

## Russian-Chinese Relations and Russia's "Turn to the East"

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In its diverse and lengthy history, Russia, as a country attributed to both Western and Eastern parts of the globe, has oscillated between engagement with European nations and attempts to uphold its influence in Asian regions. The recent conflict with Ukraine ensued imposition of sanctions by Western bloc, triggering a strategic shift of Russia's foreign policy focus to the Eastern region and prioritising fostering economic and political alliances with Asian nations. This strategic reassessment is nowadays referred to as the "Turn to the East".

First and foremost, following the period of sanction imposition, Russia's priorities lie within securing an economic interconnection with Asian countries as a method of evading dependency on Western markets. Next, through fostering connections with Asia, Russia moves towards securing a new position in the existing world order, influencing political alignment of some areas, facilitating multilateral cooperation in substantial Asian NGOs, and, most importantly, counterbalancing the US influence in the region. Lastly, such partnerships boost Russia's economy and the energetic sector, as Asia's energy demands are among the world's highest, creating opportunities for mutually beneficial energy-based collaborations.

Sino-Russian relations are one of the most representative to Russia's "Turn to the East" policy, combining both mutually beneficial economic interactions and shared geopolitical interests. Ties between Beijing and Moscow have strengthened following the Crimean crisis in 2014 and subsequent sanctions, making China Russia's key ally. The enhancement of Sino-Russian relations has been marked by several political and economic events that have occurred recently.

One of such pivotal events is the Putin-Xi Summit, held in May 2024 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, which was dedicated to the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Putin's visit included his participation in various cultural events, for instance, the opening ceremony of the 8th Russia-China EXPO. The discussions at the summit centered around deepening economic ties and military cooperation, and concluded with the presidents signing a number of documents aimed at enhancing their countries' strategic partnership. Putin and Xi agreed on commitment to equality, win-win cooperation between Russia and China, and the principles of non-alliance and non-confrontation. Moreover, the presidents outlined that Russia and China are eager to foster cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative on ports, transportation, supply chains, and the development of the Northern Sea Route. Both leaders issued joint statements, emphasizing their readiness to support each other's core interests and reach peaceful settlements of global conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian situation and the Ukrainian crisis.

Joint military exercises between the Chinese and Russian warfare sectors are yet another display of inclination towards cooperation. Since 2017, China and Russia have conducted over 100 such trainings, many of which involved advanced utilisation and exchange of military technologies and strategies, including those related to nuclear deterrence. Among the exercises were aerial patrols over the Sea of Japan, live-fire drills in the East China Sea, and naval collaborations in various maritime regions. Apart from that, Russia and China have also engaged in joint nuclear projects, for instance, a contract between China National Nuclear Corporation

and Rosatom to build third-generation nuclear power units. Through demonstrating their military power through non-violent methods, the two states are aiming at counterbalancing the influence of Western states, particularly, in the East Asian region.

Economically, Sino-Russian cooperation has expanded greatly following Russia's "turn to the East": it is estimated that trade volumes has doubled over the past decade, reaching a peak of approximately \$240 billion in 2023. This increase reflected a deepening economic relationship driven by mutual interests of counterbalancing global tensions. Furthermore, their trade experienced a dramatic surge after the onset of Russia's Military Operation in Ukraine, as China emerged an essential trading partner of Russia's, while most Western countries initiated sanctions. Another major economic event that occurred in 2024 is the construction of the China-Russia natural gas pipeline, designed to become a stable source of energy for northeastern China. This project significantly increased interconnectedness between the two countries and boosted Russian natural gas supplies to China by approximately 43%. Though Sino-Russian economic relations have faced several challenges, for instance, trade imbalance (China exports significantly more to Russia than imports from it), their economic cooperation plays a crucial role for both countries and helps to satisfy their national needs.

In a nutshell, Sino-Russian economic partnership and shared political interests create a favorable environment for further deepening of this cooperation, however controversial the predictions regarding these developing relations may be.

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