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# **The new dynamics of Sino-Russian relations: strategic alignment or informal alliance?**

**- Summary –**

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Today, China and Russia are realizing the construction of an increasingly solid bilateral relation based on mutual trust. Moreover, the Former Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi, on a working visit to Moscow, stated in 2018 that the relations between the two are at the highest level in history. This statement sparked many controversies and caused panic among the states that felt threatened by the rapprochement between the two. Exactly 20 days before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping declared that there were no limits or forbidden areas to the Sino-Russian cooperation.

These fears and controversies brought to the fore the idea of a potential hidden alliance between the two states. In this regard, there were many specialists who were quick to refute or support this idea. For example, Dmitri Trenin, a member of the Council for Foreign Policy and Defense of Russia, does not believe in an alliance, considering the relation between the two to be rather an entente. Trenin's definition of entente includes an agreement on the foundations of world order supported by a mixture of extremely strong common interests. On the other hand, Alexander Gabuev, a specialist in the Sino-Russian relations, believes that the United States and other Western capitals are naive and ignore the fact that the hostile policies on the two, in fact, influence and increase the level of cooperation between Russia and China in a dangerous way. The Former American Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, when asked if he is worried about a possible alliance between China and Russia, says that he does not see anything in the long term that would align Russia and China. Robert Kaplan agreed with James Mattis, and said that the Sino-Russian military alliance is only what you see on the surface, but what is actually underneath is a serious geopolitical competition.

The current study will show that nowadays there cannot be an alliance between the two, be it informal, as the War in Ukraine and other elements that will be discussed during the thesis, would rather highlight the limits of the Sino-Russian partnership than the idea of forming an alliance. It is also important to mention that the current research will stop at the beginning of the War in Ukraine, which represents a significant turning point at the regional and global level.

All political and academic circles seem to agree on one aspect. Punitive measures and the attitude of the West throw Russia more and more into China's arms and represent the main catalyst for the development of relations between the two, but it is not the only one. Other catalysts could be the shared Sino-Russian vision for a multipolar world (a distribution of power in which more than two states have similar amounts of power) or the economic interdependence between them.

As previously said, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown that the alliance that many Western and Asian states feared is still uncertain, even if it is more likely than 20 years ago. Today, Russia and China are developing almost all areas of interest, keeping the strategic flexibility of their

own decisions, which an alliance could not offer. In the partnership between Russia and China, there are, in fact, few limits and few unexplored areas, the development of relations between the two happening even at the subnational level. Therefore, my opinion is that today Russia and China are much more inclined to cooperation than to competition or conflict.

There are also some discrepancies regarding the Sino-Russian relations. One of them could be represented by the fact that for China the main economic partner is the West itself, economic development being at the top of Chinese policies. As of today, Russia seems to have to wait several more years until a reset of its relations with West.

China still remains cautious regarding Russia's international adventures, supporting it at the diplomatic level, but without concretely helping it in the conflict with the West. However, there is a trend that seems to show that China is also becoming more aggressive at the international level, especially if we look at the events in the South China Sea, where the US often exercises its right of navigation in international waters and which also brings the ships of the two countries close to conflict. Perhaps the most illustrative example is China's behavior at the announcement of the visit of the President of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan. Even so, China seems not ready to completely give up on harmonious development, and it would require a series of events affecting China's vital interests to resort to military measures.

The reason behind my choice of this subject of study is that I wanted to understand why Russia and China consider that today reached the best level of bilateral relations in history and what are the factors that led them here. In the past, the Sino-Russian relations was rather one laden with suspicions and tensions, such as the border conflicts of 1969. Another curiosity that emerged during the research was sparked by the prospects for Sino-Russian relations. Nowadays, there are two positions in the literature regarding the relations between Russia and China: the optimists (those who believe in the continuous development of relations) and the pessimists (those who believe that the relations are doomed to failure).

The current research begins with a chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework and methodology of the research, a chapter in which the methods, the theoretical framework, the approach I have to the research or the way in which the data were selected, collected or analyzed are dealt with. A subchapter is dedicated to the limitations of the current study.

Chapter III, "*A retrospective look at the history of Sino-Russian relations (1945-2010)*", includes a brief historical foray into Sino-Russian relations that begins in 1945 and ends around 2010. This short historical foray is followed by chapter IV, which includes a comparative analysis on the different dimensions of the Sino-Russian relations: military, economic, cybernetic, artificial intelligence or demographic.

Chapter V is dedicated to their interactions in the main regional and international institutions: SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), UN (United Nations Organization).

Chapter VI is dedicated to the analysis of the main discourses regarding the Sino-Russian relations. While reading a significant number of works, I found a multitude of common points or connections between them. Thus, the structure of this chapter was divided into several topics of interest such as: the role of the US in the Sino-Russian relations, the position of the two great schools of thought that analyze the Sino-Russian relations, the Sino-Russian common views on the international system, the Sino-Russian interactions in different regions of the world or how the relation between China and Russia is defined/seen by the main specialists in international relations.

The last section of the analysis, chapter VII, includes possible future scenarios regarding the Sino-Russian relations, under what conditions they would be fulfilled and what are the implications of each for Europe: open rivalry, limited partnership, formal/informal alliance or strategic alignment. It should be noted that this analysis of predictions regarding Sino-Russian relations for the next 10 years will be purely speculative, due to the fact that there is a wide range of factors that could influence the bilateral relations, as well as a multitude of unpredictable events or extreme conditions that may occur in the coming years.