

A new epoch of Sino-Russian relations and their regional and global influence

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The aim of this article is to describe direction of Sino-Russian relations toward a new epoch – as the decision-making centers of both countries define them - indicating the commitment to building the future international order. It includes the synthesis of evolution of relations, descriptions of cooperation building of mutual confidence by both sides in variety of institutions; analyses of geo-economic relations emphasizing their geostrategic dimension and finally dynamics showing how two great powers want to achieve new areas of cooperation focused on building multipolar world order which is the essence of “new epoch”. The argument goes towards recognizing the relationship as a “hybrid alliance”. This hybridity is a structural factor that can constrain the use of new dimensions of asymmetric interdependence as political leverage especially by United States against the two non-western powers but also facilitate to use it against West.

Keywords: China, Russia, new epoch, hybrid alliance, multipolar world order, geoeconomy geostrategy, geopolitics

1. Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the unipolar world order was run under the leadership of the USA. Russia lost their prominent positions at the global scale and China was opening up to global capital. The American dominance spread all over the world and its intervention into the domestic affairs of many other countries increased, as well. Theoretically, acceptance of "pax americana" terminated at the end of the 1990s, as expressed by joint declarations of Moscow and

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Beijing. However, it can be assumed with some caution that the years 2012-2014 are the beginning of a real challenge to the hegemony of the United States. This is related to the assumption of the presidency in Russia for a third term by Vladimir Putin and the coming to power of Xi Jinping in China. In a symbolic move, the Russian president chose not to travel to the G-8 summit in Washington, D.C., shortly after his inauguration in 2012 and instead made his first foreign trip to China. In response to the growing position of the People's Republic of China, the United States is developing processes aimed at weakening the Middle Kingdom. China, however, has found a very close friend that also aims to build a multipolar world, the Russian Federation.

The aim of this article is to describe direction of Sino-Russian relations toward a new epoch indicating the commitment to building the future international order. Thus, it is necessary to show their dynamics of change in the shifting international context.

The relationship of the two powers, was described in the official narrative as a "comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new epoch". Meanwhile, it is essential to establish what both countries call "the new epoch". As it seems it is a new order that is emerging after the end of the unipolar hegemony of the United States and the domination of the West. It can be assumed that it started in practice with the Chinese announcement of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in 2013 and Maidan in Kiev in 2014 which has shifted the geopolitical axis of Eurasia. New epoch means also new forms of asymmetric competition. Therefore, we face a new phenomenon, the hybrid alliance between Russia and China (Vavilov, 2021a, 2021b). This hybridity is a structural factor that can constrain the use of new dimensions of asymmetric interdependence as political leverage especially by United States against the two non-western powers but also facilitate to use it against West.

A significant number of researchers describe the matter in terms of "either an alliance or not" (Trenin, 2019; Zhongping & Jing 2014) it is often believed that Russia would play a role of a junior partner (Sutter 2017) or join an anti-Chinese coalition (Mearscheimer, 2019, p. 456); for autocracies are not able to form alliances the way democracies are (Kroenig, 2020, p. 155-224); Russia's alliance with China is improbable but not impossible (Saradzhyan, 2020). The Bobo Lo's ambiguous term "an axis of convenience" (Lo, 2008) is still in use (Lubina, 2017), repeated later in another form as "grand alignment of the aggrieved" (Allison, (2018) gained popularity in this respect. Authoritative Russian thinkers called it as "an almost allied relationship" (Karaganov & Suslov, 2018). In my research to date, I have called it a counter-hegemonic alliance (Cimek, 2019a, 2019b).

Article try to find answers to the following questions: What is understood by the so called "new epoch"? Does it mean we are witnessing an alliance between China and Russia? Are they ready to make use of expanding networks of interdependence to fulfill, their individual and allied geopolitical goals? The answers to these questions are the main goal of the article. The spectrum of the research should cover the entire issue, relations along many dimensions: threat perceptions, relationship between leaders, official designation of the other, military and

intelligence cooperation, economic entanglement, diplomatic coordination and elites' orientation. but due to objective limits, we will focus on a selected aspect.

The article is divided into four parts. The first section discusses synthesis of evolution of relations based on official documents. The second section describes new institutions as the basis for a new epoch. Next one focused on geo-economic relations showing the growing interdependence; this part highlights the combination of quantitative and qualitative factors explains the real meaning of „new epoch”. Fourth section will analyze actual dynamics showing how two superpowers want to achieve new areas of cooperation focused on building multipolar world order. Finally, a summary of considerations can be found in the fifth section.

On a conceptual note, I am drawing on the perspective of the geopolitics of critical realism (Cimek 2017) which is a methodological way of considering theoretical issues in relation to empirical content. It comprises critical realism at the level of research philosophy, assuming that the world consists not only of events, experiences, impressions, and discourses, but also of structures, forces, and tendencies that exist regardless of whether we detect them and how we do so (through experience and/or discourse). The indicated pattern of science is the basis for the application of the theory of international relations.

Neoliberal theories put emphasis on economic interdependence and common values, which are regulated by international institutions that build trust and ensure cooperation. In turn, neorealist theories emphasizing the military-political dimension of the structure of the international system, mainly focus on states. Their one-sidedness is concealed by showing the ways in which the stronger state uses economic asymmetry against the weaker state (Farrell & Newman, 2019). However, the Eurocentrism of neoliberalism and the state-centrism of neorealism ought to be rejected. Firstly, these powers represent non-western civilizations and their own system of values, and secondly, contemporary globalization has created a new quality in which the geoeconomics and geopolitical aspects as well as the activity of the transnational corporate class create new dimensions of international influence.

2. The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relationship

After the collapse of the USSR, Sino-Russian relations began to improve. In 1994, a "constructive partnership" was established which two years later was turned into a "strategic partnership" confirmed by a joint "Declaration on a Multipolar World" adopted in 1997. In 2001, Russia and China signed a "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation". In this treaty, Putin and Jiang committed their joint effort to promote a just and fair new world order adhering to the rule "friends forever, enemies never". The highlights, such as growing contradiction between Russia and the US at that time and Vladimir Putin's speech in Munich in 2007, in which he criticized unilateralism, were found to be a breeding ground for cooperation. Therefore, in 2011, the bilateral relationship was transformed into a "comprehensive strategic partnership for coordination" based on equality, mutual trust, mutual support, shared prosperity and friendship. Russia and China have undertaken ambitious projects to integrate the Eurasian markets. The first step was signing The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as a step towards building

the Eurasian Union. China, in turn, promoted the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), also known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative, which thanks to China's financial potential is to integrate Eurasia, both physically and economically, with China as a core of the project.

The two initiatives differed to a great extent and even clashed in many ways. The possibility to start a "new Big Game", this time between Russia and China in Central Asia, was considered. And that bring us to a new epoch – that started in practice with the Chinese announcement of the BRI in 2013 and Maidan in Kiev in 2014. The Ukraine crisis has shifted the geopolitical axis of Eurasia. It has directly weakened Russia and China begin to realize that if Russia would overthrown, the West will control all their natural resources, and – most important - it may have turned out that under pressure and sanctions, Moscow would change its geopolitical vector to anti-Chinese (Baldwin & Heartsong, 2015). Therefore Beijing supported Russia by signing long-term contracts for the purchase of gas and oil.

In these new geopolitical conditions, both powers signed a declaration on opening a new stage of strategic partnership at the Shanghai summit held in 2015. Its principle was the pursuit of symbiosis between the Russian project of Eurasian integration and the Chinese project of the BRI (Sovmestnoye, 2014). The new stage of relations was crowned with the idea of "Greater Eurasia" and the narrative of the "greater Eurasian partnership" initiated by President Vladimir Putin in 2016. Its essence is a broad integration framework stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific that involves the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and all other countries of the Eurasian continent, including the EU countries. It was aimed at keep up the dynamic development of the national economies and to remove obstacles to the movement of goods, capital, labor and services, but it will also create a solid foundation of security and stability throughout the vast region from Lisbon to Jakarta.

At the same time, in the sphere of narration, both sides retain restraint, reminiscent of Deng Xiaoping's strategy. Recent Russian and Chinese documents refer to relations as “comprehensive, equal and trust-based partnership and strategic cooperation” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2016) and “comprehensive strategic partnership, (China and Russia, 2013). respectively, but contain no language on “alliance” or “allied relations”. In the "The PRC White Papers" published in January 2017, nothing indicated that China was aspiring to be build alliance with Russia; among the priorities, relations with the US were on the first place (China's Policies, 2017). Moreover, the joint statement on developing the two countries’ “comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction in a new epoch,” adopted during Xi Jinping’s 2019 June visit to Russia, explicitly says the bilateral relationship will be based on a “repudiation of establishing allied relations, [and of] confrontation, and [on] not being directed against third parties”, among other principles (Sovmestnoye, 2019).

The advent of a new epoch brings a new quality moment: the start of the US trade war against China in 2018. The former US President Trump saw Beijing as the main threat to

American hegemony, weakening the existing anti-Russian geopolitical vector. He also rejected the missionary vision of the US as a promoter of democracy and human rights in favor of superpower competition for spheres of influence. However, after Trump's presidency had ended, the incumbent President Biden returned to the previous course and indicated that the US should remain a world leader promoting democracy around the globe.

3. New Institutions as the Basis for a New Epoch

Shanghai Cooperation Organization established in 2001 with a regional reach only and focused on security issues, was able to develop into an intergovernmental international organization dealing with geoeconomic, geopolitical and military aspects. In addition to cooperation in the field of defense and security, combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, the Business Council, the Interbank Consortium, the Energy Club and other bodies of regional economic cooperation were created. However, Moscow is holding back Chinese attempts to create a free trade zone.

By contrast, the geopolitical dimension of the SCO reveals the meaning of a new epoch, especially with the joining of India and Pakistan. The former state was supported by Russia, and the latter by China, which means that the specter of strengthened "Pax Sinica" has been negated. It's something quite remarkable that two members of the SCO — China and India — could be experiencing such extreme tensions in their bilateral relationship but still gather for the SCO. As India and China stand on the [brink of war](#) in the Himalayas, their foreign ministers gathered in Moscow.

Enlargement led to the creation of the "The Group of Eight" states, striving for global and regional security based on respect for cultural and civilization diversity and the recognition of the right to sovereignty. After all, it covers 40% of the world's population and 60% of the Asian mainland; it generates about 20% of global GDP, and according to the purchasing power parity it is already equal to the G-7 group (International Comparison Program, 2018). Thus, we observe the emergence of the "collective East", who wants to actively participate in shaping the idea of the "common fate" of mankind in accordance with the declaration adopted at the last summit in 2018 in Qingdao (Tsindaoskaya deklaratsiya, 2018).

Another example of building common institutions is the BRICS group, which brings together four powers: Brazil, China, Russia, India and since 2011 South Africa, which strive for a multipolar world (Kozlowskij&Komarov& Makruszin, 2013; Laying the BRICS, 2013), but also propose a new paradigm for globalization (Cimek, 2017b). An undeniable qualitative achievement within this activity, that cannot go unnoticed, was the establishment of two economic institutions: the New BRICS Development Bank and the Currency Reserve Fund. BRICS, just as it is in case of SCO, is not limited to economic issues. In 2018, the 10th summit was held in Johannesburg, and on the occasion of an intelligence forum. For the first time, instead of the threat of terrorism and cybercrime, most of the speeches were devoted to the US's attempts to impose its ideology and vision of the world. There are around 100 BRICS-related meetings on economic, political, civil society and culture topics per year in the country where the

summit takes place. Many studies indicate that the BRICS is a way of lobbying Chinese interests, or even an attempt to rebuild the world in Chinese. However, the intensity of the India-China border conflicts and Brazil's pro-American return during the Bolsanaro presidency weakened the BRICS as a counter-hegemonic force (Vieira & Ouriques 2016).

Moreover, in 2014 China created another instrument of competition by establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with a capital of \$ 100 billion. What is particularly conspicuous and cannot pass unnoticed is that among the AIIB founders there are all the BRICS countries ranked the first three places in the share: China holds 29.8%, India 8.9% and Russia 6.5%, which has been recognized by Beijing as an Asian state, thanks to which it will receive more votes (Asian, 2018). The bank aims at providing financial support for underdeveloped Asian countries in the fields of transport, telecommunications, agriculture, water supply and sanitation, environmental protection, sources of energy, as well as urban development and logistics. The head office has been located in Beijing, although unlike the World Bank and the IMF, China has given up its veto, symbolically distinguishing itself from the hegemonic stance of the US. This way the AIIB may be the BRI's broader plan to win allies, or gain more control in Eurasia and Africa. Contrary to fierce protests from the United States, all major Western states joined.

Since coming to power in 2013, Xi Jinping has met Vladimir Putin 36 times, more than any other foreign leader. Five intergovernmental committees and several dozen subcommittees meet regularly. China and the Russian Federation have developed a similar position in the fight against international terrorism and extremism, support each other in the sovereignty of the Internet and many other issues. Regular contacts were established between the administration of the President of the Russian Federation and the office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Recapitulating the effects of cooperation, it is necessary to emphasize the agreement of both countries on important international issues i.e.: in the conflict in Syria and Venezuela they support effectively legitimate governments; in Ukraine - despite the fact that China does not support the annexation of Crimea by Russian Federation, both countries condemn the "color revolutions", considering them to be hybrid forms of realizing the geopolitical interests of the West (e.g. Euromaidan, Hong Kong); the situation on the Korean Peninsula; Iran's nuclear issues; fight against terrorism and providing peace and stability in the region. It is worth adding that during voting in the UN Security Council, the stance of both states overlaps up to 98 percent, and Russia has backed all Chinese vetoes since 2007.

4. Geoeconomic Relations and Their Strategic Dimension

The processes of globalization have resulted in a much greater international activity of most countries towards the geoeconomic sphere which is of a higher order due to its internal structure features determined by technological, trade, production and financial relations. If a state's activity is focused on geoeconomic sphere and pursues economic goals, it provides better conditions for

development. Taking a closer look at the dimension of Russian-Chinese relations is necessary to notice how they are heading towards the "new epoch". However, while watching their path, we need differentiate between quantitative factors and qualitative factors that reveal also strategic dimension.

In 2019 at the Valdai Discussion Club Putin said. "This is an allied relationship in the full sense of a multifaceted strategic partnership. This is reflected in the economy." (Putin, 2019a). As it used to be in the nineteenth century, both powers are now anxious to break free from dependence on Western capital and the economic drain. Putin's vision of a "greater Europe" from Lisbon to Vladivostok, made up of the European Union and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, is being replaced by a "greater Asia" from Shanghai to St. Petersburg. But in the new epoch, both powers go further, proposing "Greater Eurasia" as far as Lisbon (Putin, 2019b).

When it comes about quantitative factors Russia's trade turnover with the PRC in 2012 and 2013 amounted to USD 89 billion. In 2014, they reached USD 95 billion - six times more than in 2003. With the overall investment of USD 13.6 billion into Russian economy, China was ranked 2nd on the list of external investors. In May 2015, Moscow and Beijing announced that the trade turnover between them would increase to USD 100 billion in 2015 and to USD 200 billion in 2020. It is already known that these were too optimistic forecasts, because in 2015 there was a collapse, and only later only a slow increase was observed. In 2016, the value of the exchange was USD 70 billion, and in 2017, USD 84 billion. In 2018, the turnover amounted to USD 108 billion. China is Russia's largest trading partner, while Russia ranks only 10th on the Chinese list of partners (the US is the leader). Over 75 percent of Russian exports to the PRC are raw materials, especially crude oil, wood and coal. In turn, Chinese export to Russia accounts for 45% of consumer goods and 38% of electronics and machinery. 15% of Russia's trade turnover is accounted for China, and 30% for the EU (Warsaw Institute, 2019).

The level of Chinese investment in Russia is still low, although its dynamics reflects the geopolitical breakthrough observed in 2014. It looks as follows, counting in billions of dollars: in 2009 - 2.22; 2010- 2.79; 2011 - 3.76; 2012 - 4.89; 2013 - 7.58; 2014 - 8.69; and from 2015 – 14.02; 2016 - 12.98; 2017- 13.87; 2018 -14.21; 2019 12.80. Under the coronavirus crisis, Chinese investment in 2020 was just \$ 0.32 billion, out of \$ 163 billion worldwide. Despite the open strategic rivalry between the West and Russia, it needs to be pointed out that as far as the investments in Russia in 2020 are concerned, the level of investment made by the West greatly outnumbered Chinese ones and totaled in US dollars as follows: the USA - 4.59, Germany -19.49, France -18.65, Switzerland 16.17 and the Netherlands 49.25 billion (Total FDI stock, 2021). This quantitative dimension of geoeconomic relations illustrates marginalization of Russia in Beijing's strategy. From this point of view, China's reluctance to strengthen Russian economy with greater investments is remarkable. It is likely that Chinese entrepreneurs and state-owned companies are rather reserved or cautious and refrain from investing in Russia, especially in its financial sector, which is also related to Western sanctions. On other hand, symptomatic was the signing of a 10-year negotiated contract for the supply of Russian gas to China shortly after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. One year before it was established that Russia will also supply 46 million

tons of oil annually to China over the next 25 years. China and Russia are also tightening cooperation in the field of nuclear energy (Chen, 2021).

When it comes about qualitative factors the key to understand the herald of the "new epoch" is the start of the US trade war against China in 2018; however, Moscow has never officially sided with Beijing (Putin, 2018). The PRC's trade with the US and the EU is more than five times greater than Russia's, which makes its geo-economic space more vulnerable to attacks by the US and its allies, and thus reveals the geostrategic aspect. As Russian economy is less advanced and less tied with the world economy, it has less to lose in the event of a global crisis. In such circumstances, China therefore needs a reliable ally.

Above all, it should be emphasized that Russia sided with China in the first digital war. Russia's decision to use Huawei equipment in its 5G trials was announced the moment when the Chinese company was receiving more scrutiny by Western markets. The deal between the Russian telecom MTS and the Chinese Huawei regarding the development of the 5G network in Russia was signed during Xi's visit to Moscow in 2019, further underscoring its symbolic importance. Putin called the US pressure on Huawei "the first technological war of the digital age" (Hillman, 2020, p. 8).

A significant element of technological cooperation was an agreement on cooperation for the peaceful use of satellite systems signed in November 2018 between Russian "Glonass" and Chinese "Beidou". The agreement laid foundations for the creation of common Russian-Chinese satellite navigation standards and improvement of their accuracy. This step also demonstrates an increased level of trust. As it is in the United States, constellations of navigation satellites will be used by the Russian Federation and China for reconnaissance and precision weapon targeting.

Another example of a change in Russia's attitude towards China is the sale of weapons, which has been a key element in their relationship since the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, Russia stopped selling the latest military technology, fearing being copied and resold to other countries. Moscow changed its mind and in April 2015 Moscow sold 6 battalions of the S-400 anti-missile systems to China; and in November 2015 - 24 Su-355 fighters. However, in 2013-2017, India became the largest customer of Russian military industry (35 per cent of Russian arms exports), opposite to China (12 per cent); Turkey and India also bought the latest S-400 equipment, and Qatar and Saudi Arabia are waiting for the decision. Although China was the first to buy Russia's most advanced Su-35 combat aircraft, Indonesia, Egypt and India are also thinking about its purchase (Warsaw, 2019, p. 9). As for Russian arms sales to China, it is becoming an asset that balances Beijing's economic advantages. The two countries can complement each other.

In the sphere of geo-economics, currency is a strategic resource. The motor for US hegemony is ability to control the dollar as the world currency. That is why it is so important that both China and Russia are moving towards de-dollarization. The Russian Central Bank drastically reduced the share of the US dollar in its international reserves, reducing it to 34.4 percent. At the same time, the share of the euro and the Chinese Yuan increased to 32 percent and 14.7 percent,

respectively. Russia now has almost 10 times more Yuan than the average of other central banks, which is about a quarter of the world's total Yuan reserves. But without the slightest doubt the China's activity is a decisive factor in the direction towards de-dollarization. 2021 brings the digital Yuan - a central bank currency based on blockchain technology and cryptographic technologies. Its aim is to increase the circulation and its international reach, along with the hope of making it a global currency.

Another important factor in the asymmetric geo-economic conflict is the international payment system. The US and the EU proved that it can be used for geopolitical purposes. A good example is an attack on Iran (Farrell & Newman 2019). Therefore, the direction of the strategic cooperation between Beijing and Moscow is demonstrated by alternatives to the Brussels-based SWIFT system that are nascent but notable. China has been more successful in attracting international participation to its version, the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS). As of April 2020, CIPS has participants in 95 countries. Russia's version, the System for the Transfer of Financial Messages (SFPS), only expanded to include members of the EAEU last year. After Japan, Russia has the second-largest number of banks using China's CIPS payment system. Western sanctions are a major driver for these alternatives, which deserve more attention and caution from U.S. policymakers. Fearing its disconnection from SWIFT, Russia announces full de-dollarization and an alternative to SWIFT in cooperation with China.

Important place in the development of strategic dimension of the geoeconomic space is revealed by the design of the Northern Sea Route. It runs along the northern coast of Russia and connects the Far East with the European part of the federation. Russia, as the only country in the world, owns technology that allows navigation in those waters i.e. the largest fleet of icebreakers ever built in the world: 5 nuclear and 39 diesel-electric ones.

The North Sea Route also combines geo-economic and geostrategic content. First of all, the route would cut transport costs, speed up deliveries by almost a third and would be safer as pirates do not operate on those waters. The second of all, more raw materials required by the Chinese economy could be discovered; third of all, it goes in line with the Chinese BRI, as the American power projection is rather limited in that area. Current sea routes, such as the Strait of Malacca, that are used to supply raw materials and for import-export purposes, are vulnerable elements of China's energy security. It is a reasons that China has vowed to actively participate in Arctic affairs as a "Near-Arctic State" and has been an observer of the Arctic Council since 2013 (Arctic Council, 2020). In view of the above the major component of this plan is to build a Polar Silk Road, a network of trade routes through the Arctic to help expedite global shipping delivery. It is very probable that technological difficulties will be overcome over time, but due to the fact the BRI is planned to be finalized in 2049 therefore it has a strategic dimension for China (Yiwei, 2016).

Russia's strategic interests are convergent with China's. This route will allow the development of Russian hydrocarbon exports to China, for example liquefied natural gas. Especially since Russia pushed out of Western LNG markets by the US. Moscow's strategic goal should be to turn the Northern Sea Route into one of the world's most important trade routes and

use this waterway for the development of Russia's northern regions and the Far East insofar as its security and sovereignty are not jeopardized. Asian countries — China, Japan, South Korea, and even India — are also increasingly interested in the Arctic, a development serving Russia's interests.

In the geopolitical dimension, certainly the described dimensions of cooperation effectively undermine the dominance of the West, but the stakes are higher. Its most fundamental aim is to build an alternative economic model. "From today's U.S. vantage point, that polarization is the basic dynamic of today's U.S.-sponsored neoliberalism. China and Russia are existential threats to the global expansion of financialized rentier wealth. Today's Cold War 2.0 aims to deter China and potentially other countries from socializing their financial systems, land and natural resources, and keeping infrastructure utilities public to prevent their being monopolized in private hands to siphon off economic rents at the expense of productive investment in economic growth" (Hudson, 2021). And this is a feature that distinguishes the shape of the new epoch in relations between Beijing and Moscow.

5. Toward "new epoch"

The strategic competition aiming at building a multipolar world is the essence of the "new epoch" of Sino-Russian relations. Literature describes it as a hybrid, asymmetric war – "a new type war". It displays the attributes of unrecognizability, difficulty in determining the beginning and the end, concealing the fact of using various economic and financial instruments, making use of information and diplomatic methods, and activities in cyberspace. Last but not least, the frequent involvement of entire societies. In this war, military action is limited to the absolute minimum (Surdyk, 2017, p. 86-92). Although an official definition of the hybrid war has not been coined yet, the category has been popularized by NATO and the EU claiming that this type of activity is taken by Russia in the Ukrainian crisis using integrated combinations of conventional and unconventional methods (Caliskan & Liégeois, 2020). At the same time, Beijing and Russia have already accused the West of similar methods, pointing to the use of "color revolution" technology to change regimes into pro-Western, for example in Ukraine, Georgia and Hong Kong.

The speech of the US Secretary of State Mike in July of 2020 made clear to everyone that the United States was openly proclaiming the need to defeat China and change their political system (Pompeo 2020). A key element of this geostrategy is to strengthen the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) alliance (Sakhuja, 2021), which, apart from Japan and Australia, effectively distracts India from the formats of cooperation with China based on the idea of multipolarity, i.e. BRICS, RIC, and SCO. The role of the UN and international law is being weakened in favor of ad hoc partnerships concerning various international problems, where the West creates particular norms legitimized by the narrative of "ruled based order" (Speech, 2021). Another tool to weaken China and isolate Russia is the Indo-Pacific strategy.

As a part of the game, other Asian countries, that perceive China as a greater threat than the United States, are being drawn into the anti-Chinese coalition and causing disruption in China (Mearsheimer 2019, 459 - 463). The importance of Russia as an ally is also growing due to its arms export to India and Vietnam, which also stands in the way of Chinese opportunities. The US may even exempt India from sanctions on Russian arms purchases to stimulate the distance between Beijing and Moscow (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2021). Thus, it is hard to believe in the deliberations about the threat to Russia by China. For the time being, Russian military potential is able to destroy China's energy centers causing inevitable collapse of the whole industry. It is worth to underscore that Russia has improved much its armed potential since the 1990s, and at that time China did not want to occupy the Far East.

It means that the new epoch will bring new geopolitics where tensions with the West will create new kind of cooperation known as “ hybrid alliance”. It is a new type of alliance that leaves sovereignty as a base value (Vavilov, 2021b). President Putin clearly stated that “without sovereignty, Russia cannot be a state” and highlighted that "Russia's equal and mutually beneficial relations with China currently serve as an important factor of stability in international affairs and in terms of Eurasian security, offering a model of productive economic cooperation" (Putin, 2019b). Russia does not have to be active and exposed to the consequences if China invaded Taiwan, and by analogy, Beijing does not have to interfere in Ukraine. At the same time, we can observe a common military cooperation. China took part in Russia's Vostok-2018 wargames — the first time the Chinese army participated in its Russian counterpart's annual strategic military exercises (Osborn, 2018). Moreover, the navies of both countries held their first joint maneuvers in the Mediterranean in 2015 and in the Baltic in 2017. Russian warships also attended Chinese military operations and training at the South China Sea which can be perceived as a significant support considering that China claims the sea in its entirety, while its neighbor states strongly oppose to that.

Hybridity, generally speaking, allows ally countries to pursue their national interests, through mutual support and coordination of foreign policy, in order to optimally maneuver in the conditions of prevailing instability of the international environment in which no single power can be a global hegemon. Therefore, there will be no "permanent force" active, nor will there be any will to create a global security organization. But –what is very important - it is supposed to be cemented by a "unique community of values" (Bhadrakumar, 2018).

The various aspects of a hybrid alliance are becoming more and more visible. One of the them is the high-level talks between American representatives and the Chinese Government on March 19, 2021 in Anchorage, Alaska. For the first time, Chinese officials accused the United States so openly of using its military and financial advantage to put pressure on other countries, including China, suggesting that the United States should end its messianic geopolitics based on the export of democracy (Chiny, 2019). The day after, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, rejected Western criticism on human rights and issued a joint statement offering an alternative vision for global governance (Lawrow 2021). The feedback of that meeting remains unprecedented, and not only for its rhetoric function. A few days later, Russia began to amass troops along the border with Ukraine – to a

much larger scale than during the annexation of Crimea in 2014. At the same time, China began to conduct widely publicized military exercises and air raids on the so-called Taiwan Air Defense Identification Zone (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2021).

The considerations of American theorists and practitioners prove that Russia and China create something more than a strategic partnership. Such conclusions are suggested by the report of the American intelligence community (Statement, 2019). Some have suggested that President Donald Trump's benign view of Russia, in reality is a carefully thought out cover for a strategy designed to split it from China and thus shift the geopolitical balance in Eurasia in favor of the United States (Tisdall, 2016). A former ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, pointed out that an important task was to separate China from Russia (McFaul, 2018). All that generates long-run disagreements and persistent opinion fluctuations among practitioners. Jim Mattis, a former-U.S. Secretary of Defense, said in June 2018 that "there is little in the long term that aligns Russia and China," but the head of the U.S. national intelligence, Daniel Coats, told legislators in January 2019 that Russia and China "are more aligned than at any point since the mid-1950s" (Osborn, 2018).

Due to the growing antagonistic contradictions between the two countries and the US, even the G-7, a new document will be signed on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the good-neighborly agreement. Minister Lavrov in a diplomatic manner pointed out that both sides are not planning a "classical military alliance", like NATO, but the new epoch of multipolarity creates a new quality in the international system and therefore Chinese-Russian relations will be "perhaps even closer" than if it were a classic alliance (Spetsial'nyy vypusk, 2021).

6. Summary

From the beginning of the 21st century, cooperation and coordination, as well as the joint narrative of Russia and China, were growing, which was manifested by activity in many institutions. The projects of the Eurasian Union and the Chinese BRI, which originally were treated as competitive, have become the binder of building a new epoch of building the greater Eurasian partnership (Yilmaz & Changming 2020). It is a manifestation of the construction of a multipolar world and the end of US hegemony. The ultimate aim of the hybrid alliance politics played by Moscow and Beijing is to pave way for the world where all the countries get equal priority and importance. Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS are the major groupings, which balances the United States' presence in central Asia and the later denounces the prestige of international financial institutions such as WB and IMF led by the US.

While in 2014 one must agree that Russia abandoned its attempts to balance China and chose to join its development in order to remain in the game of world powers. Moscow recognized that the West as the greatest threat to Russia's sovereignty. The US initiation of a trade war and the process of weakening China changed the situation because rapprochement with Russia also became a strategic necessity for Beijing.

Chinese investments in Russia have increased since the Ukrainian crisis, but they are still relatively low, which raises questions about the reasons for this state of affairs. At the same time, Russia started selling new military technologies to China, without giving up on supplying them to Beijing's Asian rivals, which allows it to maintain its geostrategic advantages. Moscow also benefits from the development of the Northern Sea Route. In relations between the two powers, the economic and technological asymmetry in favor of China is therefore counterbalanced by Moscow's strategic advantages. Russia is becoming China's greatest mainstay against the growing pressure from Washington. This is how the conditions of the "new epoch" in relations between the two Eurasian powers have been shaped.

The multidimensional interdependencies with the West resulting from several decades of capitalist globalization link both entities with the West and hinder the process of building a "classic alliance". New forms of competition mean that we face a new phenomenon, the hybrid alliance. Support and assistance for the other party are not pledged and taken a priori, but they rather depend on dynamically changing regional and global situation. After all, China is more entwined into the global economy than Russia, while its geopolitical problems result from the need to defend its position in the post-Soviet reality. Mutual benefits and separate advantages make it impossible to talk about a junior-senior relationship.

First of all, the "new Epoch" means a common strategic goal combining the interests and values of China and Russia, which lead to the emergence of a multipolar world and the decline of the dominance of the West. Its most important distinguishing feature is the replacement of neoliberalism and capitalism based on private ownership of the means of production. It is therefore a paradigm shift in the development of human civilization, which they call "the common fate of humanity".

This also serves the purpose of increasing cooperation within the scope of issues e.g. de-dollarization, providing alternatives to the SWIFT system, or cooperation in the field of space and satellite technologies. Their development is essential to expand the instruments used by Washington to maintain global domination. Due to this situation, it is Russia that will decide on the pace of China's growth, as it disposes the sources of raw materials and maintains capability to block BRI. The current analysis shows that Moscow has agreed to the role of a supplier and stabilizer of the Eurasian space, which will translate into profits from transit, and probably contribute to a larger number of Chinese direct investments.

The most important bond of the hybrid alliance, however, is the „win-win” relationship. The political economy of „Greater Eurasia” supports Russia's rebirth. The platform of the common Eurasian house fulfills Russia's historic tasks in preserving its civilizational identity and plays an important role not only from the military point of view, to provide stabilizing, but also from spiritual and ideological spheres. China, in turn, is allowed to continue its pursuit of being the first economic power on the path to become a global leader in 2049. Further holding the position of the head of state by Putin and the continuation of the current trajectory of Xi Jinping's movement, if the president of the PRC remains in power until 2033 and transfers power to

successors faithful to the course, herald further development and a new, strengthened type of alliance for both states for several decades (Vavilov, 2021a, p. 585-594).

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