

Joint statement by the foreign ministers of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, Moscow, September 11, 2020

11-09-2020

The Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, in the spirit of relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation that are entering a new era, and based on a common vision of the current international situation and key problems, urge the international community to promote cooperation, deepen understanding, stand up against new challenges and threats by collective efforts and facilitate global political stability and global economic recovery.

The sides have declared the following:

1. The modern world is undergoing a stage of deep transformation. The turbulence is growing stronger, and a blow has been dealt to economic globalisation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The coronavirus epidemic has become the most serious global peacetime challenge.

The sides express their deep concern over the spread of false and inaccurate information against the backdrop of the novel coronavirus pandemic. It threatens the health and wellbeing of people, public safety, stability and order, and prevents nations from learning more about each other. In this context, Russia and China urge the governments of states, public organisations, the media and business circles to promote cooperation and jointly resist false information. Disseminated information and assessments must be based on facts and rule out interference in the internal affairs of other countries and unjustified attacks on their political systems and development paths.

The sides again declare their firm support for the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its coordinating role in international efforts to counter epidemics, and support the deepening of international cooperation in this area and the accelerated development of medications and vaccines. They urge all countries to stop politicising the pandemic and pool efforts in order to overcome the coronavirus infection, jointly respond to various challenges and threats, and speed up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, the greatest tragedy in human history that claimed tens of millions of lives. The Soviet Union and China were hit the hardest by Nazism and militarism and bore the brunt of the burden of resisting the aggressors. At the price of enormous human losses, they stopped, routed and destroyed the occupiers, displaying unparalleled self-sacrifice and patriotism in this struggle. The new generations are deeply

indebted to those who gave up their lives for the sake of freedom and independence, and the triumph of good, justice and humanity. Entering a new era, the current Russia-China relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation have a powerful, positive feature of true comradeship developed on the battlefields of World War II. It is a sacred duty of all humanity to preserve the historical truth about that war. Russia and China will jointly counter all attempts to falsify history, glorify the Nazis, militarists and their accomplices, and tarnish the victors. Our countries will not allow anyone to revise the results of World War II, which are fixed in the UN Charter and other international documents.

3. In the year of the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII and the establishment of the United Nations Organisation, Russia and China, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, reiterate their firm commitment to the principles of multilateralism; support the idea to hold a series of high-level meetings timed to coincide with the 75th anniversary of founding the UN and the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII; call on the international community to jointly uphold the system of international relations, in which the UN plays a central role, and the international order based on the principles of international law; and reaffirm the positions outlined in the Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on increasing the role of international law dated June 25, 2016. China supports Russia's initiative to convene a meeting of the heads of state of permanent members of the UN Security Council. Russia and China will continue to resolutely uphold the goals and principles of the UN Charter, in particular, the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in other states' internal affairs and to protect global peace and stability. The parties stand for justice in international affairs and reforming and improving the global governance system. They strongly reject unilateral actions and protectionism, the policy of force and bullying with regard to other states, and unilateral sanctions that are not supported by international legal foundations, as well as the extraterritorial application of national legislation.

4. We are facing major challenges in the field of international security, of which the UN Security Council is in charge. Outdated Cold War-era thinking, pitting major powers against each other, and the desire to ensure one's own security at the expense of the security of other states seriously undermine the basic principles of international relations, global and regional strategic stability and security. The parties note the importance of maintaining constructive interaction between major powers in order to resolve global strategic problems on an equal basis in the spirit of mutual respect. As permanent members of the UN Security Council and nuclear states, the parties play a special role in ensuring global strategic stability and will continue to deepen strategic mutual trust, to build up strategic interaction, and to jointly maintain global and regional strategic stability, in the spirit of the Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on strengthening global strategic stability in the modern era, signed on June 5, 2019.

Russia and China call on all the states participating in treaties and agreements on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation to comply with all provisions

of these treaties and agreements in full and to strictly follow the dispute resolution procedures outlined in them.

5. The sides will continue developing cooperation on promoting and protecting human rights and advancing the equal treatment of all categories of human rights in the UN human rights agencies. They will enhance their efforts in the areas to which the developing nations pay special attention: exercise of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. They are against politicising the international human rights agenda and using human rights issues as a pretext for interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

6. The sides urge the international community to pool efforts in countering all forms and manifestations of terrorism and extremism. They consistently pursue a comprehensive policy on this issue, eliminating both the reasons and consequences of the problem and facilitating the formation of a united global anti-terrorism front, with the UN playing the central role. They prevent linking terrorism and extremism to specific states or religions, nationalities or civilisations, and oppose the use of double standards in anti-terrorism activities.

7. The sides urge the international community to pool efforts in countering the use of ICT for purposes incompatible with maintaining international and regional peace, security and stability. They oppose criminal and other terrorist activities involving the use of ICT. The sides stand for preventing interstate conflicts that may be triggered by the illegal use of ICT and again declare the UN's key role in countering the threats to international information security. In this context, they express support for the UN activities to elaborate the rules, norms and principles of the responsible conduct of states in the information space. They welcome the timely formation of the UN-sponsored first negotiating mechanism on this issue in line with UN General Assembly Resolution 73/27, in which all states can take part, notably, the open-ended working group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security. They also urge all states to take a constructive part in the work of the special intergovernmental committee of experts established under UN General Assembly Resolution 74/247 and emphasise the need to draw up, as soon as possible, a UN convention on countering the use of ICT for criminal purposes.

They also underscore common positions on internet governance, including the importance of ensuring equal rights of states to govern the global network, and emphasise the need to enhance the role of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in this context. The sides agreed to continue promoting bilateral cooperation based on the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on cooperation in ensuring international information security of May 8, 2015.

8. The parties are aware of the digital economy's comprehensive impact

on the socioeconomic development of the countries of the world and the global governance system. They believe that the safekeeping of the digital data affects national security, public interests and individual rights in each state, and call on

all the countries to push, on the principles of universal participation, for drafting global rules governing the security of digital data that reflect the aspirations of all states and are based on respect for the interests of all stakeholders. Russia took note of the Global Initiative on Data Security advanced by China and welcomes China's efforts to improve global digital data security. The parties express their intention to build up cooperation in international information security both in a bilateral format and within the UN, BRICS, the SCO, ARF and other global and regional multilateral platforms.

The parties recognise the significant potential for developing digital economy, especially during the pandemic, and call on the international community to follow development trends, to encourage new methods of economic management, new production sites, new development models, and to jointly form an open, fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for developing and using information technology, to pay attention to data security and cross-border flows, and to support global supply chains for information products and services.

9. The Parties are making every effort to maintain the leading role of the World Trade Organisation in trade liberalisation and coordination when drafting global trade rules and supporting the multilateral trading system, of which the WTO is the cornerstone. They call on the international community to improve coordination in macroeconomic policy, protect security and stability of global value chains, to encourage greater openness, inclusiveness, shared prosperity, balance and common benefit of economic globalisation, and to contribute to early recovery of the global economy.

10. The parties rate highly cooperation on topical regional issues, including those linked with Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and the Korean Peninsula. They emphasise that dialogue is the only effective way of resolving problems and are willing to continue taking part, on the basis of consensus, in multilateral consultations and dialogue platforms and facilitate the settlement of problems by political and diplomatic means.

11. Russia and China will continue their line of aligning plans for the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, contributing to the strengthening of regional connectivity and economic development in Eurasia. The parties reaffirm their commitment to parallel and coordinated promotion of the Greater Eurasian Partnership and the Belt and Road Initiative.

12. China enthusiastically supports the work carried out by Russia during its chairmanship of BRICS and the SCO, and will actively help Russia prepare a meeting of the BRICS heads of state and a meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council this year. The sides will continue strengthening contacts and coordination within the G20, APEC and other multilateral mechanisms with a view to enhancing their constructive role.

The following is the first instalment of an extended report on one of the most important geopolitical developments of the 21st century: the increasingly comprehensive alliance between China and Russia and its implications for Eurasian and regional powers across the planet.

By M.K. Bhadrakumar

Joint statements between two countries are usually riveted on a particular event, but in extraordinary circumstances involving great powers, they can assume an epochal character and be viewed as diplomatic communication that reflects what the Germans call the *zeitgeist* – the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history – and frame geopolitical power relations.

This is more so in the case of great powers that have long traditions in diplomacy and have left deep imprints in the march of history.

To be sure, the [joint statement](#) issued after the visit of Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Moscow on September 10-11 falls into this second category.

Wang's visit to Moscow was in connection with the foreign-minister-level meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. His "bilateral" with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov took place on September 11 at the very end of the visit, but from the perspective of international security and the world order, it will stand out as a momentous event as a turning point in the evolution of the Sino-Russian entente.

The document that came out of Wang's visit turns attention to the core areas of the Sino-Russian partnership for discourse analysis, and the two powers' mutual interests, and the ever-evolving global geopolitical context in the contemporary world situation.

The joint statement is more in the nature of a Sino-Russian declaration on the current international situation and key problems, especially global political stability and global economic recovery.

It is the sort of declaration that we generally attribute to close allies, and it signifies that a qualitatively new stage is approaching in the Sino-Russian comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation, which has already brought the bilateral relationship to its historically highest level.

Clearly, the Russia-China joint statement of September 11 is a negotiated, public-facing document of a bilateral relationship that reflects not only the political ideologies of the two countries but also their "common vision" and their recommendations to find solutions together to their common problems.

It references a world that is “undergoing a stage of deep transformation. The turbulence is growing stronger.... The coronavirus epidemic has become the most serious global peacetime challenge.”

The 12 core areas of partnership outlined in the joint statement as such reflect the two countries’ foreign policy objectives as well.

These 12 areas include, first, the invidious campaign begun by Britain and the United States, which was picked up soon by a clutch of other countries (including a chorus within India), that the blame for the Covid-19 pandemic – the “Wuhan virus” – must be squarely put on China, where it began, for its alleged failure to fulfill its international obligation to share details with the world community.

The “politicization” of the pandemic didn’t gain traction in the international community – even within America – but the US and its close Anglo-Saxon allies used it as a handle to vilify China, to be intrusive in China’s internal affairs and to mount unjustified attacks on the Chinese political system itself.

The September 11 document underscores that Moscow stands four-square behind Beijing in urging other governments and states, public organizations, media and business circles to promote cooperation and jointly resist false information, to stop politicizing the pandemic and instead pool efforts in order to overcome the coronavirus infection and jointly respond to various challenges and threats.

No doubt, it will be a matter of great satisfaction and comfort for Beijing at this point in time that as much as Moscow is signaling the high quality of the Sino-Russian entente, it is conveying the Kremlin’s strong solidarity on this issue of high sensitivity to the Chinese leadership.

The two countries have underscored that they insist on the coordinating role of the WHO in the international efforts to counter epidemics, deepen international cooperation in this area and to oversee the accelerated development of medications and vaccines.

“Historical truth” about World War 2

A second vector of last week’s joint statement concerns the “historical truth” about World War 2. This may seem an esoteric subject but it is anything but that. A seemingly innocuous western campaign has been going on in the recent years to downplay and belittle the heroic sacrifices of the former Soviet Union in defeating Nazi Germany. Moscow was quick to grasp its invidious, treacherous intent.

Simply put, the Soviet Union bore the brunt of the burden of resisting the Nazi aggressors, but the facts of history are being systematically falsified in countries such as Poland and the Baltic states, often with the subtle encouragement of

the US. The campaign fuels anti-Russian sentiments but even more dangerously, it encourages irredentism and militarism.

The joint statement pledges that Russia and China “will not allow anyone to revise the results of World War II, which are fixed in the UN Charter and other’s international documents.” The common Russian-Chinese stance touches on the gradual transition taking place in Germany and Japan in the recent years to shift away from pacifism towards militaristic ideologies. This needs explaining.

Russia has been watching with growing disquiet that Germany is in another historical transition that holds disturbing parallel with the transition from Bismarck in the pre-World War 1 European setting and, subsequently from the Weimar Republic to Nazi Germany, which led to two world wars and caused horrific destruction to mankind.

To illustrate the change sweeping over the German ideology, in an interview with the weekly magazine *Die Zeit* in July, German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (who is also the acting chairwoman of the ruling Christian Democratic Union party) stressed that it is “high time” to discuss “how Germany must position itself in the world in the future.”

She said Germany is “expected to show leadership, not only as an economic power”, but it also concerns “collective defence, it concerns international missions, it concerns a strategic view of the world, and ultimately it concerns the question of whether we want to actively shape the global order.” Plainly put, the German voice is no longer the voice of pacifism.

Kramp-Karrenbauer said “the claim of the current Russian leadership” to advocate their interests “very aggressively” must be “confronted with a clear position: We are well-fortified and in case of doubt, ready to defend ourselves. We see what Russia is doing and we will not let the Russian leadership get away with it... If you look at who is within range of Russian missiles in Europe, then it’s just the Central and Eastern European states and us.” She promised to “work on a joint threat analysis” with European allies to develop “defence systems,” which would increasingly involve “drones, swarms of AI-controlled drones or hypersonic weapons.”

Suffice to say, seventy-five years after the end of World War 2, German imperialism is stirring—and, once again, targeting Russia. A comprehensive militarisation of society is back on the German agenda. Germany’s elites, as in the past, will stop at nothing to push forward the interests of German capital both at home and abroad.

Three features are to be noted here. As in Weimar Germany, right-wing extremist networks in Germany’s *Bundeswehr* (armed forces) and the security services have once again begun their operations largely unhindered by the German ruling elite. A comprehensive militarisation of society is, once again, under way. As Kramp-Karrenbauer put it, she is pleased “that we have been able to make the Bundeswehr somewhat more visible in the midst of society, with troops taking a public pledge before the German *Bundestag* (federal

parliament) on the Bundeswehr's birthday and the free train rides for those in uniform."



Bundeswehr soldiers sit on a Bueffel ("buffalo") armored tank recovery vehicle in Grafenwoehr, Germany, prior to deployment to Lithuania bordering Russia, January 31, 2017 (File photo)

In response to the prompter by *Die Zeit* that "comradeship, war, dying for one's country, killing someone" was "practically non-existent in the public self-representation of the Bundeswehr," Kramp-Karrenbauer promptly replied that precisely this had to change. "We are an army. We are armed. When in doubt, soldiers must also kill," she declared. Unlike in the past, "today, dangerous foreign missions are common. Those who join the Bundeswehr know that. That is also part of what I understand by a well-fortified democracy and a strong Europe."

The German-American tensions and the recently announced American troop withdrawal from Germany is in reality working as an excuse to accelerate Germany's rearmament plans. Germany has recently massively increased its military expenditure and is planning armament projects worth multi-digit billions, although the budget still currently stands at only 1.38 percent of GDP. In reality, this enables Germany to become militarily independent from the U.S. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the high-quality Swiss newspaper known for its objectivity and its detailed reporting of international affairs, wrote with great prescience recently, "At first glance, Trump may have punished the country. But in truth, the withdrawal of troops opens up an opportunity: all those *Realpolitikers*, who for years have been speaking out against the partly pacifist, partly anti-American majority opinion in Germany, are now at an advantage for a change."

"Does it want to retain the comforting feeling of being a 'peace nation'? Until now, this has meant that others have ensured peace. Or will the country come out from under the shadow which spreads from its past, and secure peace for itself and its European partners?"

The German public militates against war and militarism. The horrors of the world wars and the crimes perpetrated by Nazi Germany on humanity are still in collective memory. What is taking place is that the return of German militarism comes exclusively from the ruling elites with strong backing from the industrial

conglomerates that have a gory history as arms manufacturers and shameless record in war profiteering. Put differently, faced with a deep crisis of capitalism and growing international tensions, the ruling German elites are returning to the means of militarism and war to secure their wealth and power.

Return of militarism

In the east, we see, similarly, the rising wave of Japanese militarism. After its disastrous defeat in World War 2, Tokyo renounced years of warfare in favour of a pacifist outlook, vowing to only use force to protect the Japanese homeland in the event of an attack—never to wage war on an enemy unprovoked. In recent years, however, Japan's political leaders, especially Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, have tried to break the country out of its post-war shell.

The rise of China provided a useful alibi for Abe to find ways to bolster his nation's forces with minimal domestic blowback. Abe pushed through legislation allowing Japan to defend allies, approved a new muscular defence plan, and was campaigning for amending Japan's war-renouncing constitution to formalise the resuscitation of the nation's armed forces when he was forced to step down two weeks ago.

Japan can now more effectively defend its mainland and hundreds of islands, fight back if challenged, patrol global sea lanes, and counter adversaries where and when appropriate. This evolutionary shift from militaristic empire to pacifist nation and back to a pro-military political culture gives the U.S. a much stronger ally to fight alongside, but on the other hand it holds the potential to seriously raise regional tensions and the prospects of war with China and Russia.

Russia was the victim of militaristic Germany twice already in modern history. And both Russia and China have taken a heavy toll historically at the hands of Japan's militaristic ideology. In 1904, Japan went to war against Russia by launching a surprise attack. After years of fighting and pseudo-rule, Japan officially annexed the Korean Peninsula in 1910. And in 1932, Japan created its own puppet state in China.

It is an undeniable historical fact that Japan was unusually forceful, unrelentingly ambitious, and unsparingly brutal toward China. During the six-week massacre in China alone, now known as the "Rape of Nanking", in less than two months, Japanese soldiers killed around 300000 Chinese people and raped upward of 80000 women.

In the case of both Germany and Japan, there are incipient signs of history repeating. Japan is in many ways a carbon copy of what is unfolding in Germany. Abe's agenda on the hand was to jump-start Japan's sputtering economy, while on the other hand, pursue a muscular foreign policy with a special focus on countering China. Only a few months into assuming office as prime minister, Abe told Wall Street Journal in an interview, "I've realised that Japan is expected to exert leadership not just on the economic front, but also in the field of security in the Asia-Pacific."

In December 2018, Abe released a new 10-year defence plan, which amongst other things, called for converting the Izumo helicopter carrier into an aircraft carrier, giving the nation its first vessel of that kind since World War II; spending about \$240 billion on the Self-Defence Forces (army) over the next five years, continuing the nation's steady increase in defence expenditures; and purchasing new fighter jets to replace old ones. Clearly, all that equipment are not meant to safeguard the mainland but add to Japan's capability to project power abroad.

In contrast with Germany, however, the Japanese public opinion under Abe has become deeply divided and perhaps somewhat ambivalent about his legacy-defining initiative of militarisation. Abe's party shares power with Komeito, to stay in charge, and Komeito's base is largely pacifist. Komeito's ambivalence turned out to be a major hurdle for Abe's ambitions to change Japan's constitution and make the country a regional power with a global vision.

To be fair, Japan under Abe also senses it is in danger, surrounded by an imminent threat, North Korea, and a long-term challenger, China. The Japanese military is the most respected institution in Japan and the Japanese society isn't anti-military anymore, albeit still antiwar. But the point is, even after Abe's impending exit, a future leader who desires a more traditional military in Japan will have a propitious political climate to push for change.

True comradeship on the battlefields

Berlin plays a leading role in the western offensive against Russia and leads the NATO battlegroup in Lithuania. Germany and the U.S. are also working closely together on NATO moves against Russia. Germany is the most important staging area for NATO units deployed at the Eastern European border with Russia. And the German media is awash with opinion demanding that the NATO commitment should now finally be fulfilled and military spending increased to 2 percent of gross domestic product. (It currently stands at 1.38 percent of GDP although it recently massively increased its military expenditure and is planning armament projects worth multi-digit billions.)

Whereas, in the Asia-Pacific, Abe has not hidden that his primary objective is to counter Beijing's growing economic and military prowess that could allow it to reshape the region and the world in its image. Japan also has simmering territorial disputes with both Russia and China. Abe's critics have argued that his militarism would give Japanese forces a pathway to war against other countries, and some Japanese critics even called the law changes he piloted as "war legislation", and depicted him as Germany's Adolf Hitler.

To be sure, against such a poignant backdrop, it comes as no surprise that the joint statement issued in Moscow on September 11 reserves its most powerful passage on the *raison d'être* of the Russian-Chinese alliance in the emerging international situation by recalling their historic struggle against Nazism and Japanese imperialism:

“The Soviet Union and China were hit the hardest by Nazism and militarism and bore the brunt of the burden of resisting the aggressors. At the price of enormous human losses, they stopped, routed and destroyed the occupiers, displaying unparalleled self-sacrifice and patriotism in this struggle. The new generations are deeply indebted to those who gave up their lives for the sake of freedom and independence, and the triumph of good, justice and humanity. Entering a new era, the current Russia-China relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation have a powerful, positive feature of true comradeship developed on the battlefields of World War II. It is a sacred duty of all humanity to preserve the historical truth about that war. Russia and China will jointly counter all attempts to falsify history, glorify the Nazis, militarists and their accomplices, and tarnish the victors. Our countries will not allow anyone to revise the results of World War II.”

Indeed, the historical analogy carries profound echoes in the current situation in Europe and the Asia-Pacific. The German government is openly accusing the Russian state of poisoning opposition politician Alexei Navalny and is threatening Russia with sanctions. Germany’s language toward Russia has dramatically changed. It is no more restrained by any sense of guilt that the blood of 25 million Soviet citizens are on its hands. It is talking as if it is already planning the next military campaign against Moscow.

Above all, as had happened once before in the 1930s, other western powers, in their obsession with containing Russia and China, are not only turning a blind eye to the growing militarism in Germany and Japan but are surreptitiously encouraging it.

The Sino-Russian alliance comes of age— Part 2

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I look for the land of the Poles that is lost to the Germans, for the moment at least. Nowadays the Germans have started searching for Poland with credits, Leicas, and compasses, with radar, divining rods, delegations, and moth-eaten provincial students’ associations in costume. Some carry Chopin in their hearts, others thoughts of revenge. Condemning the first four partitions of Poland, they are busily planning a fifth; in the meantime flying to Warsaw via Air France in order to deposit, with appropriate remorse, a wreath on the spot that was once the ghetto. One of these days they will go searching for Poland with rockets. I, meanwhile, conjure up Poland on my drum. And this is what I drum: Poland’s lost, but not forever, all’s lost, but not forever, Poland’s not lost forever.

—*The Tin Drum*, Günter Grass

The Russian diplomacy, which has a glorious tradition in modern history, does not make its moves accidentally or impulsively. The historical consciousness is intense. Memories from the past and the present lie deeply embedded, hopelessly entangled in the collective consciousness. A little-noticed fact

remains to be that the Russian-Chinese statement of September 11 was released on the eve of the thirtieth anniversary of [The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany](#).



Signing ceremony of The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany: Foreign Ministers of USA, UK, USSR, France, GDR, FRG (from left to right) ; Moscow, September 12, 1990.

The so-called “2+4 Treaty”, signed in Moscow on 12th September 1990 between the then Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic — with the erstwhile World War 2 allies USSR, USA, Britain and France as co-signatories — had formalised the unification of Germany, which used to be a divided nation through the previous four decades and a half.

No doubt, the joint statement issued in Moscow on September 11 heralds a new phase in Russian foreign policy in the post-cold war era, especially with regard to Russo-German relations and Russia’s relations with Europe and the world order in general. The salience that draws attention here is that Moscow decided to embark on this new journey holding the Chinese hand. This is of great importance for European, Eurasian and international politics as a whole.

Two days after the joint statement was issued, on September 13, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov appeared on the prestigious *Moscow. Kremlin. Putin*. programme of the state-run Rossiya-1 TV channel, where he was asked about the spectre of western sanctions once again haunting Russia in the shadows of the “Navalny case” and Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project in particular, with Germany in a lead role. Lavrov summed up Russia’s deep disenchantment with its European partners in the following words:

“In principle, the geopolitical response over these years consisted of recognising that our Western partners were unreliable, including, unfortunately, members of the European Union. We had many far-reaching plans, and there are documents setting forth the path to developing relations with the EU in the energy sector and high technology, and stepping up economic cooperation in general. We share a single geopolitical space. Considering our shared

geography, logistics, and infrastructure across the Eurasian continent, we benefit from a substantial comparative advantage.

“It would certainly be a grave mistake for us and the European Union, as well as other countries in this space, including the SCO, the EAEU, and the ASEAN, which is also nearby, not to use our comparative geopolitical and geo-economic advantages in an increasingly competitive world. Unfortunately, the European Union sacrificed its geo-economic and strategic interests for the sake of its momentary desire to match the United States in what they refer to as “punishing Russia.” We (Russia) have grown used to this. We now understand that we need a safety net in all our future plans related to reviving the full partnership with the European Union. This means that we need to proceed in a way that if the EU sticks to its negative, destructive positions, we would not depend on its whims and could provide for our development on our own while working with those who are ready to cooperate with us in an equal and mutually respectful manner.”

The extent of the bitterness in the Russian mind at this point in time can be put in perspective only with a recap of history devolving upon the unification of Germany in 1990, the hopes that the momentous event had raised in regard of Russo-German relations (which has a troubled history, to say the least) and what subsequently turned out during the three decades thereafter. It is a complicated story of amnesia and plain political chicanery on the part of the West.

With the benefit of the “declassified” archival materials that are available today — especially, the indispensable [diary of the Soviet politician Anatoly Chernyaev](#), aide to Mikhail Gorbachev, relating to the year 1990 — it is possible to reconstruct Russia’s tortuous relations with the West in the post-cold war era.

Memory mixing with desire

To jog memory, the germane seeds of German unification lay in Gorbachev’s perestroika against the bigger backdrop of the globalisation phenomenon in international life that had emerged on the horizon in the 1980s. Gorbachev’s reform programme sent shock waves through Eastern Europe, which was already heaving with discontent, and a wave of political upheaval began sweeping across that region almost overnight that finally crashed on the granite walls of East Germany which had remained obstinately impervious to change. (At one point, East Germany’s communist government began blocking Soviet state-run media materials of the *perestroika* and *glasnost* genre from being disseminated in their country and mislead the public opinion.)

Nonetheless, on the frozen ground of a seemingly permanent state of divided Germany, a ray of hope appeared for the first time that a unification of Germany was not necessarily a chimera so long as Gorbachev remained in power in Moscow and his reform programme was continuing. Without doubt, the West lionised Gorbachev with a fair understanding of his susceptibility to flattery. (The vignettes of numerous such incidents lie scattered in Chernyaev’s diary.)

We tend to forget that when West Germany's close NATO allies — Britain and France — began sensing the new stirrings of the “German Question”, they cautioned Gorbachev that he was going too fast for their liking. They pointed out that Europe was simply not ready yet for a unified German nation. The then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher flew down to Moscow for a tête-à-tête with Gorbachev. So did the then French President Francois Mitterand. Thatcher, by the way, was the first western leader to spot Gorbachev as a rising star in Soviet politics in the early 1980s with whom the West could “do business”. But, ironically, when it came to the German Question, Gorbachev disregarded the Anglo-French reservations. The point is, the Soviet Union — as indeed the present day successor state of Russian Federation — had already exorcised from its psyche any revenge mentality or atavistic fears about Germany over the horrific crimes it had perpetrated on the Russian people. (An estimated 25 million Soviet citizens perished in World War 2 following the Nazi invasion.)

On the contrary, Britain and France still believed that a strong Germany was neither in their interests nor in the interests of Europe as a whole. They feared that it was a matter of time before a unified Germany would reassume its role as the top dog in Europe and dominate the continent's politics, as had happened twice already in the 20th century. The US took an ambivalent position, navigating its self-interests largely from the perspective of its transatlantic leadership, making a tough condition that a unified Germany should still remain within NATO. Basically, Lord Ismay's famous dictum about NATO was still at play in the American calculus — that the western alliance system was meant “to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”

Beggars cannot be choosers, and West Germany as the supplicant was willing to settle initially with a Hong Kong-style “one country, two systems” formula, if only Gorbachev would concede the idea of a confederation between West and East Germany. To cut short a long story of “multipolar” diplomatic wrangling, Gorbachev overruled the hardliners within his own Politburo — who of course went on to plot a coup against him within the year that eventually brought the roof crashing down on the Soviet Union — and ignoring the protestations of East Germany, went ahead to strike a deal with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (and US secretary of state James Baker) to wave the green flag for the unification of the two Germanies.

Kohl was so thrilled after the fateful meeting with Gorbachev that according to some accounts, he spent the remaining night walking the streets of Moscow — he couldn't sleep due to the unexpected gift from God. Kohl was a pragmatist who accepted the tough conditions imposed by Germany's western allies for its unification. Thus, in lieu of the Allies relinquishing their post-World War 2 rights over Germany and withdrawing their militaries, Germany would accept the Oder-Neisse Line as its border with Poland and renounce all territorial claims beyond East German territory (effectively renouncing claims over most of Germany's eastern provinces to Poland and the former Soviet Union).

A unified Germany would cap the strength of its armed forces to 370,000 personnel, renounce for all time to come the manufacture, possession of, and

control over nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and accept continued full application of the NPT forever. It will deploy military forces abroad only in accordance with the UN Charter; give up any form of future territorial claims (with a separate treaty reaffirming the present common border with Poland, binding under international law, effectively relinquishing the old German territories such as the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad in the Baltic coast) and so on.

Clearly, nothing was forgotten or forgiven as regards the potential return of German revanchism. But much has changed in the three decades since then. Many fault lines have appeared. For a start, Germany successfully integrated the backward East German part, rebuilt itself with the characteristic German discipline and rigour, and has bounced back as the powerhouse of Europe (which now gets further accentuated with the Brexit and UK's exit from the European Union.) Two, Poland too began surging as a regional power and it has old scores to settle with Germany and Russia. (Poland recently claimed war reparations from Germany and is competing with German leadership of the EU by forming the Vysegrad Group, aspiring to bring former Warsaw Pact countries and the Baltic states under its umbrella.) To add to it, a right-wing nationalist government is in power in Warsaw that militates against the so-called liberal values that Germany espouses, and has eagerly sought the establishment of American military bases units soil.

Meanwhile, German mentality has also changed with regard to Russia, with the departure of an entire generation of politicians at the leadership who were dedicated to ["Ostpolitik", first propounded by Willy Brandt](#), predicated on the belief that a strong relationship with Russia was fundamentally in German interest. The transition from German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to Angela Merkel marked the end of one era of Ostpolitik being the anchor sheet of German policies toward Russia and as a key template of German foreign policy as such.



Fifty years of Ostpolitik: In one of the most iconic gestures of modern European history, Willy Brandt knelt in atonement at the memorial to the heroes of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, December 7, 1970.

Merkel's eyes are cast on Germany's tryst with the leadership of Europe. She began cherry picking Germany's rapprochement with Russia, which was meant to have been a corner stone of the "2+4 Treaty" of 1990.

Beer, pretzels & Bavarian brass-band

All this has added to the tensions over the eastward expansion of NATO toward Russia's borders and the present-day geopolitical contestation unfolding between the US, European Union and NATO on one side and Russia on the other side over the post-Soviet republics along Russia's western borders and the Black Sea and the Caucasus. Russia has been seeking a *modus vivendi* between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union and at one point advanced the concept of a united Europe from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but Merkel is not interested.

Meanwhile, the incipient signs of German militarism have appeared. In a stunning remark in May 2017, while on campaign trail for German elections, Merkel said that Europe can no longer "completely depend" on the US and UK following the election of President Trump and Brexit. "The times in which we could completely depend on others are on the way out. I've experienced that... We Europeans have to take our destiny into our own hands," Merkel told a crowd at an election rally in Munich, southern Germany.

Partly, the remarks might have been "thanks to the beer, pretzels and Bavarian brass-band enlivening the crowd," as a BBC commentator wryly noted on that balmy day in Munich, but what was striking was that Merkel's words were uncharacteristically passionate and unusually forthright. The message resonated all across Europe and Russia: 'By all means keep friendly relations with Trump's America and Brexit Britain — but we can't rely on them.'

This led to some speculation that Germany under Merkel was drifting away from the US. Although, in reality, it was more a matter of the testy relationship between Merkel and President Trump and not at all about her own imminent transformation as a German Gaullist, so to speak. The speculation, in fact, has since died down as quickly as it had surfaced. The fact of the matter is Merkel's generation of German politicians are staunchly "Atlanticist" — as she herself is — who place primacy on "shared liberal values" in the overarching German-American relationship (bypassing Trump) and see it as at the very core of the trans-Atlantic alliance. Thus, they are committed to building a stronger European pillar of NATO. This is twice removed from French President Emmanuel Macron's conception of an independent European force.

Unsurprisingly, they see Russia as antithetical to their value system which is riveted on democratic principles, rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech and so on. They regard as a huge challenge Russia's perceived aggressive, assertive policies and that Russia altered established international boundaries on the doorsteps of Europe not less than four times. Plainly put, they are shell-shocked by Russia's resurgence under President Vladimir Putin.

The western analysts initially pooh-poohed when Putin in 2007, towards the end of his second term in office, appointed Anatoliy Serdyukov—the former head of the Federal Tax Service—as defense minister as part of an effort to combat corruption in the Russian military and carry out reforms. But, as the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict revealed large-scale Russian military operational failures, the Kremlin became more determined to boost military capabilities. Thus, a comprehensive reform programme began touching on all aspects of the Russian armed forces — from the total size of the armed forces to its officer corps and command system, a large-scale 10-year weapons modernisation plan, military budgets, the development of new weapon systems both for strategic nuclear deterrence and conventional forces and the Russian national security strategy and military doctrine itself.

The reform has gone further than any previous efforts in altering the force structure and operations of the Russian armed forces inherited from the Soviet Union. By 2015-2016, western analysts who were initially sceptical began sitting up and taking notice that Russia was in the midst of a major modernisation of its armed forces, driven by Putin's ambition to restore Russia's hard power and supported by the revenues that flowed into the Kremlin's coffers between 2004 and 2014, when the price of oil was high. A Russia specialist at Brookings Steven Pifer wrote in February 2016, "The modernisation programs encompass all parts of the Russian military, including strategic nuclear, nonstrategic nuclear and conventional forces. The United States has to pay attention. Russia... retains the capacity to make significant trouble. Moreover, in recent years the Kremlin has shown a new readiness to use military force." (Pifer was writing soon after the Russian military intervention in Ukraine and Syria.)

To be sure, in a national address in March 2018, Putin announced that Russia's military had tested a group of new strategic weapons aimed at defeating western defence systems. Putin used videos shown on a large screen to present some of the weapons he discussed. He said the new weapons had made the missile defences of the NATO "useless." In a December 2019 speech, Putin disclosed that Russia has become the only country in the world to deploy hypersonic weapons. "Now we have a situation that is unique in modern history when they (West) are trying to catch up to us," he said. "Not a single country has hypersonic weapons, let alone hypersonic weapons of intercontinental range."

Castrated nations and Trojan horses

Suffice to say, Germany's "militarisation" needs to be put in perspective. Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said recently in a conversation with the Atlantic Council that "Russia needs to understand that we are strong and we intend to follow through." She said Germany is committed to meeting 10 percent of NATO requirements by 2030 and a higher defence budget and building up of capability is in Germany's own interest.

However, neither Germany nor Japan is at liberty to plunge headlong into "neo-militarism". Neither has an independent foreign policy. A lot of domestic opposition will have to be overcome first to take to a neo-militarist path. In both

countries, the national discourses are still dominated by post-war pacifism questioning the military and each of its operations. The two countries have voluntary armies; neither is capable of starting a war without American support or concurrence; both are in effect supplementary powers and not major forces on their own steam. Germany doesn't want to get out of NATO, while Japan simply cannot think of life except under the canopy of its military alliance with the US. In the final analysis, both are militarily castrated nations lacking the capacity or the political will, having been the losers in the last world war.

Surely, Russia and China will not be impressed by a fake neo-militarism in Germany or Japan. So, where lies the problem? The answer is that what brings Russia and China closer together is the challenge posed by the alliance systems that the US is assembling on their borders to "contain" them. There is an upsurge of nationalist sentiments both in Poland and in a number of other countries of Central and Eastern Europe with an increasingly anti-Russian overtone. The US is pushing Germany to come to a consensus on Russia with Poland and the Baltic countries, which would of course require that Berlin altogether abandons even a residual pursuit of its traditional Ostpolitik in relation to Moscow, and switches instead to an adversarial mode.

Similarly, in Asia, the US is leading the Quadrilateral Alliance with Japan, India and Australia to encircle China. The US is hoping that the countries of the Asia-Pacific could be turned into an anti-China mode. With India, Washington has made headway, while the southeast Asian nations refuse to choose sides between the US and China, and South Korea sits on the fence.

The US is increasingly resorting to unilateral sanctions against both Russia and China that are not supported by international legal foundations, and is stepping up pressure through the extraterritorial application of national legislation to compel other countries to fall in line with its sanctions regimes and domestic laws, often in contravention of international law and the UN Charter. The European companies working on Russia's \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project have been threatened with US sanctions.

Similarly, there is already talk of the US using sanctions as a weapon to browbeat small countries like Sri Lanka to terminate the Belt and Road projects being undertaken by Chinese companies. In the Indian Ocean region, India plays the role that Poland is playing on the western fringes of Eurasia, as the Trojan horse of the US regional strategies. The regime change last year in the Maldives is being taken to its logical conclusion — the establishment of an American base that supplements Diego Garcia and firms up a "second chain" to monitor and intimidate Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean. The US, with India's backing, is pressing the newly-elected Sri Lankan leadership to quickly ratify the military pacts that have been negotiated, especially a Status of Forces Agreement that paves the way for the stationing of American military personnel on the island, which strategists have described as an aircraft carrier.

Again, the US is unabashedly politicising the international human rights agenda and using human rights issues as a pretext for interfering in the internal affairs of China and Russia. The US has imposed sanctions against Chinese

functionaries and entities in connection with their involvement in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. There is already talk of likely western sanctions against Russia over the alleged poisoning of the Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny. Russia already faces an avalanche of US sanctions on various issues.

The Sino-Russian Alliance Comes of Age - Part 3

26.9.2020

Discourse of shared legacies

The disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991 was a geopolitical disaster for Russia. But the watershed event, paradoxically, prompted Moscow and Beijing, erstwhile adversaries, to draw closer together, as they watched with disbelief the United States' triumphalist narrative of the end of the Cold War, overturning the order they both had regarded, despite all their mutual differences and disputes, as crucial for their national status and identities.

The Soviet collapse resulted in great uncertainty, ethnic strife, economic deprivation, poverty, and crime for many of the successor states, in particular for Russia. And Russia's agony was closely observed from across the border, in China. The policymakers in Beijing studied the experience of Soviet reforms in order to steer clear of the "tracks of an overturned cart." A sense of apprehension over the Soviet collapse might have been there, stemming from the shared roots of the two countries' modernities.

But, looking back, whilst the political discourses in China and Russia on the reasons for the disintegration of the Soviet Union would have shown at times divergent outlooks, the leaderships in Moscow and Beijing succeeded in ensuring that the future of their relationship remained impervious to it.

Soon after becoming the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping is known to have spoken about the former Soviet Union. The first time was in December 2012, when, in comments to party functionaries, he reportedly remarked that China still had to "profoundly remember the lesson of the Soviet collapse." He went on to talk about "political corruption," "thought heresy," and "military insubordination" as reasons for the decline of the Soviet Communist Party. Xi reportedly said, "One important reason was that ideals and beliefs were shaken." In the end, Mikhail Gorbachev just uttered a word, declaring the Soviet Communist Party defunct, "and the great party was gone just like that."

Xi said, "In the end, there was not a man brave enough to resist, no one came out to contest (this decision)." A few weeks later, Xi revisited the topic and reportedly said that one important reason for the Soviet collapse was that the struggle in the ideological sphere was extremely fierce; there was a complete denial of Soviet history, denial of Lenin, denial of Stalin, pursuit of historical Nihilism, confusion of thought; local party organisations were almost without a role. The military was not under the Party's oversight.

In the end, the great Soviet Communist Party scattered like birds and beasts. The great Soviet socialist nation fell to pieces. This is the road of an overturned cart!

In the Russian narrative, the main reason was the failure of the Soviet macro-economic policy. It is easy to see why President Vladimir Putin appeals to China's experience of reform and opening. Putin does not claim to be a Marxist-Leninist; nor does he draw on the Soviet ideology for legitimacy. In his perspective, *perestroika* was well-founded as Gorbachev clearly understood that the Soviet project had run aground. But Gorbachev's new ideas and new policies failed to deliver and led in turn to a deep economic crisis and financial insolvency that ultimately discredited him and destroyed the Soviet state.

Putin had first-hand experience of both the wonders of Soviet socialism as well as its fatal failure to compete with the West in providing the quality of life for the citizens. Probably, Putin returned to St. Petersburg from his post in Dresden utterly disenchanted with communist ideals. Putin was not quite five months old when Stalin died, and for him, the great figures of Marxism-Leninism didn't add up to much.

On the other hand, Xi Jinping experienced China in the grip of a revolution. For Xi, Mao was both a god-like figure and a living person. Xi's own father was Mao's comrade (even if Mao purged him). Xi experienced the Cultural Revolution first-hand. Yet, for him, denying Mao would be like denying a part of himself. Therefore, Xi's rejection of Soviet-style "historical nihilism" comes naturally to him. In Xi's words, "The Soviet Communist Party had 200 thousand members when it seized power; it had 2 million members when it defeated Hitler, and it had 20 million members when it relinquished power... For what reason? Because the ideals and beliefs were no longer there."

But where Putin and Xi Jinping come together is in three things. One is their shared appreciation of China's astonishing sprint to the ranks of an economic superpower. In Putin's words, China "managed in the best possible way, in my opinion, to use the levers of central administration (for) the development of a market economy... The Soviet Union did nothing like this, and the results of an ineffective economic policy impacted the political sphere." The great importance—almost the centrality—that Putin attaches to the economic ties in the overall Sino-Russian partnership falls into perspective.

Second, despite whatever differences there might be in the respective narratives of the two countries regarding the reasons for the Soviet collapse, Putin and Xi are on the same page on the legitimising discourse of revolutionary greatness that the Soviet Union represented. Thus, the Sino-Russian identity is very much on display today in their common stance against the West's attempts to falsify the history of the World War 2.

In a recent interview, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said,

we are witnessing an aggression against history aimed at revising the modern foundations of international law that were formed in the wake of World War 2 in

the form of the UN and the principles of its Charter. There are attempts to undermine these very foundations. They are primarily using arguments that represent an attempt to equate the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany, aggressors who wanted to enslave Europe and turn the majority of the peoples on our continent into slaves with those who overcame the aggressors. We are being insulted by outright accusations that the Soviet Union is more culpable for unleashing WW2 than Nazi Germany. At the same time, the factual side of the matter, such as how it all began in 1938, the policy of appeasing Hitler by the Western powers, primarily France and Great Britain, is thoroughly swept under the rug.

A model alliance of mutual support

China is also experiencing currently a similar trajectory of role reversal—the aggressor becoming prey and the victim being pilloried. A strong sense of empathy with Russia on the part of China is only natural as it too faces predicaments such as being forced to the back foot on the issue of human rights in Xinjiang or being branded as “assertive” when it began reviving in 2015 its historical claims in the South China Sea from where they were abandoned in 1935, in response to the activities of the other littoral states.

It is an open secret that the western intelligence had a big hand in stirring up the unrest in Hong Kong. In fact, the history of the U.S. interference in China’s internal affairs to destabilise the communist government is not new. It goes back to the CIA’s covert activities in Tibet in the fifties and early sixties (which was partly at least responsible for triggering the 1962 China-India conflict). Today, the U.S. is steadily backtracking on its “One-China” policy, which was the bedrock of the Sino-American normalisation in the early 1970s.

Similarly, the U.S. interference in Russian politics that began surging through the late 1980s in the Gorbachev era became blatant and obtrusive in the 1990s following the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The U.S. openly engineered a desired outcome in favour of Boris Yeltsin in the Russian presidential election in 1996—and has openly bragged about financing it and micro-managing it.

Putin has accused the United States of stirring up protests in Russia in 2011 and spending hundreds of millions of dollars to influence Russian elections. Putin said that then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had encouraged “mercenary” Kremlin foes. “She set the tone for some opposition activists, gave them a signal, they heard this signal and started active work,” he alleged.

Invoking Ukraine’s 2004 Orange Revolution and the violent downfall of governments in Kyrgyzstan, Putin has said Western nations were spending heavily to foment political change in Russia. “Pouring foreign money into electoral processes is particularly unacceptable. Hundreds of millions are being invested in this work. We need to work out forms of protection of our sovereignty, defence against interference from outside.” Putin added,

What is there to say? We are a big nuclear power and remain so. This raises certain concerns with our partners. They try to shake us up so that we don't forget who is boss on our planet.

The pattern of interference by the U.S. and its close allies was much the same in Hong Kong—to destabilise China and thwart its rise as a global power. Equally, China faces today the very same pattern Russia experienced of the U.S. creating a network of hostile states surrounding it, encircling it—Georgia, Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic States, etc. Last week, the director of Russia's foreign intelligence service SVR, Sergey Naryshkin stated that Washington had provided about \$20 million for staging anti-government demonstrations in Belarus.

Naryshkin said,

According to the available information, the United States is playing a pivotal role in the current events in Belarus. Though publicly Washington tries to keep a low profile, once the massive street demonstrations began, the Americans stepped up funding to the Belarusian anti-government forces bountifully to the tune of tens of millions of dollars.

He specified,

The demonstrations have been well organised from the very outset and coordinated from abroad. It is noteworthy that the West had launched the groundwork for the protests long before the elections. The United States in 2019 and early 2020 used various NGOs to provide about \$20 million for staging anti-government demonstrations.

Belarus, of course, is the missing link in the arc of encirclement of Russia that the U.S. contrived to put in place. The very same approach is today at work against China, too. The U.S.-led Quadrilateral Alliance (Quad) comprising Japan, India and Australia serve such a purpose.

In earlier years, the Russian-Chinese entente focused exclusively on the bilateral relationship. Incrementally, it moved on to coordination at the foreign-policy level—in a limited way, to begin with—which has steadily intensified.

Russia and China are helping each other to push back at the U.S.' containment policies. Thus, China has openly hailed the election victory of Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko. On Russia's part too, there is much louder criticism of the U.S. attempts to ratchet up tensions in the Asia-Pacific. Foreign Minister Lavrov said on September 11 in Moscow in the presence of the visiting Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi,

We noted the destructive character of Washington's actions that undermine global strategic stability. They are fuelling tensions in various parts of the world, including along the Russian and Chinese borders. Of course, we are worried about this and object to these attempts to escalate artificial tensions. In this context, we stated that the so-called "Indo-Pacific strategy" as it was planned by

the initiators, only leads to the separation of the region's states, and is therefore fraught with serious consequences for peace, security and stability in the Asia-Pacific Region. We spoke in favour of the ASEAN-centric regional security architecture with a view to promoting the unifying agenda, and the preservation of the consensus style of work and consensus-based decision-making in these mechanisms... We are seeing attempts to split the ranks of ASEAN members with the same aims: to abandon consensus-based methods of work and fuel confrontation in this region.

Again, on September 18, in an interview with Nikkei Asian Review in Washington, Russian ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Antonov stated,

We believe that the U.S. attempts to create anti-Chinese alliances around the world are counterproductive. They present a threat to international security and stability... As for the U.S. policy in Asia-Pacific,...Washington promotes anti-Chinese sentiments and its relations with regional countries are based on their support to such an approach... It is difficult to call the Indo-Pacific initiative 'free and open.' More likely it is quite the opposite: this project is non-transparent and non-inclusive... if we talk about the Indian Ocean countries. Instead of well-established norms of the international law Washington promotes there an obscure 'rules based order.' What are those rules, who created them and who agreed to them—all this remains unclear.

These statements suggest that in actual fact, a steady evolution is taking place in the Russian attitude even as the U.S. is ratcheting up pressure on China in the South China Sea and East China Sea.

Foundation for mutual trust

The western propagandists blithely overlook that the Sino-Russian alliance is built on strong foundations. Do not forget for a moment that Xi Jinping's first overseas visit as president of was to Russia—in March 2013, a full year ahead of the Ukraine crisis that led to western sanctions against Moscow. Yet, the western analysts insist that the Russian-Chinese entente was a "pivot" by Russia, ensuing from its estrangement with Europe.

Speaking ahead of the visit to Russia, Xi said the two countries were "most important strategic partners" who spoke a "common language". Xi called Russia a "friendly neighbour", and said that the fact that he was visiting so soon after assuming presidency was "a testimony to the great importance China places on its relations with Russia. China-Russia relations have entered a new phase in which the two countries provide major development opportunities to each other."

In an interview with Russian press on the occasion of Xi's visit, Putin said Russia-China co-operation would produce "a more just world order". Russia and China, he said, both demonstrated a "balanced and pragmatic approach" to international crises. (In an article in 2012, Putin had called for further economic co-operation with China to "catch the 'Chinese wind' in (its) economic sails".)

One significant outcome of Xi's talks with Putin was the formalisation of a direct contact between the two high offices in Moscow and Beijing. In July 2014, Sergei Ivanov, then Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office in the Kremlin and Li Zhanshu, then Head of the Secretariat of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee institutionalised this format when the former visited Beijing.

That was the first ever such format of contact for the Chinese side directly with another country. Li and Ivanov (who was received by Xi Jinping in Beijing) drew up the road map for a multifaceted relationship riveted on intensive top level contacts, and cemented the strategic partnership.

Four years later in a September 2019 visit to Moscow in his new position as Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress, Li Zhanshu said at a meeting with Putin in the Kremlin,

Nowadays, the U.S. is carrying out double containment of China and Russia, as well as trying to sow discord between us, but we can see this very well and will not take that bait. The main reason is that we have a very solid foundation for mutual political trust. We will continue strengthening it and firmly support each other's aspiration to walk down the path of our own development, as well as defending national interests and ensuring the sovereignty and security of the two countries.

Li told Putin,

In the last few years, our relations have reached an unprecedentedly high level. It was possible primarily because of strategic leadership and personal effort of the two leaders. Chinese President Xi Jinping and you are great politicians and strategists who think globally and broadly.

In fact, the joint statement signed by Xi Jinping and Putin on June 5 last year in Moscow during the Chinese leader's state visit to Russia was widely noted as a pivot that elevated the relationship to the new connotation of the China-Russia "comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era".

A Chinese commentator Kong Jun writing in the People's Daily at that time described the June 2019 statement as showcasing "the maturing of a relationship featuring the highest degree of mutual trust, the highest level of coordination and the highest strategic value." Simply put, Xi's state visit Russia last year signalled that the two countries were on the threshold of building allied relations *de facto* though not *de jure*.

A functional military alliance was in the making too by that time. Exactly three months after Xi's state visit to Russia, Putin spoke publicly for the first time about an "alliance" with China—precisely, in front of a domestic audience on September 6, 2019, in Vladivostok. Since then, of course, the messages exchanged between the Russian and Chinese leaders routinely began to underscore their pledge and firm determination to jointly safeguard "global

strategic stability”, as enunciated in the June 2019 joint statement issued after Xi’s state visit.

In October last year, hardly four months after Xi’s state visit to Moscow, while addressing a political conference in Sochi, Putin dropped a bombshell. He disclosed,

We are currently helping our Chinese partners to create a missile attack warning system. It is a serious thing that will drastically increase the defence capabilities of the People’s Republic of China. Right now only the U.S. and Russia have such systems.

A day later, Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov lauded Russia’s “special relations, advanced partnership with China... including in the most sensitive (areas) linked to military-technical cooperation and security and defence capabilities.” Separately, Sergei Boyev, director general of Vympel, Russia’s major weapons manufacturer, confirmed to the state-run media that the company was working on “modelling” the missile attack warning system for China. “We can’t talk in detail about it because of confidentiality agreements,” Boyev said.

Alliance for global strategic stability

Putin’s speech in Sochi in October was hugely significant where he lauded the “unprecedented level of mutual trust and cooperation in an allied relationship of strategic partnership” between Russia and China. Putin noted that the missile-attack early warning system (*Systema Preduprezdenya o Raketnom Napadenii*–SPRN) will be “seriously expanding the PRC’s defence capabilities.”

Also, Putin denounced as futile the U.S. attempts to contain China through economic pressure and by building up Asia-Pacific alliances (Quad) with other regional states. Commenting on Putin’s speech, the pro-Kremlin news site Vzglad flagged that while Moscow and Beijing will not be signing a formal political-military alliance treaty anytime soon, the two countries are de facto allies already, closely coordinating their activities in different areas, building together a new world order that may lead to the eviction of U.S. influence from Asia.

The strategic import of Russia’s transfer of advanced missile early-warning knowhow to China needs to be properly understood. It implied a virtual military alliance. It coincided with a massive Russian military exercise, dubbed Center-2019 (Tsentr-2019), held from September 16 to 21 in Western Russia to which PLA’s Western Theater Command had dispatched an undisclosed number of Type 96A main battle tanks, H-6K strategic bombers, JH-7A fighter bombers, J-11 fighter jets, Il-76 and Y-9 transport aircraft, and Z-10 attack helicopters.

On the Russian side, the exercise reportedly involved 128,000 servicemen, over 20,000 pieces of hardware including 15 warships, 600 aircraft, 250 tanks, about 450 infantry fighting vehicles and armoured personnel carriers, and up to 200 artillery systems and Multiple Launch Rocket Systems. The Russian MOD

stated that the main objectives of the strategic command post exercise was to verify readiness levels of the Russian military and to improve interoperability.

As far back as May 2016, Russia and China had begun their first simulated computer anti-missile defence exercises. An announcement in Moscow at that time described it as “the first joint Russian-Chinese computer-enabled command-staff anti-missile defence exercises”, which was held at the scientific research centre of Russian Aerospace Defense Forces.

The Russian Defense Ministry explained that the exercises’ main goal was to drill “joint manoeuvres and operations of rapid reaction anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence units of Russia and China in a bid to defend the territory from occasional and provocative strikes by ballistic and cruise missiles”. It said,

The Russian and Chinese sides will use the results of the exercises to discuss proposals on Russian-Chinese military cooperation in the field of anti-missile defence.

Therefore, suffice to say, the transfer of the SPRN was far from a “stand alone” event. In plain terms, this is about Russia providing China with an exclusive know-how to both counter U.S. missile strikes as well as to develop “second strike capability” that is crucial to the maintenance of strategic balance.

The SPRN consists of powerful long-range radars with the capability to detect incoming ballistic missiles and warheads. If China buys the more powerful and longer-range S-500 anti-missile system (which Russia is beginning to produce and deploy) in addition to the S-400s, Russia would be in a position to help China build and influence the architecture of a future integrated PLA SPRN and missile-defence capability that will represent for China a strategic stabilising factor vis-a-vis the U.S., providing reliable information on potential American missile launches and calculate their possible impact points.

Plainly put, the Russian system can guarantee for the leadership in Beijing “tens of minutes” of reliable early warning of an imminent enemy missile strike before impact, allowing for appropriate decisions to launch China’s nuclear missiles in a reply salvo.

Clearly, this is a prelude to Russia’s deeper cooperation with China on creating an integrated missile defence system. Importantly, it signifies that Russia is creating a military alliance with China and raising the stakes should the U.S. decide to attack either. A Moscow-based foreign affairs analyst Vladimir Frolov told CBS News,

If the Chinese missile attack warning system will be integrated with Russia’s, we will get increased detection range for the U.S. ballistic missiles launched from submarines in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean, where we have problems with fast detection.

To be sure, the Russia-China alliance is far more nuanced than it first appears. In a rare display of warm personal relations, Xi said in an interview with Russian

media ahead of his trip to Russia in June last year, "I have had closer interactions with President Putin than with any other foreign colleague. He is my best and bosom friend. I cherish dearly our deep friendship." At a ceremony in the Kremlin during the visit, marking the 70th anniversary of Russian-Chinese diplomatic ties, Xi told Putin that China was "ready to go hand in hand with you."

Xi said,

The Russian-Chinese relations, which are entering a new stage, are based on solid mutual trust and strategic bilateral support. We need to cherish the precious mutual trust. We need to boost bilateral support in matters that are critically important to us, to firmly maintain the strategic direction of Russian-Chinese relations despite all kinds of interference and sabotage. The Russian-Chinese relations, which are entering a new era, serve as a reliable guarantee of peace and stability on the globe.

Conclusion

The U.S. National Security Strategy document dated December 2017, the first of its kind in the Trump presidency, characterised Russia and China as "revisionist" powers. The concept of revisionism is flexible enough to hold various meanings that typically distinguish between states that accept the *status quo* distribution of power in the international system and those which seek to alter it to their advantage.

Quintessentially, Russia and China contest a set of neoliberal practices that have evolved in the post-World War 2 international order validating selective use of human rights as a universal value to legitimise western intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. On the other hand, they also accept and continuously affirm their commitment to a number of fundamental precepts of the international order—in particular, the primacy of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, the importance of international law, and the centrality of the United Nations and the key role of the Security Council.

Critically, Russia and China have acted as rule takers rather than challengers in their participation in the global financial institutions. China is a leading exponent of globalisation and free trade. In sum, Russia and China's view of the operation of the international system conforms in a large part to Westphalian precepts.

In geopolitical terms, nonetheless, the U.S. National Security Strategy document of December 2017 says,

China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity... China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests. China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region... Russia aims to weaken U.S. influence in the world and divide us from our allies and partners... Russia is investing in new military capabilities, including nuclear systems that remain the most significant existential threat to the United States.

Admittedly, the previous “model alliance” between Russia and China has evolved into a “real alliance” today. The internal dynamics of China-Russia relations has become increasingly strong and exceeds any influences from the external international environment. The expanding strategic partnership has already brought comprehensive benefits to both countries and has become a common strategic asset. At the same time, it strengthens their respective status on the international stage and provides basic support for the diplomacy of both countries.

The heart of the matter is that the Russia-China alliance does not conform to the norms of a classic alliance system. For want of a better way of characterising it, one may call it a “plug-in” alliance. In the normal life, it can perform a range of “customisable options” while also provide support for any specific functionality that may arise. It enjoys a great deal of flexibility. The Russia-China alliance has no intention to militarily confront the U.S. But its posturing is geared to deter a U.S. attack on either, or both. Simply put, a race of attrition is on. And it is going to be more and more frustrating for the U.S., as Russia has lately moved in to challenge the so-called “Indo-Pacific strategy”.

The Russian criticism of “Indo-Pacific strategy” has become strident. This is happening at a time when tensions are rising in the Taiwan Straits and the Quad plans to hold a meeting for the first time in Japan in October.

On September 17, the Kremlin expressed alarm that “the military activities of non-regional powers” (read the U.S. and its allies) are causing tensions and the Eastern Military District based in Khabarovsk, one of Russia’s four strategic commands, is being reinforced with a mixed aviation division command unit and an air defence brigade.

The U.S. cannot win this contestation by its very nature. The Quad is useless since three out of its four members—Japan and India—have no reason to regard Russia as a revisionist power or to be hostile toward it. Some American pundits say the answer lies in the U.S. reverting to its transatlantic ties, which Trump neglected, and Biden can energise Euro-Atlanticism in Europe overnight. But that is not as simple as it sounds.

The point is, as the former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer once wrote, the growing transatlantic “rift” is borne out of an alienation—a mix of disagreements, lack of mutual trust and respect, and divergent priorities—that dates back to the pre-Trump era, and it will not end even after a new incumbent enters the White House. Besides, there are many European states who do not share the U.S.’ hostility toward Russia and China.

The paradox of the Sino-Soviet alliance lies here. The U.S. cannot overwhelm that alliance unless it defeats both China and Russia together, simultaneously. The alliance, meanwhile, also happens to be on the right side of history. Time works in its favour, as the decline of the U.S. in relative comprehensive national power and global influence keeps advancing and the world gets used to the “post-American century.”

Clearly, the leaderships in Moscow and Beijing weaned on dialectical materialism have done their homework while building their alliance attuned to the 21st century.