West Pushes Russia and China Closer Together

With Beijing celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party's rule, there's been a heated discussion across the Western world about the role that China is going to play in the global affairs. Among those taking part in the discussion there's been those pointing out to the growing military cooperation between Beijing and Moscow.

As it's been underlined by a once respected Western media source, for the longest time any relationship between Russia and China would be dismissed as a marriage of convenience with limited impact on American interests. But since Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia after the coup in Ukraine in 2014, Chinese and Russian authorities have increasingly found common cause, disparaging the Western-style "rule-based order" and offering themselves as alternatives to America's post-war leadership.

As Western countries carry on their meddling with the internal affairs of nations in the eastern hemisphere, political cooperation among nations such as China and Russia becomes a major geopolitical factor. As China and Russia are growing even closer, it becomes evident that this new arrangement is going to present a challenge to Washington's dominance on the geopolitical stage.

As it's been noted by John Arquilla, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School:
Indeed, the ties between Russia and China go back decades, as those countries were bound by a full-fledged military pact some time ago. Among the reasons behind this rapprochement one can name the omnipresent external threat to the very existence of those states, as the West has done everything it could to undermine both of those both internally and externally.

It's no coincidence that Article 9 of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation states:

When a situation arises in which one of the contracting parties deems that peace is being threatened and undermined or its security interests are involved or when it is confronted with the threat of aggression, the contracting parties shall immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats.

Of course, some may argue, nor Moscow neither Beijing are duty-bound to rush to each other's aid, but its wording is reminiscent of the North Atlantic Treaty, where there's no guarantee that anybody would rush to your rescue should things go south. That's the reality of modern diplomatic relations, where treaties are driven by the commitment of the participating parties towards a common goal instead of formal obligations. So careful wording is a modern imperative in such documents, and those who drafted the above-mentioned piece were no strangers to this concept.

So, it's safe to say that Moscow and Beijing are coordinating their goals, military planning and production capabilities, and they've been doing this since the early 2000s.

However, the turning point in the bilateral relations between Russia and China can be traced to a major spike in anti-Russian sanctions that occurred in 2017. Against this backdrop, Moscow proposed that a comprehensive roadmap should have been developed, covering the time span of three years and encompassing all the areas of military cooperation between the states. China was happy to accept this proposition largely to the fact that it was facing the prospect of a full-blown trade war with the United States, that was later launched by the Trump administration.

As the situation on the geopolitical stage remains highly volatile, it's no wonder that both Moscow and Beijing describe each other as close strategic partners. With Beijing being yet unable to reach nuclear parity with the United States, it gravitates closer to Moscow and its massive nuclear stockpiles. This year's China's Defence White Paper states that the cooperation between the states remains on a particularly high level, with a special emphasis being laid on the fact that it will not threat any third party, unless the latter decides to attack any of the two states.

The intention of pursuing further rapprochement can be observed in the way Xi Jinping's visit to Russia was carried out last June. In particular, he signed a number of military deals with his Russian counterpart, with the parties pledging their commitments to pursue the goal of preserving security, addressing threats and creating favorable conditions for further rapprochement.

The scale of this cooperation can be seen in the official figures, as prior to 2013 China would buy no more than 5% of all weapon systems produced in Russia, with the situation improving in the following years, as this ratio reached 15%. China was the first country to receive Russia's top-of-the-line S-400 anti-aircraft weapon systems, together with its fourth plus plus generation fighter SU-35, which resulted in Washington slapping it on the wrist with a new round of sanctions.

Additionally, China and Russia have been conducting joint military exercises intermittently for more than a decade. They often vote alike at the United Nations and have similar positions on Iran and North Korea. Both have become much more active in the Middle East, where Russia is trying to regain its standing as a major power and China is trying to cultivate relations with energy suppliers like Iran.

As it's been noted by Die Welt, Moscow's growing mutual trust with China is capable of redrawing the entire geopolitical layout in the world. Just recently, Vladimir Putin would announce Russia's intention to help Beijing build a strategic missile early warning system. To the present day, Russia and the United States are the only ones to possess such capabilities. It's been noted that the system will allow the two countries to warn each other of launches carried out by a third-country. According to Russia's leader such a development will result in a quantitative change
in Beijing's ability to ensure its security. However, the publication is convinced that should the two countries integrate their warning systems into one it will constitute a major shift in the existing balance of powers. It's also been noted that as the US-Russia relations carry on deteriorating it's hard to imagine any other development than Moscow and Beijing formally recognizing their status of close military allies.

Recently, the former Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Newt Gingric revealed that this activity creates a real potential for a China-Russia strategic alliance which would turn much of Western national security planning and strategy on its head.

In turn, the Diplomat would state:

*China appears to be the beneficiary of the worsening Russia-West relations. After the Ukraine crisis and the sanctioning of Russia, Moscow has felt the need to cultivate its own strong partnerships in Asia and China has benefited immensely from this Russian outreach. Irrespective of the reasons for this deepening alliance, it has implications for others, including Asian powers such as India.*

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