

China-Russia Strategic Partnership: Its Implications for US Hegemony in the International System

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Abstract: *The strategic alignment between China and Russia presents a challenge to the traditional power dynamics, which has significant implications for the hegemony of the US. The partnership deepens cooperation in various domains, including trade, investment, military exercises, and diplomatic initiatives, thereby undermining America's ability to assert unilateral dominance on the global stage. This paper examines the deepening strategic partnership between China and Russia and its potential implications for US hegemony in the international system. Through qualitative analysis, this study aims to shed light on how this partnership may challenge the dominance of the United States on the global stage. This study fills the gap in existing literature by analysing the collective implications of the China-Russia partnership on the global order and its effect on the US dominance. Two key research questions guide the inquiry: 1) what are the drivers behind the China-Russia strategic partnership? 2) How does this partnership affect US hegemony in the international system? This research will answer these questions in detail. By applying the theory of Balance of Power, the paper aims to explore the ongoing dynamics of power shifts and alliances in contemporary global politics. It is arguably concluded that a strategic alliance between Russia and China will impact US hegemony in the world.*

Introduction

China and Russia have dedicated efforts to forging a strategic alliance in the post-Cold War era, hoping to restrain US hegemony and usher in a new global order. Over the past 20 years, these two states have increased the level of their military cooperation as part of this collaboration and their attempts to accomplish the aforementioned aims (Yu and Sui, 2019).

Early in the 1990s, confidence-building measures (CBMs) were implemented between the two nations, establishing the military ties between them. Its goal was demilitarization and de-securitization, with a focus on China's shared border with Russia. Early in 2000, Russia made an attempt to settle its border disputes with China, and the CBMs served as a means of creating a shared military cooperation framework and facilitating the formation of a shared development agenda for bilateral military-technical cooperation (MTC) between the two nations. This collaboration states that the main areas of attention for both nations are joint military exercises and training. China is now a more intimate partner in the MTC framework. China was permitted to use

Russian military equipment per the 2001 dialogue between Russia and China. Russia and China signed a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2012 that encompasses a number of topics, including equality, shared prosperity, shared trust and support, and enduring friendship. Both China and Russia extended the strongest agreement, which is already a reality, in 2014, surpassing their joint collaboration from 2012. Increased bilateral collaboration on political, economic, and military matters resulted from this pact. Under the terms of the 400 billion dollar trade agreement, China committed to buy natural gas from Russia for a period of 30 years. The "Conference on Contact and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia" (CICA) was started by the two nations, who also invented the international security organization. Since taking office as president of the PRC, Xi Jinping has visited Russia over twenty times as a state guest because he views the country as a crucial strategic ally in the global economy (Bharti, 2022).

The strategic alliance between China and Russia has grown stronger in the new century as a result of China's growing concerns about US unilateralism brought on by "the Bush administration's conceptualization of China as a strategic competitor" and the US military's belligerence in a number of wars, including those in Iraq and Afghanistan, which has significantly raised Chinese feelings of insecurity (Tull 2006). Francis Fukuyama emphasizes how these US-initiated wars and the strong link they established between military invasion and the advancement of democracy damaged the latter (Fukuyama 2011). The Chinese people saw these wars as proof that the US was pursuing global hegemony and power games under the pretense of promoting democracy and combating terrorism, which posed serious threats to international peace and stability (Zhao 2011). In addition to military authorities, policymakers, scholars, and even common people in China have been calling for an acceleration of military reform and anticipation (Yu and Sui).

The two most powerful revisionist nations united in their contempt for the Western world are China and Russia. These two totalitarian governments perceive the West as focused on crippling domestic political issues. Putin despises the weak and fragmented Europe he perceives. China, in Xi Jinping's opinion, is well on its path to overtaking the West as the leading Asian power because it has an effective model of economic and political advancement. Though they have historically seen each other as dangers to the West, China and Russia are currently developing a closer strategic alliance. If the military alliance between China and Russia keeps growing, it will unavoidably have an impact on the global security order. One way this will manifest itself is through posing a challenge to the US-led alliance system in the Asia-Pacific and European regions. They are both aware of the US's military might, but they also understand that the United States no longer has unchallenged military dominance globally (Dibb, 2019).

After the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded, China and Russia have proven a strong security alliance. Both nations have shown a significant desire for any kind of military collaboration in the defense industry. China has led the way in a broader bilateral military engagement as Russia's coalition partner (Bharti, 2022).

Their military are getting closer, and Russia and China are teaming up more frequently in the global arena to counterbalance America. The alliance has recently expanded to include joint military drills in the Baltic and East China seas, as well as the supply of cutting-edge Russian military weapons to China. There is growing evidence that the connection between China and Russia is becoming closer than it has ever been, and it is strengthening pretty quickly. China and Russia have joined forces to create a new global order that will protect their respective authoritarian regimes. International developments and the reality that they are "out-gaming" the West should please both of their leaders. Beijing and Moscow most likely feel that with the Western bloc in chaos, this is a moment of enormous strategic opportunity. Given this, Beijing and Moscow may have realized the time has come to put Washington to the test and see if they are capable of taking on the US in both the European and Asian arenas. Russia and China might even start to believe that they can reclaim lost areas like Taiwan and Ukraine. Both are now benefiting from increasing territorial claims without facing frontal opposition from the West (Dibb, 2019).

Scholars and decision-makers alike are paying close attention to China and Russia's strategic cooperation in recent years. There are concerns about the alliance's possible effects on US

hegemony in the international system as these two superpowers deepen their cooperation in an array of areas, from military cooperation to economic trade. This study attempts to dive into the details of the China-Russia cooperation and its repercussions for the global balance of power. This study intends to provide understanding of the changing field of international relations by investigating the forces behind, dynamics within, and outcomes of this strategic alliance.

Objectives of the study

This paper argues that the deepening strategic partnership between China and Russia challenges US hegemony. It posits that this partnership has significant implications for the international system. The collaboration of these two major powers could potentially shift the global balance of power. Through an analysis of the economic, political, and military dimensions of this alliance, it demonstrates how the China-Russia partnership alters power dynamics and reshapes the global balance of power.

Research Questions

The research aims to explore two important questions. The first question is what are the drivers behind the China-Russia strategic partnership? This question delves into the drivers behind this partnership, probing into factors such as mutual concerns about regional security, a desire to counterbalance Western hegemony, and the pursuit of strategic autonomy. Understanding these drivers is crucial for deciphering the motivations behind the alliance. The second question is, how does this partnership affect US hegemony in the international system? This question pertains to the impact of the China-Russia partnership on US hegemony. As China and Russia deepen their cooperation across various domains, from trade and investment to military exercises and diplomatic initiatives, the partnership undermines America's ability to assert unilateral dominance. Thus, this research aims to answer these questions in detail.

Theoretical Framework

There is no denying that the US's decision to refocus its military and strategic attention on the Asia-Pacific area has increased the likelihood that China and the US will vie for worldwide and regional supremacy. In spite of his prediction that "should China emerge particularly prosperous, it could easily establish a military superpower and threaten the United States," American political scientist Mearsheimer asserts that "China cannot rise peacefully." (Mearsheimer, 2003). The relationship between China and the United States can never be particularly good, and in fact, given their increasingly mutually beneficial and strategic aims, an increasing proportion of Chinese foreign officials and international relations specialists think it may get pretty awful. This indicates that China's greater attempts to improve relationships with Russia are more important from a strategic standpoint than economically (YU and Sui, 2019).

According to Balance of Power Theory, states tend to form alliances or align themselves strategically with other states to prevent the emergence of a dominant power. With regard to the China-Russia alliance and its impact on US hegemony, it is analysed that the alignment of China and Russia may counterbalance American power and influence in the international system. Balance of power is one commonly held approach to IR, one which leads some observers to entertain a Sino-Russian anti-American balancing assumption, the notion that China and Russia will balance (or are balancing) against the pre-eminent power in the international system, the United States. This balancing assumption suggests that China and Russia may work together to counterbalance the power and influence of the United States, either through military alliances or economic partnerships. While the validity of this assumption is still a matter of debate, it remains an important topic in the field of international relations (Moore, 2022).

Discussion

What are the drivers behind the China-Russia strategic partnership?

Russian leaders believed that the sole possibility for Russia to survive its unexpected battle with the West was to acquire another foreign partner, which helped to strengthen the alliance. Given that China had a sizable enough economy, refrained from openly opposing Russia, and had no intention of enacting penalties in reaction to the Ukraine issue, it was an obvious choice. Russia and China have been developing a strategic collaboration since 2014. This is mainly because of increased

military cooperation, which includes sales of cutting-edge military hardware and a more extensive schedule of bilateral and multilateral military exercises. Though considerably less so, there has also been a rise in diplomatic and economic collaboration (Gorenburg, 2020).

The strategic alliance between China and Russia, which aims to subdue US hegemony and restore a more favorable world order, continues to heavily rely on military collaboration. Some Chinese IR researchers stress that the USA has unquestionably acquired the upper hand in the China-Russia-USA strategic triangle due to its superior military and economic might and that a Russian break-up could severely damage China's strategic interests and standing internationally. As a result, Chinese political officials believe that strengthening their strategic alliance with Russia is essential, and they see military cooperation between the two countries as a powerful means of countering US military hegemony. Furthermore, Chinese foreign policymakers along with international relations scholars share the belief that China will face growing opposition from the United States of America, the current power in the world's power structure, as it grows stronger militarily and economically (YU and Sui, 2019).

First, it's crucial to recognize that China and Russia have two widespread cultures that vary from the Western heritage. They have long-lasting memories of being humiliated by the West: for China, this included being occupied by European countries for a large portion of the 19th century, and for Russia, it involved multiple military assaults from Sweden, France, and Germany between the 18th and the 20th centuries. Furthermore, they both contend that Western meddling is to blame for their recent territorial losses. Beijing therefore thinks that America still supports Taiwan's separation from China. Moscow views the dissolution of the Soviet Union—which Putin characterizes as the biggest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century—as the reason why the West has urged the former Russian territories to secede from Russia and join NATO. Throughout history, both China and Russia have faced periods of social unrest and Western exploitation, exemplified by the corresponding communist revolutions. Russia and China all claim to be extremely alarmed by what they perceive to be Western meddling in their internal political processes. According to China's most recent Defense White Paper, separatist movements are "becoming more acute" in regions like Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang (also known as "East Turkestan") and pose a significant risk to the stability of the country. In Putin's eyes, the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine are a sign from the West that his own government is about to be undermined. Both of these dictatorships prioritize preserving domestic power and stability at all costs (Dibb, 2019).

In the Asia-Pacific area, China and Russia remain especially watchful and resist the establishment of other groups. Both nations disagree with the US's stance and its regional Indo-Pacific concept strategy. Both Russia and China have consistently worked to establish an inclusive and transparent rule basis system in the Asia Pacific area when it comes to maritime policy. The trilateral military collaboration between the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom (AUKUS) is a matter that Russia as well as China take carefully; both countries have a deeper connection in the area of involvement in strategic stability. The Russian and Chinese governments both recognize that the AUKUS is an activity at odds with US-led objectives. Gaining security advantages over China and Russia in the Asia Pacific area is the goal of the US-led strategy (Bharti, 2022).

Another crucial aspect of the economic interaction is energy. Russia has long been predicted to emerge as a significant provider of energy, as China's economic growth increases the need for the fuel. For the Taiwan atomic facility, which was put into service in 2007, China had previously acquired two nuclear power plants from Russia (Cheng and Cohen, 2013).

China's Minister of National Defense, Wei Fenghe, claimed in April 2018 while going to Moscow that the minister was there "to let Americans understand the the close relationship between the armed forces of China and Russia." China and Russia are increasingly integrating forces in the global battlefield to balance against America. But there won't be a restoration to the 1950–1979 Sino–Soviet Treaty of Friendship, which ended due to sharp disagreements over the Sino–Soviet split and Soviet nuclear war threats in the 1960s. A "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation," signed by the Russian president and Jiang Zemin, took its place in 2001.

Among other things, it allows for a greater military collaboration, the exchange of military expertise, and in particular, China's utilization of Russian military technology. Recently, this deeper connection has made it possible for China to purchase more sophisticated Russian military hardware as well as conduct joint military drills in the Baltic and East China Seas. Moscow and Beijing "are sending the communication that their strategic partnership is not a paper tiger—it has grown to political–military force to be dealt with," according to a Russian scholar from the Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok. "Military missions between China and Russia outside of their borders are going to go on gaining scale and sophistication," he notes.³⁴ Close military and security cooperation between the Russian and Chinese governments "will play a stabilizing role" in the Asia-Pacific region, according to Alexander Lukin, Director of the Center for East Asian Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, which is part of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Dibb, 2019).

Russia and China's strategic ties are strengthening thanks in large part to the Belt and Road Initiative. In order to better align the development strategies of the two initiatives and establish a common economic space, China and Russia signed a joint declaration in May 2015 on the merger of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), signaling the continued establishment of relations. Thus far, viable commercial and financial links have been developed. These include financial platforms like currency swap agreements, Renminbi (RMB) clearing centers, cooperative investment and credit initiatives, and buildings like bridges, railroads, the ports, and highways. Both parties seem keen to deepen their current partnership and explore new areas of strategic convergence, largely driven by different economic and political factors like the trade-dominated multifront financial offensive introduced by the Trump administration against China or the sanctions led by the US on the Russian economy. Such friendly and mutually beneficial interaction is made possible by the BRI (Yilmaz and Changming, 2019).

Their connection was also improved by the war in Ukraine. After 2011, there was a little upsurge in Russian arms sales to China, but these sales really took off during the crisis in Ukraine, when deals to supply Su-35 combat aircraft and S-400 air defense systems to China signified the lifting of Russia's unofficial embargo on the country's acquisition of cutting-edge weaponry. 16 Vladimir Putin declared in October 2019 that Russia was assisting China in creating a system of early alerts for ballistic missiles. The degree to which previous concerns about exchanging advanced weaponry with China have faded in recent years is demonstrated by Russia's increased willingness to divulge knowledge regarding strategic nuclear weapons.¹⁷ For electrical parts and military diesel-powered engines that it could no more get from the West, Russia has also looked to China. Most notably, military-to-military and defense ties strengthened when defense sales decreased, demonstrating that these relationships are not influenced by arms sales but rather by top political figures (Gorenburg, 2020).

How does this partnership affect US hegemony in the international system?

During the 1990s, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China attempted to foster the establishment of a multipolar global setting that would put pressure on American power, although neither country actively desired conflict with the other. This was demonstrated in 1997 after Chinese Premier Li Peng declared a "strategic partnership" with Russia in an effort to "offset the grip of the United States" upon his return from a visit to Moscow. Later that year, China and Russia jointly released a declaration on the "multipolar world," advocating for a new global order. This was in response to Russia's worries about Chechen rebellion and NATO expansion, and China's worries about the US-Japanese alliance strengthening and Taiwan's independence movement (Cheng and Cohen, 2013).

Since there is no other way to stop US control in the world, they are collaborating with one another. Russia can have further tools to further its goal of counterbalancing the US and strengthening its interpretation of multipolarity in Europe. As a result of China's escalating conflicts with the United States in Asia, Russia provides China with political support as well as accessibility to its economic and technological assets (Gorenburg, 2020).

Since World War II ended three-quarters of a century ago, the notion that great nations always go to war has gradually vanished from popular consciousness. Major nations have since been

seen engaging in small-scale hostilities in the Korean Peninsula, Vietnam, and other regions including the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Great powers have only engaged in combat on opposite sides once, during the Korean War. The US and the Soviet Union did not actively engage in armed war throughout the Cold War. Although there was never a direct armed confrontation, the two big nuclear crises of 1962 and 1983 were undoubtedly extremely perilous. Since 1991, no significant nation has emerged from the post-Cold War era with the international reach that is necessary to challenge US dominance. The United States of America has had essentially complete control over the deployment, assembly, and use of its armed forces throughout the last thirty years. However, the US's top national security issue now is long-term regional strategic rivalry with Russia and China. According to Washington's 2018 National Defense Strategy, it is becoming more evident that China and Russia intend to use their authoritarian models to control the globe. The stated goal of the Chinese military upgrading program is "to achieve global preeminence in the future by dislodging American supremacy and achieving Indo-Pacific dominance in the near term". Russia is said to be attempting to "shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and alter European and Arab security arrangements in its favor" by attempting to "veto authority over nations on its borders about regarding their economic, governmental, and diplomatic decisions."⁸ The US policy plan continues, "But if coupled to its growing and improving its nuclear weapons the obstacles is clear." Russia's use of emerging technologies to undermine democratic institutions in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine is a cause for concern (Dibb, 2019).

The 1990s saw a surge in defense cooperation accompanying the restoration of relations between China and the Soviet Union (Russia), which continued into the twenty-first century. This is because, in response to the altered global context dominated by US unilateralism and neo-conservatism, the Chinese leadership started to modify its strategy by placing a higher importance on the modernization of the PLA. The arms embargo that the West placed on China after the Tian'anmen Incident forces it to look to the the Soviet bloc (Russia) for cutting-edge military hardware. Since then, there has been a boom in arms transactions between the two nations as China, which enjoys economic prosperity, is eager to keep up its rapid modernization of the PLA with Russian weaponry and equipment (Yu and Sui, 2019).

China and Russia have mutually agreed to limit US threats worldwide and have no conflict of interest on an international level. As opposed to Russia and China teaming up, the United States and its allies are still working to increase their power. China's first choice is for Russia to work with other countries globally in order to oppose the alliance led by the US. Russia fears that NATO will continue to get closer to its territory. The Taiwan Strait, which is now the center of US strategic strategy, poses a comparable threat to China. China and Russia contend that both incidents represent violations of the multilateral world order idea and outside meddling in domestic affairs. In 2001, both nations made a vow to oppose the the military rule of other nations. Indirectly jeopardizing US strategic goals in Asia and Europe is the growing military collaboration between China and Russia. The US is facing a terrifying scenario, and in the soon to change global order, the idea of a two-front war against the USA could come to pass. It appears that the idea of a "pivot to Asia" could be destroyed by the proxy conflict between China and Russia in Eastern Europe. "The United States cannot do whatever it has to do across Europe along with Asia in order in order to combat the Chinese threat," stated retired Gen. Ben Hodges (Bharti, 2022).

China has been looking more and more toward the rest of Asia under Xi Jinping. This is due in part to China's extensive trade as well as the need to secure supply and resources in order to maintain an enormous economy developing for the years to come. China believes that in order to ensure both the sustainability of its newly discovered affluence and its broadest possible dissemination, economic expansion is imperative (Akaha et al., 2021). A sensitive period of global power transition is being ushered in by China's rapid ascent in the twenty-first century, which is reflected in the expanding extent of China-Russia military ties for China. Chinese international relations scholars are concerned about the growing strategic pressure that the USA and other established powers are putting on China. This is because the USA's long-term goal is to prevent any

rising powers from ever becoming strong enough to challenge its dominance, especially in the Asia-Pacific area (Yu and Sui, 2019).

By traveling via the western part of the globe, both nations aim to fully reimburse the United States' freedom-of-navigation operations. Russia and China may choose to have a naval drill in the Caribbean Sea, with Venezuela or Cuba serving as the hosts. An exercise of this kind would neither significantly advance the military might or naval interoperability of China or Russia, nor would it have a lasting effect on their respective geopolitical clout in Latin America as a whole. Nonetheless, it would get a lot of media attention, showcasing the nations' apparent worldwide reach and prospective strategic alliance. Put differently, both nations would perceive that they had won a propaganda battle at a little expense, but the real effect on security in the region would be insignificant (Gorenburg, 2020).

America is unable to fight two significant regional battles at once, and China's military capability is rapidly developing along with significant reforms in Russia's armed forces. The United States' fixation with inner reflection and "making America great again" presents China and Russia with new strategic chances. America wants to keep favorable regional power balance in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. But with Russia extending its armed forces muscles throughout Europe and the Middle East and China becoming a more powerful force in Asia, that will be an especially difficult duty. This is not to suggest that China and Russia are forming an official alliance for security. Rather, what we're witnessing is a coalition of big powers that represents the expanding geopolitical opportunities that Beijing and Moscow are currently facing (Dibb, 2019).

In the past few years, China and Russia have implemented steps to limit US use of space for military, commercial, and other objectives. Beijing's increasing interest in building the capacity to counter what many Chinese strategists view as a significant weakness in US military might—the Pentagon's reliance on space-based sites to relay intel, interactions, and instructions across the globe—is highlighted by the PRC's devastation of one of its forecasting satellites in January 2007. Russia has also been enhancing its capacity to carry out military space operations. China's move to launch its first anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test signifies a dramatic shift in the formerly low-key alliances between China, Russia, and the United States over the military use of space. This test marked the first ASAT acquisition by any nation in more than 20 years. It was also the first time a satellite in orbit has been destroyed by a ground-based missile. ASAT experiments conducted in the past by the US and the USSR included satellite explosions, the launching of a "kill vehicle" from an aircraft in midair, and other techniques. The Chinese meteorological satellite that collapsed in the collision was roughly 530 miles (850 kilometers) above Earth in the orbit of several US military satellites. According to some analysts, the Chinese might completely destroy the US military's space intelligence capacity with just 40–50 low-orbit satellites destroyed (Weitz, 2009).

The governments of China and Russia have been working diligently to improve their information warfare tactics in the cyberspace, and as a result, they now have vast arsenals of offensive cyberweapons. Cyber operations are seen by Chinese and Russian analysts as essential components of warfare tactics. They have indicated a desire to create asymmetric capabilities—like sophisticated information processing that gives American commanders an edge in situational awareness—that would counterbalance American military advantages. Considering the significance of technological advances in US military operations, it is possible to weaken US defenses to the point that China might take Taiwan or Russia could invade Georgia before the US could muster a coordinated counterattack (Weitz, 2009).

China's growing capabilities have supported its desire to prove its position as either an important nation with a regional lead as well as an international actor—all in the service of changing the current world order—according to Ambrosio et al. (2019), which represents an important shift of America's post-Cold War narrative about the China threat. The greatest proof of multi-polarization will be the rise of emerging superpowers, and the two key measures of whether this is occurring are proportionate rates of expansion and global GDP shares. There provides proof here to support the claims made by Khanna, Mahbubani, and, to some extent, Zakaria that Asia is getting the new center of global financial power, replacing the US and Europe. The importance of the

transfer in economic power to East Asia stems from two possible reasons: first, it may accelerate China's rise and the relative decrease of U.S. power; second, the emergence of regional multipolarity may lead to substantial power wars in the future (Layne, 2009). China, a reconnected Korea, and Japan will start to move together both politically and economically—this is tougher to say. This isn't going to be simple now. It will be extremely challenging to bring Korea back together. Although there are many reasons for the two countries to hate one another and have long-standing hostilities, it will be challenging to reunite China as well, but pressure is mounting. They must continue throughout this manner if they want to genuinely endure as a separate force in the globe (Wallerstein, 2003).

Conclusion

This research indicates that the strategic alliance between China and Russia may have far-reaching implications for the global political landscape. As two of the world's largest and most powerful nations, a partnership between these two countries could potentially challenge the existing hegemonic status of the United States in the international system. The potential impact of this alliance on the balance of power in the world cannot be understated. It could lead to a realignment of global alliances and the emergence of a new geopolitical order, with significant implications for international relations, trade, and security. Furthermore, such a shift would likely be accompanied by increasing tensions and competition between the United States, China, and Russia, which could further exacerbate geopolitical instability.

It is important to note that the full extent of the impact of this strategic alliance is not yet clear, and much will depend on how the United States responds to this potential challenge to its global power. However, it is clear that the emergence of a new world order is something that cannot be ignored, and policymakers and analysts must be prepared to adapt to these changing geopolitical realities.

According to the study, the motivation behind the alliance between China and Russia is multifaceted. One of the primary reasons is the perceived threat from the United States. Both countries view the US as a potential adversary, and the alliance is seen as a means of countering American influence. Furthermore, the alliance is also driven by the desire to challenge the US's dominance in the global order. China and Russia both seek to increase their own power and influence on the world stage, and they see working together as a way to achieve this goal. Overall, the study suggests that the China-Russia alliance is motivated by a complex set of factors, with geopolitical considerations playing a significant role.

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