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Sino-Russian Military Cooperation since the War in Ukraine

Čínsko-ruská vojenská spolupráce od počátku války na Ukrajině

Zdeněk Rod[1], Martin Růžička[2]

[1]CEVRO Univerzita; Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze
[2]Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Abstract: The presented study seeks to illuminate the nature and scope of Sino-Russian military cooperation following the onset of the war in Ukraine in 2022. The research question guiding this study is: In which military dimensions – such as technological collaboration, joint military exercises, or the provision of ammunition – does Sino-Russian cooperation manifest, and what underlying factors drive this engagement. The study revealed that the military cooperation between the two countries is very close and has been developing and deepening for a long time. The war in Ukraine has played a role in partially changing the nature of cooperation, but the continuity of cooperation itself was already set before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The war in Ukraine did not open a new area of military cooperation but rather deepened existing ties. It also highlighted the asymmetry of the partnership, which now tilts in favor of China, which is a shift from the situation prior to 2022.

Abstrakt: Předkládaná studie si klade za cíl objasnit povahu a rozsah čínsko-ruské vojenské spolupráce po vypuknutí války na Ukrajině v roce 2022. Výzkumnou otázkou, která tuto studii provází, je: V jakých vojenských oblastech – jako je technologická spolupráce, společná vojenská cvičení nebo dodávky munice – se čínsko-ruská spolupráce projevuje a jaké faktory tuto spolupráci podmiňují? Studie odhalila, že vojenská spolupráce mezi oběma zeměmi je velmi úzká a dlouhodobě se rozvíjí a prohlubuje. Válka na Ukrajině sehrála roli v částečné změně povahy této spolupráce, avšak samotná kontinuita spolupráce byla nastavena ještě před ruskou invazí na Ukrajinu v roce 2022. Válka na Ukrajině tak neotevřela novou oblast vojenské spolupráce, ale pouze jí prohloubila. Válka také prohloubila asymetrii partnerství, jež se nyní vychyluje ve prospěch Číny, což je změna oproti stavu před rokem 2022.

Keywords: **M**ilitary Cooperation; Peoples Republic of China; Russia; Technology.

Klíčová slova: vojenská spolupráce; Čínská lidově demokratická republika; Rusko; technologie

INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of China (hereinafter China) and the USSR (hereinafter Russia) have long maintained a complex, often adversarial relationship. During the Cold War, shared communist ideology was outweighed by strategic and geopolitical rivalry. The nadir came in 1969 with armed clashes along the Ussuri River, rooted in border disputes dating back to the Tsarist era. These skirmishes, resulting in considerable casualties, prompted the Soviet Union to consider nuclear options—underscoring the depth of mutual distrust (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 2023).

Though a ceasefire was eventually reached, bilateral ties remained fraught. Against this backdrop, China welcomed the United States' strategic pivot in the 1970s. Under Kissinger's realist diplomacy, Washington sought to balance Soviet power by engaging Beijing. Mao Zedong's leadership reciprocated, perceiving the USSR as the more immediate threat and recognising the strategic utility of closer ties with the US (Kissinger, 1994, 723–730). This triangular dynamic profoundly shaped the international order during the latter Cold War.

Historically, China and Russia have clashed over ideology and border management, particularly along their 4,184-kilometre frontier. However, since the early 2000s, relations have improved markedly. The resolution of border disputes enabled increased military cooperation, evidenced by joint exercises and arms deals. Economically, Western sanctions have pushed Russia to deepen ties with China, particularly in energy and trade. Internationally, both states have converged in contesting the normative dominance of the US-led liberal order (Fong and Maizland, 2024).

Following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, bilateral defence ties were significantly enhanced. Military exercises have grown in scale and complexity, while collaboration has extended into strategic realms such as missile warning systems and satellite integration. A major intensification occurred in early 2022, when Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin declared a partnership with "no limits," just days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Fong and Marrow, 2024).

This propagandistic proclamation reflected shared opposition to perceived unilateralism and expansionist alliances. Both states reject NATO enlargement and critique the US Indo-Pacific strategy as destabilising, advocating instead for multipolar security frameworks rooted in sovereignty and cultural pluralism. On arms control, they condemn Washington's treaty withdrawals and missile defence expansions, citing risks to strategic stability. Similarly, they express concern over alleged Western bioweapons activities, urging transparency and accountability under the Biological Weapons Convention (China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2022, 5–9).

As argued elsewhere (Rod and Ruzicka, 2025), the war in Ukraine has catalysed a new phase of Sino-Russian military-technical cooperation. China has supplied Russia with key dual-use components—including US-made semiconductors—while denying direct involvement. In return, it has received sensitive Russian defence technologies, such as S-500 missile systems and submarine technology. Cooperation spans drone production and stealth platforms, reinforcing the partnership amid Russia's growing international isolation. Though not formal allies, their coordination presents significant challenges for

Indo-Pacific security. China's naval modernisation—supported by Russian inputs—risks undermining US maritime deterrence and altering the regional balance, especially for Japan.

This article therefore investigates the evolving scope of Sino-Russian military cooperation since 2022. It asks: In which military dimensions—technological, operational, logistical—does this cooperation manifest, and what strategic imperatives underpin it?

Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the analysis first outlines the conceptual framework guiding military cooperation, before detailing the study's methodology. It then explores Sino-Russian defence collaboration post-2022, concluding with a synthesis of findings and implications for global security dynamics.

1 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MILITARY COOPERATION

Military cooperation may be approached through several theoretical lenses. Drawing on International Relations scholarship, Davidzon (2022) explores neorealism, liberalism, constructivism, and rational institutionalism as frameworks for understanding such cooperation. Neorealism explains it as a response to the distribution of power in an anarchic international system, with states seeking alignment for survival. Liberal theory points to domestic institutions, suggesting democracies are more inclined to cooperate due to shared governance norms. Constructivism emphasises the role of norms and collective identities, while rational institutionalism highlights institutions as mechanisms for reducing transaction costs and facilitating sustained coordination (Davidzon, 2022).

While these theories illuminate the motivations behind military cooperation, they offer limited analytical utility in specifying the dimension in which such cooperation takes place. The present study is not concerned with explaining the broader systemic drivers of Sino-Russian cooperation, but rather with identifying the discrete areas—such as intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and weapons development—in which it manifests. As such, the explanatory reach of IR theory remains intellectually valuable, but ultimately insufficient for this analytical purpose.

Instead, this study adopts a dimension-based framework grounded in extant scholarship (Zaręba, 2022; Callado-Muñoz and Hromcová eds, 2019; Behera and Balachandran, 2018; Zandee and Drent eds, 2016; Pałasz-Rutkowska, 2022; Mastro, 2024). As outlined in Table 1, military cooperation is inherently multidimensional, comprising diverse and often overlapping interactions. While quantitative studies may delineate categories with numerical precision, qualitative research must contend with the fluidity and contextual ambiguity of such classifications. Boundaries between dimensions are porous, and military activities frequently serve multiple functions, complicating attempts at rigid categorisation.

Table 1: Military Cooperation Framework

Areas of Cooperation	Dimensions of Military Cooperation	Specific Activity of Military Cooperation
Operational cooperation	Joint military exercise and training	Coordinated drills and instructional programmes between armed forces, designed to enhance interoperability, tactical proficiency, and strategic cohesion in anticipation of potential security contingencies
	Joint military operations	Cooperative military engagements involving multiple states, often under a formal coalition or alliance framework, aimed at achieving shared security objectives, whether in conflict or peacekeeping contexts
	Military technical assistance	Provision of expertise, training, and logistical support by one state to another, typically to strengthen operational capacity, modernise defence infrastructure, or fulfil strategic commitments
	Intelligence and strategic coordination	The systematic exchange and integration of security-related information, operational planning, and threat assessments among allied or partner states to enhance collective situational awareness and strategic response
	Maritime security and naval cooperation	Collaborative efforts to safeguard sea lanes, counter piracy, uphold freedom of navigation, and project naval power in contested maritime domains, underpinning broader regional security architectures
Defence-industrial cooperation	Collaborative or joint arms development	Bilateral or multilateral initiatives to design, manufacture, and enhance military capabilities, leveraging pooled resources, technological expertise, and strategic requirements
	Defence technology and arms trade	The exchange and procurement of military hardware, software, and expertise among states, shaping geopolitical alignments and fostering defence-industrial cooperation
	Space and aerospace cooperation	Joint endeavours in satellite technology, missile defence, space exploration, and aerospace engineering, often with both civilian and military applications, reflecting the growing securitisation of outer space
Political-strategic cooperation	Non-aggression pact or formal alliance agreement	A diplomatic accord between states that either renounces the use of force in mutual relations or establishes a framework for military cooperation, collective defence, and geopolitical alignment
	Nuclear and strategic stability dialogue	High-level diplomatic and technical engagements focused on mitigating risks associated with nuclear deterrence, arms control, non-proliferation, and crisis management to preserve strategic equilibrium

Source: Table created by author based on the following readings – Zaręba, 2022; Callado-Muñoz and Hromcová eds, 2019; Behera and Balachandran, 2018; Zandee and Drent eds, 2016; Pałasz-Rutkowska, 2022, Mastro, 2024

This limitation is particularly salient in the case at hand. The multifaceted nature of Sino-Russian cooperation resists strict compartmentalisation. Nonetheless, the typology presented in Table 1 remains a useful heuristic for mapping the principal vectors of interaction. Without such a framework, the analysis risks becoming overly descriptive, obscuring broader patterns and theoretical implications. The following section outlines the methodological application of this classification in assessing post-2022 Sino-Russian military cooperation.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study conducts a qualitative case study (QCS) of Sino-Russian military cooperation since the onset of the war in Ukraine in 2022. While the primary focus lies on post-2022 developments, the analysis incorporates key antecedents that continue to shape contemporary dynamics. A purely post-invasion lens would neglect structural and institutional foundations that predate the conflict but remain integral to understanding current cooperation. Moreover, the decision to focus on Sino-Russian military cooperation is based on the fact that many scholars and practitioners (Cozad-Cooper, eds., 2024; Gorenburg-Wishnick, eds., 2023; Carlson, 2024; Mastro, 2024) have called for further research in this area. They argue that Sino-Russian military cooperation remains under-researched, and that greater understanding of its specific forms is both necessary and timely.

The methodological approach rests on a comprehensive text-based analysis, combining textual, content, and contextual methods to ensure analytical rigour. First, textual analysis of official speeches, communiqués, military white papers and doctrinal publications from China and Russia was used to identify recurring concepts, rhetoric and silences that reveal how cooperation is framed. Second, content analysis of secondary sources — including policy reports, think-tank studies, academic works and media coverage — was conducted using systematic keyword searches, with the material coded according to the cooperation dimensions in Table 1, alongside additional categories identified inductively. Third, contextual analysis situated these findings within broader geopolitical dynamics by linking them to historical precedents (e.g. arms sales in the 1990s, Cold War border disputes) and to current constraints such as sanctions. This approach connected observed practices to structural drivers such as asymmetry, technological complementarities and shared opposition to the US-led order.

Furthermore, to facilitate systematic inquiry, the concept of military cooperation is clearly defined and operationalised using the typology outlined in Table 1. This framework developed by the authors categorises cooperation into discrete dimensions, allowing for structured classification of empirical evidence according to functional characteristics and strategic purpose. For instance, increased technological assistance is categorised under “Collaborative or joint arms development,” while joint exercises, interoperability measures, or coordinated deployments are allocated to relevant categories within the framework. This structure ensures coherence while accommodating the multidimensional nature of Sino-Russian military engagement.

The study draws on a broad range of sources—academic literature, media reports, and policy analyses from governmental and non-governmental bodies. Particular emphasis is placed on discourse analysis, including official statements, strategic white papers, and military doctrinal publications from both China and Russia.

In recognition of the evolving nature of global security, the study remains responsive to emerging evidence. Through sustained engagement with the most comprehensive available literature, it aims to offer a nuanced, empirically grounded account of the post-2022 trajectory of Sino-Russian military cooperation.

3 ANALYSIS OF SINO-RUSSIAN MILITARY COOPERATION

A key aspect of Sino-Russian military cooperation are regular exercises ongoing since 2003, when the first took place within the multilateral framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Two years later, the first bilateral exercise called Peace Mission 2005 was held in Vladivostok and on China's Shandong Peninsula. Other exercises followed and in 2009 the Gulf of Aden held their first naval drill. Most of the exercises from this time were primarily aimed at counter-terrorism (Hart, 2022).

Since then, joint bilateral and multilateral exercises have increased. From 2003 to the end of 2024, including naval and air patrols and army games, the two countries have held 111 bilateral and multilateral exercises and patrols together. More than half of these have taken place after 2018 (CSIS China Powers, 2024), showing the immense deepening of the two countries' military relations. The more frequent exercises are due to the deepening political relations between the two countries.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, military exercises are becoming more comprehensive and assertive towards other states. For example, there are frequent military exercises and air-sea patrols in the Sea of Japan, which may be perceived as a potential risk and power projection towards the Japanese government. In 2024, three Sino-Russian exercises and patrols were conducted in the Sea of Japan (CSIS China Powers, 2024). In the same year, their navies also conducted drills near the port city of Zhanjiang in the strategically important South China Sea (Mahadzir, 2024). Another exercise, called North-Joint 2024, built on the combat experience of the war against Ukraine in the Black Sea and so emphasis was made on anti-UAV operations and anti-sea drone warfare (Sukhankin, 2024). That year they also organized the first air patrol near Alaska. Two Russian Tu-95 bombers and two Chinese Xian H-6 planes flew over the waters of the Chukchi and Bering seas (Sonne, 2024) making its first ever joint exercise in the Arctic. Largest exercises after 2022 were Vostok 2022, Joint Sea 2022, Northern Interaction 2023 and 2024, Ocean 2024.

Deepening military exercises is one of the most visible and politically significant components of cooperation of Sino-Russian military cooperation. The fact that both countries are willing to train together in such strategically important regions is a demonstration of high cooperation. Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix observes that Sino-Russian naval exercises are reaching a high level of sophistication and that "two fleets share tactics and procedures, facilitated in this specific case by common sensors and combat and data link system" (Sheldon-Duplaix 2022, 113). The author also points out that although no documents or frameworks exist to formalize their naval cooperation, since 2012 we have observed "increasingly sophisticated annual exercises between the two navies" (ibid. 115).

After 2022 naval patrols became an integral part of Sino-Russian military cooperation. Since 2022, they have jointly held at least one each year, mostly in the Bering Sea and East China Sea. Naval exercises then most often focus on anti-submarine warfare, air defense, counter-piracy and rescue operations. However, naval exercises in 2023 have also focused on formation movement and communications (CSIS China Powers, 2024).

The nature of ground and air exercises has also changed. According to Ditrych and Ekman exercises initially focused towards more jointness, including establishment of

joint command centres or air force landings at each other's airports. Today exercises have evolved into greater coordination, with troops training to use each other's more high-end military equipment. Their nature is also more complex. Initially, most exercises focused on counterterrorism, but today exercises have evolved into regional war scenarios (Ditrych and Ekman 2024, 2). According to the locations of most naval, air and land exercises, it can be inferred that their joint exercises are primarily directed against the US, Japan and non-state actors (terrorists, pirates).

Because the PLA lacks recent combat experience, lessons from Russia's military operations, particularly in Ukraine, are highly valuable. This constitutes one important driver for sustaining close military ties, alongside technology transfers and strategic alignment. Russia's military tradition offers insights that help strengthen China's long-term capabilities. In this regard, a massive initiative to deepen military exercises can be expected from China after the end of the war in Ukraine. That war has become a kind of laboratory for the most advanced warfare, and China will want to absorb as much of the Russian experience as possible, especially in terms of drone warfare, but also dealing with Western technologies in Ukraine that China might encounter in Taiwan. These include the Patriot mobile surface-to-air interceptor missile system, the Javelin anti-tank weapon system, the Stinger man-portable air-defence system, the Himars multiple rocket launcher, and the F-16 fighter aircraft.

It is already highly likely that Russia shares information and experience of the war with China. In 2015, the two countries signed a bilateral agreement on international information security, pledging to share cybersecurity information (Korzak 2015). This agreement has helped intelligence agencies from both countries to strengthen mutual trust. After the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, trust continued to deepen.

In 2023, Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergey Naryshkin was surprisingly open about the fact that Russia and China share a "large amount of intelligence, operational and awareness information exchange." He added that "the level of relations is unprecedented" (TASS, 2015). At the moment, this is the biggest evidence of their intelligence cooperation. Some have also pointed out that after the war began, the two sides found common ground in spreading disinformation and anti-Western narratives. MERICS reports that "the war in Ukraine has also put the spotlight on Russia-China joint intelligence cooperation, influence operations, cyber-attacks in Europe" (Sabanadze, Vasselier and Wiegand 2024, 12).

In the long term, it can be observed that mutual cooperation in military technology has been mostly based on simple selling weapons from Russia to China. Since the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, the nature of this level of military cooperation has begun to change. Russia is showing more confidence in adopting Chinese technology due to the pressure of the war in Ukraine and the deepening geopolitical relationship between them.

In November 2024 came an unprecedented statement from Mikhail Babich, Deputy Director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation. In an interview, he stated that Russia is interested in joint development and production of weapons with China. He spoke about joint development of high-tech military products, establishment of joint ventures for the production of military products, construction of service centres for the maintenance of supplied products, performance of mutually beneficial research

and development work on military products. He added that "If our Chinese partners show interest in this form of cooperation, we are ready to discuss possible options of interaction" (Demidov, 2024). Joint development and production would show the transformation of the relationship, in which Russia has until recently always been the more experienced partner with more advanced military technology, into one where they will be equals.

Russia and China have been deepening their cooperation on joint military research in recent years. In 2024, Reuters reported that Russia had been conducting the development of long-range attack drones in China for a year in cooperation with local experts. They are called Garpiya-A1 and Russia is developing and manufacturing them in China with the incorporation of Chinese components. These are supposed to be large suicide drones (Deutsch and Balmforth, 2024). This is the first clear break from the trend in which Russia and China have been mere armsales partners with Russia's technological superiority.

With the joint development of drones, the relationship is changing and Chinese companies and experts are an indispensable part of the project. This is due to what Bitzinger and Raska point out that China has a better national innovation system that also facilitates military-commercial innovation (Bitzinger and Raska 2022, 134). The latter is important in the case of drone development because the Russian military-industrial complex does not have the same experience in drone development as Chinese companies, which among other things has filed 82% of all global drone patents since 2015 (Butler, 2024).

The joint development of drones is, of course, not the first mutual cooperation in military innovation. Already mentioned in this paper was the joint development of missile warning systems. Also worth noting is a 2016 project in which the two countries agreed to produce an advanced heavy-lift helicopter for China, based on Russia's Mi-26 design. Russia was expected to supply the engines and other components, while China was to be responsible for the design and testing phases (Schwartz 2017). On the Russian side, there is talk of supplying transmission, tail rotor and anti-icing systems. According to the Russian side, even in 2024 this project was still going ahead on schedule (TASS 2024).

Due to Russia's isolation from the West and the increased trust between Russia and China on the political level, joint projects can be expected to continue. However, China will begin to play a greater role in them. While Russia is still strong in certain military categories, it is certainly lagging behind in the development of drone technology, in which China can play a key role for Russia. In the future, spillover of military development into other areas cannot be ruled out either, if Mikhail Babich's call towards China is listened to.

The important thing is the transformation of the relationship. From primarily arms sales to China, the relationship after 2015 has moved into a gradual evolution in categories in which Russia has traditionally been strong , and by 2024 the evolution has moved into a phase in which China is strong and in which Russia itself is sending signals to China that it would like to take the research to other phases.

Likewise, Russia can be expected to remain more willing to share its own military technology for China's own research and production. It turns out that during the Ukraine war, China supplied Russia with key dual-use technologies that Russia uses in its weapons systems. During the war approximately 60% of foreign components in Russian

weapons originated from China (Payne, 2024). CSIS talks about the supply of dual-use components such as chips used in Russian weapons systems or electronic warfare (EW) technologies such as jamming technology (Hart, 2022). The supply of EW from China to Russia during the conflict was confirmed in late 2024, when criticism from Russian military officials about the quality and failure rate of Chinese jamming devices appeared in the media (Malyasov, 2024).

In 2024, it was also revealed by US intelligence that China is providing geospatial intelligence, such as satellite imagery to Russia for military use (Nardell and Jacobs 2024). China still protects its cutting-edge EW technology and supplies it to Russia on a limited basis, yet the sharing of satellite information for military purposes is a demonstration of mutual trust. On the other hand, Russia has long been important to China's military capacity building. Historically, it has supplied China with Su-35 fighter aircraft or S-300 and S-400 mobile surface-to-air missiles systems. But the arms exchange has transformed. It appears that China has begun to develop more of its own development and production, so that direct Russian arms exports to China have begun to decline. This means that today China is not dependent on Russia's assistance, but during the war in Ukraine, Russia appears to be dependent on assistance from China.

This was also because China was able to take some of the Russian technology it had previously imported and use it for its own production. The situation surrounding the sale of S-300 systems and S-24 aircraft to China is a good example. Through reverse engineering, it developed its own SAM HQ-9s, which are clearly derived from the Russian S-300 PMU (Kopp, 2009). In the same way, technologies from Su-27 fighter jets were copied to develop China's J-11s. Russia's Rostec even issued a statement in 2019 saying "China alone has copied aircraft engines, Sukhoi planes, deck jets, air defense systems, portable air defense missiles, and analogues of the Pantsir medium-range surface-to-air systems" (Hart, 2022). China also likely copied the AL-117S engines from Su-35 aircraft delivered in 2018 for its domestic production.

Whether the technology was actually stolen or transferred with the knowledge of Russian government officials is unclear. But it is a fact that a lot of Chinese equipment is indeed built on the Russian-Soviet model, including some Chinese tanks and armored vehicles. But China has already advanced in such a way that any sales of tanks or armored vehicles have not been made for a long time and cannot be expected to be made.

Arms trade simply changed its form. This time it is no longer about the supply of large pieces of military equipment, but in the supply of key technological components in which it still has the upper hand over China. These include aeronautical technologies (including stealth capabilities), missile systems (S-500 surface-to-air missiles technology), submarine technologies, engines for fighter jets and early warning systems (Rod and Ruzicka, 2025).

Sharing submarine technology and selling it has always been an important component of Sino-Russian military cooperation. In the 1990s, for example, China's shortcomings in naval capabilities, which were manifested, in its failure during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, resulted in a desire to purchase naval technology abroad. In addition to destroyers, China bought 12 Kilo-class diesel-powered submarines from Russia (Hart, 2022). In 2012, the two countries even agreed to jointly develop Lada-class submarines for Chinese needs, but the project mysteriously went quiet after a few years and seemed

to have failed. China seemed to have gone its own way and has its own production and development of submarines.

Yet in in 2024, news broke that China could be developing a new hybrid-nuclear-powered submarine. There is speculation that the new submarine could be a sort of third type combining nuclear and diesel-electric submarine technologies. Given China's past struggles with advanced nuclear reactor design, Russian technical help is expected to play a key role in developing its new submarine. Russia has in the past transferred other types of nuclear propulsion technology to China which indicates a general willingness of Russia to provide China sensitive nuclear reactor technology (Kirchberger and Carlson, 2025). It is also very likely that Russia is helping China develop the Type 096 nuclear submarine. This is a model that will significantly elevate China's naval capabilities by the end of the decade when it is expected to enter service. Russia is reportedly providing expertise to enhance propulsion systems for greater stealth (Suciu 2025). Sharing Russia's advanced submarine silencing technology with China would signal a significant deepening of military ties.

Cooperation in space has also become interesting. In 2017, China and Russia signed an Intellectual property rights agreement in space, which allowed them to transfer space technologies (Pollpeter 2023, 31). This was an important milestone in their cooperation in this area. An important cooperation occurred in 2019. At that time, Putin announced "we are now helping our Chinese partners to create a missile warning system. This is a very serious thing that will drastically enhance the defensive capacity of the People's Republic of China. As currently, only the US and Russia have such systems" (TASS, 2019).

China has made great strides in missile defence technology in recent years. According to Jacob Mezey one of the key enablers of China's progress is its ability to rely on Russian technology and expertise both in developing its interceptors and sensor architecture (Mezey 2024, 15). China's capabilities have been greatly helped by the sale of the S-300 and S-400 systems and subsequent Chinese in-house development built on these Russian technologies.

China's early warning system with Russian assistance has not yet been fully completed. But it is likely that it will be based on the Russian Tundra satellites and Voronezh modular ground-based radar stations set up in Chinese territory (Korolev, 2020). However, according to the China Aerospace Studies Institute, it is unlikely that cooperation on early warning system development will spill over into an integrated China-Russia missile early warning system, as that would be too close to the edge of the official alliance (Pollpeter et al., 2023: 21).

In addition to the joint development of an early warning system, China and Russia have been conducting a strategic dialogue on nuclear weapons that began before the war in Ukraine. This was confirmed by Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov when he said "we have our own good relations with China, which we are developing, we are dialoguing on all issues of stability, and we will expand this dialogue" (Interfax, 2025). China has reportedly been pressuring Putin since the start of the conflict in Ukraine not to consider using nuclear weapons during the conflict. It has also come up with the No-first-use of Nuclear Weapons Initiative, which for political and technical reasons is not considered seriously in Russia (Wolf, Sokov and Huaicheng 2024, 5). This is because nuclear weapons

are strategically important for Russia in its NATO deterrence policy. However, all the indications show us that nuclear and strategic dialogue is taking place at some level.

The following Table 2 in the previous part summarises this research's findings. Those findings are elaborated in detail in Conclusion.

Table 2: Specific Activity of Military Cooperation after 2022

Areas of Cooperation	Dimensions of Military Cooperation	Specific Activity of Military Cooperation
Operational cooperation	Joint military exercise and training	Intensive military exercises in the naval, air and land domains (both bilateral and multilateral) – largest being Vostok 2022, Joint Sea 2022, Northern Interaction 2023 and 2024, Ocean 2024
	Joint military operations	X
	Military technical assistance	Very likely help with developing submarine Type 096 (potentially helping China with quietting technology) and new hybrid-nuclear-powered submarine (Russia might assist China with developing nuclear propulsion technology)
	Intelligence and strategic coordination	Sharing intelligence report Cooperation in cybersecurity China is providing geospatial intelligence for Russia's war effort
	Maritime security and naval cooperation	Naval collaboration, marked by a growing number of joint naval patrols and exercises – both bilateral and multilateral – which now regularly take place in strategically critical regions such as the Sea of Japan, East China Sea, South China Sea, and, more recently, the Arctic.
Defence-industrial cooperation	Collaborative or joint arms development	Heavy-lift helicopter (based on Russian Mi-26) Drones Garpiya-A1 developed in China with the help of local companies and experts
	Defence technology and arms trade	Missile systems S-300 and S-400 technologies – sharing or copying technologies for the production of China's HQ-9 SAM Fighter engines AL-117S from Su-35 – today produced in China using reverse engineering EW technologies – jamming technologies to Russia for its wartime needs
	Space and aerospace cooperation	Developing early warning system for China – likely it will be based on the Russian Tundra satellites and Voronezh modular ground-based radar stations
Political-strategic cooperation	Non-aggression pact or formal alliance agreement	X
	Nuclear and strategic stability dialogue	Functional nuclear dialogue China's emphasis on non-use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine

CONCLUSION

Russia has long shared military technology with China, and mutual trust has steadily grown. Since the invasion of Ukraine, this trust has deepened further. This shift is partly voluntary, reflecting record-high political relations, and partly driven by necessity, as Russia has come to rely on Chinese dual-use technologies during the war. As Gabuev

(2024) observes, Russia is "having a hard time resisting China's requests to share sensitive technology."

The most sensitive transfers appear to involve submarine stealth technologies. In other dimensions, cooperation reflects a continuation of pre-existing trends. Notably, Russia now tends to transfer components and technologies rather than complete systems—less a product of the Ukraine conflict than of China's growing defence industrial base.

Nonetheless, the war has introduced a new dynamic. While military cooperation was already expanding, shared interests in reshaping the global order—away from US-led unipolarity towards multipolarity—have gained renewed emphasis. This shared strategic vision is strengthening, rather than redefining, their military partnership. Close military cooperation enables both countries to pursue their common objective of weakening the US-led international order. It can be argued that without a common interest in transforming the current international order, such close military cooperation would be highly unlikely due to the historical rivalry between both countries. It can even be argued that if the world goes fully multipolar, the friction between the two countries could fully emerge in their military cooperation, and close cooperation could turn into rivalry.

Despite growing closeness, the two remain outside a formal alliance structure. Both prize strategic autonomy and remain wary of entanglement in each other's conflicts—Ukraine in Russia's case, and Taiwan in China's (Saunders, 2024). The partnership between the two states enables China to strengthen its military capacities in specific domains and to acquire combat know-how that may enhance its position relative to that of the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific. From the perspective of NATO's eastern flank, Sino-Russian military cooperation after 2022 serves as a warning that, even in the event of a potential escalation between Russia and NATO, China could act as a key partner for Moscow, capable of supporting its activities.

Yet their alignment is arguably evolving into a tacit non-aggression pact. According to our research, cooperation is indeed close, but it cannot be described as a de facto alliance. Trust between the two countries has deepened since 2022, resulting in closer military cooperation, but it cannot be said with certainty that this situation will continue after the possible end of the war in Ukraine, which creates an asymmetry in partnership between the two countries and Russia's dependence on China as a partner. In the future, such asymmetry could result in Russia seeking to reduce the level of military cooperation.

Bilateral ties have clearly intensified since 2022. Xi Jinping's 2023 remark to Putin—that "we are the ones driving these changes together" (Al Jazeera, 2023)—underscored this trajectory. Likewise, Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu's 2023 visit affirmed deepening ties, with Putin highlighting ongoing military-technical cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises. Xi's 2024 call for greater strategic coordination further reinforced this alignment. Alongside the "no limits" rhetoric, such declarations signal enduring convergence and shared global aims—trends likely to drive further military integration.

Table 2 in the previous part summarises this research's findings. While military cooperation has been long in development, the war in Ukraine has accelerated and deepened existing patterns, rather than establishing wholly new dimensions of cooperation. Many of the current dynamics originated after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Intelligence and strategic coordination remain opaque. Though the two states signed a cyber and information security agreement, the extent of intelligence sharing is unclear. Still, this area has grown more prominent since 2022. Russia is likely providing operational insights from Ukraine, while China may be supplying satellite imagery and geospatial data.

In arms development and trade, significant transformation has occurred. Even prior to 2022, Russia's role as a supplier of full systems (e.g., Su-35, S-300, S-400) had begun to wane due to China's maturing defence industry. The focus has shifted towards joint technological development. Russia remains a key contributor in submarine and missile technology, though whether this involves authorised transfers or reverse engineering remains uncertain.

Crucially, the Ukraine war has revealed China's technological edge in drone warfare and electronic warfare (EW), prompting Russia to exchange high-value technologies for Chinese assistance in these fields. Cooperation now includes joint development of loitering munitions ("suicide drones") and Chinese EW systems used in theatre. The two countries thus complement each other: China leads in drones and EW; Russia retains comparative advantages in submarine tech, early warning systems, aircraft engines, and heavy-lift helicopters (notably the joint Mi-26 derivative). NATO's Eastern flank and the United States' partners in the Indo-Pacific should be most concerned about this form of military cooperation, which, while often subtle and lacking the symbolic visibility of large-scale military exercises, in practice strengthens the combat capabilities of both states in modern domains of warfare.

Naval and air patrols, alongside military exercises, remain a central pillar of cooperation. Over 111 joint drills and patrols have occurred, over half since 2018. Exercises have expanded into the Arctic, Sea of Japan, East China Sea, and South China Sea—strategic zones reflecting the depth of cooperation. The Ukraine conflict further incentivises these engagements, enabling China to glean lessons from Russia's experiences with Western weaponry—potentially relevant to a future Taiwan contingency.

In sum, Sino-Russian military cooperation since 2022 reflects continuity rather than rupture: existing patterns have been deepened, diversified and partially rebalanced in China's favour. The war in Ukraine has accelerated joint activities — ranging from large-scale exercises and naval patrols to joint weapons development and intelligence sharing — while at the same time highlighting Russia's growing dependence on Chinese technologies and economic support. Yet cooperation still falls short of a formal alliance, with both states prioritising strategic autonomy and avoiding binding commitments that might entangle them in each other's conflicts. The trajectory therefore points to a pragmatic, asymmetrical partnership — driven less by shared identity than by convergent interests in countering Western influence - that is likely to persist for as long as the current international order remains contested.

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