, edited by Alexei Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin, and Sergey Oznobishchev (Moscow: IMEMO RAN, 2012), 26; "World Nuclear Forces," *SIPRI Yearbook 2012: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, edited by Bates Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 308.

The noticeable detail on this figure is the 800 nuclear weapons that China is suspected to possess in tunnels. The Chinese army has, according to several policy experts, built what is informally called as the Underground Great Wall of China. It is a vast network of tunnels designed to store and hide military materials, mainly strategic missiles and nuclear weapons (Wan 2011). The importance of this question is fundamental in regards to China's capability to retaliate after a nuclear attack by another state.

The US refuses to recognize to China the existence of a mutual nuclear deterrence, and Russia has adopted the same position. Russia and China have left the question of the mutual nuclear deterrence out of their relations. The nuclear doctrine of China is that she will never use nuclear weapons first, but only if she is attacked to retaliate. On the contrary, Russia, as the US, has very specific cases where she plans to use her nuclear weapons first, such as if another state attacks her and the existence of Russia is threatened. Moscow has instated the last years on the crucial importance of its nuclear arsenal to ensure Russia's national security. China demands that the US and Russia officially abandon any usage of first use of nuclear weapons before entering any arms control negotiations (Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2013).

However, this is a sensitive issue for Russia because of her reliance on nuclear dissuasion. As seen before, the Chinese army has now surpassed the Russian one both in size and equipment, except for the nuclear forces. In addition, China has reinforced her forces in its Northern territories near the Russian border (Røseth 2018: 12). Her nuclear arsenal has thus become increasingly important for Russia's security towards China, especially in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Giving up the first use of nuclear weapons would mean for Moscow abandoning its only military superiority over China. Russia has also been sceptical about the Chinese nuclear military doctrine. Usually when a nuclear state adheres to the no first use of nuclear principle, it means that this state will employ nuclear force only for retaliation after an enemy attack. But if China only has the 800 nuclear weapons that experts generally presumed, it would mean that she does not have the capacity to retaliate as their nuclear arsenal would be mostly destroyed after a first attack. So, to have a retaliation capacity she would need to have another nuclear weapons stock available, as some researchers have suggested she has in the underground tunnels. The secrecy about this question and about the real number of the Chinese nuclear arsenal is deeply disturbing for Russia's national security and may cause additional frictions as measure as the military gap increases between the two countries. Additionally, the Russian proposal to construct with the US a joint Ballistic Missile Defence system has provoked some swirls in Beijing. Chinese officials have felt this proposal as a bias against China, in that they were excluded from the proposal (Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2013).

As the overall situation suggests, the nuclear question is a domain where Russia and China do not have the same views and it can be considered as a factor preventing a full military alliance.

c) The Russian Far East

Russia has historically been worried about Chinese intentions concerning the Russian Far East. Since the 19th century, the Tsars were concerned about massive Chinese immigration in the Far East. It is a particular area of vulnerability for Russia, due to the exode of the population and the weak economic activity. During the Soviet times, the region was given a high priority: people were encouraged to go and live there by receiving high salaries in compensation, investments were made to develop the region and factories were built. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the region suffered from a lack of investment which conduced many of its previous inhabitants to leave the region and to migrate to Western Russian in hope of better living conditions. The 1990s were times when Moscow was particularly concerned about the Far East as the border was still undermarked (Kurht 2018: 255). Even if this question has been resolved, Moscow still has concerns about this region due to its wealth in natural resources, which China is very much in need of. The continuing depopulation and the recent immigration of Chinese workers remains a source of concern too. The regional authorities of the Far Eastern districts have been willing to attract Chinese investments to develop the region's autonomy, as investments from Moscow were not sufficient. They want to give the priority to the economic development of the region, which is especially rich in hydrocarbons (Røseth 2018: 7).

The federal government seems to have a dual policy towards the Far East. In 2012 a new Ministry for Far Eastern development was created in Moscow, which looked like the government was giving priority to the development of the region. However, the facts have contradicted this affirmation, as the Fast East has not received substantial funds from Moscow. Russia is divided between the need of investments in the region and the security concerns that it upholds towards Beijing's intentions. Russia has turned towards its other traditional Asian partners to diversify the investments in the region and avoid the predominance of one country in the Far East. Russia has tried to develop economic links with Vietnam, its long-term ally in Southeast China. The trade between Vietnam and Russia has developed rapidly since the 2010s (Korolev and Portyakov, 2018: 428). Yet, Chinese investments still represent the big majority of all the foreign investments in the Russian Far East.

Russian officials have repeatedly stated that the region is crucial for Moscow. The land mass of the Far East is enormous, as it represents around 36% of the whole Russian territory. It is the key to Russia's access to the Asia-Pacific region, where the Pacific Fleet is stationed, a huge reservoir of resources (gas, oil, minerals, wood). But at the same time, it suffers from underdevelopment and mass emigration. The Far East only represented in 2015 5,5% of Russia's global GDP (Stronski and Ng, 2018: 18). Moreover, the Siberian territories were ceded to Russia by China in a series of 19th century treaties that Beijing has several times called as unequal, weakening in Moscow old fears

of Chinese irredentism. Russian economic goals in the region are to move from raw materials exportations to manufacture and industrial production. China has committed to several projects to develop the industrial sector of the Far East, but doubts have emerged in regard to the actual realisation of these projects. If on the official level authorities emphasize these new economic projects, their actual implementation meets more difficulties. Chinese and Russian business cultures are different, and Chinese businessmen have faced troubles with slow bureaucracy and reluctance from some local authorities. Some mistrust is still present among the local population, as the 2015 demonstrations around the Baikal region demonstrated. The local population was protesting against the lease of some farmlands to a Chinese company. These demonstrations showed that the local people are still wary about a Chinese economic domination of the region (Stronski and NG, 2018: 21). Russians are also afraid that the big Chinese companies will represent an unequitable threat for local Russians companies, as they do not possess the same means and capital.

The Far East is also a strategic region for Russia's national security as it the area where huge gas and oil fields are located. Most of the gas fields exploited today in Russia are in Western Siberia, while the reserves and future fields are located in Eastern Siberia. Oil and gas production represented in 2018 38.9% of Russia's revenues (Warsaw Institute, 2020). Thus, they are a strategic resource for the Russian government and their exploitation must be secured. This concern is apparent in the Russian official documents, which have listed as potential threats the overdependence of Russia on hydrocarbons resources and the risk of losing the control over these hydrocarbons (Grajauskas, 2009). In this regard, Russia has been concerned with her unbalanced relations with China over the energy sector. After the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and the downfall of European-Russia relations, the European Union has reaffirmed her will to diversify her supply of energy to ensure her national security. Russia, for her own national security, has looked to the East to diversify her export energy routes, turning particularly to China's enormous energy needs. In this context and after several years of negotiations the Power of Siberia gas deal was signed between Russia and China in May 2014. The experts noted that the deal's conditions were economically favourable to China, as Russia's economy had suffered from the Western sanctions and needed this deal to signed (Kurht 2018: 259). China managed to fix gas prices favourable to her, and Beijing is now buying from Gazprom gas at a lower price (per cubic meter of gas) than the Western European states. China is mainly interested in the Russian Far East as a way to secure her tremendous needs of energy resources. Beijing's southern energy imports are mainly through sea routes, which could be easily disrupted in case of a US blockade (Stronski and Ng, 2018: 21). Therefore, Russia has also security concerns about its energy relations with China, which are quite

asymmetrical as Russia needs more to sell energy to China than China needs to buy energy from Russia.

Neither China or Russia have to gain into engaging in economic or political disputes around the Russian Far East. As the officials have repeatedly stated, both countries have an interest in developing the region's economy. The difficulty relies on the implementation of the actual projects which are often only committed through joint statements or communiqués. As in other aspects of the Sino-Russian partnership, there is sometimes a gap between the political will and the actual realisation of the projects. Generally, the Russian Far East is a region that will require further observation to see the consistency and success of Moscow's Asian policy. Natasha Kurht has resumed the situation in these words: "a failure to integrate the region with broader integrative processes would consign the Russian Far East to the status of a 'double periphery, a region on the periphery not only of the Asia-Pacific, but also of European Russia'" (Kurht 2018: 260).

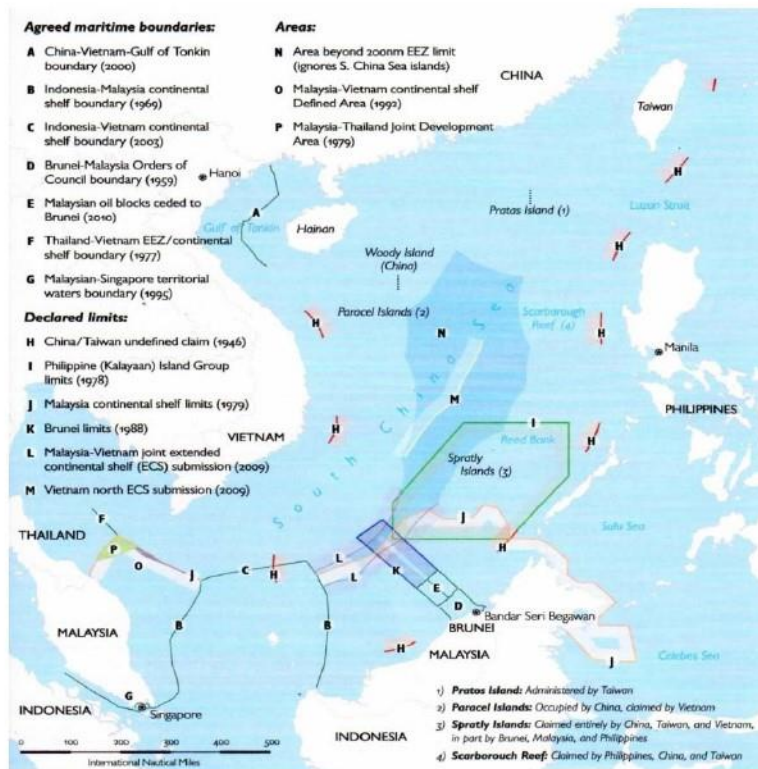
d) Territorial claims

Russia and China hold frequent bilateral meetings to agree on their foreign policy views and often express common positions about international issues. However, at times they have lacked support for one another. Their different regional security policies have led them to not support each other's territorial claims, which resulted in some frustration from both sides.

Russia had some reluctance to support China's territorial revendications in the South China Sea dispute. This territorial dispute opposes China to several other states in the region. China claims to have historical rights within a nine-dash line from its earth border, which represents around 80% of the South China Sea. Almost three quarters of China's energy imports pass through this area. This question is of crucial importance for China, both for her national security and in identity terms, as this sea is within China's geopolitical third circle, which is considered as a part of China's rightful zone of influence.

Russia has not supported China as Moscow does not want its Asia-Pacific policy to be subordinated to China's one, especially that this territorial dispute involves strategic partners of Russia such as Vietnam. Vietnam has been a military and economic partner of Russia since the Soviet era, and supporting China would be a risk of falling apart with Hanoi for Moscow, at a time where Russia seeks to diversify her partners in the region (Weitz 2019: 6).

Figure 5: The South China Sea dispute



Source: ‘China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea’

Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, CNA Occasional Paper, 2014

<https://seasresearch.wordpress.com/2014/08/19/china-versus-vietnam-an-analysis-of-the-competing-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-2/>

Russia expressed concern about the freedom of navigation regarding the South China Sea dispute, which led some Chinese analysts to criticize what they saw as a lack of support from the Kremlin. Moscow’s official position has been to remain neutral, to call for a pacific and multilateral resolution of the question, to keep the issue at a regional level and to avoid the implication of extra-territorial actors. Russia stated that the parties should solve the issue in light of the international law, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Russia has remained cautious on not expressing any positions regarding the territorial claims of any of the parties. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially commented in 2016 that Russia “would never be involved in it [the dispute]; we consider it a matter of principle not to side with any party” (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016, cited in Korolev and Portyakov, 2018: 423). Nevertheless, in 2016 several actions led by Russia shown an increased support for China’s side in the dispute. Russia agreed to conduct the Joint Sea military exercise in 2016 in the South China Sea,

which raised concerns among other states in the region. The Permanent Court of Arbitration of the Hague ruled in 2016 in favour of the Philippines against the Chinese territorial claims. China did not recognise this decision and Putin officially supported Beijing's position at the Hanzhou Summit of September 2016. The Russian position was though more about criticising the involvement of the court on territorial disputes between sovereign states than a support for Chinese territorial claims (Kurht 2018: 262).

Similarly, China has not backed up the Russian territorial claims in Crimea or recognised the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Beijing has not joined the Western nations in condemning the Russians actions in Georgia and Ukraine, but remained neutral about the Ukrainian crisis and the Caucasus republics. In 2008 following the Georgian War, China remained outside of the issue at the United Nations, and explained that she did not want to get involved in this regional affair. After the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, Beijing's position was quite similar. China was attentive to remain neutral and to underline that she was in support of a peaceful political resolution that would satisfy all the parties involved. China abstained herself in all the votes concerning the Ukrainian crisis at the UN Security Council. The Ukrainian crisis did not change the Russian-Chinese relations, and business continued as usual. The bilateral relation even intensified as the West took sanctions against Russia, provoking a fall in Russia's economic relations with Europe and pushing further Moscow's pivot to the East. In spite of this, China's official position at the UN was a full support for the principles of territorial integrity and state sovereignty. Liu Jievi, the Chinese envoy to the UN, expressed that Beijing "does not approve confrontational methods" (Liu Jievi 2014, cited in Korolev and Portyakov 2018: 420). Some signs showed that China chose to support the new elected authorities in Kiev rather than the separatists, like the fact that Xi Jinping sent a special emissary to attend the assumption of office of Petro Porochenko.

These different territorial claims generate some tensions between Russia and China and showed the limits of their collaboration in international security. The Chinese authorities felt concerned about Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The territorial integrity principle is a strategic notion for Beijing, as within China separatism is a national security issue for the authorities. China is worried that the success of any new independence movements will encourage the separatist movements in Xinjiang, Taiwan and Tibet to pursue their fight. As for Russia, she does not want to be embarked in the political fight between China and her other Asian partners. The South China Sea dispute needs to be followed closely to observe the evolution of the Sino-Russian military partnership. The growing asymmetry between Russia and China may push China to expect more support from Russia on her territorial claims, especially if Russia's relations with the West remain at their actual level (Kurht 2018: 265).

f) China's internal situation

Finally, the Chinese internal situation is also a concern for the Russian government. If the Chinese communist regime is still firmly in place in China, several events in China have raised critics within the international community and especially among Western powers. Russia pursues since Putin's third mandate a civilisationist policy, but Western European states are still of strategic importance for Moscow, which is under economic sanctions after the Ukrainian crisis. These sanctions have deeply hurt the Russian economy, and the Kremlin would like them to be lifted as soon as possible. Moreover, Europe is important in identity terms for Russia, which defines herself more like a European state rather than an Asian one. Russia is still hoping for an improvement in its relations with the West, and the situation in China could impact the Russo-European relations as China might push for more Russian support on these issues, in a similar situation to that of the South China Sea.

The primary situation that has provoked reactions within the international community is the security situation in Hong Kong. Since the Umbrella Revolution of 2014 in the former British colony, the Chinese authorities have responded with a strict security crackdown in Hong Kong. The protests were led by civilians and students demanding a respect of the territory's autonomy and rule of law. China passed in 2020 a new law on national security, which led to the arrest of several major figures of the opposition, as well as an increased control over the media, the political system and the internet of the peninsula. This provoked a reaction of the Trump Administration who revoked the special economic status of Hong-Kong, and took several sanctions against the Chinese authorities of the region. The crisis in Hong-Kong has provoked a fall in the US-China relations, which impacted the whole security situation of the Asia-Pacific region and augmented the instability in the area. Other partners of Russia in the region, such as Malaysia, have also criticized the actions of the Hong Kong president Carrie Lam (Kin-Wa, 2019). Russia does not want to take sides in this dispute, defending the traditional non-interference in internal affairs principle that she has for long promoted. But as the situation in Hong Kong worsens, this might provoke tensions with other South-East Asian states, which are concerned about the Chinese economic and political assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific. Russia's pivot to Asia is accompanied by a will to conduct a multi -vector policy in the region to not be overdependent on China in economic terms, thus Russia wants to continue to appear as a neutral state in the region, a position that she might not be able to retain if the Chinese actions continue in Hong Kong.

The other main internal issue in China is the situation in Xinjiang. This North-West region of China is populated mainly by the Uighur population, which has been under repression from the authorities in Beijing for several decades. Xinjiang became an international issue in 2017 after it was revealed that more than one million Uighur people were detained in forced labour camps, and that the Chinese authorities were conducting a Sinicization policy in the region. The UN, as well as Turkey, the US and some other states, have publicly condemned the Chinese policy towards the Uighurs. Russia has supported the Chinese policy in the region, saluting the Chinese efforts against terrorism (Miles 2019). Despite this, some fears have emerged in Russia that the situation will spread to Central Asia. Some protests have occurred in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as the local population is well informed about the Uighur repression due to the links existing between Central Asia and the Xinjiang region. The anti-Chinese resentment is growing among the Central Asian states, which is not a good sign for Russia (Goble 2019). If the crackdown against Uighurs continues in China, which is most likely, the demonstrations and anti-Chinese feelings may grow among the Central Asian population and create instability in the region. Instability in this vital region is an important security concern for Russia, both for internal and external reasons. The internal reasons are that instability and radicalism in Central Asia have often nourished the same movements in the volatile regions of North Caucasus and Chechnya, where Moscow had to fight terrorism and separatist movements. The external reason is that a growth of radicalism in Central Asia may lead also to a growth of the anti-Russian feeling in the region, given the proximity between Moscow and Beijing. As Russia struggles to maintain her influence in Central Asia, this is something Moscow does not want to happen.

The overall situation demonstrates that there are a lot of disparities between Russia and China. This is especially true in the economic realm; it creates a situation of inequality where there is a risk for Russia to rely too much on China. Chinese investments are needed in Russia, especially in the Far East, and their common stand on international issues gives them more power, especially as they are both members of the UN Security Council. At the same time, the Kremlin is conscious of the dangers of a too close relation with Beijing due to their asymmetrical relation. The Sino-Russian strategic partnership was formed because the circumstances pushed the two countries together. Their ties have grown closer as their interests coincided more and more, but they are not formal allies. In this sense, their partnership is not a full alliance but more an informal alignment which may imply security concerns about the other partner (Røseth 2018: 3). The international events pushed Russia and China closer especially after 2014, a period where trade with China as well as Chinese investments were of a huge help for Russia's economy. However, Russia did not have many other options than China to turn to. And Moscow is also concerned about this

overdependence as Russia wants to conserve her own independent foreign policy. As a Russian scholar puts it: “With this paradigm still in existence, Russia will never be able to take decisions interfering with the Chinese interests” (Bordachev 2017, cited in Kurht 2018: 258).

Henceforward, the growth of the People’s Liberation Army and the subsequent change in military power position that it has produced; the nuclear relations; the Far East region; the energy relations and the economic relations have produced security concerns in Russia regarding Moscow’s relation with Beijing, especially because of the growing gap between the two countries. The fact that Russia does not want to be considered as a subordinate partner of China and wants to ensure her national security has influenced the deepness of Moscow’s strategic partnership with Beijing. The persistent security concerns from the Russian government have indeed influenced the level of the Sino-Russian relations and prevented the formation of a full military alliance.

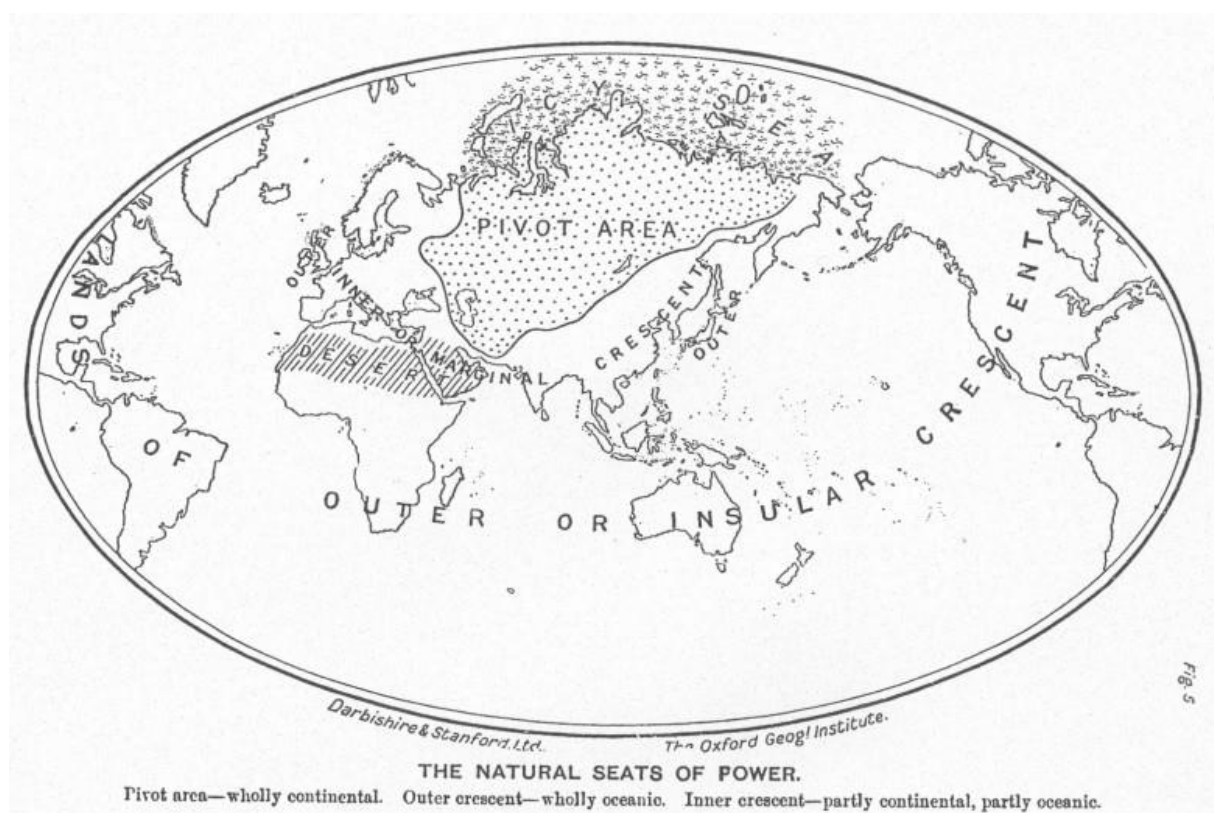
Section 3: Security issues in Central Asia

The last and third unit-level factor that this study will analyse is the security issues in Central Asia between Russia and China (the intervening variable) and how they influence the level of their military relations (the dependent variable).

The Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) were progressively incorporated in the Russian Empire through the 19th century. The growth of the Russian Empire worried the British Empire who engaged in a geopolitical competition with Russia to maintain its status as first world power. According geopolitical theories, in the international system “any significant changes in the balance of power would unavoidably trigger ‘zero-sum game’ struggle between rival great powers” (Berryman 2018: 60). The extension of Russia changed the international balance of power and engaged the British Empire and Russia in what was named the Great Game, i.e. a competition for influence and power in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Such a Great Game occurred in Central Asia because it is a strategic region in Eurasia, both due to its location and its resources. One of the founders of modern geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, theorized the strategic importance of Eurasia in the race for world hegemony. By focusing on geography, Mackinder developed a thesis concerning the geographical pivot of history that is the Heartland, which can be defined as the centre of the world. This Heartland area is covered by Eurasia consisting of a vast set of plains and plateaus stretching from the Baltic Sea to Eastern Siberia which is out of reach of ships and where, in economic and military terms, the

conditions for power are found. It is a space from which all the great invasions started. At the heart of this Heartland lies Russia, which is the pivot whose positions will be strengthened by the development of railways. It is around this Heartland that all the geopolitical dynamics of the planet will revolve, according to Mackinder. Surrounding the Heartland are several rings, the first of which is the Inner Crescent which is on the outskirts of the Heartland; this inner crescent represents the Heartland protective belt. According to Mackinder, the Heartland and its immediate periphery, where is located Central Asia, is a strategic zone as the country who will control it will have the ability to control Greater Eurasia and the world (Mackinder 1904).

Figure 6: The Heartland and the world, Mackinder's vision



Source: Mackinder H. J. (1904) 'The Geographical Pivot of History', Geographical Journal, Volume 23, Number 4, pp. 421-437.

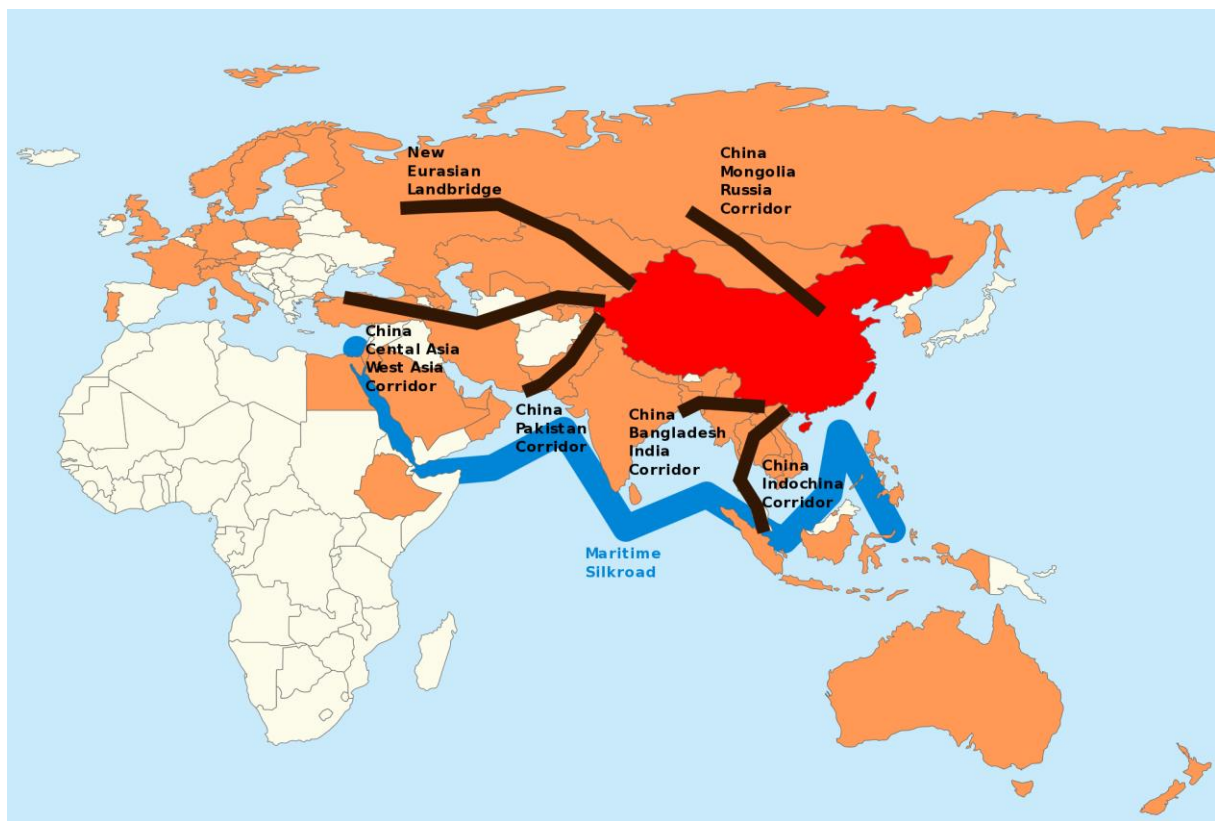
Nicolas Spykman updated Mackinder's theory. The Rimland is the key strategic concept that Spykman proposes to replace that of the Heartland. It is a pivotal space on the outskirts of the Heartland, a region that could be defined as an intermediate region between the Heartland and the maritime space. Following on from its precursor, it is the Rimland which, according to Spykman, constitutes the fundamental friction zone in international relations. In his famous quote, he affirmed that "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world" (Spykman, 1942). Central Asia located in between the Heartland and the Rimland, is

thus a strategic zone for the control of Eurasia and the world. Russia considers it as a part of its legitimate zone of influence, the Near Abroad, and has since the 19th century been the security guarantor in the region.

However, since the beginning of the 21st century China has become a key actor in the region, particularly in economic terms. China needed to increase her imports of energy, and the Central Asian states sought to diversify their hydrocarbons exportations as they were too dependent of Russia. China constructed a gas pipeline system in Central Asia to import energy from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and became in 2008 the first trading partner of the Central Asian countries (Omeliicheva 2018: 331). The arrival of China in the region was met with uncertainty, as her economic relations with the Central Asian countries could have provoked a backlash in Beijing's relations with Moscow. Russia and China have not yet been in open confrontation regarding Central Asia. They have worked to cooperate through multilateral institutions to fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism as well as the US presence in the region and colour revolutions. China is interested in the security issues of Central Asia partly due to the networks that exist between Central Asia and the Xinjiang region. Russia and China created the SCO to cooperate on security issues in the area, conducting bilateral military exercises under the auspices of the organisation. Initially, Moscow saw the SCO as an occasion to put in practise its own vision for Eurasia and the international order. Russia wanted the SCO to be mainly a political organisation, where China and Russia would collaborate along other Asian states on the main issues of the region, realising in some way Primakov's vision of Greater Eurasia, with Russia collaborating with China and India to counterbalance the US (Ziegler 2018: 131). Russia's economy went under recession after the financial crisis of 2008 and she was not in a position to make big investments in Central Asia, thus the Kremlin preferred to focus on the diplomatic side and tried to put a concert of power in place within the SCO to regulate Central Asia's security. Moscow wants to avoid the domination of any power in the region, including China's. Russia advocated for the enlargement of the SCO to India, Pakistan and Iran in order to balance China's weight and influence in the organisation (Lukin 2018: 396). China's views on the SCO were somewhat different as Beijing view more the organisation in economic terms than in political ones. China has been pushing to develop the economic aspect of the SCO, to promote more economic integration between its members. Russia firstly resisted these developments, but the international context (financial crisis of 2008, Ukrainian crisis in 2014, fall of oil prices) made her forced to make some concessions to China (Freire 2018: 405). The Development Strategy Towards 2025 of the SCO defined its main objectives as enforcing security in Central Asia and to increase economic cooperation between its states, based on the Chinese One Belt One Road (OBOR) project

(Molchanov 2018: 418). Moscow had little choice but to agree to expend the economic aspect of the SCO as China multiplied the projects outside of this framework, the main one being the OBOR project. This project was launched by Beijing to develop commercial routes (on earth and on sea) between China and Europe, through Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. The project passes right through the strategic Heartland of Mackinder, in Russia's traditional zone of influence.

Figure 7: China's One Belt One Road project.



Source: AP Human Geography

https://aphug-hansen.weebly.com/uploads/2/3/9/3/23931771/geopolitical_theories.pdf

Russia had her own plans for the region, as Moscow would prefer to manage the region's economy through its own institutions, most notably the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), of which Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members and Tajikistan a candidate. China's project pushed Russia to collaborate with Beijing on this question out of the fear that these new projects would simply bypass her. In May 2015 China and Russia signed an agreement on the cooperation between China's Silk Road Initiative and the EEU, with the final objective of creating a free economic zone. The observers noted that Moscow was more resolved to make concessions than being very

enthusiastic about the project (Kurht 2018: 264). As the Russian expert Dmitry Yefremenko analyses it, “the initiative was partly defensive and designed to ease the tension that would otherwise have developed” (Yefremenko 2017, cited in Freire 2018: 405).

In definitive, Russia and China are competing for influence in an area that Mackinder and Spykman demonstrated to be strategic for great powers. Their game for influence is also because they do not have the same vision for Central Asia. Moscow has since Putin’s third term developed an increasingly civilisational foreign policy and insists on its geopolitical view of a multipolar world divided into spheres of influence. In this understanding, Central Asia is a part of Russia’s legitimate zone of influence, which encompasses more or less the post-Soviet space. Yet, from China’s perspective this view does not fit her best interests in the region (Bolt 2014: 50). Chinese foreign policy experts have expressed reserves about Russia’s concept of zone of influence, claiming that Moscow should stop trying to implement this vision and to consider the post-soviet space as her rightful zone of influence and to focus more on a good neighbouring policy (Korolyev and Portyakov, 2018: 425). China has seen the concept of zone of influence as a potential threat for her OBOR project and wants to promote another form of regionalism based on pragmatic collaboration. An exclusive approach to regionalism as in the EEU was seen from Beijing as a way of excluding China from Central Asia and bad for business (Kurht 2018: 265). As for now, China and Russia have managed to conceal their differences through cooperation in regional organisations such as the SCO and to agree to collaborate on their respective projects, the EEU and OBOR. Nevertheless, Russia retains concerns about China’s presence in the region, and tried to balance Beijing’s hegemony by conducting a multi-vector policy within the SCO. As Moscow does not completely trust China in Central Asia, these security issues have influenced their strategic partnership and their military relations. They are one of the factors that have prevented the formation of a full Sino-Russian military alliance. How they manage to collaborate between the SCO and the EEU will impact their strategic partnership as well as their military relations. For the moment China has not considered Central Asia as her top priority and is more interested in the region in economic terms rather than in political ones. If this situation would be to reverse, it could make collaboration with Russia more difficult. As Mariya Omelicheva resumes it: “The ‘Great Game’ in Central Asia, however, will be played between Russia and China” (Omelicheva 2018: 335).

Conclusion

The strategic partnership between Russia and China is currently one of the most important phenomena in the international system. Their relations had broken up during the Soviet Era and the border issue led to several military clashes that provoked a fear of a military conflict between the two communist states. In spite of this, after the end of the Cold War the 1990s were a new starting point for Russia and China's relations. The border issue was finally resolved in 2008 and their relations transformed into a comprehensive and strategic partnership on a level that many observers would not have imagined thirty years ago. The military component of their partnership represents a significant part of their relations and of strategic importance for both countries. Moscow and Beijing have repeatedly issued official statements describing their relations as better than ever, with a strong level of trust and cooperation. The Russian official documents underline the strategic importance of this partnership. The People's Liberation Army and the Russian Armed Forces have conducted many joint military exercises in the last decade, with an increased interoperability and a larger scale each time. Russia has sold her most advanced technology weapons to China, like the S-400 missile system and the SU-35 fighter jets. The senior officials of the two armies have held frequent top-brass meetings, to share their views on international security and train together. These indicators show an increased trust between Russia and China and an improvement in the level of their military relations. Nevertheless, some mistrust remains between the two partners. The unilateral military exercises conducted by Russia and China as well as their deployment of military forces along their common border show that they still unofficially acknowledge each other as a potential threat. They also have collaborated in cybersecurity, as hybrid warfare will play an increasingly important role in the military. But in this domain their collaboration remains rather limited.

Russia and China are both great powers engaged in the international competition for power. The international system, characterized since the 1990s by the US unipolarity, went in the last decade under a series of changes. Russia recovered from the fall of the Soviet Union, re-engaging herself on the international scene with the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. China became an economic global power, challenging the US domination of the world economy in 2014. Their emergence as great powers allowed them to engage in external balancing against Washington. The international system went from the American hegemony to what experts called a "balanced unipolarity" (Simons 2018: 48). The colour revolutions in the post-soviet space, the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and the sanctions that followed deteriorated Russia's relations with the West and increased the pressure Moscow was under. Similarly, China felt

an increased pressure from the US and the international system as Beijing and Washington engaged in a commercial war and a geopolitical competition in the Asia-Pacific region.

Russia and China also share similar visions of the international order. Both countries want to be recognised as great powers. They insist on the importance of the traditional Westphalian principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, and the recognition of spheres of influences, in opposition to the Western international vision based on liberalism, democracy and human rights. They developed this alternative model of multilateralism within the SCO, in what became known as the Shanghai Spirit approach. Thus, the systemic analysis highlights that the international environment has pushed Moscow and Beijing to consolidate their strategic partnership and to increase the level of their military relations. This level of analysis is not enough to explain why they did not become full allies.

The second step of the study was to move to the unit-level of analysis to underline which factors prevented the formation of an official military alliance. The factors identified are the disagreements between Russian elites, the persistent security concerns from the Russian government and the security issues in Central Asia. These are the intervening variables that impacted the trend of the independent variable on the dependent variable and countered it. Putin's coalition has been divided in regard to which policy Russia should adopt towards China. Some members of the *siloviki*, the security officials, are reluctant to adopt a policy of complete trust towards Beijing. The officials with a background in the security services (the *chekisty*) are among the most suspicious about the Chinese intentions, notably the FSB, the Ministry of Defence and the arms manufacturers. The members of the governmental coalition with economic and energy resources are, on the contrary, more favourable to a closer relation with China. As long as the *siloviki* remain an important group in Putin's coalition, they will be a factor preventing the formation of a military alliance.

The persistent security concerns from the Russian government are of different natures. The first security concern is about the Chinese military. The People's Liberation Army has grown both in troop numbers and in military equipment, and now surpasses the Russian Armed Forces in number and technology regarding the conventional forces. This change in power positions is a concern for the Russian military. The second issue in national security for Russia is the nuclear question. China has maintained a secrecy around the number of her nuclear arsenal, and controversy has emerged as to her capacity to conduct a retaliatory strike. This, plus Beijing's refusal to engage in arms control negotiations, is a source of worry for Russia's national security, as the nuclear dissuasion is a fundamental part of the Russian security strategy. The Russian Far East

region is a historical point of tension in the Sino-Russian security relations. The economic underdevelopment of the region, its economic dependence on Chinese investments and the energy question make it a strategic region for Russia's security. The evolution of the situation there is particularly important for the future of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. The final security concern from the Russian government is the issue of territorial claims. Both China and Russia have remained neutral in each other's territorial claims, but the growing asymmetry between the two countries may make difficult for Russia to not support more China's position in the South China Sea dispute, especially that the Kremlin's neutrality has raised criticism among Chinese observers. Finally, China's internal situation has also raised concerns in Moscow, as the situation in Hong Kong and Xinjiang generate instability in their respective regions.

The last intervening variable are the security issues in Central Asia. As for now, Russia and China have managed to manage the security of the region collectively within the SCO framework. However, Russia was already forced to make concessions to focus more about economics in the SCO, and about the collaboration between the EEU and the OBOR project. Russia preserves apprehensions about China's presence in Central Asia and tries to conduct there a multi-vector policy to counterbalance the Chinese predominance in the region, which is a part of Russia's Near Abroad.

The future evolution of the Sino-Russian military relations is still open for questions. This will depend on the evolution of the international situation, particularly on how the US-China and US-Russia relations evolve. The three great powers form a strategic triangle in which any changes between two of the members impact the others. To maintain their military relations at a good level, Russia and China will also have to manage the security issues mentioned above, as they will determine the future of their strategic partnership.

Bibliography

Arbatov, A. and Dvorkin, V. (2013) 'The Great Strategic Triangle', The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April, p.55.

Barkanov, B. (2018) 'Natural gas', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 138-152.

Blank, S. (2016) 'Russian writers on the decline of Russia in the Far East and the rise of China', The Jamestown Foundation, p.22.

Berryman, J. (2018) 'Geopolitics and Russian foreign policy', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 60-78.

Bolt, P. J. (2013) 'Sino-Russian Relations in a Changing World Order', Strategic Studies Quarterly, Volume 8, Number 4, pp. 47-69.

ChinaPower Project website (2018) 'How dominant is China in the global arms trade?', <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-global-arms-trade/>, consulted on 23.06.20

Clinton, H. (2011) 'America's Pacific Century', Foreign Policy website, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, consulted on 7.08.20.

Cordesman, A. H. (2020) 'Chronology of Possible Russian Gray Area and Hybrid Warfare Operations', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 18 August, p. 25.

Dufour, J.-F. (1999) Géopolitique de la Chine, Complexe (Géopolitique des Etats du monde).

Feklyunina, V. (2018) 'International norms and identity', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 5-21.

Freire, M. (2018) 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 400-409.

Fu, Y. (2016) 'How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow Are Close, but Not Allies', Council on Foreign Relations, Volume 95, Number 1, February, pp. 96–105.

Goble, P. (2019) 'Chinese Repression of Muslims in Xinjiang Echoes Across Central Asia', The Jamestown Foundation website, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinese-repression-of-muslims-in-xinjiang-echoes-across-central-asia/>, consulted on 23.07.20.

Gorenburg, D. and Schwartz, P. (2019) 'Russia's Strategy in Southeast Asia', PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memo No. 578, p. 6.

- Gould, J. (2020) 'US nuclear weapons budget could skyrocket if Russia treaty ends', Defense News website, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/08/25/cbo-us-nuclear-weapons-budget-could-skyrocket-if-russia-treaty-ends/>, consulted on 25.07.20.
- Grajauskas, R. (2009) 'What is new in Russia's 2009 national security strategy?', Centre for Eastern Geopolitical Studies, 25 June, p. 5.
- Hillman, J. E. (2020) 'China and Russia: Economic Unequals', Centre for Strategic and International Studies website, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-and-russia-economic-unequals>, consulted on 20.08.20
- Kaczmarek, M. (2014) 'Domestic Power Relations and Russia's Foreign Policy', The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization, July, p. 29.
- Kin-Wa, C. (2019) 'Hong Kong football friendly against Malaysia cancelled', South China Morning Post website, <https://www.scmp.com/sport/football/article/3030355/hong-kong-football-friendly-against-malaysia-cancelled-amid-protest>, consulted on 5.07.20.
- Konyshov, V. and Sergunin, A. (2018) 'Military', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp.168-181.
- Korolev, A. (2018) 'Beyond the Nominal and the Ad Hoc: The Substance and Drivers of China-Russia Military Cooperation', Insight Turkey, Volume 20, Number 1, pp. 25–38.
- Korolev, A. and Portyakov, V. (2018) 'China-Russia Relations in Times of Crisis: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation', Asian Perspective, Volume 42, Number 3, pp. 411–437.
- Korolev, A. and Portyakov, V. (2019) 'Reluctant allies: system-unit dynamics and China-Russia relations', International Relations, Volume 33, Number 1, pp. 40–66.
- Krickovic, A. (2018) 'The G20', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 367-376.
- Kristensen, H. M. and Korda, M. (2019a) 'Russian nuclear forces, 2019', Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Volume 75, Number 2, pp. 73–84.
- Kristensen, H. M. and Korda, M. (2019b) 'United States nuclear forces, 2019', Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Volume 75, Number 3, pp. 122–134.
- Kropatcheva, E. (2018) 'Power and national security', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 43-59.
- Kuhr, N. (2018) 'Asia-Pacific and China', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 254-268.
- Lukin, A. (2018) 'Asian Organizations', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 388-399.
- Mackinder, H. (1904) 'The Geographical Pivot of History', Geographical Journal, Volume 23, Number 4, pp. 421-437.

- Maizland, L. (2020) 'China's Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang', Council on Foreign Relations website, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-repression-uighurs-xinjiang>, consulted on 15.08.20.
- March, L. (2018) 'Nationalism', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 79-98.
- Miles, T. (2019) 'Saudi Arabia and Russia among 37 states backing China's Xinjiang policy', Reuters website, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang-rights-idUSKCN1U721X>, consulted on 14.06.20.
- Molchanov, M. (2018) 'The Eurasian Economic Union', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 410-420.
- Morozov, V. (2018) 'Global (post)structural conditions', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 22-42.
- Nocetti, J. (2018) 'Cyber power', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 182-198.
- Omelicheva, M. (2018) 'Central Asia', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 325-337.
- Osborne, S. (2020) 'China and Russia combine in mysterious new fearsome submarine programme', Express website, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1328345/China-news-russia-war-latest-world-war-3-submarine-project-US>, consulted on 28.08.20.
- Page, J. (2010) 'China Clones, Sells Russian Fighter Jets', Wall Street Journal website, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704679204575646472655698844>, consulted on 5.05.20
- Paul Stronski and Ng, N. (2018) 'The Russian Far East', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp. 17-25.
- Pedrozo, R. (2014) 'China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea', South China Sea website, <https://seasresearch.wordpress.com/2014/08/19/china-versus-vietnam-an-analysis-of-the-competing-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-2/>, consulted on 1.07.20.
- Roberts, K. (2018) 'The United States', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 237-253.
- Rose, G. (1998) 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', World Politics, Volume 51, Number 1, pp. 144-172.
- Røseth, T. (2019) 'Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing', Problems of Post-Communism, Volume 66, Number 4, pp. 268-286.
- Russia Maritime Studies Institute (2015) 'The 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation',

- RMSI Research website,
https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/rmsi_research/3, consulted on 12.05.2020.
- Ryan, K. (2009) 'Russo-Chinese Defense Relations', in Bellacqua, J. A. (ed.) The Future of China-Russia Relations, University Press of Kentucky, pp. 178–196.
- Schwartz, P. (2017) 'Russia-China Defense Cooperation: New Developments', The Asan Forum Website,
<http://www.theasanforum.org/russia-china-defense-cooperation-new-developments/>, consulted on 22.07.20.
- Simons, G. (2018) 'Media and public diplomacy', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 199-216.
- Spykman, N. (1942) America's strategy in world politics, The United States and the balance of power, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Statistics Times website (2019) 'Comparing United States and China by Economy',
<http://statisticstimes.com/economy/united-states-vs-china-economy.php>, consulted on 27.07.20.
- Strokan, M. and Taylor, B. (2018) 'Intelligence', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 153-167.
- TASS website (2019a) 'Xi Jinping: Russia and China staying in tune with the times',
<https://tass.com/world/1061613>, consulted on 22.07.20.
- TASS website (2019b) 'Chinese-Russian relations reached highest level in 70 years, president says',
<https://tass.com/world/1061924>, consulted on 22.07.20.
- The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland website (2015) 'The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2014',
<https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>, consulted on 25.06.2020.
- The New York Times website (2004) 'Putin and Hu resolve border disputes',
<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/15/world/asia/putin-and-hu-resolve-border-disputes.html>, consulted on 24.06.2020.
- The Russian Foreign Policy concept of 2016,
https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/2542248, consulted on 1.07.2020.
- The Russian National Security Strategy of 2015,
<http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>, consulted on 23.06.2020.
- Tsygankov, A. P. (ed.) (2018) Routledge handbook of Russian foreign policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- United Nations website, 'United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea' (1982),
https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf, consulted on 25.06.20

United States Department of State website 'New START Treaty', <https://www.state.gov/new-start/>, consulted on 24.06.20

Wan, W. (2011) 'Georgetown students shed light on China's tunnel system for nuclear weapons', Washington Post website, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/georgetown-students-shed-light-on-chinas-tunnel-system-for-nuclear-weapons/2011/11/16/gIQA6AmKAO_story.html, consulted on 30.07.20.

Warsaw Institute website (2020) 'Russia's Economy Is Becoming Heavily Dependent on Hydrocarbons', <https://warsawinstitute.org/russias-economy-becoming-heavily-dependent-hydrocarbons/>, consulted on 12.07.20.

Weber, Y. (2018) 'Petropolitics', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 99-117.

Weitz, R. (2019) 'An Emerging China-Russia Axis? Implications for the United States in an Era of Strategic Competition', Hudson Institute, p.8.

Wilson, J. (2016) 'The Eurasian Economic Union and China's Silk Road: Implications for the Russian-Chinese Relationship', European Politics and Society, Volume 17, Number sup.1, pp. 113–132.

Wishnick, E. (2017) 'In Search of the "Other" in Asia: Russia-China Relations Revisited', The Pacific Review, Volume 30, Number 1, pp. 114–132.

Yuan, J. (2009) 'Sino-Russian Defense Ties', in Bellacqua, J. A. (ed.) The Future of China-Russia Relations, University Press of Kentucky, pp. 203–223.

Zeng, J., Yuefan, X. and Breslin, S. (2015) 'Securing China's Core Interests: The State of the Debate in China', International Affairs, Volume 91, Number 2, pp. 245–266.

Ziegler, C. (2018) 'Diplomacy', in A. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 123-137.