

CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS POST-SOVIET RUSSIA AND
CENTRAL ASIA: A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS POST-SOVIET RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA: A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST ANALYSIS

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This thesis aims to examine China's foreign policy towards Russia and Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is argued that China's foreign policy towards this region is best explained with neoclassical realism. Because neoclassical realism focuses both on system and unit level factors, this thesis will first frame the systemic and domestic drivers of China's foreign policy towards Russia and Central Asia. Some key points are the China's position against the United States US, and its desire to avoid confrontation with the US, while achieving its development and stability goals. The thesis is composed of five chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter focuses on China's grand strategy, and the importance of Russia and Central Asia for China for China's both international and domestic considerations. The third and fourth chapters focuses on the developments on China-Russia and China-Central Asia relations, mainly on economic and security aspects, and the effects of the Ukraine war on the relations are also emphasized.

Keywords: China, Russia, Central Asia, Neoclassical Realism

ÖZ

ÇİN'İN SOVYET SONRASI RUSYA VE ORTA ASYA'YA YÖNELİK DIŞ POLİTİKASI: NEOKLASİK REALİST BİR ANALİZ

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Bu tez, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından bu yana Çin'in Rusya ve Orta Asya'ya yönelik dış politikasını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çin'in bu bölgeye yönelik dış politikasının en iyi neoklasik realizm ile açıklandığı ileri sürülmektedir. Neoklasik realizm hem sistem hem de birim düzeyindeki faktörlere odaklandığından, bu tez öncelikle Çin'in Rusya ve Orta Asya'ya yönelik dış politikasının sistemik ve yerel itici güçlerini çerçevelemektedir. Bazı önemli noktalar, Çin'in ABD'ye karşı konumu, kalkınma ve istikrar hedeflerine ulaşırken ABD ile çatışmaktan kaçınma arzusudur. Tez beş bölümden oluşmaktadır. Giriş bölümünden sonra, ikinci bölüm Çin'in grand stratejisine ve Rusya ile Orta Asya'nın Çin'in hem uluslararası hem de yerel faktörler açısından Çin için önemine odaklanmaktadır. Üçüncü ve dördüncü bölümlerde, Çin-Rusya ve Çin-Orta Asya ilişkilerindeki gelişmeler, ekonomi ve güvenlik boyutu başta olmak üzere ele alınmakta ve Ukrayna savaşının ilişkilere etkilerinde durulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin, Rusya, Orta Asya, Neoklasik realizm

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMG	Aktobemunaigaz
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNISCO	China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation
CNODC	China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Company
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
C+C5	China+Central Asia
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EIA	U.S. Energy Information Administration
ESPO	Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean
EU	European Union
Eximbank	Export-Import Bank of China
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MMG	MangistauMunaiGas
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
QUAD	Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral Dialogue

PAP	People's Armed Police
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RFE	Russian Far East
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SCS	South China Sea
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SRF	Silk Road Fund
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Scope and Objective

This thesis will inspect China's relations with Central Asia and Russia through neo-classical realist theory. How China's relations have developed with these states, while also considering China's both domestic and foreign policy and needs, can provide some insights for its role in the region in the future. The emergence of post-Soviet states allowed China to build new relations with these states. The Central Asian states are still dependent on Russia in some areas, while Russia was highly important for the European Union (EU) as an energy provider. The region is going through a transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union, where China is trying to form good relations, creating multilateral organizations and initiatives, and today, because of Russia's war on Ukraine. If Russia's importance for Central Asian states decreases in the future, the most likely candidate to replace Russia, or at least the one to be more influential, is going to be China. If the sanctions on Russia continue and European states refuse to buy goods delivered through Russia, Central Asia will be more important for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a transport hub.

Finally, if European states manage to reduce their dependence on Russian energy, Russia might turn to China and provide even more oil and gas.

1.2. Research Question

To understand China's foreign policy towards Russia and Central Asia after the cold war, the thesis aims to answer the following questions: How did the relations with this region has changed since the end of the cold war? What are the driving factors that lead to increased Chinese cooperation with post-Soviet Russia and Central Asia? How to best explain China's foreign policy towards post-Soviet Russia and Central Asia?

To answer these questions, first, the region's place in China's grand strategy must be analyzed. As seen in the thesis, both system level and unit level considerations of China led it to get more involved with the region. What are these international and domestic driving forces? How did these driving factors affect the way China is involved in the region? What are the developments in China's relations with Russia and Central Asia? Thus, China's foreign policy towards the region requires one to look at both system and unit level driving forces, and to inspect the developments in China's relations with the region.

1.3. Literature Review

China's relations with particular Russia and Central Asian states have been inspected by scholars since the emergence of post-Soviet states. For instance, Swanström ar-

gued that the region is important for China because of energy security, combatting terrorism, and for inter-regional trade, and Central Asia's role as a transport hub, connecting China to Europe; and China's increasing influence in the region was possible with the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹ Focusing on these issues led China and the states in the region to solve their border issues, increasing military and security cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally.²

Additionally, Swanström points out the domestic security concerns, where China cares about regional stability and wants to solve problems created by the three evils, of terrorism, separatism, and extremism; while he also points out that "China has refrained from openly expressing further interest in establishing military bases in any of the states."³ Similarly, Guangcheng points out that China's interests in the region are mainly in the security, where the terrorism and radicalism threaten Central Asia's and Xinjiang's stability; in the economic sphere with energy cooperation; and because of cultural ties, since the ancient Silk Road connected the region and China, which also led to the creation of the BRI.⁴

¹ Niklas Swanström, *China and Greater Central Asia: New Frontiers?* (Stockholm, Sweden: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2011).

² Swanström, *China and Greater*, 6.

³ Swanström, *China and Greater*, 6.

⁴ Xing Guangcheng, "The Strategic Interests of China and Russia in Central Asia," in: *China, The United States, and the Future of Central Asia: U.S.-China Relations*, ed. David B.H. Denoon (New York, NY, 2015), 159.

Swanström points out that increasing cooperation with the states in the region will eventually spill over to political influence in the region.⁵ Cooley, in a policy brief, states that China's involvement in the region after 2014 is mainly fueled by security concerns such as United States (US) withdrawal from Afghanistan and potential Taliban/ISIS support of separatists in the Xinjiang region.⁶ With the BRI, China aims to "create a friendly community that will join new Chinese-led regional organizations," open new trade corridors to East Asia, Middle East, and Europe, internationalize renminbi, "put accumulated foreign reserves to better use than in 'safe harbor' investments such as US Treasury bonds," and show China's increasing role in the global governance.⁷

In addition to these, he presents domestic objectives such as upgrading infrastructure and developing Xinjiang region, solve overcapacity problem by accessing new markets, and fostering competition within China's regions.⁸ Finally, Cooley points out that China's engagement in Central Asia creates competition with Russia, because China buys cheaper natural gas from Turkmenistan as a leverage, Russia was blocking Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s economic projects and created Eur-

⁵ Swanström, *China and Greater*.

⁶ Alexander Cooley, *Russia and China in Central Asia* (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2015), 2.

⁷ Cooley, *Russia and China*, 2.

⁸ Cooley, *Russia and China*, 3.

asian Economic Union (EEU), and while Russia-China economic cooperation is growing, China has the upper hand, and it is being conducted on China's terms.⁹

Regarding the creation of BRI and EEU, Kaczmarek argues that the two initiatives are different, because Russia tries to bolster its great power status in the Central Asia region with the EEU, prioritizing political influence, while China focuses on trade and investments with the BRI, and hiding its "great power potential behind the façade of multilateral cooperation," and because of these differences, the chances of rivalry between Russia and China is low.¹⁰

Norling stated that tensions arise between China and Russia for reasons such as Russia's dissatisfaction with the trade with China, where it prefers exporting technology and machinery instead of exporting energy and raw materials; disagreements in oil and gas agreements; and Chinese immigration into Russian Far East (RFE); disagreements within SCO's economic role; growing power imbalance both in military and economic terms.¹¹ Another scholar that points out the differences in views is Cebestan, while recognizing the achievements of SCO, he states that interests and

⁹ Cooley, *Russia and China*, 4.

¹⁰ Marcin Kaczmarek, "Two Ways of Influence-building: The Eurasian Economic Union and the One Belt, One Road Initiative," *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 7 (2017): 1028.

¹¹ Nicklas Norling, "China and Russia: Partners with Tensions," *Policy Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (2007): 40-42.

views of SCO members are different.¹² These include Russia's desire to expand SCO to India, Iran to make China less influential in the organization, conflicts and rivalries between Central Asian SCO members, preference of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) over SCO by some SCO members.¹³ He further states that "China is unable to become a dominant power in Central Asia."¹⁴

Rolland argues that while some scholars expect "factors such as prestige and a yawning power disparity will eventually pull them apart," China and Russia share similar views on issues such as the Western presence in Eurasia, the stability and security of the region, and objectives on future regional order.¹⁵ While both Russia and China focus on the Eurasia region, this does not lead to tensions between the two states. Rolland states that China expects Russia to lose its power eventually, and meanwhile China can focus on building its capabilities, allowing China to exert greater influence in the region.¹⁶ Korolev argues that while China and Russia constructed a strategic partnership, and cooperate in the military aspect the most, compared to economic or diplomatic aspects.¹⁷ When Korolev considers diplomatic aspect, he states that the

¹² Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Central Asia, and the Great Powers, an Introduction: One Bed, Different Dreams?" *Asian Survey* 53, no. 3 (2013): 426.

¹³ Cabestan, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 426-29.

¹⁴ Cabestan, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 430.

¹⁵ Nadège Rolland, "A China–Russia Condominium over Eurasia," *Survival* 61, no. 1 (2019): 7-8.

¹⁶ Rolland, "A China–Russia Condominium," 8.

¹⁷ Alexander Korolev, "How closely aligned are China and Russia? Measuring strategic cooperation in IR," *International Politics*, 57 (2019).

two states are not acting like allies, but because their views on threats and interests overlap, China and Russia support each other in both existing and newly founded international institutions. Additionally, while he recognizes energy projects that create bilateral interdependence, their cooperation remains limited in economic aspect.¹⁸ Overall, a closer cooperation between China and Russia would be beneficial for both parties because it would help Russia balance the US, and China would get Russia's support, energy resources, and military technologies that could help it with the growing tensions with the US; hence, the two states can choose increase cooperation, and work on the merging of BRI and EEU that could reshape Eurasia.¹⁹

Some scholars also inspect Chinese soft power in the region. For instance, Swanström states that Central Asia is important for China because the region allows China to diversify energy imports and transit routes, reduce energy deficit, thus increasing energy security.²⁰ China's engagement with the region allows China to secure its borders, and "improve communication links, pipelines and trade in general, for all of which a stable and peaceful Central Asia is necessary", while he also points out that around 80 percent of the trade between Central Asia and China is conducted by Xinjiang region, and that Central Asia allows China to reach new markets in Eu-

¹⁸ Korolev, "How closely aligned."

¹⁹ Korolev, "How closely aligned."

²⁰ Niklas. Swanström, "China's role in Central Asia: soft and hard power," *Global Dialogue* 9, no. 1/2 (2007).

rope.²¹ He inspects why security, energy, and trade and infrastructure ties are important before focusing on the general lack of Chinese soft power in Central Asia, compared to other regions, and China is not putting much effort to the promotion of its Culture in the region.²²

In a more recent article, Berdiyev and Can look at how China is using soft power in Central Asia region, which allows China to build its capabilities by ensuring security and creating a peaceful environment, having access to more energy resources, and preventing other states being more influential in the region.²³ This leads China to follow good-neighborly policies, where China “contributes to the infrastructure, primarily energy projects, and enhances bilateral relations and trade traffic among the regional states,” and while Russia is the more influential actor compared to China in the region, China wants to replace Russia as the most influential actor.²⁴ However, they state China’s soft power that is based on promoting Chinese culture is limited in the region.²⁵

²¹ Swanström, "China's role in Central Asia."

²² Swanström, "China's role in Central Asia."

²³ Ahmet Berdiyev and Nurettin Can, “The Importance of Central Asia in China’s Foreign Policy and Beijing’s Soft Power Instruments,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 21, no. 4 (2020).

²⁴ Berdiyev and Can, “The Importance of Central Asia,” 24.

²⁵ Berdiyev and Can, “The Importance of Central Asia,” 24.

1.4. Argument

This thesis analyzes China's foreign policy towards Central Asia and Russia since the emergence of these states in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. To do so, China's foreign relations with these states, with regards to China's internal policy goals will be analyzed.

This thesis argues that China's foreign policy towards Central Asia and Russia are best explained from neoclassical realist perspective, in contrary to scholars that argue that China's foreign policy towards post-Soviet countries in general could be explained either by neorealist or neoliberal theories. Neoclassical realist perspective focuses on both system and domestic levels and allows us to analyze how these factors shape China's struggle for power regarding China's foreign policy towards Russia and Central Asian states. China quickly formed relations with these states, solved existing issues, and cooperated both bilaterally and multilaterally to achieve Chinese domestic goals. This led to increased levels of cooperation, both in economic and military aspects.

China's increasing influence, both bilaterally and multilaterally, with Central Asia region and Russia can be seen since the emergence of these post-Soviet states with the increased cooperation within the SCO, increasing amounts of cooperation in the energy and economic sectors, and now with Xi Jinping, within the BRI. These are firstly caused by the factors such as increasing US presence in the Asia-Pacific region, avoiding US encirclement by having good relations with neighbors in the region, Central Asia's proximity and ties to Xinjiang, and domestic development goals,

exporting overcapacity, and the need to reach new markets. This also show that economic and security aspects are connected in China's foreign policy.

1.5. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this part of the thesis, the reason for choosing neoclassical realist theory framework when considering China's relations with Russia and Central Asia is explained. The major theories that are used in the field of international relations (IR) are neorealism, liberalism, and constructivism. Yet, all these theories have shortcomings when China's policies in the region is considered.

Neorealism considers the international system as anarchic, where states in the international system look for power to maximize their own security to survive. In a self-help system, states consider their own gains, instead of mutual gains.²⁶ Hence, neorealism disregards the domestic politics and solely focuses on the system-level. To explain why states balance or bandwagon, Walt first considered sources of threat, provided four factors which are aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions.²⁷ Regarding the first, when explaining what makes a great power, Onega defines six material indicators of capabilities, which are size of territo-

²⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 105.

²⁷ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance formation and the balance of world power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3–43.

ry, population, gross domestic product (GDP), military spending, innovation, and Composite Index of National Capability.²⁸

When the offensive capability is considered, the US still spends much more than both China and Russia on military. For instance, the US spent \$801 billion on military in 2021, while Russia and China spent \$65.9 billion and \$293 billion in the same year, respectively.²⁹ Finally, when offensive intentions are considered, it can be said that Russia and China both view US policies as threats. These are North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s expansion on Russia's west, and China's encirclement. This, eventually, brings China and Russia closer because their primary concern is not each other, but the US.³⁰ When the terms balancing, bandwagoning and buck-passing are considered, it is possible to say that the two states are balancing against the US.

From the neorealist perspective, China and Russia would be expected to balance against the US, since both states are not completely happy with the US-led world order. However, this does not mean that the two states will always support each other. When China's relations with Russia are inspected, it is possible to see that their

²⁸ Tudor Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers* (London: Routledge, 2020), 24-26.

²⁹ "World military expenditure passes \$2 trillion for first time," SIPRI, 25 April 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time>.

³⁰ See Robert S. Ross, "Sino-Russian relations: the false promise of Russian balancing," *International Politics* 57, (2020). He further argues that instead of neorealism, a better explanation of China-Russia relations, and the reason why Russia bandwagons with China is better explained with classical realism.

partnership is limited. This is because while the two states share similar views on the US-led world order, they do not always cooperate, especially on the regional level, which cannot be explained with neorealism.³¹ This includes but not limited to, the views on arms sales, BRI and EEU, and Central Asia.

Additionally, from an offensive realist perspective, great powers are first trying to achieve regional hegemony to ensure their survival.³² However, cooperation is still an important aspect of the China-Russia relations. Ross argues that this is different from the neorealist view, for reasons such as Russia's lack of capabilities in its Far East, which makes China the only great power in the region; the US/NATO as Russia's primary challenge, and Central Asia as the secondary challenge; China's rise is not a threat to Russia in the Far East; and because there are no other great powers in mainland North-East Asia, Russia cannot externally balance China.³³ While this could explain why China and Russia are not always cooperating as there is a competition for regional hegemony, this perspective would not consider domestic factors.

³¹ Alexander Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging: China–Russia Relations," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, (2016).

³² John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, (2010): 387-88.

³³ Ross, "Sino-Russian relations."

The neoliberal thought promotes cooperation, arguing economic interdependence is useful to keep peace.³⁴ Within the liberal thought few different ideas include democratic peace, liberal interdependence, and neoliberal institutionalism. In the context of this thesis, liberal interdependence and neoliberal institutionalism are the most likely theories to explain China's behavior.

While accepting some of neorealism's assumptions, liberal interdependence perspective claims that increased trade and interdependence will reduce the probability of a war.³⁵ As Nye states, this will not prevent a war, but only will reduce the likelihood of a war, increasing the costs.³⁶ From this point of view, cooperation will provide absolute gains. However, this point of view cannot completely explain China's behavior, because despite the increases in China's trade in the world, it still has disputes. These include Taiwan, South China Sea (SCS), US presence in neighboring states such as Japan and South Korea, and the Malacca Dilemma. These concerns lead China to take its security very seriously, pushing it to develop its military and conduct military exercises. China's military expenditure has increased from \$22.24 billion in 2000 to \$293.35 billion in 2021.³⁷

³⁴ For instance, see Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, (Princeton University Press: 1984); James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, "A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): pp. 467–91.

³⁵ Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Power and Interdependence with China," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 1, (2020): 12.

³⁶ Nye, "Power and Interdependence," 12-13.

³⁷ "Military expenditure (current USD) – China," World Bank, accessed 15 January 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=CN>.

China's policy towards post-Soviet Russia and Central Asia are hard to explain with liberal interdependence as well. As mentioned, China is not happy with the US-led international order and is willing to change it, which brings China and Russia closer. This happens despite China's economic ties with the US, and Russia's economic ties with the EU. Russia only constituted 2.4 percent of China's total trade, while China constituted 18 percent in Russia's total trade in 2021.³⁸ From this, it can be seen that Russia depends more on China than the other way around. Hence, there should be other ways of explaining their relations, which is against the US-led international order. As mentioned later in the thesis, China and Russia increased their economic and security relations hugely since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

However, this was a slow process. One major turning point in the relationship was the Ukraine crisis in 2014, which accelerated the economic cooperation, especially in terms of energy. This view also lacks one important aspect: the unit level (regional and domestic), that limit cooperation. While their trade has increased, however, Russia and China still are suspicious about each other, and as argued later, follow a hedging strategy towards each other.³⁹ In Central Asia, while China's role as an economic partner surpassed Russia, Russia still considers itself as the main security provider in the region. As shown in the later chapters, on the economic aspect of their

³⁸ Author's calculations based on data from UN Comtrade, <https://comtrade.un.org/>.

³⁹ Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging."

relations, China is less dependent on Russia. This overdependence on China and asymmetric dependence also led Russia to seek cooperation with other states in the Asia-Pacific.

Another point is that despite the increased trade and cooperation, both Central Asian states and Russia see increased Chinese businesses and population in their states concerning. One example can be Russian concerns over RFE, where decreasing Russian and increasing Chinese population could lead to Chinese occupation, or even annexation.⁴⁰ As Sterling-Folker states that liberal interdependence theory ignores nationalism, yet “national identity and nationalism continue to play an enduring, foundational role in domestic political struggles and foreign policy, even in the context of increased interdependence.”⁴¹ This actually leads economically interdependent states to consider each other as security threats.⁴² Finally, China’s engagement with Russia and Central Asia allow China to increase its influence in the region, and allows China to slowly build up its economic and military capabilities, while mitigating the risks of a possible US naval blockade, in line with the realist logic. In this sense, the post-Soviet space with increased Chinese influence, where Russia still sees itself as the patron, will stay as a region for competition between China and Russia.

⁴⁰ Jing-Yun Hsu and Jenn-Jaw Soong, “Development of China-Russia Relations (1949-2011),” *Chinese Economy* 47, no. 3(2014): 79.

⁴¹ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Neoclassical Realism and Identity: Peril despite Profit across the Taiwan Strait,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, eds. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 108.

⁴² Sterling-Folker, “Neoclassical Realism and Identity,” 104.

From the liberal institutionalist perspective, China's participation in international organizations should raise the stakes for international conflict, and it would be China's interest to further integrate in this order. However, while China participates in international organizations, it bends the rules. For instance, Weinhardt and then Brink argue that China is bending World Trade Organization (WTO) rules in some sectors, specifically agriculture, and steel; and while they argue China does not necessarily challenge WTO's trade order, they conclude "China's behavior will certainly shift the lowest common denominator regarding the kind of liberal compromise that the WTO stands for."⁴³

In the post-Soviet space, China created its own organizations as well, that include SCO and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). However, as shown in the later chapters, their partnership remained limited until 2010s. On the regional level, Russia has its suspicions about Chinese initiatives that promote connectivity. While China created these organizations and initiatives that tries to promote military relations or connectivity along with countering Western influence, they remain somewhat limited, vague, or other states that participate in SCO or BRI view the roles of these organizations/institutions differently and see their own spheres of influences (hence own projects) more important than these organizations. This leads to reluctances and inefficiencies that limit these organizations and initiatives. This is true especially in the case of Russia, where it does not join or support some SCO or BRI projects to gain more influence. Russia was also hesitant on selling arms to China,

⁴³ Clara Weinhardt, and Tobias ten Brink, "Varieties of contestation: China's rise and the liberal trade order," *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 2 (2020): 274.

especially after 2005. Additionally, Russia, because of its suspicions about Chinese initiatives, promoted its own initiatives such as the EEU. This can be explained with Mearsheimer's argument against liberal interdependence theory that argues absolute gains will cause states to cooperate, stating relative gains cannot be ignored, because when relative gains are considered, military and economic issues cannot be divided, and relative gains can prevent cooperation.⁴⁴

Neoclassical realism can provide a better analysis when China's relations with Russia and Central Asia are considered. It is similar to neorealism, where system level considerations are important, but unit level and domestic factors are also an important part of neoclassical realism, which provide a better picture in the context of this thesis. As Rose stated:

[Neoclassical Realism] explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level.⁴⁵

While other theories provide useful insights, they are not complete in the context of this thesis. While considering material capabilities, interests of the leaders also need to be considered. Hence, while material capabilities of a state, such as size of territo-

⁴⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19, no. 3, (1995): 20.

⁴⁵ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1, (1998): 146.

ry, population, GDP, military spending, and innovation are important for a state to be considered a great power, the vision and goals of the leadership is equally important, and with Xi Jinping's rise as the leader, he made the changes necessary to China's foreign policy.⁴⁶

Neoclassical realism is a more useful theory to understand China's interests and foreign policies in the region because neoclassical realism can be used to explain economic and security relations over a period. Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman state:

Neoclassical realism seeks to explain variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints. It makes no pretense about explaining broad patterns of systemic or recurring outcomes. Thus, a neoclassical realist hypothesis might explain the likely diplomatic, economic, and military responses of particular states to systemic imperatives, but it cannot explain the systemic consequences of those responses.⁴⁷

This differs from neorealism, where it explains "recurring patterns of international outcomes" which is defined as the likely outcomes of the interaction between two or more states in an anarchic environment.⁴⁸ Combined with China's position vis-à-vis the US, China tries to exert more influence to its neighboring states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, through bilateral relations, and multilateral organizations and initiatives, in line with Rose's statement that states try to control and shape their exter-

⁴⁶ Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, 204.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman. "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, eds. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21.

⁴⁸ Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, "Neoclassical Realism," 19.

nal environment in accordance to their relative power, as a response to the international anarchy.⁴⁹

Within neoclassical realism, scholars use different intervening variables as well, as Meibauer states, these include “strategic interaction, regime type, extraction and mobilization capacity, public opinion and media pressures, culture and identity, and perceptions, ideas, and beliefs.”⁵⁰ As mentioned below, China’s grand strategy has evolved with its rising capabilities and each leader. Because the leader is so influential in China, it is important to note the influence the leader exerts when directing the country’s new grand strategy. In China, economic development and restoring China’s place in the world has been important, which led to the increasing Chinese influence in the resource-rich post-Soviet Central Asia, but leaders had different ways to exert influence. China started to exert its influence in accordance with its rising capabilities to the post-Soviet territory through SCO, and lately with BRI. This was in accordance with China’s grand strategy of hiding and biding time and peaceful development, and more recently, striving for achievement, where China aimed to avoid conflict with the US; because a possible conflict with the US would go against the development goals of China and endanger China’s security.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Rose, “Neoclassical realism,” 152.

⁵⁰ Gustav Meibauer et al., "Rethinking neoclassical realism at theory's end," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2021): 269.

⁵¹ Onea, *The Grand Strategies*, 81-96; 202-05.

As Korolev also argues, China and Russia are balancing against the US when system level variables are considered, but when regional aspects of the relationships are considered, they are hedging against each other in the region.⁵² This leads to cooperation between China and Russia, but cooperation remains limited. From this point of view, as mentioned later in the thesis, Russia's relations with Vietnam, Russia's approach to BRI and the creation of EEU, and their struggle to be more influential in Central Asia are some examples of the hedging strategy.⁵³ Additionally, other domestic factors that shape China's relations with Russia and Central Asian states is the territorial disputes. Although concerns over territorial disputes exist in each of these states, this is a factor that prevents these states from fully supporting each other, especially in the case of China and Russia.⁵⁴ By territorial disputes, Korolev and Portyakov refer to Caucasus Crisis of 2008, the Ukraine crisis of 2014, and SCS dispute; and argue, for instance, for China, recognizing breakaway states and fully supporting Russia would endanger China's on territories such as Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Inner Mongolia.⁵⁵

This thesis is a qualitative research that focuses on mainly China's grand strategy, and its relations with Russia and Central Asia through political, economic, and security spheres. Sources used in the thesis include academic articles and books, govern-

⁵² Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging."

⁵³ Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging."

⁵⁴ Alexander Korolev and Vladimir Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations in Times of Crisis: A Neo-classical Realist Explanation," *Asian Perspective* 42, no. 3, (2018).

⁵⁵ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations."

mental data, statistics, and announcements, newspapers, and organizational reports and commentaries. The information provided in these documents include official statements by governments, trade volumes, and statistics that show cooperation in areas such as security.

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis composes five chapters. The first chapter provides the introduction, in which the scope and objective, the argument, theoretical framework, and the organization of the thesis are explained. The second chapter provides a background on China's evolving grand strategy, security interests in the region, BRI's importance for current foreign policy goals of China, and its energy needs. In this chapter, both system level and unit level reasonings are explained. After inspecting China's grand strategy, this thesis turns to its relations towards the post-Soviet Russia and Central Asia. The third chapter analyses China-Russia relations through economy and security. Economic relations are inspected through trade, energy, and investments, while the security aspect is inspected through both the cooperation within the SCO and bilateral exercises, and arms purchases. Finally, prospects after the Ukraine war are given. The fourth chapter analyses China-Central Asia relations in terms of economy and security. China's economic relations with Central Asia are inspected through trade, energy, and investment. The security aspect is inspected through the SCO, bilateral exercises, and arms sales. Finally, prospects after the Russia's war on Ukraine is given. The fifth and the final chapter concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

IMPORTANCE OF RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA FOR CHINA

2.1. Introduction

This chapter of the thesis will explain China's grand strategy since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the importance of Central Asia and Russia for China. It is argued that these states are important for China for several reasons that include economy and security which are connected to domestic reasons. The domestic reasons include Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s legitimacy through keeping growth high, and the image and place of China in the world for Chinese leaders. Additionally, China's rise also shapes the international environment around China, where initiatives created by China not only aim development, but also serves as a tool to avoid confrontation with the US that wants to contain China, while China is increasing its capabilities.

It is also important to briefly look at thoughts originate from China. Some views that originate from Chinese school of IR include Tianxia (All-under-heaven), Tsinghua

approach or moral realism, the Relational Theory of World Politics, and the Balance of Relationship Theory.⁵⁶

It is also important to note the different views and theories within China. The Tianxia (All-Under-Heaven) Approach argues that politics must aim for “coexistence and the common happiness of the whole,” hence gaining people’s hearts, and doing better than the previous leaders are important.⁵⁷ The happiness of the whole includes other worldviews as well, and Demir states that this is different from the Western philosophy, because it favors diversity and otherness, instead of the Western ideas of sameness.⁵⁸

The Tsinghua (moral realism) approach “focuses on the relationship between political leadership and national power,” arguing that in the development of national power political leadership plays the most important role, while economy and military capabilities are at secondary importance, which also gives the leader the ability to shape the international relations.⁵⁹ From this perspective, while economic and military aspects are seen important, the importance of morality of a leader is emphasized

⁵⁶ Emre Demir, *Contemporary China in Anglo-American and Chinese Perspectives: Making Sense of a Rising China*, (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 92-93.

⁵⁷ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 94.

⁵⁸ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 96.

⁵⁹ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 97-98.

for a state achieve the dominant position in the world order.⁶⁰ Additionally, the importance of implementing and upholding interstate norms are emphasized within this approach; which is shaped by the power position and ideology of a hegemonic state.⁶¹ From this perspective, structural conflicts between a rising power and a hegemon are expected, because it allows a rising power to create a favorable international environment for its rise, which allows the altering of international norms.⁶²

Finally, the Relational Theory of World Politics argues that the world, humans are all related, and to other things, whereas Western IR theories consider units as independent entities that are located in a structure.⁶³ From this perspective, state actors are considered as human beings, and social relations change over time.⁶⁴ Another important thing Demir point out is the co-identity, and their identities are shaped by their relations.⁶⁵ As two states get closer, they have more friendly relations, which is the “logic of relationality.”⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 98.

⁶¹ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 101.

⁶² Demir, *Contemporary China*, 108.

⁶³ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 103.

⁶⁴ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 104.

⁶⁵ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 104.

⁶⁶ Demir, *Contemporary China*, 105.

Overall, while these were not the only theories, Chinese scholars consider China's rise differently from the Western views, while there are different thoughts within China, and each have a different way of explaining China's rise.

2.2. China's Grand Strategy

In China's case, while the grand strategies since 1949 are similar, with the change in leadership, the grand strategies also changed slightly. When considering China's Aussenpolitik (foreign policy) that aims to combat the geopolitical effects of American hegemony, and China's desire to create a strategic and economic alternative to the US-led world order, Clarke states, China's Innenpolitik (domestic politics) such as CCP's legitimacy and performance through keeping growth rates, development, and restoring China's place in the world also need to be considered, since they are interconnected.⁶⁷ While economy is not the only source of legitimacy, reform-era regime gained legitimacy through its economic performance; high growth rates are used to determine the efficiency of the CCP, being one of the sources of public trust; and growth rates affecting the government's annual budget by taxing the growth, which makes sustaining high growth rates important for political stability.⁶⁸ Hence, it is important to note that along with system level analyses, scholars also note the importance of domestic factors when considering China's foreign policy.

⁶⁷ Michael Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West: The Convergence of Innenpolitik and Aussenpolitik on China's 'Belt and Road'?", *Journal of Contemporary China* 29, no. 123, (2020): 337.

⁶⁸ Min Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond: State-Mobilized Globalization in China: 1998-2018* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 29-30.

China's grand strategy has adapted to the changes both in the system level and domestic level. Goldstein argues that China's grand strategy since 1992 is the Strategy of Rejuvenation, where China wants to regain its status as an advanced country and become a great power; while the Chinese leaders since then had different approaches while having the same goal.⁶⁹ Since 1992, the approaches evolved, from hiding and biding time, to peaceful rise/development, and finally to "China Dream" with the rise of Xi Jinping as the leader, where China would shape the world for China's rise.⁷⁰

When China's development goals and domestic reasonings for gaining greater influence in the region is considered, one key aspect is energy. China became an important center for production, which resulted in increased energy consumption and increased need for energy supplies. Between 2009 and 2019, average annual growth rate of energy consumption in China was 3.8 percent, and China's 2020 share of consumption was 26.1 percent, higher than any other country in the world.⁷¹ In this increase, the highest share of energy source belonged to coal with mostly around 60 percent. This huge use of coal also surpassed any other country in the world, where China's coal consumption share was 54.3 percent in 2020.⁷² After coal, the second highest total energy supply belonged to oil, and the total supply steadily increased

⁶⁹ Avery Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (2020).

⁷⁰ Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping."

⁷¹ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021: a dramatic impact on energy markets." *BP*, 8 July 2021, accessed 25 January 2022. <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/bp-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2021-a-dramatic-impact-on-energy-markets.html>.

⁷² "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021."

since 2000. In 2020, China's overall energy consumption has increased by 2.1 per cent, where the consumption of coal, natural gas, oil, and renewables all increased.⁷³ In 2020, these increases consist of approximately 7 percent increase in gas demand, approximately half of the global increase in solar and wind capacities, whereas the coal consumption increased to 82.27 from 81.79 exajoules, and oil consumption changed from 27.94 to 28.50 exajoules compared to 2019.⁷⁴ So, it can be seen that China needs more energy, with increases usage in different types of energy whether its renewables, natural gas, or coal.

Because both coal and oil have high emissions, which cause high pollution, China needs to look into other sources of energy, and reduce emissions which have serious dangers to health. This led to the "war on pollution" in China, and the aim of reducing coal usage to 65 percent by 2015.⁷⁵ Despite China's desire to reduce coal's share in its energy, the actual amount is not decreasing yet. Chinese president Xi Jinping stated that he would control the construction of new coal power plants, and would reduce the electricity generation from coal starting in 2026.⁷⁶ Hence, emission rates

⁷³ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021."

⁷⁴ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021."

⁷⁵ Jane Nakano, "China's War on Pollution and the Uncertain Fate of "King Coal."" *CSIS*, 30 May 2014, accessed 27 January 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china%E2%80%99s-war-pollution-and-uncertain-fate-%E2%80%9Cking-coal%E2%80%9D>.

⁷⁶ Camilla Hodgson, "Kerry closes two-day summit by holding nations to account." *Financial Times*, 23 April 2021, accessed 02 February 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/3ea3e9f6-1c18-42c7-9912-c51efed3f721>.

of China have increased with an average of 2.4 percent per year.⁷⁷ In 2020, China's share in World emissions was 30.7 percent.⁷⁸ However, China is promoting green energy, and is now heading towards clean and green energy types and will not build any more coal power plants as a part of the BRI.⁷⁹ This is to promote China as the responsible partner in the world.

Additionally, also related to US encirclement, China tries to reduce its dependency on sea routes, escaping the "Malacca dilemma." Malacca dilemma refers to the Malacca Strait, where most of the China's energy imports from Middle East and Africa pass through. It is an important issue for China, which was first voiced by the former leader of the country, Hu Jintao, who was concerned about the dependence on the strait and possible attacks by terrorists, pirates, or even other states that could be harmful for Chinese trade.⁸⁰ Similarly, maritime terrorism, instabilities in the oil producing states and the possible US blockade are some possible reasons that could affect the energy sources negatively.⁸¹ To overcome this, one option is finding other sources of trade that could bypass the strait. As Zhang states, around 77 percent of oil

⁷⁷ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021."

⁷⁸ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021."

⁷⁹ "Belt and Road projects yield fruits, forge ahead amid pandemic in Asia-Pacific," *The State Council*, 22 December 2021, accessed 30 January 2022, http://english.www.gov.cn/news/international/exchanges/202112/22/content_WS61c314dbc6d09c94e48a28e0.html.

⁸⁰ Marc Lanteigne, "China's Maritime Security and the "Malacca Dilemma"," *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 (2008).

⁸¹ You Ji, "Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma: China's Effort to Protect its Energy Supply," *Strategic Analysis* 31, no. 3 (2007).

imports of China passed the strait.⁸² In this sense, even though Central Asia cannot be an alternative yet, it can reduce the dependence on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the strait. As seen in the next chapters, this led to increased cooperation between China and Central Asia, and to the construction of pipelines. Additionally, Russia became an important partner in the energy sector as well, especially after 2014.

Even though MENA region stays as the main source of energy for China, states in the Eurasia region could decrease the dependence on the Malacca Strait. In this case, Eurasian states can play an increased role in Chinese energy. Because of the proximity of the region China could invest more on Central Asian and Russian energy. This would also help both Russian and Central Asian economies, which would also result in increased cooperation on other sectors, thus making China more influential in these states. Before the BRI, Central Asia was also an important source for raw materials, where China promoted the Eurasian Continental Bridge to bring raw materials.⁸³ Now, BRI is an important aspect in diversifying energy routes of China, since building new energy infrastructure is also within the scope of BRI.⁸⁴

⁸² ZhongXiang Zhang, "China's energy security, the Malacca dilemma and responses," *Energy Policy* 39 (2011).

⁸³ Freymann, *One Belt One Road*, 27.

⁸⁴ Michael Clarke, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Exploring Beijing's Motivations and Challenges for its New Silk Road," *Strategic Analysis* 42, no. 2 (2018): 91.

Overall, the importance of Russia and Central Asia region for China stem from both international and domestic concerns. This is related to legitimacy of the CCP, as high growth rates and increasing prosperity are the basis of CCP's legitimacy; social stability and restoring China's place in the world.⁸⁵ To achieve the development goals, ties with Central Asia and Russia was important, because it allowed China to reach new markets, and ensure stability after solving border issues and with the fight against three evils. While China focused on economic development, when Xi Jinping became the leader, this has changed, with the BRI, China aims to have "a more central role in its region, creating economic links that also forge greater political certainty for China as its partners let their material self-interest gain traction over political and diplomatic loyalties."⁸⁶

These considerations push China towards Russia and Central Asia region. For instance, Gould-Davies point out that while Sino-Russian relations have improved with Russia's pivot to Asia after Ukraine crisis of 2014, their cooperation is limited, and both states focus more on their relations with the West.⁸⁷ Along with energy needs of China, and Russia's potential as an energy provider to China, security ties bring these states closer. These include NATO on Russia's west, and the encirclement of China. Domestic imperatives include China's goals of development, reducing the develop-

⁸⁵ Rod Wye, "China's Leadership and Domestic Politics," in *The Critical Transition: China's Priorities for 2021*, ed. Kerry Brown (Chatham House, 2017), 6.

⁸⁶ Kerry Brown, "China's Foreign Policy," in *The Critical Transition: China's Priorities for 2021*, ed. Kerry Brown (Chatham House, 2017), 8.

⁸⁷ Nigel Gould-Davies, "Sino-Russian Relations," in *The Critical Transition: China's Priorities for 2021*, ed. Kerry Brown (Chatham House, 2017), 34.

ment gap within the state, where underdevelopment also leads to instabilities that could threaten the legitimacy of CCP.⁸⁸

Additionally, while similar initiatives created before, BRI allows China to focus on its west and avoid a conflict with the US, while ensuring China reduces dependence on sea routes, it also serves domestic purposes of development by focusing on “hydrocarbon and mineral extraction, the BRI relies on promoting energy generation, industrialization, and connectivity.”⁸⁹ As Garcia and Guerreiro points out, China’s development is also tied to the development of its neighbors, which also lead to increased stability and export destinations for Chinese goods. Thus, the development goals, ensuring energy supply of security, and current initiatives allow China to be more influential in its region, which serve both unit level and system level considerations, which will be inspected with regards to China’s grand strategy below.

2.3. Hiding and Biding Time and Peaceful Development

As Clarke states, with the biding time strategy since the late 1980s, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping aimed to promote economic growth, resolve border issues, and combat the unwanted effects of the US, since regime survival was the most important thing for CCP, and it would only be possible with a stable international environ-

⁸⁸ Zenel Garcia and Phillip Guerreiro, “China’s Domestic Politics Are Driving the Belt and Road Initiative,” *The Diplomat*, 29 January 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/chinas-domestic-politics-are-driving-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

⁸⁹ Garcia and Guerreiro, “China’s Domestic Politics.”

ment.⁹⁰ With Jiang Zemin, this policy was taken further, and China focused on reducing tensions around it by joining regional and multilateral organizations, which also helped China counter US influence in the region, so it could focus on domestic, political and social reform challenges, which led China to focus more on cooperation, multilateralism, and regionalism.⁹¹ In this period, China cooperated with newly emerged post-Soviet Central Asian states that shares a border with it: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. China has managed to have better relations with its neighbors, solving border issues, and agreed on the fight against the three evils and founded the Shanghai Five with Russia and with the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which became the SCO when Uzbekistan joined in 2001.⁹²

The next leader of China, Hu Jintao, further developed the strategy, and emphasized the peaceful rise/development strategy. With the peaceful rise/development strategy, China would continue trying to catch up with medium level developed countries, and with the change of the term from rise to development, China tried to assure the US that it did not want to challenge it.⁹³ During this period, China emphasized that it was following its development goals, and not hegemony.⁹⁴ Overall, during this period,

⁹⁰ Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West," 339.

⁹¹ Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West," 339-40.

⁹² Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West," 339-40.

⁹³ Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West," 341.

⁹⁴ Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West," 341.

China followed a “keeping a low profile” strategy, until Xi Jinping became the leader.⁹⁵

Central Asia’s stability became important for China to increase capabilities and to avoid instabilities within China. A stable Central Asia allows China to diversify energy sources, while also promotes and develops Xinjiang region as it becomes a transportation and trade hub.⁹⁶ In line with China’s development and good neighborly policies mentioned during this period, one of the earliest developments in the region was the formation of Shanghai Five in 1996, with the founding members China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. The organization later became the SCO in 2001 when Uzbekistan joined. Both China and Central Asian states share the same views on separatism, terrorism, and extremism, which is a factor that brings these states together. SCO was promoted by China to manage member states’ “common interests in terms of security, economic exchange, and cultural interaction.”⁹⁷ SCO became the main body for China to combat the three evils, while China also tried to promote an economic aspect of the organization. The member states adopted many agreements to fight the three evils. As Jiang states,

The member countries of the SCO are all facing different levels of terrorist threat such as China’s Xinjiang “East Turkestan” terrorist forces, Russia’s Chechen terrorist forces, and in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the

⁹⁵ Xuetong Yan, “From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014).

⁹⁶ Raffaello Pantucci, and Sarah Lain, “Silk Road Security,” *Whitehall Papers* 88, no. 1 (2016): 70.

⁹⁷ David Kerr and Laura C. Swinton, “China, Xinjiang, and the Transnational Security of Central Asia,” *Critical Asian Studies* 40, no 1 (2008): 129.

“Islamic Renewal Party,” “Uzbekistan Islamic Movement,” and other terrorist and extremist forces.⁹⁸

One of two permanent bodies is the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO. The RATS agreement was signed in 2002, and it is based in Tashkent. The aim of RATS is to be a center for combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism at the regional and global levels.⁹⁹ RATS is an important part of the SCO, which holds annual anti-terror exercises with the member states. The other permanent body of the organization is the SCO Secretariat, based in Beijing, became active in 2004. The Secretary General is appointed for three years, and the nationality of the Secretary General rotates between the member states. It is the executive body of the SCO.¹⁰⁰

SCO has signed cooperation agreements with other international organizations. For example, in 2004, SCO became an observer in the United Nations (UN). In 2005, a memorandum of understanding between SCO and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was signed, and a memorandum of understanding was also signed with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where they

[...] proposed cooperation in combating transnational crime (counter-terrorism, drugs and narcotics control, arms smuggling, money laundering, and human trafficking) as well as economic cooperation, tourism, environment and natural resource management, social development, and energy cooperation.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Jiang quoted in Kerr and Swinton, “China, Xinjiang,” 130.

⁹⁹ “History.” *SCO RATS*, accessed 23 March 2022, <https://ecrats.org/en/history/>.

¹⁰⁰ “General information about the SCO Secretariat,” *SCO*, accessed 15 January 2023, <http://eng.sectsc.org/secretariat/>.

¹⁰¹ Hasan H. Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy: China's Central Asian foreign policy since the cold war* (UBC Press, 2010), 157-58.

SCO is important to fight any instabilities in the region. The US also took a similar role in the region after the 9/11 attacks. The US “War on Terror” aligned with the Chinese views of three evils.¹⁰²

Within Xinjiang, however, the US government’s focus on combating Islamic “extremism” and “terrorism” in Chinese perceptions strengthened their efforts against separatist ethnic minorities in the province. This has been illustrated by China’s contemporary framing of its struggle against ethnic separatists by reference to the goals of the US “War on Terror.”¹⁰³

At the same time, the US presence in the region also “undermined China’s foreign policy efforts in Central Asia since 1991,” where the Central Asian states tilted toward the US, allowing US to increase its presence in the region.¹⁰⁴ With the US presence in the region, especially after 2001, SCO emphasized the importance of the war against terror. Ong explains the US presence in the Central Asia region can have three outcomes: weakening Russian, or Chinese influence in the region, and containing the spread of Islamic extremism in the region. He goes on to write that Russia and China can work together to counter the US in the region, through the SCO.¹⁰⁵ The presence of the US in the region after the 9/11 led SCO to deepen its institutional structures, with members holding meetings on issues such as Afghanistan, border

¹⁰² Michael Clarke, ““Making the Crooked Straight”: China’s Grand Strategy of “Peaceful Rise” and its Central Asian Dimension,” *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 (2008): 124.

¹⁰³ Clarke, ““Making the Crooked Straight’,” 123.

¹⁰⁴ Clarke, ““Making the Crooked Straight’,” 124.

¹⁰⁵ Russell Ong, “China’s security interests in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 4 (2005).

issues, and counterterrorism.¹⁰⁶ For example, during the color revolution in Kyrgyzstan and 2005 incident in Uzbekistan, SCO supported the existing regimes, which was needed by the regimes to ensure their stability. This was because US promotion of democracy and human rights instead of stability, whereas China promoted economic development, security, stability, and anti-terrorism, along with its non-interference policy.¹⁰⁷ Along promoting SCO's role, this also led China and Central Asian states to agree on bilateral security agreements and increasing China's role as a security partner in the region.¹⁰⁸

While Russia's actions in Georgia challenged the non-interference stance, non-interference policy of the SCO is emphasized, for instance in Kyrgyzstan's Osh riots in June 2010.¹⁰⁹ As Aris and Snetkov state,

[...] the SCO's emphasis on the principle of non-interference as the cornerstone of its geopolitical identity seems to be driven by its members' leaderships' fear of active intervention by external actors in their domestic affairs, as well as a reaction against international condemnation and punishment for their domestic policies aimed at regime security.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Cooley, "Tending the Eurasian Garden: Russia, China and the Dynamics of Regional Integration and Order," in: *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jo Inge Bekkevold, and Bobo Lo (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019), 120.

¹⁰⁷ Clarke, "'Making the Crooked Straight'," 125.

¹⁰⁸ Clarke, "'Making the Crooked Straight'," 124.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Aris, and Aglaya Snetkov, "Global alternatives, regional stability and common causes": the international politics of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its relationship to the West," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 54, no. 2 (2013): 214-16.

¹¹⁰ Aris and Snetkov, "Global alternatives," 216.

Along with the fight against the three evils, SCO became an important organization for China to secure its interests in the region, whether its trade, energy, or connectivity. SCO is not only a regional organization considering security, but it also has an economy aspect since its foundation. Along with fighting the three evils, members of the SCO put an emphasis on economic cooperation, and on improving trade and investment in member states. One example can be the 2004 summit, where, in addition to security aspect, the members agreed to deepen cooperation in “trade, investment, transportation, and environmental protection; establishing a task force on e-commerce technical regulations, customs, transit potential, and investment promotion.”¹¹¹ Karrar also adds that this emphasis on economic cooperation would not necessarily mean trade between all SCO members would increase, but most likely their trade with China would get affected; but how much of this is related to the SCO is unclear.¹¹² However, it is clear that SCO became an useful organization for China to promote investments and assistance, which will be mentioned in the coming chapters.

2.4. Striving for Achievement

Lastly, with the rise of Xi Jinping, these strategies evolved further. Along with domestic goals, such as keeping the legitimacy and longevity of the CCP, China’s place in the world in the eyes of Chinese leadership has gained more importance. Hence, keeping a low profile strategy was changed to striving for achievement strategy.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 155.

¹¹² Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*.

¹¹³ Yan, “From keeping a low profile.”

This change in strategy with Xi's rise as the leader led to the creation of initiatives such as the BRI to reshape the world. Similarly, Beeson states China's strategy of keeping a low profile has changed, especially after Xi Jinping became the leader, and Chinese elites are more confident about the capabilities and their place in the global governance and want to use the economic power to restore China's position, by expanding its influence.¹¹⁴

The China Dream that aims the rejuvenation of China, has both domestic and foreign policy aspects, which aims to preserve the legitimacy of the CCP, and also gives China the ability to "preserve a peaceful external environment."¹¹⁵ The rise of Xi Jinping as the leader, and his speech in October 2013, provided the legitimization of the transition, while it was not the beginning of this transformation.¹¹⁶ As Yan puts it,

The goal of the striving for achievement strategy also addresses the importance of regional peace and stability, but it also emphasizes that foreign policy should serve the need of national rejuvenation not just economic development.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Mark Beeson, "Goeconomics with Chinese characteristics: the BRI and China's evolving grand strategy," *Economic and Political Studies* 6, no. 3 (2018).

¹¹⁵ Clarke, "Exploring Beijing's Motivations," 86.

¹¹⁶ Yan, "From keeping a low profile."

¹¹⁷ Yan, "From keeping a low profile," 166.

For the national rejuvenation, becoming a world power would mean China has achieved the rejuvenation goal.¹¹⁸ With the evolution of the strategy, China started to follow a more active foreign policy, trying to shape its neighboring regions.

The rise of China heated discussions about possible conflicts between the US and China.¹¹⁹ US presence, and policies towards Asia-Pacific region, such as alliances with states like Japan, South Korea, Philippines, India and Australia is concerning for China. The aim of these hub-and-spoke alliance networks are perceived by China as to contain China.¹²⁰ To avoid an attack or a blockade by the US which could endanger China's access to raw materials and energy sources, Onea states the China Dream led China to have "two-pronged approach," one in the SCS, while the other one is the BRI.¹²¹ With the US pivot to Asia, the US increased its military presence in Asia-Pacific and strengthened its alliance structures by deploying more troops and equipment, having more access to military systems and bases in Australia, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea.¹²² Chinese leadership tried to avoid conflict with the US, and instead aimed gaining more influence on China's west. This allows China to bring

¹¹⁸ Ye Zicheng quoted in Tudor Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, 204.

¹¹⁹ For one of most influential texts in the literature, see Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Mariner Books, 2018).

¹²⁰ Jae Jeok Park, "The US-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific: hedge against potential threats or an undesirable multilateral security order?" *The Pacific Review* 24, no. 2 (2011): 138.

¹²¹ Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, 204.

¹²² Lai-Ha Chan, "Soft balancing against the US 'pivot to Asia': China's geostrategic rationale for establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 6 (2017): 570.

supplies by pipelines or through sea lanes from its west if the supplies coming by sea in the east and south are endangered.¹²³ In the Eurasia region, being more influential, hence initiatives like SCO and BRI are important for China. Michael Clarke explains BRI is a result of China's geopolitical, economic, and soft power goals, that aims to be a solution for the US in the Asia-Pacific region, to ensure economic growth that the CCP legitimacy depends on, moving excess capacity, and as a soft power tool with its "peace, development, cooperation and win-win relations," rhetoric that promotes the idea of China's peaceful rise which will be beneficial to global security.¹²⁴

Through its projects, China is trying to increase its influence in the world, by pulling states into organizations and projects that it created as an alternative to the Western ones. BRI also allows China to avoid a "diplomatic containment" by the US as well, because US allies would be more involved with China, both economically and culturally, and would side with China or restrict cooperation with the US if the US tried to contain China.¹²⁵ China tries to re-constitute regional, and global order, with its own rules, norms, and governance ideas.¹²⁶ These include "mutual respect, mutual trust, reciprocity, equality, and win-win cooperation [...] China at the center of the new regional order, while neighboring countries are at the margins."¹²⁷ This is not

¹²³ Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, 205.

¹²⁴ Clarke, "Exploring Beijing's Motivations," 85.

¹²⁵ Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, 205.

¹²⁶ William A. Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream': The Belt Road Initiative and the New Regional Order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (2016).

¹²⁷ Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream'," 231.

only done by participating in Western, US-led organizations, where China adapts and also tries to take advantage of the rules of those organizations,¹²⁸ but it also creates its own multilateral projects and organizations as alternatives to Western ones. The creation of new organizations is also because China is not happy with the voting system of US-led organizations.¹²⁹

Yan explains that Xi Jinping emphasized being close, benefiting, and inclusive as the foreign policy principles of the striving for achievement strategy.¹³⁰ By being closer, both improving relations with neighboring states and relations with these states would be as important as relations with the US; by credibility, China's increased responsibilities in the international issues are emphasized, especially in the security issues; by benefiting, economic aid to developing states; and by inclusive, principle of openness, where China encouraging regional cooperation.¹³¹

Yan states that there are two differences, striving for achievement strategy is similar to keeping a low profile strategy but more active, which led to the creation of sub-regional economic communities one being the silk economic belt in Central Asia, in

¹²⁸ Weinhardt and ten Brink, "Varieties of contestation."

¹²⁹ Bas Hooijmaaijers, "China, the BRICS, and the limitations of reshaping global economic governance," *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 1 (2021).

¹³⁰ Yan, "From keeping a low profile," 167.

¹³¹ Yan, "From keeping a low profile," 167-69.

relation to this thesis; and secondly, while keeping a low profile first aimed economic cooperation, striving for achievement aims to achieve regional cooperation not only in economic but also in political, security, and cultural areas as well, which leads China to deepen its security cooperation with its neighbors.¹³² Finally, while keeping a low profile put more importance on economic concerns and strategic cooperation on improving mutual trust, with the striving for achievement strategy, strategic cooperation based on larger common interests, morality, and strategic credibility became more important, which, as Yan states, is one of new IR theories introduced by Xi Jinping's administration.¹³³ Overall, China became more active in the region, increasing its cooperation in the region to be more influential.

As mentioned, when Xi Jinping became the leader, China started to follow a more active foreign policy. BRI's land part was announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University, and Maritime Silk Road was announced in Indonesia. BRI is an infrastructure project that aims to connect China to Europe, which has two parts: a Maritime Silk Road, and a Silk Road Economic Belt that is made of several economic corridors. China would build energy networks, roads, railways to connect states within the scope of BRI. Additionally, to support the BRI, China set up new organizations and funds, such as the AIIB, and the Silk Road Fund (SRF).¹³⁴

¹³² Yan, "From keeping a low profile," 169.

¹³³ Yan, "From keeping a low profile," 169-70.

¹³⁴ Nadège Rolland, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer?" *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1, (2017): 127-28.

While China benefitted from Western international organizations, its own projects can allow China to exert influence more easily. Along with stabilizing Xinjiang region, Cooley also states cooperation and development initiatives within the region allows China to increase connectivity, to build a political community in which the states are sensitive to China's interests and priorities, and to create new market opportunities.¹³⁵ Hence, the creation of its own institutions allows China to be more influential in the decision making process and be more effective when it needs to finance projects through multilateral institutions. Wang states that

Instead of directly challenging the current existing international institutions, the Chinese are trying to create new platforms that Beijing can control or substantially influence. Through these new initiatives, Beijing aims to create a new international environment that is more favorable to China, one that will limit strategic pressures from the United States.¹³⁶

This also shows that the security concerns are connected to the economic factors.

BRI would allow China to be an alternative to the post-1945 world order led by the US, while being within the scope of striving for achievement and China dream strategy and goal of China. The BRI would also lessen China's dependence on sea routes, and make it reach Europe easier. This would also include the energy sector, where

¹³⁵ Cooley, "Tending the Eurasian Garden," 114.

¹³⁶ Zheng Wang, "China's Alternative Diplomacy," *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/chinas-alternative-diplomacy/>.

the BRI would allow China to invest energy-related projects in Russia, Central Asia, and Indian Ocean.¹³⁷

Additionally, BRI is important to China to counter the US containment.¹³⁸

Washington sought to build a ‘C-shaped ring of encirclement’ around China by linking the East China Sea, Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, Malacca Strait and Indian Ocean for limiting China’s influence in the first island chain and constraining China’s expansion into the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹³⁹

The US is getting more engaged in the Asia-Pacific region, where it strengthens relations with states such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India, and forms pacts and dialogues such as Aukus and Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD). BRI can act as a soft balancing tool for China against the US containment, by increasing interdependence with Eurasian partners, while also promoting China as a normative power, and being more influential with its values and interests in global governance.¹⁴⁰

Another important aspect of BRI is that it can help China cope with its overcapacity problem which arised after the global financial crisis of 2008. Clarke states that after the global financial crisis, “[m]ajor issues identified in this regard are managing in-

¹³⁷ Michael Clarke, “The Belt and Road Initiative: China’s New Grand Strategy?” *Asia Policy* 24 (2017).

¹³⁸ For example, see Weifeng Zhou and Mario Esteban, “Beyond Balancing: China’s approach towards the Belt and Road Initiative,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 112, (2018).

¹³⁹ Zhou and Esteban, “Beyond Balancing,” 492.

¹⁴⁰ Zhou and Esteban, “Beyond Balancing.”

dustrial overcapacity, developing new markets for exports, securing access to natural resources, and finding uses for surplus capital.”¹⁴¹ This excess capacity is used in other states, helping them develop as well. One example used by Clarke is the Chinese steel industry, where it can “export excess capacity, diversify exports and develop greater international competitiveness.”¹⁴² Additionally, BRI forces Chinese companies to invest outside, which will require reform to make them competitive in the international markets.¹⁴³

BRI also faced some criticisms, especially after Sri Lanka could not pay back its debts and China acquired the port of Hambantota for 99 years. This sparked the discussions on “debt-trap diplomacy,” where China is big promoting projects, and when the other state cannot pay their debts, China gains additional benefits, although now it is debunked.¹⁴⁴

It is also important to note that similar ideas and projects were created before. For instance, Freymann states the idea of New Silk Road first came from Kyrgyzstan in

¹⁴¹ Clarke, “China’s New Grand Strategy?” 74.

¹⁴² Clarke, “Exploring Beijing’s Motivations and Challenges,” 90.

¹⁴³ Raffaello Pantucci, and Sarah Lain, “Domestic Drivers for the Belt and Road Initiative,” *Whitehall Papers* 88, no. 1 (2016): 27-28.

¹⁴⁴ See Deborah Brautigam, “A critical look at Chinese ‘debt-trap diplomacy’: the rise of a meme,” *Area Development and Policy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 1-14; Pádraig Carmody, “Dependence not debt-trap diplomacy,” *Area Development and Policy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 23-31; Ajit Singh, “The myth of ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ and realities of Chinese development finance,” *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2020): 1-15.

1998, which was followed by usage by Chinese foreign ministry and Chinese party-state, and after the global financial crisis of 2008, the term New Silk Road was used to describe China's internationalization by Chinese scholars, policymakers, and bureaucratic agencies.¹⁴⁵

Freymann offers symbolic and historical reasons for Xi Jinping's desire to take credit for BRI. From the historical aspect, the project is in line with China's "diplomatic slogans and theoretical frameworks from the late 1990s and early 2000s", and with the financial crisis of 2008, the idea was started to be used more in discussions on China's role in the international stage and how to explain it to both foreign and domestic audiences; which, Freyermann argues, Xi Jinping was more concerned about the domestic audience.¹⁴⁶ The idea of a new Silk Road was also presented by the US in 2011.¹⁴⁷

While the idea of reviving the Silk Road was used elsewhere, similar ideas to BRI was also present in China. For instance, in 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin mentioned a "Eurasian Continental Bridge," in a meeting with Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov; to revive the Silk Road which would bring raw materials to

¹⁴⁵ Eyck Freyermann, *One Belt One Road: Chinese Power Meets the World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2021), 22-26.

¹⁴⁶ Freyermann, *One Belt One Road*, 23.

¹⁴⁷ Freyermann, *One Belt One Road*, 32.

China.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, infrastructure development proposals existed before BRI, as Ye mentions, such as Hu Jintao's plan on "Deepening Mutual Connectivity and Realizing Sustainable Development," in 2012, China-ASEAN Mutual Connectivity Joint Committee, Premier Li's announcements on investing on infrastructure and Asia Infrastructure Cooperation Initiative in 2013, which aimed to "utilize China's excess capital and strengthen the country's commercial and diplomatic interests abroad."¹⁴⁹ Along with infrastructure diplomacy, Chinese Marshall Plan that aimed to increase Chinese investments on infrastructure abroad and China Goes West Proposal that aimed to avoid confrontation with the US in Asia-Pacific were similar proposals to BRI.¹⁵⁰ Because similar infrastructure projects existed before BRI, these projects were also rebranded as BRI projects after the creation of BRI.

Additionally, Ye argues that the BRI is the latest form of other projects created by China, namely Western Development Program, and China Goes Global, to keep growth rates high. Hence, all three initiatives were created due to economic concerns.¹⁵¹ Western Development Program was initiated in 1999, which aimed to reduce the development gap within the state by developing the western region of the state, to enhance ethnic unity, and to ensure border security.¹⁵² By increasing trade

¹⁴⁸ Freymann, *One Belt One Road*, 27-29.

¹⁴⁹ Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond*, 118-20.

¹⁵⁰ Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond*, 117-124.

¹⁵¹ Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond*.

¹⁵² Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond*, 36-40.

with Central Asia and developing underdeveloped provinces of China, China aimed to “legitimize its presence in the region, improve economic growth and tighten border security.”¹⁵³ China Goes Global was initiated in 2000, which aimed to attract foreign financing and increase exports.¹⁵⁴ And finally, the latest form of Chinese initiatives is the BRI. Ye argues all of these were created because achieving high development rates and keeping political stability are important for China; and states “Behind each strategy’s formation, the empirical process demonstrates a critical juncture opened up by economic crisis, pressing domestic development imperatives, and nationalist external ambition.”¹⁵⁵

China’s striving for achievement strategy also had some changes in the way China provides development assistance. As mentioned, striving for achievement strategy led to some changes in China’s role in the globe. In a more recent white paper of 2021, this can also be seen, where China has outlined the cultural and philosophical origins, stating China has a duty to engage in international development.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Pooja Pingua, “China’s Policies for Combating Domestic Terrorism in Xinjiang,” *World Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2017): 64.

¹⁵⁴ Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond*, 40-44.

¹⁵⁵ Ye, *The Belt and Road and Beyond*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Nargis Kassenova, “How China’s Foreign Aid Fosters Social Bonds with Central Asian Ruling Elites,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2022): 8.

China's increased engagement in international development led not only Chinese but also Western organizations to transform.¹⁵⁷ It is argued that this cooperation and competition between Chinese and Western development institutions is leading to changes in the approaches of both Chinese and Western institutions, for China this means considering the environmental, social, and procurement standards more, where China invests more in renewables, and sometimes co-finances projects with Western multilateral development banks (MDBs), which was not the case before; and for Western MDBs this means that they focus more on working with local actors to encourage co-ownership, and asking for less conditionalities.¹⁵⁸

Overall, China needs to have good relations with the states within the BRI to achieve its goals. Hence, the Central Asia and Russia are important partners for China, to bring raw materials, keep growth rates high and develop its underdeveloped regions and military, reach to Europe, reduce its dependence on sea routes and the Malacca dilemma, and avoiding military confrontation with the US in the Asia-Pacific. It is possible to say that energy is one of the key elements of China's relations with Central Asia and Russia, which is connected to both economic and security aspects.

¹⁵⁷ Morena Skalamera Groce and Seçkin Köstem, "The dual transformation in development finance: western multilateral development banks and China in post-Soviet energy," *Review of International Political Economy*, (2021).

¹⁵⁸ Skalamera Groce and Köstem, "The dual transformation," 19.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter inspected China's grand strategy, and its foreign policy choices through neoclassical realism. From this perspective, it can be said that China is developing its capabilities because of international pressures such as the US encirclement, Malacca dilemma, the fear of instabilities in Central Asia region. Firstly, focusing on the system level aspect, China is increasing its influence in the region, which also serves unit level considerations such as stability and development. As mentioned, China's first interaction with the post-Soviet states was to solve border issues, and increasing cooperation to avoid conflicts, which was crucial to the development of China.

This has been done while China's grand strategy was evolving, from hiding and biding time to peaceful development. And finally, China's grand strategy changed to striving for achievement, with China's rising capabilities, it follows a more active foreign policy. By doing so, China still avoids conflict with the US, while also ensuring stability, improving relations with its west. Additionally, BRI reduces China's dependence on sea routes, especially Malacca Dilemma. China's rising capabilities also allows it to build new international institutions where it can be more dominant, compared to US-led organizations.

CHAPTER 3

CHINA AND RUSSIA

3.1. Introduction

This chapter of the thesis analyses Sino-Russian relations. First, a background of political relations, and systemic and unit level factors that bring these states closer, and at the same time, reasons for not supporting each other is given. Then, economic relations in terms of trade, energy, and investments will be inspected. Then, military relations, with emphasis on both multilateral and bilateral security cooperation, and arms sales will be assessed. Finally, possible effects of Russia's war on Ukraine on Sino-Russian relations will be inspected.

Russia became an important partner to China in the political, energy, and security areas. Russia is an important partner for China, since Russia can provide raw materials and energy to China, while China can access Russian markets, cooperate on the security of Asia, and access Europe through Russia. Additionally, Russia helped China to modernize its military. There are factors that bring these states together,

such as their position against the US, similar views on the international order, and security, including the security in Central Asia.¹⁵⁹

3.2. Development of China-Russia Relations

Although the relations between the two states was not always perfect, especially during the cold war, in the 21st century the two states have improved their relations. One of the earliest developments in China-Russia relations was in 1996, when the leaders of the two states agreed to develop a strategic partnership.¹⁶⁰ China and Russia signed Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Agreement in 2001, which “involved many issues, among them the border dispute, military cooperation, regional trade, and fostering Sino-Russian friendship among the citizens of the two states.”¹⁶¹

Three years later, in 2004, China and Russia have solved their border disputes, signing a border agreement. Solving the border issues and no threats from China meant Russia could also reduce the number of its troops in the region, also benefiting the economy.¹⁶² In 2006 and 2007, Year of Russia in China, and Year of China in Russia

¹⁵⁹ Mingjiang Li and Angela Poh, “The Indispensable Partner: Russia in China’s Grand Strategy,” in: *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jo Inge Bekkevold, and Bobo Lo (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019), 21-39.

¹⁶⁰ Mark Burles, *Chinese Policy Toward Russia and the Central Asian Republics* (RAND 1999).

¹⁶¹ Hsu and Soong, “Development of China-Russia Relations,” 70-87.

¹⁶² Paul Schwartz, “Evolution of Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation since the Cold War (Part 1+ Part 2),” in: *International Relations and Asia’s Northern Tier: Sino-Russian Relations, North Korea, and Mongolia*, ed. Gilbert Rozman and Sergey Radchenko, (Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2018), 29.

was celebrated to strengthen the bilateral ties.¹⁶³ In 2008, Chinese President Hu Jintao promoted a four-point proposal that would institutionalize their relations, also promoting the economic development between China's Dongbei and RFE.¹⁶⁴ While in the next years, Russia and China's relations improved, and in 2010, China has become the biggest trading partner of Russia. The two states also aimed to cooperate on many projects:

In 2009, to stimulate the development of regional Sino-Russian relations, Moscow and Beijing adopted a "Program of Collaboration between the regions of the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia and the North-East of the PRC," which gave details of 160 joint projects to be implemented by 2018, 94 of which were to be on Russian soil.¹⁶⁵

However, it is also important to note that many of the projects were abandoned. For example, most of the projects which were announced in 2009 could not be completed, and only 19 of them were under construction by 2015.¹⁶⁶ As Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill state, the reason these projects could not provide the expected outcomes was the back-pedaling of Russia.¹⁶⁷ This is also true for the energy sector, where there were some cancelled projects, or delayed outcomes.

¹⁶³ Li and Poh, "The Indispensable Partner," 28.

¹⁶⁴ Hsu and Soong, "Development of China-Russia Relations," 75-76.

¹⁶⁵ Olga Alexeeva, Frédéric Lasserre and Elizabeth Guill, "The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations as Seen from Moscow: The Limits of Strategic Rapprochement," *China Perspectives* 3 (2018): 72.

¹⁶⁶ Johnathan E. Hillman, *The Emperor's New Road* (Yale University Press, 2020), 72.

¹⁶⁷ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill. "The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations," 72.

A decade after the signing of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Agreement, in 2011, China and Russia agreed on improving their relations, and agreed to form a comprehensive strategic partnership; and in 2014, they agreed on “a New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination, and agree to establish a strategic partnership of energy cooperation.”¹⁶⁸ This has further developed, in 2019, during the 70th anniversary of forming China-Russia diplomatic relations, China and Russia agreed to upgrade their relations to comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era.¹⁶⁹

In terms of security cooperation, Russia has also taken a part in founding the Shanghai Five forum in 1996, which eventually became the SCO. Along with these economic developments, this allowed China and Russia start conducting military exercises through SCO, first one being held in 2005, which was called the Peace Mission 2005.¹⁷⁰

When Xi Jinping became the leader in 2013, went to Russia as his first foreign visit, only after eight days after his appointment.¹⁷¹ Additionally, between 2013 and May

¹⁶⁸ Zhou Jingnan, “Timeline: Highlights of China-Russia ties in the past 70 years,” *CGTN*, 4 June 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514f7967444d35457a6333566d54/index.html>.

¹⁶⁹ “China, Russia agree to upgrade relations for new era,” *China.org.cn*, 6 June 2019, accessed 25 May 2022, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2019-06/06/content_74859445.htm.

¹⁷⁰ Jin Wang, and Dehang Kong, “Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Between China and Central Asian States in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2019): 73.

¹⁷¹ Li and Poh, “The Indispensable Partner,” 29.

2022, Vladimir Putin is the most visited foreign leader for the Chinese President Xi Jinping, where he visited Putin 39 times during the time period, followed by Indian leaders 19 times, and the US leaders 16 times.¹⁷²

And more recently, China and Russia announced a Joint Statement on February 4, 2022, during the Olympic Winter Games, which is quite important because it was around 20 days before Russia's attack on Ukraine. The leaders of China and Russia has announced the Joint Statement on "the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development," where they emphasized there are many forms of democracy depending on the cultures, traditions, history, social and political systems, and that other states should not try to pressure using their own democratic standards and human rights approaches; emphasized the importance of peace, development, and cooperation in the international system, hence the need for greater cooperation between the BRI and EEU, fight against climate change; and finally, the topics China and Russia emphasized also included the international security challenges, which included countering terrorism, color revolutions, intervening internal affairs of sovereign states, stated they oppose the enlargement of NATO, and Russia also reminded that it supports one-China principle.¹⁷³ Additionally, the two states will try to increase their trade volume to \$250 billion by 2024.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² "Series: China-Russia Relations" *CSIS China Power Project*, <https://chinapower.csis.org/series-china-russia-relations/>.

¹⁷³ "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development," *The Kremlin*, 4 February 2022, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.

¹⁷⁴ Jonathan E. Hillman, "China and Russia: Economic Unequals," *CSIS*, (2020).

One turning point for the China-Russia relationship was the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Russia wanted to overcome the dependence on the West and reduce the effects of sanctions. Hence, Russia put more importance in its relations with Asian states. After the annexation of Crimea,

[o]n May 20–21 [2014], Putin visited China, during which time Russia and China signed over 50 agreements, the most substantial of which being a 30-year, \$400 billion gas contract between the state-controlled Gazprom and the CNPC.¹⁷⁵

After the Russia-Ukraine war, China is going to be more important for Russia because of the Western sanctions. For China, it means that China can buy goods such as oil for cheaper prices, while Russia will be more dependent on non-Western customers, with China being the biggest potential customer, because of the Western sanctions on Russia.¹⁷⁶ With Russia's war on Ukraine, this relationship has become harder for China to sustain, yet Russia and China cannot oppose each other because of their stance against the US. For instance, Shullman and Kendall-Taylor state that China might want to mitigate the pressure on Putin which could destabilize him, because if Putin fell, the US would focus fully on countering China's rise, and undermine the CCP's grip on power, while Russian leader after Putin might not as friendly

¹⁷⁵ Ray Silvius, "Chinese–Russian economic relations: developing the infrastructure of a multipolar global political economy?" *Int Polit* 56 (2019): 632.

¹⁷⁶ Mercy A. Kuo, "Energy Crisis from Ukraine War: Impacts on China and India," *The Diplomat*, 8 August 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/energy-crisis-from-ukraine-war-impacts-on-china-and-india/>.

as Putin to China.¹⁷⁷ Hence, maintaining good relations, despite the Ukraine war is essential, since China still can benefit from Russian resources, and for Russia, China can reduce the effects of Western sanctions.¹⁷⁸

At the same time, there are competition and disagreements on certain issues, which can be seen in both system and unit levels. Both states are not completely happy with the current international system, they view it differently, where Russia sees the world in triangular terms, and states that dominate the system are the US, China, and Russia; while China considers rising China as the only counterpart of the US.¹⁷⁹ Russia and China would be expected to support each other, because of their position against the US, and because US is still spending so much more on military than both of these states, yet this is not always the case and they do not support each other always, which can be seen when unit level factors are considered.¹⁸⁰ For instance, Korolev and Portyakov explain, regarding China's non-recognition of breakaway republics of Georgia is that China is also facing its own separatist movements, where supporting

¹⁷⁷ David O. Shullman and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, "Best and Bosom Friends: Why China-Russia Ties Will Deepen after Russia's War on Ukraine," *Marshall Papers* (2022), 5.

¹⁷⁸ Iliya Kusa, "China's Strategic Calculations in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Wilson Center*, 21 June 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/chinas-strategic-calculations-russia-ukraine-war>.

¹⁷⁹ Bobo Lo, "Introduction," in: *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jo Inge Bekkevold, and Bobo Lo (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019), 6.

¹⁸⁰ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations," 424-25.

Russia by recognizing these breakaway states would also put danger on China's territories.¹⁸¹

Regarding the unit level factors for both states, Korolev and Portyakov state that

For China, economic interests in Central Asia, and the post-Soviet space more broadly, as well as its own problems of territorial integrity, prevented Beijing from fully supporting Russia. For Russia, in turn, economic and strategic interests in East and Southeast Asia in the context of Putin's emphasis on the development of Russia's eastern territories as part of the reorientation to Asia's development program increased the complexity of Russia's regional policies and prevented Moscow from siding with Beijing in the SCS.¹⁸²

Additionally, some of the disagreements come from Russia's desire to hedge against China, where Russia is cooperating with states like Vietnam and Japan to limit China.¹⁸³ For instance, Blank argues that Russian deals with Vietnam such as Gazprom's deal with Vietnam to explore gas in two licensed blocks in Vietnam's continental shelf in the SCS, and Russia stating its interest in regaining a naval base at Cam Ranh Bay despite China's demands to Russia to leave are also because of Russia's desire to curb China in the SCS.¹⁸⁴ Korolev states that the reason for regaining the naval base is to help Vietnam build a submarine base and repair dockyards, while

¹⁸¹ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations," 427.

¹⁸² Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations," 416.

¹⁸³ Stephen Blank, "Russo-Chinese Relations in Strategic Perspective," in: *International Relations and Asia's Northern Tier: Sino-Russia Relations, North Korea, and Mongolia*, eds. Gilbert Rozman and Sergey Radchenko, (Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2018): 97.

¹⁸⁴ Blank, "Russo-Chinese Relations in Strategic Perspective," 97-98.

further agreements simplified Russia's use of the naval base, military equipment sales, and formalized Russia-Vietnam defense cooperation.¹⁸⁵

Additionally, Central Asia is a region where the two states compete on certain issues, where China has surpassed Russia and is more active in terms of economy. China's investments in Central Asian energy resources is another topic of concern for Russia. China has become the major player in terms of economic relations. As shown in the next chapter, China has surpassed Russia, and imports huge energy resources from Central Asian states. Korolev states that Russia created EEU as a hedge against growing foreign influence which include not only China but also the EU and the US.¹⁸⁶

There are also disagreements on security issues in Central Asia. These mostly are related to the influence of both powers in Central Asia. While these states cooperate within the SCO, China's bases in Central Asian states are unwanted by Russia. Although they cooperate to prevent instability in the region, Russia does not want China to spread its influence in the region and expects its military presence in the region to be limited to Tajikistan.¹⁸⁷ As mentioned in the next chapter, with the Russia's war on Ukraine, China might be even more influential in Central Asia.

¹⁸⁵ Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging," 392.

¹⁸⁶ Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging," 396.

¹⁸⁷ Reid Standish, "From A Secret Base in Tajikistan, China's War on Terror Adjusts To A New Reality," *RFE/RL*, 14 October 2021, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-china-war-on-terror-afghan/31509370.html>.

This hedging strategy also can be seen within the SCO, both in terms of economy and security. For instance, these differences in views can be seen in Russia's rejection of the creation of a crisis fund after the global financial crisis, in 2008 and 2009, and in 2012 when China wanted to create an SCO Regional Development Bank, which was halted after Russia's announcement stating that it needed time to consider.¹⁸⁸

Similar to some Central Asian states, Russia also has a fear of increasing Chinese workers and migration. "Russians fear that declining population in the Far East together with massive Chinese immigration could lead to a long-term Chinese occupation and perhaps annexation of large parts of eastern Russia."¹⁸⁹ The reasons for the concern are economic, and the number of inhabitants in the RFE and on the Chinese side of the border. With better economic conditions in the RFE, Chinese people prefer to move to RFE, whereas the population of RFE is already declining, near the border, Chinese population was around 100 million, while RFE had only 7 million.¹⁹⁰

RFE is important region of Russia because it has rich natural resources.

There is an estimation that these areas contains large reserves of diamonds, almost 70% of Russia's total gold deposits as well as significant deposits of other natural resources including oil, natural gas, coal, timber, silver, platinum, tin, lead and zinc etc. These areas are rich in fish and the land is almost

¹⁸⁸ Cooley, "Tending the Eurasian Garden," 128.

¹⁸⁹ Hsu and Soong, "Development of China-Russia Relations," 79.

¹⁹⁰ Hsu and Soong, "Development of China-Russia Relations," 79.

unpopulated, which makes this area very sensitive and strategically important to Russia and maybe for China as well.¹⁹¹

Overall, while there are factors that bring these states closer, there are also factors that push the two states away from each other.

3.3. China-Russia Trade

Bilateral trade between the two states have kept increasing, surpassing US\$100 billion in 2018. As Table 1 shows, China's imports from Russia increased drastically after 2016, and almost doubled in 3 years, from 32,260 million in 2016 to 60,257 million in 2019. It can also be seen that after 2018, China imported from Russia more than it exported. The trade is expected to increase, since the leaders have announced the goal to reach \$200 billion by 2024.¹⁹² However, the two states did not always have an upwards trend in their economic relations. For example, Simola states that

The development of goods trade between Russia and China has been visibly poorer in 2014-15 than in the preceding years. The value of total trade turnover between countries fell from nearly 100 billion USD in 2012-13 to less than 70 billion USD in 2015.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Niklas Swanström, "Sino-Russian Relations at the Start of the New Millennium in Central Asia and Beyond," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 87, (2014): 485.

¹⁹² Hillman, "China and Russia: Economic Unequals."

¹⁹³ Heli Simola, "Economic relations between Russia and China – Increasing inter-dependency?" *BOFIT Policy Brief* 6 (2016): 10.

The reason for the decrease in trade in 2014-2015 is because of the falling oil prices, and less demand by the Russian consumers because of the devaluation of ruble.¹⁹⁴

2018 marked a new achievement with the trade volume reached \$107 billion.

Table 1. China’s trade with Russia between 2016 and 2021, (in million US\$).

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Imports	32,260	41,390	59,141	61,191	57,844	78,971
Exports	37,340	42,831	47,965	49,748	50,504	67,550

Source: UN Comtrade, <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

More recently, energy sector has become one of the most important aspects of Sino-Russian relations. In 2020, China’s imports from Russia were mostly oil. Around \$27 billion of China’s imports from Russia were oils, which is approximately 48 percent of total imports from Russia; in 2021, the value of oil imported from Russia increased to approximately \$41 billion; while the value of oil imported in 2019 was around \$37 billion; other import goods include wood, iron ores and concentrates, copper and copper ores, iron and steel, fish, platinum; meanwhile, China mostly exported telephones, automatic data-processing machines, vehicles and vehicle parts and accessories, clothing, and plastics.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Simola, “Economic relations between Russia and China,” 10.

¹⁹⁵ “Bilateral trade between China and Russian Federation,” Trademap, https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c156%7c%7c643%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1.

The types of products that Russia provide has changed drastically since the early 21st century. As stated before, oil and raw materials are a huge proportion of Russian exports to China now. However, during the early 2000s, Russia still had hopes of exporting machines and industrial equipment to China, which constituted 20 percent of Russian exports to China in 2002.¹⁹⁶ Since 2002, the share of hydrocarbons in Russian exports to China has jumped from 15 percent to 66.2 percent in 2017.¹⁹⁷

It is also important to note that China is more important to Russia than the other way around. In 2021, Russia's share in China's total trade was approximately 2.4 percent, while China's share in Russia's total trade was around 18 percent.¹⁹⁸ When compared with the past, it can be seen that Russia become more dependent on China in time. According to Hsu and Soong, in 2010, Russia constituted 1.92 percent of total Chinese trade, while 5.5 percent of Russian exports went to China.¹⁹⁹

3.4. Energy Cooperation

One of the earliest developments in terms of energy cooperation was the proposal of Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline, and the signing of a 5-year oil con-

¹⁹⁶ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill. "The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations," 71-72.

¹⁹⁷ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill. "The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations," 71.

¹⁹⁸ Author's calculations based on data from UN Comtrade, <https://comtrade.un.org/>.

¹⁹⁹ Hsu and Soong, "Development of China-Russia Relations," 83.

tract in 2004, which meant that China would receive 48.4 million tons of oil from Russia.²⁰⁰ Because there were no oil pipelines between Russia and China in 2004, Russia had to send oil via train, and the two states started efforts to build pipelines.²⁰¹ In the next years, the two states reached new agreements on energy cooperation, which also included investments, pledges to increase oil supplies.²⁰² However, achieving the expected results took longer than expected. Altai Gas Pipeline, proposed in 2006, would be put on hold several times because of disagreements not only on the price and demand, but also on the route, which was changed, and the pipeline still could not be completed.²⁰³

The disagreements over natural gas also affected China's attitude toward Central Asian states. Hsu and Soong state that

In 2008, the 13 million tons of oil from Russia to China were transported by rail, but no gas transportation occurred. Russian hesitation about delivering oil and gas pushed Chinese officials to search for possibilities in Central Asia for exploring and developing gas and oil fields, despite the greater distance and risk.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ James Henderson, and Tatiana Mitrova, "Energy relations between Russia and China: Playing chess with the dragon," *OIES Paper: WPM* 67, (2016): 13-14.

²⁰¹ Hongyi Harry Lai, "China's oil diplomacy: is it a global security threat?," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 3, (2007): 526.

²⁰² Lai, "China's oil diplomacy," 526.

²⁰³ Henderson and Mitrova, "Energy Relations," 8.

²⁰⁴ Hsu and Soong, "Development of China-Russia Relations," 84.

In 2009, other agreements were reached, which meant until 2030, Russia would provide 15 million tons of oil per year; and ESPO oil pipeline's first stage was completed between 2006 and 2009.²⁰⁵ In 2011, part of the ESPO pipeline between the two states began operating, which boosted the energy relations between China and Russia; while ESPO's Pacific outlet allowed Russia to diversify its oil exports.²⁰⁶ The ESPO pipeline made Russia the biggest oil provider to China, replacing Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁷ In time, ESPO pipeline was expanded, the capacity to provide oil was enhanced. China and Russia have signed similar deals regarding energy in the coming years, for example, in 2013, Rosneft and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed a deal worth \$270 billion to supply oil to China.²⁰⁸ In the same year, the two states also agreed on the trade of another 10 million metric tons of crude oil worth \$85 billion.²⁰⁹

After the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, energy relations between the two states accelerated, due to Russia's turn to Asia and the desire to reduce its dependence on European markets. In addition to cooperation agreements on electricity, and coal, CNPC and

²⁰⁵ Tom Røseth, "Russia's energy relations with China: passing the strategic threshold?" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 58, no. 1, (2017), 38.

²⁰⁶ Røseth, "Russia's energy relations," 38.

²⁰⁷ Maria Shagina, "Has Russia's Pivot to Asia Worked?" *The Diplomat*, 10 January 2020, accessed 5 June 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/has-russias-pivot-to-asia-worked/>.

²⁰⁸ Du Juan, "China in \$270b oil deal with Russia," *China Daily*, 22 June 2013, accessed 11 June 2022, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-06/22/content_16645789.htm.

²⁰⁹ Pu Zhendong and Wu Jiao, "China, Russia reach big oil deal" *China Daily*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-10/23/content_17052079.htm. Accessed 11 June 2022.

Yamal LNG agreed to supply 3 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG).²¹⁰ In 2014, after negotiating for 10 years, the two states also signed a natural gas agreement worth \$400 billion, Russia would provide 38 bcm of gas per year for 30 years via the Power of Siberia pipeline.²¹¹ “This volume amounts to 20% of China’s 2014 consumption and 60% of its 2014 gas imports.”²¹² Power of Siberia pipeline was an important achievement to have better relations. Regarding the agreement on Power of Siberia pipeline, Charap Drennan and Noël state that:

The terms offered by CNPC, the Chinese contracting party, were not acceptable to Gazprom. The project is simply too costly to make Russian gas competitive in China in the current energy market. Eventually, both governments twisted the arms of their national energy companies to sign a deal that makes little commercial sense but is a powerful symbol of the countries’ structural complementarity. Gazprom was forced by the Kremlin into a project with extremely low return on capital, if any. The Chinese government, for its part, decided that the cost of offering Moscow such a symbolic achievement was less than the potential blowback from rebuffing Russia. So it forced CNPC to accept a less-than-optimal gas-import contract.²¹³

The pipeline became operational in December 2019, and it is the first gas pipeline from Russia to China. More recently, during their Winter Olympics meeting on February 4, 2022, Russia and China had reached another agreement, where Russia would provide additional 10 bcm of gas to China for 30 years, via a new pipeline, where

²¹⁰ Henderson and Mitrova, “Energy relations between Russia and China,” 55.

²¹¹ Zachary Keck. “China and Russia Sign Massive Natural Gas Deal.” *The Diplomat*, 21 May 2014, accessed 13 June 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/china-and-russia-sign-massive-natural-gas-deal/>.

²¹² Samuel Charap, John Drennan and Pierre Noël, “Russia and China: A New Model of Great-Power Relations,” *Survival* 59:1 (2017): 30.

²¹³ Charap, Drennan and Noël, “Russia and China,” 32.

deliveries are expected to start in a couple of years.²¹⁴ There are plans to expand the energy relations after the Ukraine war as well. One of these plans is the Power of Siberia 2 project, which will be financed by China. which is expected to be operational in 2030.²¹⁵

Chinese investments in Russian energy sector is an important aspect of the relations. Along with Chinese banks financing projects in Russia, Chinese energy companies buy shares of Russian projects. China's first energy project in Russia, Sakhalin-3, was agreed on in 2005, between Sinopec and Rosneft.²¹⁶ Rosneft holds 74.9 percent of the shares, while Sinopec holds 25.1 percent.²¹⁷ In 2013, CNPC has acquired 20 percent of shares of the Yamal LNG project. Yamal LNG project got credits from Export-Import Bank of China (\$11.4 billion) and China Development Bank (\$1.63 billion) as well.²¹⁸ Then, in 2016, the SRF acquired another 9.9 percent of the

²¹⁴Chen Aizhu, "Russia, China agree 30-year gas deal via new pipeline, to settle in euros," *Reuters*, 4 February 2022, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-russia-china-agree-30-year-gas-deal-using-new-pipeline-source-2022-02-04/>.

²¹⁵ Jeff Pao, "Power of Siberia 2 to divert Europe-bound gas to China," *Asia Times*, 20 July 2022, accessed 17 January 2023, <https://asiatimes.com/2022/07/power-of-siberia-2-to-divert-europe-bound-gas-to-china/>.

²¹⁶ "FACTBOX-Russia's Sakhalin oil, gas projects," *Reuters*, 20 January 2007, accessed 15 June 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-sakhalin-projects-idUSL1172773720061211>.

²¹⁷ "Sakhalin-3," Rosneft, Accessed 15 June 2022, https://ojsverkhnechonskneftegaz.rosneft.com/business/Upstream/exploration/Prospective_projects/sakhalin_3/.

²¹⁸ Nadezhda Filimonova and Svetlana Krivokhizh, "China's Stakes in the Russian Arctic," *The Diplomat*, 18 January 2018, accessed 18 June 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/chinas-stakes-in-the-russian-arctic/>.

project from Novatek.²¹⁹ Additionally, Chinese banks also agreed to provide loans around \$10 billion.²²⁰ From Sibur, Sinopec bought 10 percent of shares for \$1.3 billion, and SRF acquired another 10 percent. In 2017, Beijing Gas acquired 20 percent shares of Verkhnechonskneftegaz for \$1.1 billion.²²¹ In 2019, China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Company (CNODC), a subsidiary of CNPC, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) each agreed to buy 10 percent shares in the Novatek's Arctic LNG 2 project.²²²

3.5. Russia and the BRI

For China's BRI, even though Russia is expected to take a part, since several BRI corridors run through Russia, Russia's involvement is very limited. Hillman states "In 2014 and 2015, Russia created 20 special economic zones (SEZs) to attract foreign investment to its Far East. Only six have attracted Chinese investment, which totaled a mere \$38 million between 2015 and 2018."²²³ One of these projects was the Moscow-Kazan high-speed railway, which was a 722 km long railway. The project

²¹⁹ Uğur Ertaş, "Novatek sells 9.9% stake in Yamal LNG Project," *Anadolu Agency*, 16 March 2016, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/finance/novatek-sells-99-stake-in-yamal-lng-project/7241>.

²²⁰ "China's CNPC: Russia's Yamal LNG to get loans of around \$10 billion," *Reuters*, 21 April 2016, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-yamal-china-loans-idUSR4N17L02O>.

²²¹ "Sale of 20% in Verkhnechonskneftegaz to Beijing Gas," *FT*, 30 June 2017, accessed 16 June 2022, accessed 16 June 2022, <https://markets.ft.com/data/announce/full?dockey=1323-13278638-6GTKBFOGF5TEECGSDLNQDOUO4J>.

²²² Nastassia Astrasheuskaya, "Russia's Novatek to sell stake in Arctic gas project to Chinese partners," *FT*, <https://www.ft.com/content/f7c32864-676a-11e9-9adc-98bf1d35a056>.

²²³ Hillman. "China and Russia: Economic Unequals." CSIS.

was actually planned before the BRI was announced, which was worth \$22 billion, was also delayed.²²⁴ Hence, while Russia can be an important partner for China, many of the announced projects are delayed, or cancelled.

The reason for not being able to complete the projects is because Russia, which Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill state “a result of back-peddalling by the Kremlin, which did not wish to confirm its intentions by releasing the financial and institutional support needed for the realization of the planned initiatives.”²²⁵ Russia’s hesitation can be explained by China’s increasing influence in the Central Asia region, where Russia created its own integration projects such as the EEU, and BRI was first seen as a challenge.²²⁶ Additionally, BRI was also seen as a challenge to Russia’s goals of becoming a bridge that connects Europe and Asia, with its Trans-Siberian Railway project, where roads that connect China and Europe through Central Asia could replace or reduce the importance of the Trans-Siberian Railway.²²⁷

However, Russia’s hesitation during the first years after the announcement of the BRI changed in a couple of years, after the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. After the Ukrainian crisis, Russia and China made plans to combining Russia’s EEU with the BRI. “Russia’s position had been weakened by its decline in regional influence, an

²²⁴ Hillman. “China and Russia: Economic Unequals.” CSIS.

²²⁵ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill, “The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations,” 72.

²²⁶ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill, “The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations,” 74.

²²⁷ Sebastien Peyrouse, “The Evolution of Russia’s Views on the Belt and Road Initiative,” *Asia Policy* 24 (2017): 96.

economic crisis, and increasing criticism of the EEU by some of its member states” are the reasons for the compromise.²²⁸ In 2015, China and Russia signed the Joint Statement on Cooperation on the Construction of Joint Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Projects. But the integration process is slow. There are still some problems, such as of differences in vision and communication problems.²²⁹ The reason for acceptance of the plan is explained by Charap, Drennan, and Noël is that if Russia saw China as a threat, Russia would try to prevent China’s plans in the post-Soviet Eurasia, including the BRI.²³⁰ Signing this agreement allows Russia to avoid tension with China, allows both China and Russia to support political and social stability in the region while keeping Western influence out.²³¹

Another important area of investments of China in Russia are in the area of telecommunications. China’s Huawei, which was also been a target of Western sanctions, is going to build Russia’s 5G infrastructure. The agreement for the 5G infrastructure was started in 2019.²³² Chinese companies also get affected from the Russia’s war on Ukraine and the Western sanctions. While Western sanction can grant

²²⁸ Sebastien Peyrouse, “The Evolution of Russia’s Views,” 98.

²²⁹ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill, “The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations,” 74.

²³⁰ Charap, Drennan and Noël, “Russia and China,” 34.

²³¹ Sebastien Peyrouse, “The Evolution of Russia’s Views,” 100.

²³² “Russia's MTS and China's Huawei sign agreement on 5G,” Reuters, 5 June 2019, accessed 17 January 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/huawei-tech-russia-mts-idUSR4N23602B>.

opportunities for Chinese brands, they are also closing their businesses in Russia, and moving to other states.²³³

Finally, it is also important to note that Russia does not want to be dependent on Chinese investments. For example, during the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, CNPC and Rosneft could not reach an agreement over the conditions of the sale of Vankorneft's 38.8 percent shares, which later was sold to Indian companies.

So despite a fairly complacent official attitude, Beijing did not wish to sacrifice its national economic interests on the altar of 'Sino-Russian friendship' as Moscow had hoped and has made no concessions during negotiations on the price of the contracts and the conditions of their realization,²³⁴

Charap, Drennan, and Noël state.

3.6. Bilateral and Multilateral Security Cooperation

Security cooperation is another important aspect of China-Russia relations. Security cooperation includes both the cooperation in regional organizations and bilateral cooperation, military exercises, and trade. The two states regularly conduct multilateral and bilateral military exercises since the beginning of the 21st century. Although the two states do not have a formal military alliance, these exercises allow both states to strengthen their military ties, exercise against the three evils, and even stress their

²³³ Iris Deng, "Huawei disbands enterprise business team in Russia in further pullback amid Western sanctions, local media reports," SCMP, 20 December 2022, accessed 17 January 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3203995/huawei-disbands-enterprise-business-team-russia-further-pullback-amid-western-sanctions-local-media>.

²³⁴ Charap, Drennan and Noël, "Russia and China," 75.

unhappiness with the Western states. In addition to military exercises, arms sales are another important aspect of military cooperation.

The two states are among the founding members of the SCO, in which the two states joined military drills in Peace Mission 2005, which was followed by Peace Missions 2007, and 2009,²³⁵ followed by other Peace Missions in the upcoming years. The two states agree on the importance of stability in the Central Asia region, whether it is from terrorism or color revolutions, hence SCO is an important instrument for China. Additionally, Cooley states that “The SCO’s “three evils” mantra was initially a convenient way for Moscow to attract Beijing’s support for its campaign in Chechnya and operations in the North Caucasus.”²³⁶

However, Russia, as the traditional power in the Central Asia region, was hesitant on SCO. While Russia has similar problems to the three evils, especially separatism, more influential SCO would mean more influential China in the region.²³⁷ Additionally, there are differences in views of the role of the SCO. While Russia prefers its CSTO over SCO, it also expects SCO to play a more anti-American role, while China not only benefits from SCO as a security mechanism, but also sees SCO as an

²³⁵ Bates Gill, and Chin-Hao Huang, *China’s expanding role in peacekeeping* (SIPRI, 2009), 19.

²³⁶ Cooley, *Tending the Eurasian Garden*,” 126.

²³⁷ Weiqing Song, “Interests, Power and China’s Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 85 (2014).

economic instrument to build economic links with Central Asia.²³⁸ In contrast with the Russia's more anti-American preference, China has emphasized that SCO does not try to counter NATO or the West.²³⁹

In addition to SCO, the two states also have bilateral military exercises. The first exercise China and Russia bilaterally held was the Peace Mission 2005. In addition to Peace Mission exercises, China and Russia also hold naval and aerial drills. The first time China and Russia held their naval, "Joint Sea" exercise was in 2012, in the Yellow Sea, and naval exercises continued in the upcoming years.²⁴⁰ Since then, both states conducted naval exercises almost every year. The aerial exercises and patrols are more recent, the first one was conducted in 2019. These patrols also conducted in the following years, and after Russia's war on Ukraine. The two states also cooperate on aerospace security and held exercises for air and missile defense.²⁴¹

3.7. Arms Sales

Arms trade is another important aspect of China's relations with Russia. Russia is the main arms provider for China, which tries to develop its own military force. To de-

²³⁸ Paul N. Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," in: *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jo Inge Bekkevold, and Bobo Lo (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019), 96; Cabestan, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 426-29.

²³⁹ Cooley, *Tending the Eurasian Garden*, 126.

²⁴⁰ Alexander Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," *Asian Security* 15, no. 3, (2019): 244.

²⁴¹ Korolev, "On the Verge," 244-45.

velop its own military, Russia was important for China especially in the 2000s. Russian arms exports to China peaked in the mid-2000s and started to decrease after 2006, while China's share in Russian arms sales between 1999-2006 was around 34-60 percent annually, between 2007-2009, it dropped to below 25 percent.²⁴²

During the early 1990s, China bought Su-27 aircraft along with the license to manufacture 200 Su-27's, Mi-17 helicopters, S-300 missiles, T-72 tanks, IL-76 transport aircraft, and submarines.²⁴³ During the next years until 2006, the value of arms sales increased. From \$1.7 billion in 2000 to \$3.2 billion in 2005, along with additional "licenses for the production of helicopters, anti-tank and anti-ship missiles, as well as design assistance for Chinese airframes and avionics systems."²⁴⁴

These arms sales allowed China to build its own weapons systems that are based on Russian designs.²⁴⁵ However, reverse engineering without permission by China caused Russia to be more hesitant to sell weapons, which also caused arms sales to decrease. As Wezeman states:

²⁴² Siemon T. Wezeman, "China, Russia and the shifting landscape of arms sales," *SIPRI*, 5 July 2017, accessed 16 July 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2017/china-russia-and-shifting-landscape-arms-sales>.

²⁴³ Schwartz, "Evolution of Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation," 29-30.

²⁴⁴ Schwartz, "Evolution of Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation," 32.

²⁴⁵ Andrew S. Bowen, "Russian Arms Sales and Defense Industry," *Congressional Research Service*, 2021.

Just a few years after Russia delivered the Sukhoi-27 (Su-27) combat aircraft, for example, China released the Jian-11 (J-11). While this aircraft was labelled 'indigenous', it was a near-copy of the Su-27. Similarly, new Chinese surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) looked very much like S-300 platforms from Russia. Moreover, Chinese submarines sported features of the Russian Project-877 and Project-636 Kilo class submarines supplied by Russia.²⁴⁶

Additionally, with the developments in Chinese weapons, China wanted to buy the most advanced weapons, and required technology transfer.²⁴⁷ The reason for the decrease in the mid-2000s is explained with Russia's hesitations because of the developments in China's military capabilities and production.²⁴⁸ In addition to Russia's hesitance of selling more weapons to China, China's increasing capabilities is another reason for fewer arms purchases. Instead of purchasing arms, China started to buy increased number of arms components.²⁴⁹ The value of arms transfers was around \$2.5 billion in 2006, which decreased to \$1.5 billion the next year.²⁵⁰

After the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, Russia's arms sales to China started to increase. Bowen states that this is because of the geopolitical considerations, which also includes Crimea's invasion by Russia.²⁵¹ Similarly, Gabuev states that Russia changed its stance about selling advanced weapons to China.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Wezeman, "Shifting landscape of arms sales."

²⁴⁷ Schwartz, "Evolution of Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation," 34.

²⁴⁸ Simola, "Economic relations between," 13-14.

²⁴⁹ Wezeman, "Shifting landscape of arms sales."

²⁵⁰ Schwartz, "Evolution of Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation," 34.

²⁵¹ Bowen, "Russian Arms Sales."

... Russia appears to have made some concessions as in late 2014. Russia announced that it has agreed to sell an advanced air defense system to China in a deal valued at around USD 2 bn. A few months later, a second deal of similar value was signed. The deal consisted of China acquiring 24 SU-35 fighter jets from Russia.²⁵³

While the value of arms trade started to increase a couple years before the Ukraine crisis, the Ukraine crisis had played a huge part in this change. Russia made concessions to counter Western sanctions and diplomatic pressure by changing its stance on arms sales to China, and eventually achieving China's aid; which also allowed Russia to access the components for defense technologies.²⁵⁴ In 2019, Russia also announced that it was going to help China develop a missile attack warning system.²⁵⁵

According to Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman, Russia's arms exports to China has increased by 4.1 percent between 2017-2021, compared to 2012-2016. While China is the second destination for Russia's arms exports with 21 percent (India is the first with 28 percent), Russia's share in China's total imports between 2017-2021 was 81 percent.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Alexander Gabuev, "Crouching Bear, Hidden Dragon: "One Belt One Road" and Chinese-Russian Jostling for Power in Central Asia," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 5, no. 2, (2016): 68.

²⁵³ Simola, "Economic relations between." 14.

²⁵⁴ Schwartz, "The Military Dimension."

²⁵⁵ Dmitry Stefanovich, "Russia to Help China Develop an Early Warning System," *The Diplomat*, 25 October 2019, accessed 16 July 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/russia-to-help-china-develop-an-early-warning-system/>.

²⁵⁶ Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021* (SIPRI Fact Sheet 2022).

3.8. Effects of Russia-Ukraine War on China and Russia

So far, China did not condemn or criticize Russia's war on Ukraine. Rather, China tried to stay neutral, stating that the two states should solve the situation through diplomacy.²⁵⁷ When unit level factors are considered, it is possible to see why. This reaction is also similar to other events that had happened in the post-Soviet space, including the Caucasus crisis of 2008, and Ukraine crisis of 2014, as Korolev and Portyakov state, while China expressed its concern over the issue, stating they should seek to solve the issues through dialogue and coordination, China did not openly and officially support Russia, while continuing its business.²⁵⁸ As mentioned previously, recognizing the breakaway republics of Georgia would create problems for China trying to prevent its own separatist movements, and recognizing these breakaway states would also put danger on China's territories.²⁵⁹

Increasing cooperation and not criticizing Russia, while also not completely supporting the war stems from several factors. These include a post-Putin Russia, where the US could focus solely on China, if the next government is not as friendly as Putin to China.²⁶⁰ Another point is that a defeated Russia would not be a useful ally, but the

²⁵⁷ Kai Wang, and Wanyuan Song, "Ukraine war: What support is China offering Russia?" *BBC*, 14 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/60571253>.

²⁵⁸ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations," 419.

²⁵⁹ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations," 427.

²⁶⁰ Shullman and Kendall-Taylor, "Best and Bosom Friends," 5.

war allows China to buy energy with discounted prices, while Chinese companies can also replace Western ones that left Russia.²⁶¹

Regarding the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Henderson stated:

It would seem that Russian conflict with the West, combined with China's growing import needs, have encouraged both sides to cooperate, although China would certainly appear to have the stronger bargaining position and has the ability to wait for opportunities to extract maximum value from any deals to emerge. However, although it is apparent that confrontation with the West has significantly weakened Russia's position in relation to China, the Kremlin has not been prepared to complete deals at any cost, and has started to seek alternative partners (such as Indian companies) to demonstrate that it has alternatives.²⁶²

As mentioned before, after the Ukraine crisis, and after two years of negotiations, Russia and China could not reach an agreement on the sale of shares of Vankorneft, because of prices and China's desire to be included in the drilling activities, and Rosneft sold the shares to Indian companies.²⁶³ Today, it might be possible to see a similar situation, where China has more bargaining power because of the sanctions imposed by the West, and tries to buy goods for cheaper prices, while Russia is looking for other partners such as India.

Regarding the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Korolev and Portyakov argue that to support Russia, China would need to cut Ukraine out of BRI, while Crimea and Ukraine's geo-

²⁶¹ Max Boot, "Xi Jinping doesn't want to wind up on the losing side in Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, 30 January 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/01/30/china-russia-ukraine-xi-putin/>.

²⁶² Henderson and Mitrova, "Energy relations between Russia and China," 18.

²⁶³ Alexeeva, Lasserre and Guill, "The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations," 75.

graphical location were important parts of the initiative, while also stressing the sanctions that the West put on Russia could further disrupt BRI since European states might not want Russia as a transit country.²⁶⁴ Today, the situation is similar, where European states put sanctions on Russia and reject to receive goods through Russia. This would also affect China's relations with Central Asian states.

It is already possible to see that cooperation is increasing. For instance, on energy, China has increased its purchase of oil from Russia.²⁶⁵ Energy trade turnover has increased by 64 percent, and physical deliveries increased by around 10 percent, compared to the same period of last year, and bilateral trade has increased by 33 percent in the first 10 months of 2022.²⁶⁶ As Ji states, LNG imports of China from Russia had increased by 32 percent, and natural gas imports have almost tripled compared to the previous year.²⁶⁷ In the coming months, this may increase even more, with new pipelines. For instance, in December 2022, "a new section of the east-route natural gas pipeline between the two countries came into operation," which was completed six months early.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations," 426.

²⁶⁵ Peter Hoskins, "Ukraine war: Russia becomes China's biggest oil supplier," *BBC*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61861849>.

²⁶⁶ Ji Siqi, "China's Xi eyes 'closer energy partnership' with Russia as Putin praises their 'evolving' economic cooperation" *SCMP*, 30 November 2022, accessed 8 January 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3201570/chinas-xi-eyes-closer-energy-partnership-russia-putin-praises-their-evolving-economic-cooperation>.

²⁶⁷ Siqi, "China's Xi eyes."

²⁶⁸ Ji Siqi, "China turns on the tap to Russian gas in Yangtze River Delta as new pipeline section opens early," *SCMP*, 8 December 2022, accessed 8 January 2023,

Another delayed project, a cross-border bridge, worth \$342 million, was opened after Russia's war on Ukraine. While the bridge was completed in 2020, it opened recently.²⁶⁹ Similarly, coal exports from Russia to China also increased between March and April 2022, while Russia's share in China's coal imports increased to 19 percent from 14 percent.²⁷⁰

The two states also keep conducting military exercises. This year, annual aerial exercises were conducted over the Sea of Japan, during the QUAD meeting, which was criticized by states such as the US and Japan.²⁷¹ On December 2022, the two states also conducted naval drills in the East China Sea, called Joint Sea 2022, which was held only 350 km away from the Taiwan Strait.²⁷²

<https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3202567/china-turns-tap-russian-gas-yangtze-river-delta-new-pipeline-section-opens-early>.

²⁶⁹ "Russia and China open cross-border bridge as ties deepen," *Reuters*, 10 June 2022, accessed 22 June 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/russia-china-open-cross-border-bridge-ties-deepen-2022-06-10/>.

²⁷⁰ Laura He, "China needs Russian coal. Moscow needs new customers," *CNN Business*, 20 May 2022, accessed 22 June 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/20/business/russia-china-coal-trade-intl-hnk/index.html>.

²⁷¹ Ellen Nakashima, Michelle Ye Hee Lee and Min Joo Kim, "Russia, China conduct first joint military drill since Ukraine invasion," *The Washington Post*, 24 May 2022, accessed 22 June 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/24/russia-china-military-exercise/>.

²⁷² Minnie Chan, "China, Russia begin naval drills in waters near Taiwan, Japan," *SCMP*, 21 December 2022, accessed 8 January 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3204157/china-russia-begin-naval-drills-waters-near-taiwan-japan>.

As Rolland states, being aware their need to work with Russia to gain regional supremacy,

Chinese strategists thus advocate a low-friction path, prudently working on ways to assuage Moscow's fears while taking advantage of its current isolation and lack of alternative options. They hope that a concerted effort might enable the two strategic partners to avoid the rise of bilateral tensions and discord, while helping both to achieve their regional objectives.²⁷³

So far, China and Russia relations did not get affected negatively by Russia's actions in Ukraine. The two states can benefit from each other in this situation, Russia, by getting funding from China, and China by getting needed resources from Russia, maybe even with a discount.

Although China did not criticize Russia for its war on Ukraine, some Chinese companies and organizations put their projects on hold. For instance, AIIB projects in Russia (and Belarus) are put on hold.²⁷⁴ The projects in Russia were "Upgrade of the Electric Rail Fleet Project," with proposed funding of \$300 million, and "Russian Railways COVID-19 Emergency Response Project," which was going to fund Russian Railways, which was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, \$300 million. Similarly, some Chinese companies paused their operations in Russia, which also included the energy sector, where Chinese firms also stopped working at Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Rolland, "A China–Russia Condominium," 8.

²⁷⁴ "AIIB Statement on war in Ukraine," *AIIB*, 03 March 2022, accessed 22 June 2022, <https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2022/AIIB-Statement-on-war-in-Ukraine.html>.

²⁷⁵ Laura Zhou, "Chinese firms 'told to stop work on Russian Arctic LNG 2 project' due to EU sanctions," *SCMP*, 20 May 2022, accessed 16 July 2022,

3.9. Conclusion

This section inspected the economic and security relations between Russia and China, with an emphasis and prospects after Russia's war on Ukraine.

China and Russia have improved their relations during the previous couple of decades. They share similar interests. Both are unhappy with the US-led world order, and both can benefit from each other. For China, Russia can provide energy, and connectivity to Europe. They also cooperate in Central Asia, through SCO, even though they have some different views in certain issues. They cooperate economically and militarily. The two states signed agreements on strategic partnership as well.

During the early 21st century, Russia was an important arms provider for China. After mid-2000s, this changed, due to Russia's concerns over reverse engineering and disagreements over pricing. Today, Russia is more important to China because of its energy resources. Energy constitutes a big proportion of Russia's exports to China. Today, Russia is less important for China whereas China is an important trade partner for Russia. Trade with Russia constitutes only a small proportion of overall Chinese trade, which is not the case for Russia.

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3178572/chinese-firms-told-stop-work-russian-arctic-lng-2-project-due?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3178572.

However, Russia's war on Ukraine will change China's role in Central Eurasia because the war also disrupts the BRI. So far, China did not criticize Russia on the war. Because of European sanctions, China may not be able to deliver goods through Russia. This would result in China investing more in Central Asia, and other possible routes to Europe, whether it is through Iran or Caucasus to complete the BRI, and to reach European markets through land.

This would change China-Russia relations as well. Russia's dependence on Asia would give China more bargaining power in the future, while Russia would try to mitigate this by seeking new allies such as India to sell products such as oil and gas for cheap prices. Just like the Ukraine crisis in 2014 brought the two states closer, Russia's war on Ukraine might accelerate this process since Russia's options are limited. Trade between the two states could also increase because of sanctions imposed on Russia, if Russia turns to buy more Chinese products. While some Chinese companies or organizations, such as the AIIB, paused operations in Russia, China can still offer products to Russia, if the West is unwilling to do so. Overall, China would have more bargaining power against Russia in many issues, and Russia may not be able to say "no" so easily.

Finally, while the two states cooperate on many issues, there are issues that they see different, and do not support each other. Ukraine crisis of 2014 and Ukraine war, and Russia's operations in Caucasus are some examples of differences in views, and where China does not support Russia because of its own territorial disputes, and Russia does not always support China because of its own economic development goals.

This is seen best through a neoclassical realist perspective, where system level pushes the two states closer while unit level factors prevent full commitment to cooperation.

CHAPTER 4

CHINA AND CENTRAL ASIA

4.1. Introduction

The fourth chapter of the thesis analyses China's relations with Central Asian states. First, a background of political relations is given. Then, economic relations in terms of trade, energy, and investments will be inspected. Next, military relations, with emphasis on both multilateral and bilateral security cooperation, and arms sales will be assessed. Finally, possible effects of Russia's war on Ukraine on China-Central Asia relations will be inspected.

For China, focusing and investing on Central Asia will allow China to reach its west, which is not only limited with Central Asia or with the Middle East, but also allows China to reach Europe, hence good relations with Central Asia also mean avoiding US encirclement for China.²⁷⁶ Additionally, China's growing energy needs and its

²⁷⁶ Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, 205.

need to diversify its energy sources; and the regional stability, since Xinjiang's stability could be related to the economic development of Central Asia, are some factors that make Central Asia important for China since the hiding and biding time strategy.²⁷⁷ From this perspective, it is possible to say that economic ties are connected to security concerns. Because of these aspects, since the dissolution of Soviet Union and especially in the first decade of the 21st century, and the economic relations between China and the region has increased drastically.

4.2. Development of China-Central Asia Relations

As mentioned in the second chapter, domestic goals of development are important for China, and similar initiatives to BRI was created, such as the Western Development program and the Continental Eurasian land-bridge to develop the underdeveloped regions of China. This campaign's goal of making Xinjiang an industrial and agricultural base and a trade and energy corridor would only be possible with increasing cooperation with Central Asian states.²⁷⁸

For Central Asian states, cooperation with states other than Russia were important, since they are now independent, but landlocked states; and cooperation with other states would reduce their dependency on Russia. Combined with the security interests of China in the region, cooperation in between Central Asia and China could be very beneficial for all parties involved. Hence, Central Asian states increased coop-

²⁷⁷ Pantucci, and Lain, "Silk Road Security."

²⁷⁸ Michael Clarke, *Xinjiang and China's Rise in Central Asia – A History*, (Routledge, 2011), 151.

eration with China, with good neighborly policies, solved border issues and established the SCO.²⁷⁹ As mentioned in the second chapter, to ensure shared security goals of the fight against three evils and stability in the region, China has been increasing its share in Central Asia's arms imports, and even constructing military bases and conducting military exercises. If this trend continues, and whether some of the Central Asia's states decide to get closer to China while keep following a multi-vector foreign policy after Russia's war on Ukraine, China might have an even bigger role and influence in Central Asia's security. However, as Standish points out, while some Central Asian states try to rely less on Russia and turn to China, China's presence as a security provider remains limited.²⁸⁰

China has replaced Russia as the biggest trade partner for some Central Asian states. For example, Peyrouse and Raballand state that “[...] China has clearly gained the upper hand, with US\$45 billion for Beijing compared to about US\$30 billion for Moscow in 2014.”²⁸¹ Furthermore, along with increased trade, China has been investing in Central Asian states, building infrastructure, and providing development assistance. These investments are now also done through the Chinese-led, multilateral organizations such as the AIIB, which is an important part of the BRI.

²⁷⁹ Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies*, (The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2009), 63-64.

²⁸⁰ Reid Standish, “Central Asia Caught Between 'Two Fires' As It Branches Out From Russia,” *RFE/RL*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/central-asia-russia-china/32164503.html>.

²⁸¹ Sebastien Peyrouse and Gaël Raballand, “Central Asia: The New Silk Road Initiative's questionable economic rationality”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 56, no. 4 (2015): 408.

Agreements between China and Central Asia, and the non-security role of the SCO, increased China-Central Asian trade:

China has signed various inter-governmental economic collaboration agreements with the Central Asian countries, the most important of which include agreements on economic and trade collaboration, the encouragement and mutual protection of investment, banking sector collaboration, road transport, rail transport, elimination of double taxation, combating tax evasion and collaboration in the petroleum sector.²⁸²

Founding the Shanghai Five, which later became the SCO, was an important step in forming China-Central Asia relations. Another multilateral form of cooperation was started in 2020 to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and to restore the economies of the region, in the “China+Central Asia” (C+C5) format, which extends China’s influence in the region mostly from economic to political sphere as well.²⁸³ With the first C+C5 meeting:

China announced its readiness to offer a green corridor for its products into Central Asia and to purchase more agriculture products from the region. Feeling the economic pinch and health crisis as a result of a second wave of COVID-19 cases, the Central Asian countries are turning to Beijing for assistance.²⁸⁴

Similarly, during the 2022 meeting, the parties reached a ten-point consensus, which included cooperation in BRI, connectivity, security (including the fight against three

²⁸² Hsiu-Ling Wu & Chien-Hsun Chen, “The prospects for regional economic integration between China and the five Central Asian countries”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 7 (2004): 1065.

²⁸³ Umida Hashimova, “China Launches 5+1 Format Meetings With Central Asia.” *The Diplomat*, 20 July 2022, accessed 15 July 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/china-launches-51-format-meetings-with-central-asia/>.

²⁸⁴ Hashimova, “China Launches 5+1 Format.”

evils and food security), fight against the pandemic, sustainable development, and implementing China's Global Security Initiative.²⁸⁵

4.3. China-Central Asia Trade

Economic ties between the region and China are maybe the most important aspect since economy, particularly energy, affects the whole relationship, is important to China for both system and unit level considerations. It is important to note that states may report statistics differently, and there are also differences between statistics provided by China and Central Asian states regarding the volume of trade; where Chinese statistics included petty trade, but the Central Asian states did not, which, Peyrouse states, makes the comparison difficult.²⁸⁶ Similarly, Loughlin and Pannell explain why there can be differences in the trade data as:

Trade between the CARs and China is quantified only with some uncertainty. There are discrepancies among the various sources based on such factors as differences in the scope and timing of the trade, the methods of evaluation, and differences in national systems of recording trade, not to mention errors in compilation.²⁸⁷

To overcome this problem, Peyrouse prefers the Chinese statistics, because Chinese exporters have little incentive to undervalue sales. Peyrouse shows the huge difference in statistics reported by China and Kazakhstan, where Kazakhstan reported that

²⁸⁵ “Wang Yi Talks about the Outcomes and Consensus of the Third China+Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 8 June 2022, accessed 15 July 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202206/t20220608_10700380.html.

²⁸⁶ Sébastien Peyrouse, *Economic Aspects of the Chinese–Central Asia Rapprochement*, Silk Road Paper, Uppsala University, (2007), 15.

²⁸⁷ Philip H. Loughlin and Clifton W. Pannell, “Growing Economic Links and Regional Development in the Central Asian Republics and Xinjiang, China”, *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 42, no. 7 (2001): 481.

it imported goods worth \$1.2 billion, while China reported close to \$4 billion; and Kazakhstan reported that it exported goods worth \$2,423 million, whereas China reported close to \$3,000 million, in 2005.²⁸⁸ Similarly, China's reported trade figures for 2006 were 23 percent higher than the announced data of Central Asian republics.²⁸⁹ He argues that China has less incentives to provide false data, hence decides to trust the Chinese data.

Raballand and Andr esy identify three types of trade between Central Asia and China. These are border trade, Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps trade, and activities of Zhejiang traders settled in Xinjiang.²⁹⁰ Border trade refers to the trade done through the border posts, and Special Economic Zones, and industrial parks or exhibition centers in Xinjiang. Second type of trade that Raballand and Andr esy identify is "Xinjiang production and construction corps trade," in which the trade is organized and done through the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), a state-owned organization, responsible of promoting social and ethnic harmony. The third and final form of trade they consider is the individual traders that are mostly coming from the Zhejiang province of Xinjiang.²⁹¹ Similarly, Hsiu-Li also stresses the importance of border trade for China. "Enterprises with their headquarters in Xinjiang play a very important role in trade between China and Central Asia. This is partly

²⁸⁸ Peyrouse, *Economic Aspects of the Chinese–Central Asia Rapprochement*, 15.

²⁸⁹ Peyrouse, *Economic Aspects of the Chinese–Central Asia Rapprochement*, 15.

²⁹⁰ Ga l Raballand and Agn s Andr esy, "Why should trade between Central Asia and China continue to expand?" *Asia Europe Journal* 5 (2007): 242-246.

²⁹¹ Raballand and Andr esy, "Why should trade," 242-246.

due to the emphasis the Chinese government has placed on border trade.”²⁹² Overall, border trade is an important aspect of Chinese policy, which is also related to security concerns, and to the development of Xinjiang region and the neighboring states.

One additional and similar, mostly unreported way of trade is mentioned by Loughlin and Pannell, is “shuttle trade,” or “shopping tourism,” where individuals bring goods to either use or resale from abroad.²⁹³

Since the independence of Central Asian states from the Soviet Union, their trade volumes with China have increased drastically. According to Wu and Chen,

[...] in 1992 the total value of import and export trade between China and the five Central Asian countries was US\$464 million. [T]rade between Kazakhstan and China came to US\$369 million, accounting for 20% of Kazakhstan’s total foreign trade. The total value of China’s trade with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in 1992 was US\$52.52 million, US\$35.48 million, US\$4.5 million and US\$2.75 million respectively. By 2002 the trade between China and the five Central Asian countries had grown to US\$2.388 billion. Trade between China and Kazakhstan continued to account for the bulk of this, at US\$1.955 billion, while the value of the trade between China and Uzbekistan and China and Kyrgyzstan was US\$130 million and US\$202 million respectively.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Wu and Chen, “The prospects for,” 1070.

²⁹³ Loughlin and Pannell, “Growing Economic Links,” 480.

²⁹⁴ Wu and Chen “The prospects for,” 1065.

Table 2. Value of China’s imports from Central Asian States 2017-2020 (in million US\$).

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Kazakhstan	6,379	8,093	8,862	10,366
Kyrgyzstan	87	54	66	35
Tajikistan	47	77	85	45
Turkmenistan	6,575	6,436	9,627	8,503
Uzbekistan	1,471	1,503	2,366	1,619

Source: UN Comtrade, <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>

Table 3. China’s exports to Central Asian states (in million US\$)

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Kazakhstan	11,564	11,352	12,729	11,703
Kyrgyzstan	5,337	5,557	6,281	2,865
Tajikistan	1,301	1,429	1,590	1,016
Turkmenistan	368	317	431	443
Uzbekistan	2,749	3,945	5,032	5,138

Source: UN Comtrade, <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>

Wu and Chen go on to write that Kazakhstan mostly imported basic consumption goods, and some hi-tech and high value-added products; where most of the imported products were shoes, clothing, machinery, plastics, and iron and steel products; all of which had increased volumes between 1995-2002.²⁹⁵ Kazakhstan’s main exports to

²⁹⁵ Wu and Chen “The prospects for,” 1065.

China were mostly raw materials.²⁹⁶ The overall trade is estimated to be around \$7 billion in 2005, when compared to 2004, there was a 50 percent increase.²⁹⁷

Kazakhstan is the major trading partner of China in Central Asia. In their article written in 2007, Raballand and Andrésy state that China-Kazakhstan trade constituted more than 70 percent of the China-Central Asia trade.²⁹⁸ More recently, in 2020, China's imported goods were worth \$9,739 million, while China's exports to Kazakhstan was around \$11,707 million, as seen in the tables. Hence, it is possible to say there was not a dramatic increase in China's imports for a long time, but the overall trade has increased.

In 2020, Kazakhstan's main exports to China were petroleum gas and other gaseous hydrocarbons, petroleum oils, copper ores, iron ores, copper, radioactive chemical elements and radioactive isotopes, and iron and steel; while China mainly exported clothing goods and footwear, machinery, telephones, and vehicle parts. Energy trade (excluding nuclear) was worth \$2,627 in 2020, which means that around 27 percent of Kazakhstan's exports to China was energy.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Wu and Chen "The prospects for," 1065.

²⁹⁷ Peyrouse. *Economic Aspects of the Chinese–Central Asia Rapprochement*.

²⁹⁸ Raballand and Andrésy, "Why should trade," 241.

²⁹⁹ "Bilateral trade between China and Kazakhstan," *Trademap*, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>.

Additionally, China is the most important export destination for Kazakhstan, for example in 2020, China was the major export destination of Kazakhstan with around 19 percent, followed by Italy (14 percent), and Russia (10 percent).³⁰⁰ For 2020 imports of Kazakhstan, Russia had the highest share with 35 percent, followed by China with 17 percent.³⁰¹ If overall trade value is inspected, China is the second after Russia, with \$15.35 billion and \$18.20 billion, respectively.

The trade between China and Kyrgyzstan mostly included “woven fabric, man-made fibre, footwear, plastics and machinery. The main products that China imported from Kyrgyzstan were aluminium, iron and steel, copper, and animal hides and skins.”³⁰² In 2020, there is very little change, where China imported precious metal ores and concentrates, copper ores, and animal hides and skins; while China exported clothing, footwear, machinery and electrical machinery, such as telephones, monitors etc.³⁰³ In 2020, China’s exports to Kyrgyzstan amounted \$2,866 million, while Kyrgyzstan’s exports to China was only \$35 million. It is important to note that while imports from China have a big share, Kazakh exports to China has a very small share in Kyrgyz trade. In 2021, Kyrgyzstan’s exports to China only constituted 3.8 percent,

³⁰⁰ “Kazakhstan Exports by Country,” *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/kazakhstan/exports-by-country>.

³⁰¹ “Kazakhstan Imports by Country,” *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/kazakhstan/imports-by-country>.

³⁰² Wu and Chen “The prospects for,” 1068.

³⁰³ “Bilateral trade between China and Kyrgyzstan,” *Trademap*, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>.

while imports from China constituted 27 percent, which was below Russia (33 percent).³⁰⁴

With Tajikistan, China's exports mainly included machinery, clothing, shoes, and foodstuffs; while Tajikistan mainly exported iron, steel, aluminum, and cotton.³⁰⁵ At 2002, bilateral trade between China and Tajikistan amounted \$12.38 million.³⁰⁶ In 2020, this number was equal to \$1,063 million, with \$45 million worth of exports to China and \$1,018 worth of imports from China.³⁰⁷ China's imports from Tajikistan were mostly ores, followed by cotton, and hides and skins; while China exported machinery and electrical machinery, vehicles and vehicle parts, footwear, iron and steel, clothing. China has a small share of Tajikistan's exports and imports. For example, in 2020, Tajikistan's biggest export destinations in order were Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and finally, China; and for imports, Tajikistan mostly imported from Russia (30 percent), Kazakhstan (24 percent), and China (14 percent).³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ "Kyrgyzstan Indicators," *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/kyrgyzstan/indicators>.

³⁰⁵ Wu and Chen "The prospects for," 1068.

³⁰⁶ Wu and Chen "The prospects for," 1068.

³⁰⁷ "Tajikistan Indicators," *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/tajikistan/indicators>.

³⁰⁸ "Tajikistan Export by Country," *Trading Economics*, accessed 14 April 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/tajikistan/exports-by-country>.

With Turkmenistan, China mostly exported machinery, transport equipment, and iron and steel products; while Turkmenistan mostly exported plastics, silk, animal hides and fur, and vegetables; and in 2002, value of bilateral trade was around \$87.515 million.³⁰⁹ In 2020, China's exports to Turkmenistan was around \$445 million, while China's imports from Turkmenistan were around \$6,071 million.³¹⁰ In 2020, China mostly imported gas, sulfur, cotton, and plastics from Turkmenistan; while Turkmenistan imported machinery, articles of iron and steel such as tubes and pipes, electrical machinery, vehicles, iron and steel, etc.³¹¹ It is important to note that most of the exports of Turkmenistan to China is energy. In 2020, gas and oil constituted 99% of Turkmenistan's exports to China, with the amount of \$6,039 million.³¹² Additionally, China is the biggest export destination of Turkmenistan, when the total exports of Turkmenistan to the world is \$7,818 million is considered.³¹³ Hence, for Central Asian states, trade with China, especially energy exports are very important part of their economies.

With Uzbekistan, during the first years of the 21st century, China's exports mainly included "machinery, optical and medical instruments, tea, coffee, and electrical ma-

³⁰⁹ Wu and Chen "The prospects for," 1068.

³¹⁰ "Turkmenistan Indicators," *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkmenistan/indicators>.

³¹¹ Trademap. Accessed 14 April 2022, <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>.

³¹² Trademap.

³¹³ Trademap.

chinery.”³¹⁴ Uzbekistan’s main exports to China were mostly cotton, which constituted 84.33% of total Uzbek exports to China.³¹⁵ In 2020, China mostly exported machinery, electrical machinery, vehicles, plastics, iron and steel to Uzbekistan; while China mostly imported gas, cotton, and copper from Uzbekistan.³¹⁶ The value of China’s exports to Uzbekistan was \$5,146 million, while Uzbekistan’s exports were \$1,483 million. \$632 million of Uzbek exports were gas, which roughly makes 43 percent of total Uzbek exports to China, while cotton also has a similar share. It is also important to note China is as important as Russia for Uzbekistan’s both exports and imports. In 2021, Both China and Russia each received 18 percent of Uzbekistan’s exports, followed by Turkey with 17 percent. When imports are considered, Uzbekistan mostly imported from Russia with 22 percent, followed by China with 20 percent.³¹⁷

It can be seen that mostly for Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and especially for Turkmenistan, energy relations with China is one of the most important aspects of their economic relations, which make up a huge proportion of their GDPs.

³¹⁴ Wu and Chen “The prospects for,” 1066-68.

³¹⁵ Wu and Chen “The prospects for,” 1066-68.

³¹⁶ Trademap.

³¹⁷ “Uzbekistan Indicators,” *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/uzbekistan/indicators>.

4.4. Energy Cooperation

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian energy became one of the areas of focus for China. The energy trade between the region and China has increased substantially, especially in the 21st century. China and Central Asian states had signed important energy deals, which eventually provided the much-needed energy for China, and economic development for the Central Asia region. Additionally, Liao argues that during the late 1990s, energy was used to create better relations between the region and China, to ensure the safety of its western borders, instead of energy security concerns or geopolitical ambitions, although China could not escape the grand games in the region which started with the establishment of the SCO.³¹⁸ Along with overcoming the dependence on sea routes and Middle Eastern energy sources, developing the Xinjiang region, and avoiding Western encirclement, economic and energy cooperation with Central Asia also gives China more bargaining power with Russia, because Central Asian energy creates alternatives to Russia.³¹⁹ Central Asia is an important region in terms of energy, where oil, mostly from Kazakhstan, and natural gas, mostly from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, is significant for China.

Kazakhstan is an important source of oil for China. Kazakhstan–China oil pipeline is one of the first energy projects between the Central Asia region and China. CNPC outbid others to develop the Uzen field, with \$9.5 billion: “The deal included the cost

³¹⁸ Janet Xuanli Liao, “China’s energy diplomacy towards Central Asia and the implications on its “belt and road initiative”,” *The Pacific Review*, 34, no. 3 (2021).

³¹⁹ Morena Skalamera, “The Silk Road Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Russian and Chinese Competition for Central Asia’s Energy,” *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 4 (2018): 51-52.

of \$3.5bn on building a 2,000 km oil pipeline to China, and a \$4.3bn payment for 60.3% of stake in Kazak oil company Aktobemunaigaz (AMG), who had 130mts of reserves.”³²⁰ The agreement for the oil pipeline was signed in 1997, and the construction of the first phase was completed in 2003. For the Phase 2, the pipeline construction from Atasu, Kazakhstan to Alashankou near the China border was completed in 2005 and started operating in 2006.³²¹ Phase 3 was completed in 2009. During the early 2000s, China’s stance toward Central Asia and Xinjiang has changed as it was discovered that Xinjiang had less oil and gas resources than expected. Hence its role was changed to a potential region that transports Central Asian oil and gas.³²²

China kept investing in Kazakh energy sector. During these years, Chinese CNPC acquired more shares of AMG, increasing shares owned to 85.42 percent; acquired shares of Texaco North Buzachi Inc. located in western Kazakhstan; in 2005, managed to acquire the shares of PetroKaz; and in 2013, the deal to sell ConocoPhillips’s stakes in the Kashagan project, along with 22 deals worth \$30 billion, was completed at the same visit that Xi Jinping announced the BRI.³²³ Additionally, CNPC has in-

³²⁰ Liao, “China’s energy diplomacy,” 494.

³²¹ Fakhmiddin Fazilov and Xiangming Chen, “China and Central Asia: A Significant New Energy Nexus.” *The European Financial Review* (2013).

³²² Clarke, “‘Making the Crooked Straight’,” 121.

³²³ Liao, “China’s energy diplomacy,” 496.

vested in other projects in Kazakhstan, such as the Mangistau Project, where CNPC holds 50% of the shares to MangistauMunaiGas (MMG).³²⁴

The cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is not just limited to oil and gas. In April 2021, Xi Jinping announced that the two states had signed a nuclear fuel deal with Kazatomprom. With Kazatomprom holding 51% of the shares, the two states would build the Ulba Fuel Assembly Plant that would allow Kazakhstan to produce nuclear fuel, and to sell it to states with nuclear power plants.³²⁵ This is an important development that would benefit both China and Kazakhstan hugely. While boosting Kazakhstan's economy, increased usage of nuclear power can help with the transition to green energy from the use of coal. As Xanthos states, this deal will have effects on Russia's nuclear market, where Kazakhstan becomes an alternative to Russia in global markets, and China becoming an alternative to Russian influence for Kazakhstan.³²⁶

Turkmenistan has huge natural gas reserves, which has drawn China's attention. Hence, another important development was the construction of Central Asia-China

³²⁴ "China's CNPC and KazMunaiGas pay \$3.3 billion for MMG," Reuters, 24 April 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-kazakhstan-energy-idINTRE53N35V20090424>.

³²⁵ "Kazakhstan Launches Production of Fuel for Nuclear Power Plants" *Kazatomprom*, 10 November 2021, accessed 2 February 2022, https://www.kazatomprom.kz/en/media/view/kazakhstan_launches_production_of_fuel_for_nuclear_power_plants.

³²⁶ Gregory Xanthos, "With Kazatomprom Deal, China Secures Nuclear Fuel Supply and Enhances Ties With Kazakhstan," *The Diplomat*, 4 June 2021, accessed 10 January 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/with-kazatomprom-deal-china-secures-nuclear-fuel-supply-and-enhances-ties-with-kazakhstan/>.

gas pipeline, starting in Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border. CNPC signed a contract with the Turkmen State Agency, which allowed CNPC to use hydrocarbon resources; and signed an agreement regarding natural gas trade, which further developed to the construction of a gas pipeline.³²⁷ This agreement also included agencies from both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As a part of the Central Asia-China Pipeline, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are important partners in natural gas trade. In 2019, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan provided 5% and 4% of Chinese imported natural gas, respectively.³²⁸

The Central Asia-China gas pipeline's construction of 'Line A' was completed in 2009, and as a part of the agreement, for the next 30 years, Turkmenistan would provide 30 bcm of natural gas annually.³²⁹ The pipeline was also expanded with additional lines, Line B and Line C, which were completed in 2010 and 2014 respectively. In 2012, Uzbekistan also started providing natural gas through the pipeline. The pipeline has the capacity to provide 55 bcm annually.³³⁰ The pipeline starts from Turkmenistan and goes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China. This is an important development since natural gas can help China's goal of reducing emissions, while also responding to the increasing energy needs. Between Kyrgyzstan, Tajiki-

³²⁷ "Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline." *CNPC*, accessed 31 January 2022, https://www.cnpc.com.cn/en/CentralAsia/CentralAsia_index.shtml.

³²⁸ "Country Analysis Executive Summary: China", *EIA*, 30 September 2020, accessed 25 January 2022, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/CHN>.

³²⁹ CNPC, "Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline."

³³⁰ "CNPC in Kazakhstan." *CNPC*, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.cnpc.com.cn/en/2020Kazakhstan/2020Kazakhstan.shtml>.

stan, and China, an extension of the pipeline was planned, as the ‘Line D’, as a part of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline, that would go through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.³³¹

In Uzbekistan, CNPC and Uzbekneftegaz agreed to develop Minglubak Oilfield in 2007, and later CNPC and Uzbekneftegaz also established New Silk Road Oil & Gas Company, which aimed to develop new, Dengizkul, Khojadavlat and Sharky Alat gas fields.³³²

Energy is as important to Central Asian states as it is to China. Although Central Asia has a smaller share in China’s oil imports while the Middle East is still one of the most important regions for Chinese oil imports, Central Asia is an important hub for China’s imported natural gas. States in the Middle East provided 50 percent of China’s crude oil imports in 2021, while Russia was the number two crude oil exporter to China in the same year, after Saudi Arabia.³³³ According to U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), Turkmenistan is the second biggest natural gas exporter to China, with 25 percent in 2019, after Australia with 29 percent.³³⁴ China

³³¹ Casey Michel, “Line D of the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline Delayed,” *The Diplomat*, 31 May 2016, accessed 18 January 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/line-d-of-the-central-asia-china-gas-pipeline-delayed/>.

³³² “CNPC in Uzbekistan.” *CNPC*, accessed 4 February 2022, <https://www.cnpc.com.cn/en/2020Uzbekistan/2020Uzbekistan.shtml>.

³³³ “China,” EIA, accessed 14 January 2023, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/CHN>.

³³⁴ EIA, “China.”

is the biggest natural gas export destination for Turkmenistan. This is because after 2016, and Russia stopped importing from Turkmenistan, and Turkmengaz stopped exporting to Iran, Turkmenistan became more dependent on exports to China.³³⁵

In China's transition to a green energy, natural gas, hence the Central Asia region, might play an important role. With the deal with Kazakhstan regarding the nuclear fuel, Kazakhstan will also be important in the transition to green energy in the region. It would be possible to say China is also an important actor in energy transition in the region.

China is also selling solar panels and wind turbines, which also contradicts with the Russian interests in the region, as Skalamera argues, China's increasing presence in the renewables aspect of Central Asian energy "is detrimental to Russia's interests and runs counter to every geopolitical instinct of the Russian elite."³³⁶ Because China is producing renewable technologies and energy such as solar panels, electric cars, battery, wind power, which is also cheaper than other alternatives, the goal of reaching carbon neutrality can benefit Chinese companies in the region; although it is important to note that these projects were mostly implemented in Kazakhstan so far, and not every Central Asian states are "seriously developing renewables yet."³³⁷

³³⁵ Liao, "China's energy diplomacy," 491.

³³⁶ Morena Skalamera, "'Steppe-ing' Out of Russia's Shadow: Russia's Changing 'Energy Power' in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no.9, (2022): 1646.

³³⁷ Skalamera, "'Steppe-ing' Out of Russia's Shadow," 1647-48.

4.5. Investments and the BRI

China is a donor state for Central Asia and invests in projects in Central Asia. Along with bilateral ties, China is also engaged in some energy diplomacy through multilateral institutions, such as the AIIB. These projects include a project in Uzbekistan that

involves the design, engineering, construction, operation, maintenance, and transfer of a 1,500MW greenfield combined-cycle gas turbine (CCGT) plant and associated infrastructure to be implemented as an Independent Power Producer (IPP) facility,³³⁸

a project in Kazakhstan regarding the development, construction, and operation of a 100 MW wind farm,³³⁹ and rehabilitating hydropower plant in Tajikistan.³⁴⁰ These projects, are not solely financed by Chinese led institutions, but rather are co-financed by Western institutions, or include cooperation with Chinese companies and Western institutions. One example is the 2018 deal with European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for the construction of a solar plant in Kazakhstan, where the operator of the project is a Chinese company. As mentioned before, this cooperation with Western MDBs is different from the past, where China did not

³³⁸ AIIB, “Uzbekistan: Sirdarya 1,500MW CCGT Power Project,” accessed 03 February 2022, <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/details/2021/approved/Uzbekistan-Sirdarya-1500MW-CCGT-Power-Project.html>.

³³⁹ AIIB, “Kazakhstan: Zhanatas 100 MW Wind Power Plant,” accessed 03 February 2022, <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/details/2019/approved/Kazakhstan-Zhanatas-100-MW-Wind-Power-Plant.html>.

³⁴⁰ AIIB, “Tajikistan: Nurek Hydropower Rehabilitation, Phase I,” accessed 03 February 2022, <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/details/2017/approved/Tajikistan-Nurek-Hydropower-Rehabilitation-Phase-I.html>.

prefer to do so, which is one aspect of the transformation in China's energy diplomacy.³⁴¹

Additionally, Central Asian states would hugely benefit from Chinese investments and development assistance, such as building new factories and facilities, investing in agriculture, and electricity infrastructure, Chinese investors might create new jobs in the region, and improve the quality of life, and allow Central Asian states to overcome their landlocked status.³⁴²

Chinese investments and foreign aid is favored by Central Asian states because of China's non-interference in internal affairs and no conditionalities approach.³⁴³ However, it is hard to assess Chinese development assistance, since it lacks clarity and transparency; not only China does not publish reports, but also China does not even have a definition for development assistance but instead it uses terms strategic partnership and South-South cooperation.³⁴⁴ As mentioned before, China outlined the

³⁴¹ Skalamera Groce and Köstem, "The dual transformation," 15.

³⁴² Fabienne Bossuyt, "The EU's and China's development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59 (2018).

³⁴³ Bossuyt, "The EU's and China's development," 622.

³⁴⁴ Nargis Kassenova, "China as an Emerging Donor in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan," *Russie.Nei.Visions* 36, (2009): 8.

cultural and philosophical origins and its duty to engage in development.³⁴⁵ which again shows ties to China's striving for achievement strategy.

However, creation of new jobs is very limited, and sometimes not the case since China exports its workforce. For example, Kassenova states that according to the agreements, at least 30 percent of the workforce had to be Tajik, but this was not the case, and there were more Chinese workers than agreed.³⁴⁶ Bossuyt states that local populations complain about several issues such as less job opportunities, poor and hazardous working conditions, low pay, etc., which creates mistrust and antipathy toward China, which cause problems for Chinese companies as well.³⁴⁷ Because some of the residents of Central Asian states are not happy with Chinese investments, some projects cannot be realized. For example, China and Kyrgyzstan was planning to construct a logistics center worth US\$275 million. However, in 2020, it was cancelled because of the protests, where protestors were against Chinese-owned lands in Kyrgyzstan.³⁴⁸

Along with the energy sector and the extraction of raw materials, China invests in transport, and communications. "Beijing sees poverty as the major matrix of the de-

³⁴⁵ Kassenova, "How China's Foreign Aid Fosters," 8.

³⁴⁶ Kassenova, "China as an Emerging Donor," 11-13.

³⁴⁷ Bossuyt, "The EU's and China's development," 623.

³⁴⁸ Catherine Putz, "Kyrgyz-Chinese Joint Venture Scrapped After Protests," *The Diplomat*, 20 February 2020, accessed 20 April 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/kyrgyz-chinese-joint-venture-scrapped-after-protests/>.

stabilizations in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the largest share of its aid is directed to those two countries.³⁴⁹ More recently, other states such as Uzbekistan also have huge number of approved projects. So far, most of the approved projects within the framework of AIIB in Central Asia are in Uzbekistan.³⁵⁰

At the SCO summit, Chinese president Hu Jintao announced a loan of US\$900 million to Central Asia in 2004, and two-thirds of the loan went to Tajikistan; and in 2007, it received another US\$30 million; and the projects China financed included the construction of highways, tunnels, and installation of power transmission lines.³⁵¹ Kassenova also states that China's Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank) was the biggest loan provider of Tajikistan, and around 43 percent of Eximbank's loans went to Tajikistan; and this made it the biggest debt holder.³⁵² More recently, Melnikovová states that

Kyrgyzstan is one of the top five countries with the highest levels of external debt towards China measured as the stock of total external debt from direct loans owed to China as share of GDP. ... Other Central Asian republics appear in the ranking as well—Tajikistan ranks 20th and Turkmenistan 23rd. Uzbekistan also makes the list of top 50 recipients, coming 40th in position, despite its reluctance to open up fully to Chinese investment.³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Sébastien Peyrouse, Jos Boonstra and Marlène Laruelle, "Security and development approaches to Central Asia the EU compared to China and Russia," *EUCAM Working Paper No. 11*, (2012): 14.

³⁵⁰ "Our Projects," AIIB, <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/list/index.html?status=Approved>.

³⁵¹ Kassenova, "China as an Emerging Donor," 13-14.

³⁵² Kassenova, "China as an Emerging Donor," 15.

³⁵³ Lea Melnikovová, "China's Interests in Central Asian Economies," *Human Affairs* 30 (2020): 242.

For Kyrgyzstan, Kassenova states that Kyrgyz Ministry of Economic Development and Trade China provided US\$1.82 million in 2000 and 2001, and another US\$7.248 million between 2002-2004; and the projects included the construction of a hospital, schools, factories, transport infrastructure, agricultural development; and in 2007, around \$7.4 million was provided to support the SCO summit in Kyrgyzstan.³⁵⁴

Kazakhstan may be the most important country in the Central Asia region, in terms of economy. China has invested huge amounts in Kazakhstan. “Between 1992 and 2002, the total of Chinese investments in Kazakhstan reached 800 million dollars.”³⁵⁵ In 2009, China has provided another \$10 billion to Kazakhstan.³⁵⁶

More recently, China’s way of investing and providing development assistance in Central Asian states is mainly within the framework of the BRI. During the announcement of BRI, Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of “friendship” and “common development and prosperity,” promoting assistance further.³⁵⁷ He also announced that “China would give 30,000 scholarships to SCO members and host 10,000 teachers and students from Confucius Institutes in China for study abroad

³⁵⁴ Kassenova, “China as an Emerging Donor,” 18.

³⁵⁵ Peyrouse, “Economic Aspects of the Chinese–Central Asia Rapprochement,” 16.

³⁵⁶ Peyrouse, Boonstra and Laruelle, “Security and development approaches,” 14.

³⁵⁷ Kassenova, “How China’s Foreign Aid Fosters,” 13.

programs.”³⁵⁸ Today, through AIIB, China supports projects in energy, transport (Dushanbe-Uzbekistan Border Road Improvement; Uzbekistan: Bukhara-Miskin-Urgench-Khiva Railway Electrification Project), water (such as improving water supply and sewerage projects in Uzbekistan), finance (such as supporting private and financial sector that are affected by COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan), infrastructure and agriculture development (such as the Rural Infrastructure Development Project in Uzbekistan), and also public health (such as Healthcare Emergency Response Project in Uzbekistan).³⁵⁹

Along with these, more recently, in January 2022, China promised more investments in the Central Asia region, where “Xi Jinping vowed to open China’s domestic market to more Central Asian goods and agricultural products,” stated he wants to increase the amount of trade to \$70 billion by 2030, said China would provide \$500 million in grants over the next three years, and provide 50 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines in 2022.³⁶⁰ Additionally, he also announced 1,200 government scholarships, promoting people-to-people friendship and increasing the number of sister cities to 100, and

5,000 seminar and workshop opportunities to help Central Asian countries train professionals in health, poverty reduction for agricultural development,

³⁵⁸ Kassenova, “How China’s Foreign Aid Fosters,” 13.

³⁵⁹ AIIB, “Our Projects.”

³⁶⁰ Almaz Kumenov, “China promises more investment at Central Asia summit,” *Eurasianet*, 26 January 2022, accessed 15 July 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/china-promises-more-investment-at-central-asia-summit#:~:text=Total%20Chinese%20investment%20in%20Central,at%20the%20end%20of%202021>.

connectivity, information technology and other fields and strengthen the driving force for self-generated development.³⁶¹

Although these are not the only development assistances provided by China to Central Asia, some are mentioned in the security cooperation, it still shows the importance of Central Asia's development for China.

However, projects are not always easy to implement. As discussed before, locals may oppose the projects, or the projects might be delayed for various reasons. For example, China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway is one of those projects, which was delayed because of reasons such as “political instability, changes of leadership, internal political disagreements on funding, and disagreements on technical aspects of the railroad.”³⁶²

Debts can be hard for Central Asian states to pay back. For example, after Tajikistan signed an agreement with China to build a 400-megawatt power plant, it could not pay back its debts, which resulted in Tajikistan giving rights of operating Upper Kumarg and Eastern Duoba gold mines to Chinese TBEA.³⁶³ Another Chinese firm that received similar concessions is called Kashgar Xinyu Dadi Mining Investment was

³⁶¹ Kassenova, “How China’s Foreign Aid Fosters,” 14.

³⁶² Umida Hashimova, “The China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Transport Corridor Stretches Further Into China,” *The Diplomat*, 22 June 2020, accessed 22 April 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/the-china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-transport-corridor-stretches-further-into-china/>.

³⁶³ Kamila Ibragimova, “Tajikistan: Another Chinese company gets tax exemptions,” *Eurasianet*, 24 October 2019, accessed 14 August 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-another-chinese-company-gets-tax-exemptions>.

given the rights to a silver deposit and was exempted from taxes and customs duties for seven years.³⁶⁴

Any instabilities in the region are a threat to the energy security of China. This is also can be seen in Chinese media. The protests in Kazakhstan became an area of concern for China, which could be seen in the Chinese media, where one of the earlier news was about the safety of the Kazakh energy.³⁶⁵ Later, China has also offered to provide “necessary assistance.”³⁶⁶ Investments and the BRI might get affected by security issues in the region, hence China puts importance on fighting the three evils of terrorism, extremism and separatism. For that reason, the security dimension of China’s relations with Central Asia is as important as its interests and investments in the region. At the same time, investments are also seen as a way to reduce the acts of terrorism, since bad economic conditions can be a cause of terrorism. For that reason, it is possible to say that security and economic dimensions are intertwined.

4.6. Bilateral and Multilateral Security Cooperation

China’s economic rise would also mean that China’s leaders would want a more stable region. In the case of Central Asia, combat against the “three evils” of religious

³⁶⁴ “Tajikistan: The cost of Chinese debt,” *Eurasianet*, 21 July 2022, accessed 14 August 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-the-cost-of-chinese-debt>.

³⁶⁵ “Chinese firms' energy projects in Kazakhstan remain safe: sources,” *Global Times*, 6 January 2022, accessed 03 February 2022. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202201/1245307.shtml>.

³⁶⁶ Yang Sheng, “China could provide assistance, support to help Kazakhstan restore order, develop economy: analysts,” *Global Times*, 08 January 2022, accessed 03 February 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202201/1245391.shtml>.

extremism, separatism, and terrorist violence is an important aspect of relations. Similarly, security is an important factor for the states in Central Asia, where some interstate conflicts regarding borders or water still exist. Along with the three evil forces, security of the region is important for China because of the energy resources in the region; hence for the energy security of China.

As mentioned before, Central Asian energy is important for China to overcome the Malacca Dilemma, and to meet its increasing energy needs. Any instabilities in the region could disturb the flow of energy to China from Central Asia. Additionally, it is possible to say that the region is also important for China because of connections to the Xinjiang region. As mentioned before, China fears that increased instabilities in the Central Asia can spread to Xinjiang, and it also could harm China's economic policies, not only in the region, but also outside the region where China is still dependent on Central Asian states to reach markets with BRI's land route. To manage unrest in the Xinjiang region, China has tried to integrate Xinjiang with Central Asia and China economically, while establishing security and cooperation with Central Asian states.³⁶⁷ As Clarke states,

[...] security within Xinjiang was to be achieved by economic growth, while economic growth was to be assured by the reinforcement of the state's instruments of political and social control, which in turn was to be achieved by opening the region to Central Asia.³⁶⁸

To overcome these issues, states in the Central Asia region and China also cooperate on security both bilaterally and multilaterally and sign international agreements. Or-

³⁶⁷ Clarke, *Xinjiang and China's Rise*, 150-151.

³⁶⁸ Clarke, *Xinjiang and China's Rise*, 151.

ganizations such as the SCO also act as a forum to solve these issues, while also works as a mechanism to provide loans and development assistance, as mentioned in the previously.

One of the earliest agreements to ensure the security in the region was signed in 1996, between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, to demilitarize the border between these states, and along with the demilitarization, states now would be required to inform each other if they decided to conduct military exercises and agreed to not conduct these exercises against each other.³⁶⁹ Solving the border issues led these states to focus on the three evils. Right after the independence of Central Asian states, terrorism was an important issue in the region:

In the period 1990–2001 Chinese sources estimate more than two thousand terrorist acts in the region, leading to 162 deaths and more than 400 injured. These attacks included assassinations of local cadres and assaults on military and economic targets.³⁷⁰

Central Asia's security is considered very important by the Chinese since China considers any instabilities could directly affect the Xinjiang region:

The linkages between Central Asia and Xinjiang are evident to the Chinese establishment. As one Chinese analyst told Willem Van Kemenade, if Central Asia falls apart, the chaos will enter into Xinjiang, and the fear of terrorism validates Beijing's acceptance of this logic. On the other hand, he observed that if those countries' stabi-

³⁶⁹ “Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Sign Treaty,” *RFE/RL*, 09 April 1996, accessed 07 March 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1080434.html>.

³⁷⁰ Kerr and Swinton, “China, Xinjiang,” 119.

lize and succeed however they do so, that will invariably stimulate deeper drives for self-rule in Xinjiang.³⁷¹

Similarly, China, has put more importance on the stability of the region than gaining more influence immediately and challenging Russia in the region. An early case is the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992-1997. Olimov provides three reasons for the conflict, local groups fighting for power and resources, the conflict between the state and Islam, and political resistance to reform (reformers vs. old guard).³⁷² China saw the CIS as the proper forum as the place to solve these kind of issues, which also could prevent military involvements from other states and especially the Western ones.³⁷³ Another example can be seen during the 2022 Kazakhstan protests, where China stated that it was ready to provide any kind of assistance to Kazakhstan, to combat terrorism and provide economic assistance.³⁷⁴ However, it still showed that China is behind Russia in terms of being a security provider in the region.

China also benefitted from the US war on terror, as Ong states, the US dealing with the terrorist organizations in Afghanistan can also enhance the security of Central Asia, hence strengthening China's grip and political security in Central Asia.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ Van Kemenade quoted in: Stephen Blank, "Xinjiang and China's security," *Global Economic Review* 32 (2003): 122.

³⁷² Muzaffar Olimov, "Civil War in Tajikistan," *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 20 (2016): 44-57.

³⁷³ Ong, *China's security interests*, 430.

³⁷⁴ Sheng, "China could provide assistance, support."

³⁷⁵ Ong, *China's Security Interests*, 105.

However, US war against terror also had implications for Xinjiang region, and hence for its relations with Central Asian states. “China supported the US’s war against terror in Afghanistan, which gave it a chance to strengthen its own campaign in Xinjiang.”³⁷⁶

Previously, China followed both soft and hard policies against ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang region, but after 9/11, China’s efforts to prevent separatism increased.³⁷⁷ This also caused China to consider Uyghur nationalist movements as dangerous, linking them to the Islamic militants that the US was against, without considering and distinguishing between violent and non-violent groups.³⁷⁸ The US “War on Terror” aligned with the Chinese views of three evils.³⁷⁹ Some ways of China’s aims to counter terrorism are being criticized for human rights abuses, although China refuses these claims.³⁸⁰

The US presence in the region also caused SCO to deepen its structures since China feared the US presence in the region would be beneficial for the US in encircling

³⁷⁶ Pingua, “China’s Policies for Combatting,” 68-69.

³⁷⁷ Işık Kuşçu Bonnenfant, "Stateless Diasporas and China’s Uyghur Crisis in the 21st Century." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2022): 8-9.

³⁷⁸ Ong, *China’s Security Interests*, 105.

³⁷⁹ Michael Clarke, “‘Making the Crooked Straight’,” 124.

³⁸⁰ For example, see “Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?” *BBC*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>.

China; which eventually led to numbers of meetings and to the founding of the regional antiterrorism structure.³⁸¹ While the role of the US and China's, and Central Asian states' interests could overlap on fight against terror, the US was criticized by SCO members eventually. Regarding the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and the uprisings in Uzbekistan, the Uzbek President Karimov stated "The final goal ... is to change the political and economic correlation of the forces in the USA's favor and to take the dominating position in the Central Asian region."³⁸² This led to China and Uzbekistan signing agreements on economic and technological cooperation, a treaty of friendship and partnership.³⁸³ The SCO also backed Karimov, and considered the events in Uzbekistan within the context of the three evils.³⁸⁴ When the US withdrawn from Uzbekistan, the role of the SCO in the region increased, with SCO promoting itself as the leader in regional struggle against terrorism.³⁸⁵ Similarly, with the current withdrawal of the US in 2021 from Afghanistan, it could be possible to see a competition between Russia and China in Central Asia for influence through security, and a more active China and a SCO in the region.

Drug trafficking is another issue in Central Asia. For some Central Asian states, such as Tajikistan, drug trafficking plays a huge role in the formation of informal econo-

³⁸¹ Cooley, *Tending the Eurasian Garden.* 120.

³⁸² Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 159.

³⁸³ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 159.

³⁸⁴ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 159-160.

³⁸⁵ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 161.

mies. The drug route starts from Afghanistan, goes through Central Asia, and then to Europe through Russia. For example, Gyene states that in Tajikistan, “[e]arnings from the drug trade may amount to 30 to 50 per cent of the annual Tajik GDP.”³⁸⁶ Additionally, during the Tajik civil war after the independence, drug money was used to buy weapons, as Karrar states:

During the Tajik civil war, [...] Tajik insurgent leaders travelled between Iran, Pakistan, and Sa‘udi Arabia in search of funding and weapons. The Tajik opposition was also smuggling narcotics from Afghanistan to Russia. Money from drug sales came back to Afghanistan and was used for the purchase of weapons for the civil war (additional weapons were procured from Chechnya, India, Iran, and Pakistan).³⁸⁷

Along with the informal economies drug trafficking causes, Karrar states that heroin addiction was also became a problem in Xinjiang.³⁸⁸ Although drugs mostly go to Europe, because Central Asian states are transit state, drug trafficking creates insecurities in the region.³⁸⁹ China and Central Asian states also conducted military operations against drug traffickers. For instance, China and Tajikistan conducted a counter-narcotics operation in 2014, aiming to prevent smuggling drugs from Tajikistan to China.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ Pál István Gyene, “‘Rentier States’ or the Relationship between Regime Stability and Exercising Power in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” *Society and Economy* 38, no. 2 (2016): 179.

³⁸⁷ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 67.

³⁸⁸ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 179.

³⁸⁹ Karrar, *The new Silk Road diplomacy*, 181.

³⁹⁰ Pantucci, and Lain, “Silk Road Security,” 73.

4.7. Military Exercises and Trainings

For military exercises, the main instrument for China was mostly the SCO mostly until 2013. After 2013, there were increased amounts of bilateral military operations between China and Central Asia. Overall, from the foundation of the SCO, it can be seen that these states consider military cooperation as an important aspect when they want to combat the “three evils,” and want a stable region. China and Central Asian states had 39 military exercises and 102 Senior-level meetings between 2003 and 2016.³⁹¹ The very first of these multilateral military exercises within the framework of SCO was in August 2003, called Coalition 2003, with all SCO members except Uzbekistan participating.³⁹² The next year, Issyk Kul Anti-Terror-2007 exercise in Kyrgyzstan in May, with the presence of CSTO observers; and the Peace Mission 2007 in Russia were held.³⁹³ Peace Mission-2007 was the first military exercise within the framework of the SCO that involved all 6 members. In 2009, along with the 2009 Norak anti-terror exercise which focused on a hostage negotiation,³⁹⁴ there was also a naval exercise.³⁹⁵ In the 2010 exercise, all the parties provided the same num-

³⁹¹ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” *China Strategic Perspectives* 11 (2017): 48.

³⁹² Bradley Jardine and Edward Lemon, “In Russia’s Shadow: China’s Rising Security Presence in Central Asia,” *Kennan Cable* 52 (2020), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-52-russias-shadow-chinas-rising-security-presence-central-asia>.

³⁹³ Marcin Kaczmarek, “Russia Attempts to Limit Chinese Influence By Promoting CSTO-SCO Cooperation,” *CACI Analyst*, 17 November 2007, accessed 21 May 2022, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/11497-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2007-10-17-art-11497.html?tmpl=component&print=1>.

³⁹⁴ Dmitry Gorenburg, *External Support for Central Asian Military and Security Forces*, (SIPRI 2014).

³⁹⁵ Sebastien Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia: Breakthrough, Limits, and Prospects,” *China Brief* 10, no. 5, 5 March 2010, accessed 21 March 2022,

ber of personnel, each side was responsible for basic needs since the exercise was outdoors, the importance of building a common command and joint operations was emphasized, and the operation was conducted at night.³⁹⁶ In 2012 exercise, one commander instructed all forces, unlike the other years where commanders would instruct their own forces; and after this exercise, the host country leads the exercise.³⁹⁷ In the next years, similar exercises were conducted as well.

The 2018 exercise was the first one that Pakistan and India participated.³⁹⁸ Another first for these states was the Cooperation 2019, which Jardine and Lemon state

a series of drills allowing China to enhance the interoperability of local paramilitary units with its own People's Armed Police (PAP). Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan all took part in 2019, marking the first time their national guard units had trained with China on counterterrorism.³⁹⁹

The last joint anti-terrorism exercise so far, named Peace Mission-2021, was held in September 2021, in Russia, during the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the SCO.⁴⁰⁰

<https://jamestown.org/program/military-cooperation-between-china-and-central-asia-breakthrough-limits-and-prospects/>.

³⁹⁶ Niva Yau, *China's Security Management Towards Central Asia* (Foreign Policy Research Institute 2022), 17.

³⁹⁷ Yau, *China's Security Management*, 17.

³⁹⁸ Yau, *China's Security Management*, 17-18.

³⁹⁹ Jardine and Lemon, "In Russia's Shadow."

⁴⁰⁰ "SCO "Peace Mission 2021" counter-terrorism drill concludes in Russia," *Global Times*, 25 September 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1235060.shtml>.

Along with military exercises, Central Asia and China also cooperate in training of officers, and similar to the arms sales, the numbers increase as years pass. For example, between 1990 and 2005, 15 Kazakh officers went to China for training, while between 2003 and 2009, the number increased to 65.⁴⁰¹ Other, more recent programs include the establishment of a department at the Kazakh University of Defense, and conducting anti-drug business training courses, partnerships with Uzbek Academy of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, where 213 Uzbek employees were sent to China for security briefings on counterterrorism and drug trafficking.⁴⁰² Within the framework of SCO, Ministry of Public Security (MPS) founded the China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation (CNISCO) at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law in 2014. The purpose of the CNISCO is explained as:

[building] a national judicial cooperation platform focusing on officials training, anti-terrorism and safeguard stability, international exchange, academic research and legal consultation to serve national security and diplomatic strategies.⁴⁰³

According to the CNISCO website, it has trained 300 officials between 2014 and 2018.⁴⁰⁴ In 2018, Xi Jinping stated that CNISCO would train 2000 law enforcement officers in the next three years.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia.”

⁴⁰² Jardine and Lemon, “In Russia’s Shadow.”

⁴⁰³ CNISCO, <http://cnisco.shupl.edu.cn/en/98/list.htm>. Accessed 30 March 2022.

⁴⁰⁴ Jardine and Lemon, “In Russia’s Shadow.”

⁴⁰⁵ CNISCO, <http://cnisco.shupl.edu.cn/en/98/list.htm> Accessed 30 March 2022.

In addition to these, since 2015, SCO also started to hold cybersecurity exercises against terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The exercise is aimed to prevent to spread of these ideas, and to prevent terrorist organizations from using internet to recruit new members.⁴⁰⁶

The first ever bilateral exercise was in October 2002, between China and Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁰⁷ In 2006, East anti-Terror exercises were held in Uzbekistan, and other, bilateral exercises were held with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as well.⁴⁰⁸ The exercise with Tajikistan had a hostage rescue scenario with mountain warfare.⁴⁰⁹

Until 2013, there were no other bilateral exercises. China held bilateral exercises with Kyrgyzstan in 2013, 2014, and 2017, with Tajikistan in 2015, in 2016, in which China and Tajikistan held exercises near the Afghanistan border, which involved at least 10,000 troops, while it was announced that China was to build infrastructure to increase security on the border.⁴¹⁰ In 2019, China held bilateral exercises with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The exercise with Uzbekistan was

⁴⁰⁶ “China to Continue Cybersecurity Drills Within SCO,” *Sputnik*, 12 March 2018, accessed 15 January 2023, <https://sputniknews.com/20180312/china-sco-security-cyber-drills-1062461140.html>.

⁴⁰⁷ Wang, and Kong, “Counter-Terrorism Cooperation,” 73.

⁴⁰⁸ Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia.”

⁴⁰⁹ Gorenburg, “External Support for Central Asian,” 77.

⁴¹⁰ “Tajikistan Starts Joint Antiterror Drills with China near Afghan Border,” *RFE/RL*, October 21, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-starts-joint-antiterror-drills-china-near-afghan-border/28066638.html>.

the first bilateral exercise.⁴¹¹ This shows that while China was late to enter Central Asia in the security domain, its influence is increasing.

4.8. Arms Sales and China's Increasing Security Presence

China's role and importance in Central Asia's security is increasing, especially after 2014, with the developments in Chinese military sector. "It has provided 18 percent of the region's arms [between 2015 and 2019], a significant increase from the 1.5 percent of Central Asian arms imports that it provided between 2010 and 2014."⁴¹²

What cannot be seen just by looking at the percentages is how much of a difference is there, since there may be other providers that sold increased or decreased amounts of weapons. When the actual amounts are inspected, it is possible to see the huge difference post-2014, with the changing perceptions of China about itself, and Chinese grand strategy. As Jardine and Lemon stated, the differences in the number of sales post-2014 is huge:

Since 2000, according to the SIPRI Arms Database, China has exported \$444 million worth of arms to Central Asia, with 97 percent of those sales occurring after 2014. SIPRI's dataset is somewhat limited, however, missing key large-scale transfers that push China's total exports to the region above \$717 million.⁴¹³

This number in Kazakhstan, according to Peyrouse, was around \$4.5 million between 1997 and 2003, which included technological aid, communications equipment, and

⁴¹¹ Yau, *China's Security Management*, 51.

⁴¹² Jardine and Lemon, "In Russia's Shadow."

⁴¹³ Jardine and Lemon, "In Russia's Shadow."

transportation.⁴¹⁴ He also mentions that China provided \$3 million loan for Turkmenistan's military needs in 2007; provided \$15 million to Tajikistan between 1993 and 2008, and offered another 1.5 million in 2009 to Tajik military; and provided military assistance to Kyrgyzstan in 2002 that was worth of \$1.2 million, and also provided another \$700.000 worth of military equipment; and for Uzbekistan, China provided some rifles in 2000, and also signed an agreement so China would provide \$3.7 million for mobile scanning systems.⁴¹⁵ The increase of Chinese presence in the region can be beneficial for Central Asia as well, since now they would be less dependent on Russia for security.

After 2014, there is an increase in Chinese arms deals with Central Asia, as stated before. After this date, China provided Kazakhstan with heavy-duty trucks, and large-load trailers, which were worth \$3.2 million, as a gift in 2015; sold 8 transport airplanes in 2018; sold Turkmenistan surface-to-air missiles in 2018; donated patrol vehicles to Tajikistan in 2018.⁴¹⁶ Additionally, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have all received armed drones from China.⁴¹⁷ Along with providing military equipment to Central Asia, China also agreed to construct officers' quarters and

⁴¹⁴ Peyrouse, "Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia."

⁴¹⁵ Peyrouse, "Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia."

⁴¹⁶ Jardine and Lemon, "In Russia's Shadow."

⁴¹⁷ Henrik Paulsson, "Explaining the Proliferation of China's Drones," *The Diplomat*, 10 November 2018, accessed 29 March 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/explaining-the-proliferation-of-chinas-drones/>.

barracks in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2014; and in 2017, another gift of \$14.5 million to Kyrgyzstan was announced.⁴¹⁸

The increasing role of China in the security of Central Asia is also related to the changing foreign policy of China. “In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping made a speech announcing that military diplomacy would be a critical element of China’s foreign policy.”⁴¹⁹ This also included Central Asia, where China also held increased amounts of military exercises. The changes in the foreign policy of China also led to China taking a more active role in the region, outside of the SCO structure. In December 2015, China passed a law to allow Chinese military to operate abroad to combat terrorism. “‘To formulate a specific anti-terrorist law is both an actual need and a matter of international responsibility for our country’, explained An Weixing, chief of the anti-terrorist department at the Ministry of public security.”⁴²⁰

The changes in the China’s role in security also resulted in Chinese military bases in the region. For example, it was reported that China was going to build 11 outposts near the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border in 2016.⁴²¹ Shih reported in 2019 that a Chi-

⁴¹⁸ Raffaello Pantucci, “The Dragon’s Cuddle: China’s Security Power Projection into Central Asia and Lessons for the Belt and Road Initiative,” in *Securing the Belt and Road Initiative*, ed. Nadège Rolland (National Bureau of Asian Research 2019), 66.

⁴¹⁹ Jardine and Lemon, “In Russia’s Shadow.”

⁴²⁰ Aleksandra Bolonina, “Security Dimension of China’s Presence in Central Asia,” *Asia Focus* 108 (2019): 17.

⁴²¹ “China Planning To Help Tajikistan Protect Afghan Border” *RFE/RL*, 26 September 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/china-planning-help-tajikistan-afghanistan-border-posts/28014407.html>.

nese military base was present in Tajikistan, watching Afghanistan, yet it was not announced or confirmed by China nor Tajikistan; and Shih also notes that analysts mention that these can be paramilitary units.⁴²² The presence of Chinese troops and bases in Tajikistan is also mentioned by Standish on 14 October 2021, and while the details of the base were unknown, it was stated that the base was being used to share information between Chinese, Tajik, and until the Taliban takeover, Afghan personnel.⁴²³ Later, it was reported that Tajikistan approved the construction of a new Chinese-funded base, near the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border; and Tajikistan also offered to give the full control of another base to China.⁴²⁴ These developments show that security of Central Asia is getting more and more important for China, and China is having more and more influence in the region. This is also related to the BRI. As Blank mentions, for example, a base in Tajikistan, near the China's Wakhan corridor in Afghanistan, especially stress the importance of Chinese military to its economic goals.⁴²⁵ With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the importance of China's bases in Central Asia might increase for China, if China cannot reach some agreement with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

⁴²² Gerry Shih, "In Central Asia's forbidding highlands, a quiet newcomer: Chinese troops," *The Washington Post*, 18 February 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20_story.html.

⁴²³ Reid Standish, "From A Secret Base."

⁴²⁴ Reid Standish, "Tajikistan Approves Construction Of New Chinese-Funded Base As Beijing's Security Presence In Central Asia Grows," *RFE/RL*, 28 October 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-approves-chinese-base/31532078.html>.

⁴²⁵ Stephen Blank, "China's Military Base in Tajikistan: What Does it Mean?" *CACI Analyst*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13569-chinas-military-base-in-tajikistan-what-does-it-mean?.html>.

However, Central Asian states also are not completely feel safe when China is considered. For example, Peyrouse mentions that while Central Asian states are benefiting from increased economic and security presence of China, they also are afraid of increasing Chinese migrants, and state that there are historical perspectives as well.⁴²⁶ For instance, Woods and Baker show Central Asian perspectives on China, which is going in a negative direction, especially in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan.⁴²⁷ Despite the increasing Chinese investments in the region, views towards China is less favorable, and more negative.⁴²⁸

For the negative views, Woods and Baker provide Xinjiang as an explanation, where China's policies, and human rights violations, Kazakh people being detained in Xinjiang, the treatment of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz peoples in China, , are the reason for Kazakhstani respondents less favorable view of China, which also leads to protests.⁴²⁹

Overall, it can be seen that China's role in Central Asia's security is increasing since 1997, and it is expected that it will keep increasing. Because Central Asia is highly

⁴²⁶ Sébastien Peyrouse, "Power differential and security issues in Central Asia Threat perceptions of China," in *Eurasia's Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics*, ed. Robert Bedeski and Niklas Swanström (Routledge 2012), 92.

⁴²⁷ Elizabeth Woods and Thomas Baker, "Public Opinion on China Waning in Central Asia," *The Diplomat*, 5 May 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/public-opinion-on-china-waning-in-central-asia/>.

⁴²⁸ Woods and Baker, "Public Opinion on China."

⁴²⁹ Woods and Baker, "Public Opinion on China."

tied to China's economic, energy, and BRI goals, and also because of the three evils that China fights against, and because of the US policy of containment, the increased influence in the west of China's borders will be even more important for China. Additionally, with the Russia's war on Ukraine, the economic and security environment may change in Central Asia, to China's favor.

4.9. Effects of Russia-Ukraine War on China and Central Asia

Central Asian states followed a multi-vector foreign policy since their independence, and with the Russo-Ukrainian war, they will keep having a similar approach to their foreign policies. With the Russia's war on Ukraine, as Avdaliani explains, Central Asia's trust in Russia is dissipating, and Central Asian states rely less on Russia.⁴³⁰ Central Asian states might want to increase cooperation with other states, such as European ones, Turkey, India, and with China to reduce dependence on Russia on certain sectors. If Central Asian states believe China could help them economically, or and militarily, they might start to form closer relations with China.⁴³¹ Since China wants no conflicts in the region, it would be beneficial for China to have more influential in the region as well, not only economic but also as a security provider.

So far, both Central Asian states and China did not criticize the Russian war on Ukraine, but also, they did not support it. All the Central Asian states and China abstained during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voting regarding the

⁴³⁰ Emil Avdaliani, "As Russian Influence Plummetts, China Capitalizes in Central Asia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 171, 15 November 2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/as-russian-influence-plummetts-china-capitalizes-in-central-asia/>.

⁴³¹ Avdaliani, "China Capitalizes in Central Asia."

Russian war on Ukraine on March 2nd, 2022.⁴³² Whether Russia wins or loses in Ukraine, most of the West is against Russia. This could provide some benefits to Central Asian states and especially to China. While Russia is dealing with Ukraine, Central Asian states can reduce their dependence on Russia, cooperating with other states, because they fear they may be next after Ukraine. Additionally, while they do not support Russia, they cannot criticize Russia. This is mainly because sanctions on Russia also affect Central Asian economies, but openly criticizing would make Central Asia-Russia relations worse. Similarly, recognizing any breakaway states would endanger the sovereignty of Central Asian states, as it endangers China's.⁴³³

Some Central Asian states expressed that they were against the war in some ways. Kazakh president Tokayev stressed the importance of the UN charter and said that peaceful, diplomatic solutions, should be pursued, while the Uzbek Foreign Minister Kamilov mentioned that they want to have good relations with both Russia and Ukraine, and Uzbekistan would not recognize any statelets backed by Russia would not be recognized.⁴³⁴

⁴³² "Aggression against Ukraine: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly," *UN Digital Library*, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3959039>.

⁴³³ For instance, see Paul Stronski, "The Common Theme in Central Asia's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 30 March 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/30/common-theme-in-central-asia-s-response-to-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine-pub-86764>.

⁴³⁴ "Russia ally Uzbekistan calls for swift halt to Ukraine conflict," *Reuters*, 17 March 2022, accessed 18 March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/russia-ally-uzbekistan-calls-swift-halt-ukraine-conflict-2022-03-17/>.

One aspect of dependence on Russia is that Central Asian states send workers to Russia, who send remittances. These remittances make up a huge proportion of these states GDPs. Because the economies of some Central Asian states are dependent on Russia, the worsening economic conditions in Russia because of the sanctions might hurt Central Asian economies that rely on remittances from Russia.

[R]emittances from work abroad – of which Russia is the primary source – in 2020 accounted for 31 percent of Kyrgyzstan’s GDP and 27 percent of Tajikistan’s. The remittances’ share in the much more populous and economically stronger Uzbekistan stands at 10 percent of GDP.⁴³⁵

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are in similar situations. In 2021, “More than 4.5 million of them were from Uzbekistan, some 2.4 million from Tajikistan, and nearly 900,000 from Kyrgyzstan.”⁴³⁶ With considering the losses in Russia’s GDP, remittances to Central Asian states from Russia are expected to decrease around 4-10 percent by 2023, and 5-13 percent by 2026, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁴³⁷ In addition to the positive effects of remittances on inequality and welfare of Central Asian states, ties between remittances and food security is also considered, where most of the money came from abroad is used to buy food, and reacting to increasing food prices in Central Asian states, migrants managed to send more remittances so

⁴³⁵ Johan Engvall, “Russia’s War in Ukraine: Implications for Central Asia,” *CACI Analyst*, 14 March 2022, <https://cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13712-russias-war-in-ukraine-implications-for-central-asia.html>.

⁴³⁶ Farangis Najibullah, “Central Asia Takes Economic Hit From Russian War In Ukraine Sooner Than Expected,” *RFE/RL*, 1 March 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/central-asia-migrants-ruble-impact/31730968.html>.

⁴³⁷ IMF, *Regional economic outlook: Middle East and Central Asia: Mounting challenges, decisive times*, (Washington DC: IMF, 2022), 35-45.

far, but this may not be sustainable under sanctions and weakening labor markets which would lead to increased poverty, and inequality.⁴³⁸

Hence, it is possible to see that Russia-Ukraine war will have dramatic effects on Central Asia. This might reduce the influence of Russia in Central Asia, citizens of Central Asian states might go to other states instead of Russia for remittances, and Central Asian states will be more open to foreign investment. This can also increase the economic importance of China, especially if it can invest more and create more jobs in the region. However, China and Russia are not the only actors in Central Asia. While Russia's importance for Central Asia may decrease, along with China, other actors such as the EU, India, and Turkey might be more important partners of the region in the future. One possible outcome may be increasing the capacities of existing oil and gas pipelines to China.

While the war was expected to negatively affect Central Asian states when it first started, the war did not affect Central Asian states negatively so far in terms of economies. Although there were some disruptions, such as the disruptions on deliveries of oil through Russia, there were also some factors that positively affected Central Asian economies. These include increased oil and gas prices and exports, increasing remittance flows and the strengthening of the ruble, increasing migrant numbers in

⁴³⁸ IMF, *Regional economic outlook*, 35-45.

Russia, Russians wanting to keep their money outside of Russia, people leaving Russia and relocating to Central Asian states, and re-export of goods to Russia.⁴³⁹

In the short-term, Central Asian economies did not get affected negatively from the war. Compared to last year, Kazakhstan's economy grew 3.4 percent in the first half, Kyrgyzstan's economy 7.7 percent between January and July, Tajikistan 7.4 percent in the first half of the year, Turkmenistan's 6.1 percent between January and July, and Uzbekistan saw a 5.2 percent growth in GDP in the first half of the year.⁴⁴⁰ In this growth, above mentioned factors contributed on different amounts for each country in the region. However, it is important to note that this growth may change in the long-term, hence it is too early to tell the actual effects of the war on Central Asian economies.

Additionally, because China cannot rely on BRI routes that pass through Russia, corridors passing through Central Asia might get more attention from China. For instance, China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway negotiations are over after 20 years of negotiations and the construction is expected to start in 2023, which would not only allow China to diversify its land routes, but also be beneficial for local economies

⁴³⁹ EBRD, *Regional Economic Prospects in the EBRD Regions: A cold winter ahead? Confronting the energy crunch*, (2022), 18.

⁴⁴⁰ EBRD, *Regional Economic Prospects*, 18-20.

through transit fees and new job opportunities.⁴⁴¹ Hence, it is possible to say that a long Russia-Ukraine war will reduce Russia's influence in the region as an economic and to a lesser extent security provider for the foreign policy options for Central Asian states, and they might be pushed towards other actors even more, Central Asian states will still want to have good relations with Russia. While these actors could include the EU, Turkey, and India, China has already invested heavily in the region, and it is most likely the only state that could be an alternative to Russia.⁴⁴²

Central Asian states are already signing deals and increasing connectivity to bypass Russia. For instance, on 31 March, Turkey signed a declaration with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia to improve transportation on the Middle Corridor.⁴⁴³ Middle Corridor aims to build rail networks between Turkey and Central Asia.⁴⁴⁴ Turkey claims that there is a "natural synergy" between BRI and Middle Corridor initiative, since Turkey's Middle Corridor has some advantages over Trans-Siberian Railway (the Northern Corridor), such as the shorter length of the route, favorable climate,

⁴⁴¹ Yunis Sharifli, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway: Opportunities and Challenges for China," *The Diplomat*, 15 July 2022, accessed 27 August 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-railway-opportunities-and-challenges-for-china/>.

⁴⁴² Emil Avdaliani, "Kazakhstan's Expanding Multi-Vector Foreign Policy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 20, no. 1, 3 January 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstans-expanding-multi-vector-foreign-policy/>.

⁴⁴³ Maryana Akhmedova, "Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan sign declaration on Trans-Caspian East-West Corridor," *Trend*, 31 March 2022, Accessed 13 July 2022, <https://en.trend.az/business/transport/3575705.html>.

⁴⁴⁴ Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "China's Belt and Road Initiative and Turkey's Middle Corridor: A Question of Compatibility," *Middle East Institute*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-and-turkeys-middle-corridor-question-compatibility>.

and easier access to MENA and Mediterranean regions.⁴⁴⁵ While Middle Corridor Initiative was started years ago, Middle Corridor might be more active after Russia-Ukraine war.

Additionally, on June 28, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkey signed the Baku Declaration on Cooperation in Transport and Communications, pointing to the importance of new transport corridors, and more advanced communication technologies.⁴⁴⁶ Hence, Turkey is another state Central Asian states might increase cooperation after Russia's war on Ukraine. This would allow China to be less dependent Russian routes, and Central Asian states to pursue their multi-vector foreign policies. Because Middle Corridor is the land alternative to Russian route, Turkey may be more active in the region, while China is supporting the Middle Corridor.

If China's idea of development and security is considered, where less development and bad economic conditions affect the region badly and causes unrest, China might want to provide investments, or it might need to get more involved in the region militarily, since any instabilities can threaten the stability in Xinjiang region.

⁴⁴⁵ "Turkey's Multilateral Transportation Policy," *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, accessed 26 April 2021, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa.

⁴⁴⁶ Nigar Bayramli, "Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Kazakhstan Sign Declaration on New Transport Corridors," *Caspian News*, 28 June 2022, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-turkiye-kazakhstan-sign-declaration-on-new-transport-corridors-2022-6-28-0/>. Accessed 13 July 2022.

Finally, because the war in Ukraine is still new and ongoing, it is still too early to reach certain conclusions. The length of the war, and reactions of other states might also completely change the current expectations, and the future role of China in Central Asia.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter inspected the economic and security relations between Central Asia and China, with an emphasis and prospects after Russia's war on Ukraine.

Since the independence of Central Asian states, economic relations with China increased in energy, trade, and investment sectors. Energy is an important aspect of Chinese foreign policy, and some Central Asian states have rich energy sources and raw materials. Access to Chinese market allows Central Asian states to diversify their export destinations away from Russia as well. This is not only limited to oil and gas, since now China also cooperates in nuclear energy as well. Hence, China heavily invested in Central Asia's energy sector. Along with energy, China invests in raw materials, transport, and communications in Central Asia. The region is also very important for China's BRI, and for its access to Europe.

In the security aspect, China and Central Asian states quickly resolved any border disputes, and started to cooperate within the Shanghai Five framework, which became the SCO later. The member states share similar views on the three evils, which brings them closer for cooperation in regional security. Along with multilateral co-

operation, China and Central Asian states hold bilateral military exercises. China is also providing arms and equipment to Central Asian states, especially after 2014. China is also expanding its military to Central Asia, with new bases to fight the three evils.

With the Russia's war on Ukraine, Central Asian states will try to keep following a multi-vector foreign policy, which also includes states like Turkey and EU members. However, the biggest player in the region is China, and China might invest more in the region. Because Central Asian states do not support Russia's actions, their relations with Russia are souring. The war also creates problems for China as well, where Western sanctions disrupt the BRI, and Chinese companies in Russia.

To sum up, both economic and security relations have improved with China since the independence of Central Asian states. While Central Asian states provide mostly energy and raw materials, their geopolitical position in Central Eurasia and China's domestic goals such as to keep development rates high through providing raw materials, and routes to new markets makes Central Asian states important for China. Finally, Central Asian states support regarding security issues such as the three evils of separatism, terrorism, and extremism in Xinjiang and Taiwan issue makes Central Asia important for China.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Central Asia and Russia has become important partners for China since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which are important to China's both foreign policy and domestic goals. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states and Russia became important partners on security and economy, and they are important states for China's grand strategy goals. China's involvement with the region is still an ongoing and changing process, where China's influence is increasing. The aim of the thesis was to inspect China's involvement in Central Asia region and Russia, while also considering Russia's war on Ukraine through neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism was used in this thesis to cover both system and unit level factors, since solely focusing on a single factor does not provide the full picture.

The second chapter of the thesis provided a background on China's grand strategy through the perspective of neoclassical realism. As mentioned, China's grand strategies slightly changed with each leader. From this perspective, system level factors such as combatting US hegemony, and creating alternatives to US-led order, avoid-

ing US encirclement, Malacca dilemma are important, domestic factors are important, which also support system level goals.

Within domestic factors, CCP's legitimacy through keeping development levels high, and restoring China's place in the world are emphasized. Additionally, China's security interests in underdeveloped regions, and ties of Xinjiang region to Central Asia are emphasized. One important aspect of China's involvement in the region is energy, which compliment both system level considerations such as a potential blockade, the Malacca Dilemma, and development goals where production is related to energy. This leads China to ensure Central Asia's stability, because any instabilities in the region could spread to China and threaten national security. Since 1992, China has followed a strategy of rejuvenation, which slowly evolved from hiding and biding time, peaceful development, and China dream, which is about restoring China's place in the world. This chapter then focuses on China's evolving grand strategy, namely hiding and biding time, peaceful development, and striving for achievement.

During the hiding and biding time and peaceful development periods, regime survival through keeping growth rates high, especially in Xinjiang region to ensure stability, and resolving border issues, while also trying to avoid US containment were important for China. Hence, during this period, China put more importance on its development, and tried to avoid conflict with the US to develop its capabilities while it tries to ensure the US that China did not want to challenge the US. This, in line with China's good neighborly policies, led China to cooperate with Central Asian states and Russia through Shanghai Five mechanism, which later became the SCO in 2001

to ensure regional stability. SCO allowed China, Russia and Central Asian states to cooperate on the fight against three evils, where each state was facing risks of separatist or extremist movements. While US stance in the region after 9/11 aligned with China's, color revolutions changed China's view of the US in the region. This led to the SCO's criticism of the US, and eventually led to SCO deepen its institutional structures. SCO also became an organization for China to cooperate in terms of economy, and through SCO China provided both investments and development assistance.

The next section in the second chapter then focused on striving for achievement strategy. With increased capabilities of China, China's leadership has decided to be more active in world to restore its position in the world, since China's elites are more confident on their capabilities. While China previously had economic development as number one goal, with striving for achievement strategy, China started to follow a more active foreign policy. Thus, China's strategy of keeping a low profile has changed, which leads China to seek more influence in its region and beyond. Because China wanted to avoid conflict with the US, it focused on its west, with the BRI. This also led China to create its own institutions, where it has more influence, which allows China to exert more influence. It is also noted that similar ideas to BRI existed prior the announcement of BRI. Xi Jinping announced BRI in 2013 in Kazakhstan, that aims to increase connectivity. This also led to the creation of new multilateral organizations by China. Hence, both system and domestic level considerations are possible to see during this period as well. Another unit-level factor men-

tioned in this chapter is that the overcapacity problem of China, with BRI, China can export and overcome overcapacity problem.

The third chapter inspected China and Russia. Russia and China share similar views on topics such as the US-led world order, and security of Central Asia. While some realists would argue that competition to be more influential in the region would lead Russia and China to oppose each other, this is not happening right now. Instead, their views on the US-led order led them to improve their relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The two states agreed to develop a strategic partnership in 1996, solved their border issues in early 21st century, and their relations improved since. Solving their border issues also benefitted their economies, since they needed to deploy less soldiers on the border. The two states took part in the creation of forums to increase trade and military relations such as the SCO, celebrated years of Russia and China. Lastly, they also announced a joint statement before Russia's attacks on Ukraine, stating their concerns on several issues such as greater cooperation of BRI and EEU, climate change, NATO expansion, terrorism, color revolutions and non-interference principle, and emphasized greater cooperation.

In the economic aspect, Russia provides energy and raw materials, while China provides end products. Oil trade became an important aspect of their economic relations. While oil was transported through trains when the two states first started to build their relations, they tried to build pipelines, which was not successful immediately, because of Russia's hesitations, which also led China to invest in Central Asian energy sources. However, the two states eventually managed to agree upon energy

trade agreements, building pipelines such as ESPO pipeline. Especially after Russia's pivot to Asia after 2014, their cooperation on natural gas also increased, where the two states signed a \$400 billion natural gas agreement, and Power of Siberia gas pipeline became operational in 2019. Additionally, this chapter has shown that Chinese firms invest and operate in Russia's energy sector. In terms of investments in general. As also shown in this chapter, because Russia does not want to be dependent on Chinese investments, it seeks other partners such as India. This chapter also focused on bilateral trade. Trade between the two states doubled between 2016 and 2019 and is expected to reach 200 billion. However, the values of trade between the two states are asymmetric, where Russia has a smaller percent in China's trade when compared to Russia's total trade.

Then, in the same chapter, security relations are inspected. In security cooperation, both multilateral and bilateral exercises and military sales are inspected. Firstly, Russia and China are among the founders of SCO. The two states cooperate within the SCO, against three evils and color revolutions in the post-Soviet Union. As stated, fight with three evils allowed Russia to get support in Chechnya and North Caucasus. The bilateral aspect is also important. The two states conduct military exercises since 2005, naval exercises since 2012, and aerial exercises since 2019. In addition to military exercises, Russia was an important arms provider for China, especially during the first half of the 2000s. Russian weapons sold to China allowed China to build up its own military capabilities. While Russia started to have doubts on selling weapons to China because of China was copying technology, Russia changed its stance after its pivot to Asia. Another reason given for the decrease of arms sales is that China is

producing its own arms, and instead of buying arms, China buys components. Military component trade became an important aspect in security relations in the last years.

Finally, this chapter focused on Russia's war on Ukraine, which will have effects on China's foreign policy and relations toward Russia. Russia's war on Ukraine might bring these states closer, because Russia will be more dependent on states that do not criticize it and those who do not sanction Russia. China did not criticize Russia, while stating there should be diplomatic solutions. While some projects were put on hold, such as the AIIB projects, the two states keep cooperating on both military and economic areas. Another effect the war might have on China's BRI is because European states reject to receive goods through Russia, China might shift its investments to Central Asia and Turkey's Middle Corridor to be able to move goods to Europe. So far, cooperation with Russia is increasing, in terms of trade and security. The two states are completing projects, trading more energy, and keep conducting military exercises.

It is also important to note the competition and disagreements in China-Russia relations. The ways they prefer to respond to the US-led order is one of them. Other topics of disagreements stem from unit-level factors, while some may also have system level considerations. For instance, while not criticizing Russia's actions in other states, China does not recognize breakaway states of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Crimea, because China is facing its own separatist movements. China's economic interests in the post-Soviet space is another topic of competition, where Russia sees

itself as the patron. This also includes Central Asia, where they compete over energy sources, which also led to the creation of EEU to counter BRI, although the two states agreed to the cooperation of BRI and EEU, and China increasing its military presence in the region with bases in Tajikistan. Russian hesitance on SCO is also noted, where it prevented the creation of crisis funds. Additionally, Russia cooperates with states like Vietnam and Japan, and not always sides with China in the SCS dispute. Finally, RFE's concerns over increased Chinese migration; Russia's hesitance on implementing Chinese projects, both before and after BRI, are some examples of unit level factors that limit cooperation.

The fourth chapter focused China and Central Asian states from economic, and security aspects, while also putting an emphasis on Russia's war on Ukraine. Since emergence of Central Asian states after the cold war, China's both domestic and international concerns led China to seek better relations with Central Asian states. China has improved its relations with Central Asian states, solved border issues, formed the SCO, and become the number one trade partner. China has surpassed Russia as the trade partner for some Central Asian states. Recently, China and Central Asia, through C+C5 format, is planning for more cooperation on COVID-19, and trade. The mechanisms China improves relations with Central Asia are SCO, and BRI.

In the economic aspect of China-Central Asia relations, most of the goods Central Asian states provide to China are raw materials, oil, and gas. Cooperation in the energy sector provides Central Asian states the opportunity to diversify their energy exports, and not only rely on Russia. For China, Central Asia became an important

partner in energy, since some of the biggest energy providers are in Central Asia. For instance, Turkmenistan's importance for China's natural gas imports is emphasized, where it ranks the second. One important development in this aspect was the completion of Central Asia-China gas pipeline in 2009, with additional lines added to the pipeline. These developments made China biggest natural gas export destination for Turkmenistan.

Additionally, China and Kazakhstan have taken energy relations to nuclear fuel dimension as well, with Kazakhstan aggregating to provide nuclear fuel to China. In the energy realm, China is also selling solar panels and wind turbines to Central Asian states. In terms of investments, China's no conditionalities and no interference in domestic policies approach is favored by Central Asian states. These investments also have problems, such as the limitations in job creations for local populations and increasing debts to China; and opposition by local populations make new investments harder. Increasing debts of some Central Asian states also lead to some concessions. One example is Tajikistan, where it gave the rights of a gold mine to China as a payment for its debts.

Then China's security relations in the region are inspected. Security has been an important aspect of the relations since the emergence of new states after the cold war. In terms of security, China and Central Asia cooperate within the SCO, hold both multilateral and bilateral military exercises, and China provides military equipment and aid. Within the SCO, China and Central Asian states cooperate to fight the three evils, which became an important aspect of their relations after solving border issues.

The war on terror allowed China to promote the fight against three evils campaign as well. Additionally, China also started to open military bases, which also shows the growing Chinese presence in the region. Unit-level factors include Xinjiang's ties to Central Asia region, where Central Asia's stability is important for Xinjiang's. Any instabilities in the region could affect Xinjiang's development, and instabilities in the region could even spread to Xinjiang region. Although China does not challenge Russia as a security provider, it is increasing its influence and presence, opening new bases in the region.

This section also inspected China-Central Asia military exercises, trainings, and trade. Through SCO, China was holding multilateral military exercises with the states in the region since 2003, and bilateral exercises increased after 2013. Along with this, China and Central Asian states cooperate in training of officers. Arms sales also increased, especially after 2014. China also started to open military bases in the region. While this is limited to Tajikistan, Chinese presence might increase in the future.

Finally, this chapter inspected the possible effects of Russia's war on Ukraine. Similar to China's position, Central Asian states do not support Russia's war on Ukraine. Because Central Asian states have ties to Russia, including trade, remittances, etc., sanctions on Russia, or decreases in Russia's GDP can affect Central Asian states negatively. This may lead these states look for other partners such as the EU, Turkey, and China. China might invest more in the region, favoring BRI corridors that go through Central Asia.

With the BRI, China can offer landlocked Central Asian states connectivity to other markets, which is now being seen where leaders of Central Asian states are trying to promote routes such as the Middle Corridor for connectivity. However, China's presence in the region also possesses disadvantages for the states in the region. These states become more dependent on China, and when Central Asian states have increasing debts, they give up resources to pay back the debts.

Overall, China's foreign policy towards Russia and Central Asia region is best explained with neoclassical realism since it considers both system and unit levels. From this perspective, system level considerations in China's interaction with the region include the US presence in Asia-Pacific, where China tries to avoid confrontation with the US, and to avoid US encirclement, China tries to be more influential in its west. This allows China to avoid problems such as dependence on sea routes such as the Malacca Dilemma, where a blockade could disrupt the energy flow to China. From the neoclassical realist perspective, great powers try to shape their international environment according to their capabilities, which is also seen in China. When China's capabilities increased, China became more confident, which eventually led China to try to be more influential in the region. China trying to be more influential in the region mostly happened when China became more confident in its capabilities. Earlier, China's interaction with the region was mostly about keeping stability, and development, but China also considered the US factor and avoided conflict.

Because China and Russia are great powers, they would be expected to compete for influence in the region. However, there is more cooperation than conflict, since both states prioritize the US as the challenge. This causes both China and Russia to focus on their west.

As mentioned, domestic drivers are also important. These include China's development goals, which is tied to stability and the legitimacy of CCP. Economic and security goals are intertwined. As China's economic ties deepen with Central Asia region, for instance, China is becoming more involved in security of Central Asia, which can be seen with the Chinese bases in Tajikistan.

Additionally, while these states cooperate, their interests do not always align. For instance, while China and Russia are expected to balance against the US, and greater cooperation between China and Russia is expected, this is not always the case. For instance, while China does not criticize Russia's military operations in Ukraine or Caucasus, it does not fully support it. Some reasons for not criticizing Russia are that the US is focusing more on Russia, while China can further avoid conflict and keep working on its development goals and own initiatives. Additionally, the Western sanctions allow China to purchase energy for cheaper prices. However, several reasons for not fully supporting include China's own problems of separatism, and the place of Ukraine, for instance, in China's grand strategy goals. If China openly supported Russia, its own territories could want to be separated as well. Thus, it is possible to say that China, because of both systemic and domestic factors, is trying to be more influential in the post-Soviet Russia and Central Asia.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKCÖ ÖZET

Bu tez, Çin'in Orta Asya ve Rusya ile ilişkilerini neoklasik realist uluslararası ilişkiler teorisi aracılığıyla incelemektedir. Çin'in bu devletlerle ilişkilerinin nasıl geliştiđi, Çin'in hem iç hem de dış politikası ve ihtiyaçları daz önünde bulundurulduğunda Çin'in gelecekte bu bölgedeki rolü hakkında fikir verebilir. Sovyet sonrası devletlerin ortaya çıkışı, Çin'in bu devletlerle yeni ilişkiler kurmasına sebep olmuştur. Çin ile gelişen ilişkilere rağmen Orta Asya devletleri bazı alanlarda hala Rusya'ya bağımlıdır. Rusya ise bir enerji sağlayıcısı olarak AB için oldukça önemlidir. Bölge, Çin'in iyi ilişkiler kurmaya çalıştığı, çok taraflı örgütler ve girişimler oluşturduğu Sovyetler Birliđi'nin dağılmasından bu yana ve bugün Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı savaşı nedeniyle bir dönüşüm yaşamaktadır. Orta Asya ülkeleri gelecekte ekonomi ve güvenlik alanlarında Rusya'ya daha az bağımlı hale gelirse, Rusya'nın yerini alacak ya da en azından daha etkili olacak aday Çin olacaktır. Örnek vermek gerekirse, Ukrayna savaşında başlayan Rusya'ya yönelik yaptırımlar uzun süre devam ederse ve Avrupa devletleri Rusya üzerinden teslim edilen malları almayı reddederse, Orta Asya bir ulaşım ve transfer merkezi olarak Çin'in Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi (BRI) için daha önemli olacaktır. Son olarak, Avrupa

devletleri Rus enerjisine olan bağımlılıklarını azaltmayı başarır, Rusya enerji akışını Çin'e çevirebilir ve daha da fazla petrol ve gaz sağlayabilir.

Bu tez, Çin'in genel olarak Sovyet sonrası ülkelere yönelik dış politikasının neorealist veya neoliberal teorilerle açıklanabileceğini iddia eden akademisyenlerin aksine, Çin'in Orta Asya ve Rusya'ya yönelik dış politikasının en iyi neoklasik realist bakış açısıyla açıklanabileceğini savunmaktadır. Neoklasik realist bakış açısı hem sistem hem de yerel düzeylere odaklanmaktadır ve bu faktörlerin Çin'in Rusya ve Orta Asya devletlerine yönelik dış politikasına ilişkin güç mücadelesini nasıl şekillendirdiğini analiz edilmesine olanak tanımaktadır. Rusya'nın ve Orta Asya ülkelerinin bağımsızlıklarının ardından, Çin, bu devletlerle hızla ilişkiler kurmuş, sınır anlaşmazlıkları gibi mevcut sorunları çözmüş ve Çin'in iç hedeflerine ulaşmak için hem ikili hem de çok taraflı işbirliği yapmıştır. Bu, hem ekonomik hem de askeri yönlerden artan işbirliği seviyelerine yol açmıştır.

Tezin birinci bölümünde, Çin'in Rusya ve Orta Asya ile olan ilişkileri dikkate alındığında neoklasik realist teori'nin tercih edilmesinin nedeni açıklanmaktadır. Uluslararası ilişkiler (IR) alanında kullanılan başlıca teoriler neorealizm, liberalizm ve "constructivism"dir. Ancak Çin'in bölgedeki politikaları dikkate alındığında tüm bu teorilerin eksiklikleri bulunmaktadır.

Orta Asya ve Rusya, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından bu yana Çin'in hem dış politikası hem de iç politika hedefleri için önemli olan önemli ortaklar haline

gelmiştir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından bu yana, Orta Asya devletleri ve Rusya, güvenlik ve ekonomi konusunda önemli ortaklar haline gelmişler ve Çin'in büyük strateji hedefleri için önemli devletler olmuşlardır. Çin'in bölge ile ilişkileri, Çin'in etkisinin arttığı ve halen devam eden ve değişen bir süreçtir. Tezin amacı, Çin'in Orta Asya bölgesindeki ve Rusya ile gelişen ilişkilerini incelemek ve aynı zamanda Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı savaşını ve bunun Çin-Rusya ve Çin-Orta Asya ilişkilerine etkilerini neoklasik realizm üzerinden ele almaktır. Yalnızca tek bir faktöre odaklanmak resmin tamamını sağlamadığından, bu tezde hem sistem hem de birim düzeyindeki faktörleri kapsayacak şekilde neoklasik realizm kullanılmıştır.

Tezin ikinci bölümü, neoklasik realizm perspektifinden Çin'in büyük stratejisine dair bir arka plan sağlamaktadır. Belirtildiği gibi, Çin'in büyük stratejileri her liderle biraz değişmiştir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, ABD hegemonyasıyla mücadele ve ABD liderliğindeki düzene alternatifler yaratma, ABD kuşatmasından kaçınma, Malacca ikilemi gibi sistem düzeyindeki faktörlerin önemi ve sistem düzeyindeki hedefleri de destekleyen yerel faktörler önemi vurgulanmıştır.

Yerel faktörler içinde, ÇKP'nin gelişmişlik seviyelerini yüksek tutma ve Çin'in dünyadaki yerini eski haline getirme yoluyla meşruiyeti sağlama amacı vurgulanmaktadır. Ayrıca Çin'in az gelişmiş bölgelerdeki güvenlik çıkarları ve Sincan bölgesinin Orta Asya ile olan bağları vurgulanmaktadır. Çin'in bölgedeki müdahilliğinin önemli bir yönü, hem potansiyel bir abluka, Malacca İkilemi gibi, sistem düzeyindeki hususları hem de üretim ile alakalı olan, kalkınma hedeflerini tamamlayan enerjidir. Bu da Çin'i Orta Asya'nın istikrarını sağlamaya yöneltmektedir

çünkü bölgedeki herhangi bir istikrarsızlık Çin'e sıçrayabilir ve Çin'in ulusal güvenliğini tehdit edebilir. 1992'den bu yana Çin, saklanma ve bekleme stratejisinden, barışçıl kalkınmadan ve Xi Jinping'in lider olmasıyla Çin'in dünyadaki yerini eski haline getirmeyi amaçlayan başarı için çabalama ile birlikte Çin rüyasına doğru yavaş yavaş gelişen bir büyük strateji izlemiştir. Bu bölüm daha sonra Çin'in gelişen büyük stratejisine, yani saklanma ve bekleme stratejisine, barışçıl kalkınmaya ve başarı için çabalama odaklanmıştır.

Saklanma ve bekleme stratejisi ve barışçıl gelişme dönemlerinde, istikrarı sağlamak için özellikle Sincan bölgesinde büyüme oranlarını yüksek tutarak rejimin hayatta kalması ve sınır sorunlarını çözerken aynı zamanda ABD'nin çevrelemesinden kaçınmaya çalışmanın Çin için önemne değinilmiştir. Dolayısıyla bu dönemde Çin, kalkınmasına daha fazla önem vermiş ve kapasitesini geliştirmek için ABD ile çatışmaktan kaçınmaya çalışırken, Çin'in ABD'ye meydan okumak istemediğini ABD'ye temin etmeye çalışmıştır. Bu, Çin'in iyi komşuluk politikaları doğrultusunda, bölgesel istikrarı sağlamak için daha sonra 2001'de ŞİÖ'ye dönüşen Şangay Beşlisi mekanizması aracılığıyla Çin'i Orta Asya devletleri ve Rusya ile işbirliği yapmaya yöneltmiştir. ŞİÖ, Çin, Rusya ve Orta Asya devletlerinin her birinin ayrılıkçı veya aşırılık yanlısı hareketlerle karşı karşıya olduğu üç belaya karşı mücadelede işbirliği yapmalarını sağlamıştır. 11 Eylül sonrası ABD'nin bölgedeki teröre karşı duruşu Çin'inkiyle uyumlu hale gelirken, renkli devrimler Çin'in bu bölgede ABD bulunmasına karşı bakışını değiştirmiştir. Bu, ŞİÖ'nün ABD'yi eleştirmesine ve nihayetinde ŞİÖ'nün kurumsal yapılarını derinleştirmesine yol açmıştır. ŞİÖ aynı zamanda Çin'in ekonomik anlamda işbirliği yapabileceği bir organizasyon haline

gelmiş ve ŞİÖ aracılığıyla Çin, üye ülkelere hem yatırım hem de kalkınma yardımı sağlamıştır.

İkinci bölümdeki bir sonraki kısım, başarı için çabalama stratejisine odaklanmıştır. Çin'in artan kapasitesiyle, Çin'in elitleri ülkenin kapasitesine daha fazla güvendiğinden, Çin liderliği dünyadaki konumunu geri kazanmak için dünyada daha aktif olmaya karar vermiştir. Çin daha önce ekonomik kalkınmayı bir numaralı hedef olarak görürken, başarıma çabası stratejisiyle daha aktif bir dış politika izlemeye başlamıştır. Böylece, Çin'in dikkat çekmeme stratejisi değişti ve bu da Çin'in kendi bölgesinde ve ötesinde daha fazla nüfuz aramasına neden olmuştur. Çin, ABD ile çatışmadan kaçınmak istediği için BRI ile ülkenin batısına odaklanmıştır. Bu aynı zamanda Çin'in daha fazla nüfuza sahip olduğu kendi kurumlarını yaratmasına yol açmış ve bu da Çin'in bu bölgelerde daha kolay nüfuz sahibi olmasına olanak sağlamaktadır. Ayrıca, bu bölümde BRI'ye benzer fikirlerin BRI'nin duyurulmasından önce de var olduğu belirtilmektedir. Xi Jinping, Çin'in bölgedeki ülkelerle bağlantılarını artırmayı amaçlayan BRI'yi 2013 yılında Kazakistan'da duyurdu. Bu, aynı zamanda Çin tarafından yeni çok taraflı örgütlerin yaratılmasına da yol açmıştır. Bu nedenle, hem sistem hem de yerel düzeydeki değerlendirmeleri bu dönemde de görmek mümkündür. Bu bölümde değinilen bir diğer birim düzeyinde faktör, Çin'in BRI ile kapasite fazlası sorununun üstesinden gelebilmesidir.

Üçüncü bölümde, Çin ve Rusya ilişkilerinin Sovyet sonrası dönemde gelişimi, iki ülkenin işbirliği yaptığı ve farklı görüşte buldukları alanlar çoğunlukla ekonomi ve

güvenlik çerçevelerinde incelenmiştir. Rusya ve Çin, ABD liderliğindeki dünya düzeni ve Orta Asya'nın güvenliği gibi konularda benzer görüşleri paylaşmaktadır. Bazı realistler bölgede daha etkili olabilmek için rekabetin Rusya ve Çin'i karşı karşıya getireceğini iddia etseler de bu şu anda gerçekleşmemektedir. Bunun yerine, ABD liderliğindeki düzen hakkındaki görüşleri, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından bu yana Çin ve Rusya'yı ilişkilerini geliştirmeye yönelmiştir. İki devlet 1996'da stratejik bir ortaklık geliştirmeyi kabul etmiş, sınır sorunlarını 21. yüzyılın başlarında çözmüş ve o zamandan beri ilişkilerini geliştirmiştir. Sınır sorunlarını çözmeleri sınırda daha az asker konuşlandırmalarını gerektirdiğinden, sınır sorunlarını çözmek ekonomilerine de fayda sağlamıştır. İki devlet, Rusya ve Çin'in kutladığı ŞİÖ gibi ticari ve askeri ilişkileri artırmak için forumların oluşturulmasında yer almıştır. Son olarak, Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya yönelik saldırıları öncesinde ortak bir bildiri yayımlayarak BRI ve Avrasya Ekonomik Birliği'nin (AEB) daha fazla işbirliği, iklim değişikliği, NATO'nun genişlemesi, terörizm, renkli devrimler ve diğer ülkelerin içişlerine karışmama ilkesi gibi birçok konudaki endişelerini dile getirmişler ve daha fazla işbirliğine vurgu yapmışlardır.

Ekonomik açıdan, Rusya Çin'e daha çok enerji ve hammadde sağlarken, Çin Rusya'ya nihai ürünleri sağlamaktadır. Petrol ve doğal gaz ticareti, ekonomik ilişkilerinin önemli bir yönü haline gelmiştir. İki devlet ilişkilerini ilk kurmaya başladıklarında petrol trenlerle taşınırken, iki ülke boru hatları inşa etmeye çalışmış olsalar da Rusya'nın tereddütleri nedeniyle boru hatlarının inşası uzun yıllar sürmüştür. Bu da aynı zamanda Çin'i Orta Asya enerji kaynaklarına yatırım yapmaya yöneltmiştir. Bununla birlikte, iki devlet sonunda Batı Sibiryası-Pasifik Okyanusu

(ESPO) boru hattı gibi boru hatları inşa ederek enerji ticareti anlaşmaları üzerinde anlaşmayı başarmışlardır. Özellikle 2014'ten sonra Rusya'nın Asya'ya dönmesinin ardından, iki devletin 400 milyar dolarlık doğal gaz anlaşması imzalaması ve Power of Siberia doğal gaz boru hattının 2019'da faaliyete geçmesiyle doğal gaz konusundaki işbirlikleri de artmıştır. Ayrıca, bu bölüm Çin'in Rusya'nın enerji sektörüne yatırım yaptığını ve enerji sektöründe de faaliyet gösterdiğini açıklamıştır. Bu bölümde ayrıca gösterildiği gibi, Rusya Çin yatırımlarına bağımlı olmak istemediği için Hindistan veya Japonya gibi başka ortaklar da aramaktadır. Bu bölüm ayrıca ikili ticarete odaklanmıştır. İki devlet arasındaki ticaret 2016 ile 2019 arasında ikiye katlanmış ve ticaret hacminin 200 milyara ulaşması beklenmektedir. Bununla birlikte, iki devlet arasındaki ticaretin asimetriktir ve Rusya'nın toplam ticaretine Çin daha büyük bir paya sahipken, Rusya Çin'in ticaretinde daha küçük bir yüzdeye sahiptir.

Daha sonra, aynı bölümde Çin ve Rusya'nın güvenlik ilişkileri incelenmektedir. Güvenlik işbirliğinde hem çok taraflı hem de ikili tatbikatlar ve askeri satışlar incelenmiştir. Öncelikle, iki ülkenin ŞİÖ'nün kurucuları arasında yer aldıkları vurgulanmıştır. İki devlet, Sovyetler Birliği sonrası dönemde üç kötülük ve renkli devrime karşı ŞİÖ içinde işbirliği yapmışlardır. Belirtildiği gibi, terörizm, ayrılıkçılık ve kökten dincilik olarak tanımlanan üç kötülükle mücadele, Rusya'nın Çeçenya ve Kuzey Kafkasya'da destek bulmasına izin vermiştir. Güvenlik alanında işbirliğinin çok taraflı organizasyonlar dışında ikili yönü de önemlidir. İki devlet 2005'ten beri askeri tatbikatlar, 2012'den beri deniz tatbikatları ve 2019'dan beri hava tatbikatları yapmaktadır. Rusya, askeri tatbikatların yanı sıra özellikle 2000'li yılların ilk

yarısında Çin için önemli bir silah tedarikçisi olmuştur. Çin'e satılan Rus silahları, Çin'in kendi askeri yeteneklerini geliştirmesine izin vermiştir. Rusya, Çin'in teknolojiyi kopyalaması nedeniyle Çin'e silah satma konusunda şüphe duymaya başlamış olsa da Rusya, 2014 Ukrayna krizi sonrası Asya'ya dönmesinin ardından Çin'e silah satmama konusundaki duruşunu değiştirmiştir. Silah satışlarının azalmasının bir diğer nedeni de Çin'in kendi silahlarını üretmesi ve Çin'in silah almak yerine parça almasıdır. Askeri bileşen ticareti, son yıllarda güvenlik ilişkilerinde önemli bir unsur haline gelmiştir.

Son olarak bu bölümde, Çin'in dış politikasını ve Rusya ile olan ilişkilerini etkileyecek olan Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı savaşı üzerinde durulmuştur. Rusya kendisini eleştirmeyen ve yaptırım uygulamayan devletlere daha fazla bağımlı hale gelecek olması ihtimali göze alınarak, Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı savaşının Çin ve Rusya'yı yakınlaştırdığı vurgulanmıştır. Çin, Savaşın bitmesi için diplomatik çözümler aranması gerektiğini belirtirken Rusya'yı eleştirmemiştir. Asya Altyapı Yatırım Bankası (AIIB) projeleri gibi bazı projeler askıya alınmış olsa da, iki devlet hem askeri hem de ekonomik alanda işbirliğini sürdürmektedir. Savaşın, Çin'in BRI'si üzerinde yaratabileceği bir başka etkinin de, Avrupa devletlerinin Rusya üzerinden mal almayı reddetmesi, Çin'in malları Avrupa'ya taşıyabilmek için yatırımlarını Orta Asya'ya ve Türkiye'nin Orta Koridoru'na kaydırması olabileceği belirtilmiştir. Ukrayna savaşı başladığından beri, Rusya ile Çin'in ticaret ve güvenlik açılarından işbirliği artmaktadır. İki devlet projeleri tamamlamakta, daha fazla enerji ticareti yapmakta ve askeri tatbikatlar yapmaya devam etmektedir.

Çin-Rusya ilişkilerindeki rekabet ve anlaşmazlıkları da not etmek önemlidir. ABD önderliğindeki düzene yanıt vermeyi tercih ettikleri yöntemler de bunlardan biridir. Diğer anlaşmazlık konuları, birim düzeyindeki faktörlerden kaynaklanırken, bazılarıysa sistem düzeyinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Örneğin Çin, Rusya'nın diğer devletlerdeki eylemlerini eleştirmeden Güney Osetya, Abhazya ve Kırım'dan ayrılan devletleri de tanımamaktadır. Bunun nedeni, Çin kendi ayrılıkçı hareketleriyle karşı karşıya olmasıdır. Çin'in, Rusya'nın kendisini patron olarak gördüğü Sovyet sonrası alandaki ekonomik çıkarları, bir başka rekabet konusudur. Bu aynı zamanda enerji kaynakları üzerinde rekabet ettikleri Orta Asya'yı da içermektedir. Bu rekabet, BRI'ye karşı AEB'nin kurulmasına yol açmış olsa da, iki devlet BRI ve AEB işbirliğini artırmayı kabul etmişlerdir. Ayrıca Çin, bölgedeki askeri varlığını Tacikistan'daki gibi üslerle artırmıştır. Rusya'nın ŞİO konusundaki tereddüt ve fikir ayrılıkları kriz fonlarının oluşturulmasını engellemesi, ve ŞİO'ya Çin'den farklı bakması açısından da değerlendirilmiştir. Ayrıca Rusya, Vietnam ve Japonya gibi devletlerle işbirliği yapmakta ve Güney Çin Denizi anlaşmazlığında her zaman Çin'in yanında yer almamaktadır. Son olarak, Uzak Doğu Rusyası'nın artan Çin göçüne ilişkin endişeleri; Rusya'nın hem BRI'den önce hem de sonra açıklanan Çin projelerini uygulama konusundaki tereddütleri, işbirliğini sınırlayan birim düzeyindeki faktörlerin bazı örnekleridir.

Dördüncü bölümde, Çin ve Orta Asya devletleri ekonomik ve güvenlik açılarından ele alınırken, Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı savaşının Çin ve Orta Asya ilişkileri üzerindeki etkileri de vurgulanmıştır. Soğuk savaşın ardından bağımsız Orta Asya devletlerinin ortaya çıkışından bu yana, Çin'in hem iç hem de uluslararası kaygıları,

Çin'i Orta Asya devletleriyle daha iyi ilişkiler arayışına yöneltmiştir. Çin, Orta Asya devletleriyle ilişkilerini geliştirmiş, sınır sorunlarını çözmüş, ŞİÖ'yü kurmuş ve bazı Orta Asya devletleri için ticaret ortağı olarak Rusya'yı geride bırakarak bir numaralı ticaret ortağı olmuştur. Son zamanlarda Çin ve Orta Asya, C+C5 formatında COVID-19 ve ticaret konusunda daha fazla iş birliği yapmayı planlamaktadır. Çin'in Orta Asya ile ilişkilerini iyileştirmesini sağlayan mekanizmalar ŞİÖ ve BRI'dir.

Çin-Orta Asya ilişkilerinin ekonomik boyutunda, Orta Asya devletlerinin Çin'e sağladığı malların çoğu hammadde, petrol ve doğal gazdır. Enerji sektöründeki işbirliği, Orta Asya ülkelerine sadece Rusya'ya güvenmekle kalmayıp, enerji ihracatlarını çeşitlendirme fırsatı sağlamaktadır. En büyük enerji sağlayıcılarından bazıları Orta Asya'da olduğundan, Orta Asya ülkeleri, Çin için önemli enerji ortakları haline gelmiştir. Örneğin, bu bölümde Çin'in doğal gaz ithalatında ikinci sırada yer alan Türkmenistan'ın önemi vurgulanmıştır. Bu açıdan önemli bir gelişme, Orta Asya-Çin doğal gaz boru hattının 2009 yılında tamamlanması ve boru hattına ilave hatlar eklenmesidir. Bu gelişmeler, Çin'i Türkmenistan için en büyük doğal gaz ihracat noktası haline getirmiştir. Ayrıca Çin ve Kazakistan enerji ilişkilerini nükleer yakıt boyutuna da taşımış, Kazakistan Çin'e nükleer yakıt sağlamak için anlaşmalar yapmıştır. Enerji alanında Çin, Orta Asya ülkelerine güneş panelleri ve rüzgar türbinleri de satmaktadır. Yatırımlar açısından Çin'in koşulsuz ve iç politikalara karışmayan yaklaşımı Orta Asya ülkeleri tarafından tercih sebebidir. Bu yatırımların aynı zamanda yerel halk için istihdam yaratmadaki başarısızlıklar ve Çin'e artan borçlar gibi sorunları da olduğundan ve Çin'in Sincan bölgesinde diğer etnik gruplara yaklaşımı nedeniyle yerel halkın muhalefeti yeni yatırımları

zorlaştırmaktadır. Bazı Orta Asya devletlerinin artan borçları da bazı tavizlerin verilmesine yol açmaktadır. Örnek olarak, borçlarını ödemek için Çin'e altın madeninin haklarını veren Tacikistan gösterilebilir.

Ardından Çin'in bölgedeki güvenlik ilişkileri incelenmektedir. Soğuk savaşın ardından yeni devletlerin ortaya çıkışından bu yana güvenlik, ilişkilerin önemli bir yönü olmuştur. Güvenlik açısından Çin ve Orta Asya, ŞİÖ içinde işbirliği yapmakta, hem çok taraflı hem de ikili askeri tatbikatlar yapmakta ve Çin, bölgedeki ülkelere askeri teçhizat ve yardım sağlamaktadır. ŞİÖ içinde Çin ve Orta Asya devletleri, sınır sorunlarını çözdükten sonra ilişkilerinin önemli bir yönü haline gelen üç kötülük ile savaşmak için işbirliği yapmaktadır. Teröre karşı savaş, Çin'in üç kötülüğe karşı mücadele kampanyasını da teşvik etmesine izin vermiştir. Ayrıca Çin'in askeri üsler açmaya başlaması da bölgede artan Çin varlığını göstermektedir. Birim düzeyindeki faktörler, Sincan'ın Orta Asya bölgesiyle olan bağlarını içermekte ve burada Orta Asya'nın istikrarının Sincan için önemi vurgulanmıştır. Bölgedeki herhangi bir istikrarsızlığın Sincan bölgesine sıçrama ihtimali ve Sincan'ın gelişimini olumsuz yönde etkilemesi tehlikesi karşısında Orta Asya'nın istikrarı Çin için önemlidir. Çin, bir güvenlik sağlayıcısı olarak bölgede Rusya'ya meydan okumasa da bölgede yeni üsler açarak nüfuzunu ve varlığını artırmaktadır.

Bu bölüm ayrıca Çin-Orta Asya askeri tatbikatlarını, eğitimlerini ve ticaretini de incelemiştir. ŞİÖ aracılığıyla 2003 yılından itibaren bölge devletleri ile çok taraflı askeri tatbikatlar yapan Çin, 2013'ten sonra ikili tatbikatları artırmıştır. Bununla birlikte, Çin ve Orta Asya devletleri, askeri eğitimlerde de işbirliği yapmaktadır.

Özellikle 2014'ten sonra silah satışları artmıştır. Ayrıca, Çin bölgede askeri üsler açmaya başlamıştır. Şimdilik bu Tacikistan ile sınırlı olsa da gelecekte Çin'in varlığı artabilir.

Son olarak, bu bölüm Rusya'nın Ukrayna savaşının Orta Asya Devletleri üzerindeki olası etkilerini ve Çin-Orta Asya ilişkilerine olası etkilerini incelemiştir. Çin'in pozisyonuna benzer şekilde Orta Asya devletleri de Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı savaşını desteklememektedir. Orta Asya devletlerinin Rusya ile ticaret, veya Orta Asya vatandaşlarının Rusya'da çalışıp, kendi ülkelerinde kalan ailelerine para gönderme gibi bağları olduğundan, Rusya'ya yönelik yaptırımlar veya Rusya'nın GSYİH'sındaki düşüşlerin Orta Asya devletlerini de olumsuz etkileyebileceği vurgulanmıştır. Bu durum, bu devletlerin AB, Türkiye ve Çin gibi başka ortaklar aramasına neden olabilir. Çin, Orta Asya'dan geçen BRI koridorlarını tercih ederek bölgeye daha fazla yatırım yapabilir.

BRI ile Çin, karayla çevrili Orta Asya devletlerine diğer pazarlara bağlantı sunabilir; bu, şu anda Orta Asya devletlerinin liderlerinin bağlantı için Orta Koridor gibi rotaları teşvik etmeye çalıştıkları yerlerde görülmektedir. Ancak, belirtildiği üzere, Çin'in bölgedeki varlığı bölge devletleri için dezavantajlar da barındırmaktadır. Bu devletler Çin'e daha fazla bağımlı hale gelmekte ve Orta Asya devletleri artan borçları ile borçlarını ödemekte zorlanmaktadırlar.

Genel olarak, Çin'in Rusya ve Orta Asya bölgesine yönelik dış politikası, hem sistem hem de birim düzeylerini dikkate aldığı için en iyi neoklasik realizm ile açıklanabilir. Bu perspektiften bakıldığında, Çin'in bölgeyle etkileşimindeki sistem düzeyindeki değerlendirmeler, Çin'in ABD ile çatışmaktan kaçınmaya çalıştığı, Asya-Pasifik'teki ABD varlığını nedeniyle ABD'nin kuşatmasından kaçınmak için Çin'in batısında daha etkili olmaya çalışmasını içermektedir. Bu, Çin'in, Malakka İkilemi gibi deniz yollarına bağımlılığın bir abluka ile Çin'e enerji akışını kesintiye uğratabileceği dikkate alınmasıyla birlikte bu sorunlardan kaçınmasına olanak tanmaktadır. Neoklasik realist bakış açısına göre büyük güçler, Çin'de de görüldüğü gibi, uluslararası çevrelerini yeteneklerine göre şekillendirmeye çalışırlar. Çin'in yetenekleri arttıkça Çin'in kendine olan güveni artmış ve bu da Çin'in bölgede daha etkili olmaya çalışmasına neden olmuştur. Çin'in bölgede daha etkili olmaya çalışması, çoğunlukla Çin'in kapasitesine daha fazla güvenmeye başlamasıyla gerçekleşmiştir. Bu dönemden önce, Çin'in bölge ile etkileşimi çoğunlukla ABD faktörünü de dikkate alması ile ABD ile çatışmadan kaçınarak istikrarı ve kalkınma ile ilgilidir.

Çin ve Rusya büyük güçler oldukları için bölgede nüfuz sahibi olmak için rekabet etmeleri beklenebilir. Bununla birlikte, her iki devlet de ABD'ye öncelik verdiğinden, çatışmadan çok işbirliği söz konusudur. Bu da hem Çin'in hem de Rusya'nın batısına odaklanmasına neden olmaktadır.

Belirtildiği gibi yerli faktörler de önemlidir. Bunlar, ÇKP'nin istikrarına ve meşruiyetine bağlı olan Çin'in kalkınma hedeflerini içermektedir. Bu bağlamda, Çin'in ekonomik ve güvenlik birbirleriyle bağlantılıdır. Örneğin Çin'in Orta Asya

bölgesi ile ekonomik bağları derinleşirken, Çin, Orta Asya'nın güvenliğine daha fazla dahil olmaktadır. Bunu Tacikistan'da açılan Çin'in askeri üsleri ile görmek mümkündür.

Ek olarak, bu devletler işbirliği yaparken, çıkarları her zaman örtüşmemektedir. Örneğin, Çin ve Rusya'nın ABD'ye karşı dengeleme politikası izlemeleri ve Çin ile Rusya arasında daha fazla işbirliği beklenmesine rağmen, bundan her zaman söz etmek mümkün değildir. Örneğin Çin, Rusya'nın Ukrayna veya Kafkasya'daki askeri operasyonlarını eleştirmemesi, bu operasyonları tam olarak desteklememektedir. Çin'in Rusya'yı eleştirmemesinin bazı nedenleri, ABD'nin Rusya'ya daha fazla odaklanması, Çin'in ise bu sayede çatışmadan daha fazla kaçınması ve kalkınma hedefleri ve kendi projeleri üzerinde çalışmaya devam etmesidir. Ek olarak, Rusya üzerindeki Batı yaptırımları, Çin'in Rusya'dan daha ucuza enerji satın almasına izin vermektedir. Bununla birlikte, Çin'in Rusya'yı tam olarak desteklememesinin çeşitli nedenleri arasında Çin'in kendi ayrılıkçılık sorunları ve Çin'in büyük strateji hedeflerinde Ukrayna gibi Sovyet sonrası Avrasya'da ortaya çıkan devletlerin önemi yer almaktadır. Bu açıdan, eğer Çin, açıkça Rusya'yı destekleseydi, kendi toprakları içinde bulunan ayrılıkçıların da Çin'den ayrılmak isteyebileceği belirtilmiştir. Dolayısıyla Çin'in hem sistemik hem de iç faktörler nedeniyle Sovyet sonrası Rusya ve Orta Asya'da daha fazla söz sahibi olmaya çalıştığını söylemek mümkündür.

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