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**Russia-China Cooperation amidst the war in
Ukraine:
From Joint Management of Security in Eurasia
to AI Collaboration**

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 🇺🇸 Although China and Russia have not yet formed a military alliance, they ought to be considered as de-facto allies. In fact, their leaders have themselves been claiming that Sino-Russian strategic cooperation exceeds the level of a formal military alliance.
- 🇺🇸 There is an ongoing process of synthesis of a common geopolitical worldview shared by both countries. In their joint statements, the Russia-originated concept of the “indivisibility of Eurasian security” has been incorporated into the Chinese framework of the “community of common destiny for all mankind”.
- 🇺🇸 After 2022, and in a stark contrast to its earlier modus operandi, Russia has officially invited China to collaborate on the security issues in Central Asia, Caucasus, and Eurasia.
- 🇺🇸 Partly as a consequence of Western sanctions, Russia has greatly intensified its technological collaboration with China, including areas such as AI technology and semiconductors production where Russia is playing catch-up. These technologies might be employed by Russia both on the battlefield in Ukraine and in its hybrid warfare inside the EU.
- 🇺🇸 Russia’s overreliance on Chinese technology and semiconductors supplies has deepened its dependence on China. In future, this dependence is likely to increase even further.
- 🇺🇸 The EU needs to monitor the evolution of Sino-Russian cooperation in the formation of international norms, rules, and institutions in order to stay relevant as a normative power, and steer the transformation of the international order in its favour.

Keywords

China

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Introduction

February 2026 marked the fifth year since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, an event that led to the isolation of Russia from the Western world and intensified its pivot towards China. Since then, Sino-Russian cooperation has continued to expand and, at least on paper, has already reached very ambitious and comprehensive scope, ranging from joint efforts in space exploration, such as the agreement to build the International Lunar Research Station and perhaps even a lunar nuclear power plant by 2035, to collaboration in military and AI technologies on earth.^[1] Although some aspects of Sino-Russian cooperation might seem immaterial or preposterous, for instance their joint investigation into the detrimental effects of Western colonial and neocolonial practices, there are other aspects that deserve immediate attention.^[2] Perhaps the most pertinent among them is military cooperation, especially if one considers that some EU countries including Germany have not ruled out the possibility that open war with Russia could break out as early as 2028.^[3]

Officially, Beijing denies that it has been providing military aid to Russia. Despite this, as Bloomberg reports, China-made drone technologies have been frequently found on the battlefield in Ukraine, and as the U.S. Department of State reported, as of the beginning of 2026 China has been providing Russia with about 80% of dual-use parts that Russia uses for military application.^[4] And perhaps even more important is the fact that both countries expressed their interest to further deepen their military cooperation in future. Since 2022 Russia and China have concluded several agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China and either the Russian Armed Forces or the Russia-led security forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation

(CSTO). These agreements state that the cooperation between the two countries' military forces will contribute to building trust between China and Russia and help them to defend not only their national interests, but also to counteract any external attempts to destabilise Eurasia, and thus to preserve regional or even global security.

Examining Russia's policies and the evolution of Sino-Russian cooperation is important in order to assess what Russia's military capabilities might be in the near future, and to better estimate the future of security in post-Soviet Eurasia in general. Another important aspect of this topic is the possibility of Russia falling into technological dependence on China. In this policy paper we consider some of these questions, relying on the analysis of bilateral agreements signed by Russia and China between 2022 and 2025, relevant Russian legislative acts, and the existing academic research and media outputs.

Russia-China shared management of post-Soviet security

In general, China has been quite supportive of Russia's arguments for its invasion of Ukraine. It endorsed one of the key Russia's war narratives already in March 2022 stating that Russia had to defend its security interests on its western border in the face of NATO's plans to expand.^[5] In fact, in the Chinese official discourse Russia has never been blamed for the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, and the blame for the war has instead been shifted to the U.S. and NATO.^[6] China also endorsed Russia's concept of the "Indivisibility of Eurasian security" in the joint statement adopted on 4th of February 2022, twenty days before the invasion.^[7] The "indivisibility of Eurasian security" is essentially a claim that the security of each of the Eurasian countries is dependent on the overall security of Eurasia, and that as a consequence none of the countries or military blocs should expand or obtain advantage at the expense of the security interests of others. China continued adhering to this position in the joint statements of 2023, 2024, and 2025.

In these joint statements China and Russia started to combine the Russian concept of the "indivisibility of Eurasian security" with the Chinese concept of the "community of common destiny for all mankind" when they stated that "the destinies of people in the world are interconnected, and therefore none of the countries can secure its security at the expense and to the detriment of others".^[8] Even though the overall argument is rather vague, this rhetorical shift is quite interesting in itself as it suggests a gradual sinicisation of Russian foreign policy rhetoric.

Following these commitments China became very visible at discussions of security issues in post-Soviet Eurasia. The special representative of the Chinese government on Eurasian Affairs Sun Linjiang has become a regular guest in the Kremlin, and Chinese officials often visit security-related conferences in the post-Soviet space.^[9] China and Russia do also hold regular consultations on the problems of the Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS). During one of their recent meetings in December 2025 China's and Russia's delegations discussed topics such as the war in Ukraine, their mutual interests in Central Asia and Caucasus, and China's prospects in the Eurasian Economic Union.^[10]

One of the more striking aspects of these developments is that Russia has acknowledged China's role in co-managing the security situation in Central Asia, which was previously considered as an exclusive domain of Russia. In particular, in the joint statement of 2023, Russia and China agreed to coordinate their activities to preserve Central Asia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and prevent any attempts of foreign interference and colour revolutions. Russia and China also tend to present themselves as particularly well-disposed to manage the security of that region.^[11] For instance, the Russian foreign affairs minister Lavrov stated that unlike Russia or China, the U.S. and NATO approach Central Asia as an isolated region and show little interest in solving the security problems of Eurasia as a whole.^[12]

An important feature of Sino-Russian cooperation is that they both support the view that the U.S. is a hegemonic actor at the centre of the international security system. Here, however, their visions of the future of the international security system are not exactly identical. While China seeks to share power on a multilateral basis Russia merely expects world power to be redistributed among several actors, each with their own exclusive sphere of influence.^[13] This is where China distances itself from Russia, claiming to be a benign and fair power capable of managing a peaceful global order.^[14] Credibility of those claims, however, might have been somewhat hurt by the fact that China failed to defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine, despite having a unique leverage over Russia. In fact, there seem to have been remarkably few voices raised in defence of Ukraine's sovereignty in the Chinese official discourse.^[15] Furthermore, reflecting the widespread U.S. view of Russia and China being America's main adversaries, Russian and Chinese officials often describe their countries as being targeted by a consolidated pressure from the West. In this regard, however, Russian officials often claim that their country does not represent a major threat to the West, and describe Russia as being only a Eurasian power, and China as a rapidly developing center of global power successfully competing with the U.S.^[16]

Evolution of China's perceptions in Russia: from arrogance to singularisation

Russia has not always pivoted towards China. In fact, from the 1990s until the early 2010s Russian elites largely followed the stereotype of Russia being China's older brother. This had its origins in the Soviet past when Russia patronised China in the conduct of its political, military and economic reforms. Russian elites generally "looked down" on China, which they considered as "a giant country with far too many poor people".^[17] They began

to reassess China's role only after the 2008 crisis when, in 2009, Russia's state-owned companies Rosneft and Transneft signed a 20 years contract with the Chinese CNPC on oil supplies, financed with a giant loan of \$25 billion from China. Even after that, however, did the overall attitude towards China remain arrogant. An expert of Russian foreign policy Alexander Gabuev highlighted that when the Russian government was developing a classified strategy on Russia's cooperation with the Asia-Pacific region back in 2011, China was still portrayed as technologically backward compared to Russia. It was really only after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that, when Russia started to fully pivot towards China with the signing of a \$400 billion deal on the construction of the "Sila Sibiri" pipeline which was planned to deliver gas from the Russian Far East to China.^[18]

At the same time, Russia and China have not yet formed a military alliance. For many years Russia had been cautious about expanding its military cooperation with China, and it was only in 2015 that Russia agreed to sell its S-400 surface-to-air missile systems and SU-35 fighter jets to China.^[19] However, it seems that the absence of a formal military alliance does not limit Russia's and China's actual intentions to cooperate in the military matters. In particular, in the joint statements of 2022, 2023 and 2024, Russia and China noted that even though their countries did not form "a military alliance of Cold War mentality type", their relations were exceeding that form of interstate interaction.^[20]

It is worth clarifying here that the statements do not imply that Russia and China are planning to enter a formal military alliance. However, as will be discussed in the next paragraph, Russia and China revealed their plans to cooperate on maintaining regional security. In addition to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China and the Russian Armed Forces, also the Russia-led security forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) are supposed to be involved in this endeavor.

Since 2022, China and Russia have adopted a number of agreements concerning their military cooperation. The agreements include plans for Sino-Russian joint military exercises between the two countries' air forces and navies, and also the rationale for the closer cooperation between the PLA and Russia's armed forces (Joint statements 2024, 2025).^[21] Interestingly, according to that rationale, trustworthy relations between the two countries' armies would help them not only to defend their national interests and the sovereignty of their respective countries, but also regional and global security. Furthermore, the earlier 2023 and 2024 statements stipulated that in addition to developing cooperation between their respective armed forces, Russia and China plan to also involve the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation's forces.^[22]

The CSTO is a military organisation consisting of the forces of six post-Soviet countries of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. (Although Armenia froze its membership in 2024 and undertook steps to withdraw from the alliance.) As their joint statement of 2025 argued, Russia and China aim to support peace and security in the

whole Eurasia, and undertake unified efforts to counteract foreign attempts to destabilise the region.^[23] Even though not much is known on that topic, the involvement of a multilateral military organisation such as the CSTO in the Sino-Russian military cooperation should be considered as an important geopolitical shift, and as Russia's official invitation to China to collectively manage the security framework in Eurasia. All in all, Russia's efforts to increase all sorts of cooperation with China suggest that Russia has already accepted China's unique and exceptional role in its future.

Unpacking some of the Sino-Russian agreements in AI

In 2026, Russia and China will celebrate the 25th anniversary of a cornerstone agreement that laid the foundations of their cooperation, the 2001 Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation. Putin plans to visit China for that purpose in May or June 2026. Some pundits believe that during that visit Putin plans to focus not only on the traditional agenda such as discussions on the "Power of Siberia-2", but also on the Sino-Russian collaboration in AI.^[24] Putin has been paying major attention to the development of AI and considers Russia's competitiveness in that field a top priority: as he argued, "anyone who secures a monopoly in AI will rule the world."^[25]

As a matter of fact, however, Russia lags behind the current leaders in the development of AI, the U.S. and China. According to the Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2025 run by Stanford University, in 2024, the U.S. companies produced 40 "notable" AI models, China 15 and Europe 3. (And China continues to lead in the number of AI-related publications and patents.)^[26] While the U.S. is home to the majority of the leading companies in this field, including Anthropic, Google, and OpenAI, China took the world by surprise when it revealed its very efficient model by DeepSeek (and has since produced several serious competitors to the American models). Compared to that, Russia has so far achieved only modest results. Its generative AI models include the GigaChat developed by Sberbank, the YandexGPT developed by Yandex, and some other models developed by Rostec or Rosatom, but their general capabilities are lagging behind top-tier Western models.

This lagging behind its competition has been recently acknowledged by Russia in its 2030 National Strategy on AI Development, stating that the deficit of chips and semi-conductors, and a general lack of specialists as the main reasons behind it.^[27] Indeed, Russia's reliance on Chinese semiconductor imports is well known, and according to the Associated Press, "Russia's semiconductor imports from China jumped from \$200 million in 2021 to over \$500 million in 2022", while "in 2023 about 90% of Russia's microelectronics came from China, which Russia has used to make missiles, tanks and aircraft."^[28]

At the same time, according to the Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2025 in 2024 Russia surpassed other countries in terms of the number of AI-related laws that it adopted (in

2024 Russia adopted 7 laws). On that account, Russian experts expressed their worries that the AI development in their country remains too centralised with the state “coordinating private business through various mechanisms and stimulating its development”.^[29] Russia adopted its first law on AI in 2019, in which it set up an ambitious goal for itself to enter the list of world leading countries in AI development by 2030. The law stipulated that by 2030 Russia should be able to produce its own microchips and competitive AI software, to secure its technological sovereignty. To support these ambitions, Russia declared its plan to build 38 small nuclear power plants in Ural, Siberia and the Far East to provide energy for AI data centers.^[30] In addition, Putin ordered the government to elaborate a national plan for AI regulation, and establish state structures to coordinate the development of AI.

Although Russia itself has not yet managed to establish itself as a leader in the field of artificial intelligence, it has been engaged in ongoing collaboration in AI with China. This collaboration started about a decade ago and intensified after 2019 when Russia launched its National Strategy for the Development of AI. The cooperation then grew even further after 2022 when Russia started to face the Western sanctions. Among the first bilateral agreements that mentioned Russia’s and China’s intentions to cooperate in AI were their joint statements of 2022 and 2023.^[31] The 2024 and 2025 joint statements granted still more attention to the issues related to AI.^[32] In the 2025 joint statement, Russia and China stressed the importance of the UN’s role in AI regulation, and expressed their position that AI should not become a geopolitical instrument in the hands of unspecified countries pursuing hegemonic goals. Furthermore, in November 2025, Russia and China decided to create a joint expert council dedicated to AI issues.^[33]

Russian-Chinese collaboration in AI has given rise to a number of projects in the fields of medicine, agriculture, road infrastructure, and telecommunications.^[34] According to the think tank SCSP, Chinese company Huawei has been gradually expanding its presence in Russia and cooperating with Russian telecom providers such as MTS to develop 5G and AI infrastructure.^[35] The Russia–China Investment Fund has also been financing AI and semiconductor technology startups in China, such as the Shanghai-based fabless semiconductor company Biren Technology.^[36] According to Anna Sytnik, an associate professor at the St. Petersburg State University, Russia has been actively adapting Chinese AI models such as DeepSeek, which provide an computationally efficient alternative for Russia which lacks access to Western chips.^[37]

Furthermore, in March 2026 Russia started discussions about the draft law according to which West-made AI models such as ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini should be limited in Russia, because those Western technologies could operate “discriminative algorithms and hidden manipulations”.^[38] On the contrary, Chinese AI models such as Qwen and Deepseek were considered safe. The draft law therefore contains plans to localise those models for the needs of the Russian population. If passed, the law will take effect in 2027. Considering all these developments, one can ask how likely it is that Russia will fall into technological

dependence on China. Furthermore, there is a possibility that Russia will develop further vulnerabilities towards China in cybersecurity, despite the fact that the country's regulation has so far been quite effective in that regard.^[39] In fact, a large-scale China-originated cyberattack on Russia took place already in August 2024, when Chinese hackers coordinated attacks on dozens of Russia's state-owned networks.^[40]

Perhaps even more importantly, Russia and China collaborate on the sensitive issue of the military use of AI. They conducted two high-level meetings on the military use of AI in 2024 and 2025.^[41] During the meeting in 2024, the Russian MFA reported that Russian and Chinese approaches to the military use of AI were close.^[42] While it is not completely clear what precisely that means, because the protocols from the meetings are not publicly available, one possibility might have been suggested by the recent Chinese research into various options to sabotage SpaceX's Starlink satellite network, which proved itself very helpful to Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia.^[43] On a more formal side of things, China and Russia also demonstrated their will to collaborate on the formation of AI-related international laws and norms, as for instance by calling for more responsibility in the use of AI-controlled autonomous weapons.

Discussion and recommendations:

As we have seen, China and Russia have already established a comprehensive collaboration in many areas spanning from coordinated diplomacy and norms creation, through intense economic ties, to cooperation in military and technology. First, this paper drew attention to the expanding military cooperation by discussing several agreements adopted between 2022 and 2025 according to which the two countries agreed to increase the cooperation between their armed forces (as well as the CSTO forces). Another aspect of the cooperation between Russia and China discussed in this policy paper was the cooperation in technology, in particular in the development of AI and semiconductor supplies. While Russia is clearly lagging behind the U.S. and China in this area, it has already acknowledged that reality and seems determined to catch up. Although this paper has not attempted to estimate Russia's likelihood of success, it pointed to the fact that China is providing Russia with significant assistance and that Russia, in its turn, is opening further to Chinese technologies and cutting itself off from their Western counterparts. This has important consequences both for Russia's present and near-future capabilities and in the context of deepening Russia's dependence on China.

There is also another side to this Sino-Russian cooperation, which the policy paper briefly considered, and those are the accompanying ideational changes. Russia has already acknowledged the special role that China seems to play in its future, and has even invited China to collaborate on the issues of security in Central Asia and Caucasus, two regions that Russia used to treat as its exclusive sphere of influence. This is a major shift from the

arrogant and patronising attitude that many Russian elites held towards China as recently as a decade ago. Furthermore, the two countries also collaborate on the formation of international relations, or as they often stress, on the opposition to the U.S. hegemony. This can be seen not only in the coordination of their diplomatic activities but also in the gradual synthesis of a common worldview, as was illustrated here with the case of the merging of the Russian concept of indivisible Eurasian security with the Chinese community of common destiny for all mankind.

It is important for the EU to appreciate these shifts. Although it is understandable that in recent years the EU has focused more on its security, it must not lose sight of the rapidly changing international order. While the U.S.-dominated rule-based order, in which the EU was used to maneuver quite skillfully, is being scrapped by its former guarantor, China and Russia collaborate on the formation of new norms, concepts, and structures that could shape the new international order. One of the strengths of the EU has been its normative power, a power that the EU cannot afford to cede too easily. To prevent that from happening, the EU must seek to monitor and understand the development of Sino-Russian collaboration, so that it can react to those changes effectively.

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