

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

China's Russia Relationship: A Greater Alignment?

M. S. Prathibha

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Summary

China's growing strategic cooperation with Russia is increasingly evident. China is committed to greater coordination with Russia against specific threats posed by US primacy. They have, however, pronounced differences rooted in complex historical and geopolitical realities. These still pose a significant challenge to a more coordinated strategic cooperation.

Introduction

China’s growing strategic cooperation with Russia is increasingly evident, as both countries conducted their first joint submarine patrol in the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea in August 2025, their 10th Joint Strategic Air Patrol over the East China Sea and the Western Pacific Ocean in December 2025, and their third joint anti-missile exercise in Russia in December 2025. Earlier, President Vladimir Putin’s visit to China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Tianjin in August 2025, and the subsequent increase in trade between China and Russia, further underscore this strategic partnership.

As a result, China can be said to have greater alignment with Russia on their shared concerns in the international system, such as the challenge posed by US primacy. In addition, this alignment is strongly in China’s favour. This brief argues that China is committed to greater coordination with Russia against specific threats posed by US primacy, such as extended deterrence. China has termed its partnership with Russia as a strategic choice. The scope of coordination seems to be geared towards balancing strategies in the neighbourhood. They have, however, pronounced differences rooted in complex historical and geopolitical realities. These still pose a significant challenge to a more coordinated strategic cooperation.

Growing Strategic Cooperation

The growing strategic partnership is characterised by their joint statements ‘International Relations and Global Sustainable Development in the New Era’ in 2022 and ‘On Deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era’ in 2023.¹ This resulted in greater political coordination on shared concerns and attempts to cooperate across a wide range of fields, including trade and investment, regional and global issues, and military and defence. Following the Ukraine crisis, the disruption of Russia’s trade routes to Western markets became a significant factor in China’s increased cooperation with Russia. Especially in trade and energy, whereby Russia increased its energy exports to China and in turn, China expanded its imports to replace Western products in the Russian market.²

In 2024, they further issued the ‘Joint Statement of the PRC and Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Coordination for the New Era in the Context of the 75th Anniversary of China-Russia Diplomatic Relations’ to strengthen the bilateral partnership. Overall, China seems intent on deepening

¹ [“Joint Statement of the PRC and the Russian Federation on International Relations and Global Sustainable Development in the New Era” \(中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于新时代国际关系和全球可持续发展的联合声明\)](#), *Xinhua News Agency*, 4 February 2022.

² [“Russia Foreign Trade Tracker”](#), Brugel, 2 December 2025.

strategic coordination with Russia, especially as great-power competition has intensified.³ Wang Yi, China’s Foreign Minister, had termed the motivation for deepening cooperation with Russia a “strategic choice”, and in “pace with the trend of the world”.⁴ There is a geopolitical need for their cooperation, as the US designated both as revisionist powers and a threat to the international liberal order in 2017. In 2025, ‘Joint Statement on Further Deepening the China-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Coordinated Relationship for the New Era’ showed a commitment to greater coordination in the international system, especially in new areas of cooperation such as AI and digital payment systems. Recent high-level meetings indicate a commitment to coordinating their strategies in select areas.

Greater coordination is also evident in the increased military cooperation between the two countries. Since 2021, both countries have conducted joint naval patrols, which concluded their fifth in August 2025; these patrols reflect the areas of their maritime interests.⁵ These areas include the Sea of Japan, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. Their first joint submarine patrol after the conclusion of their China-Russia Exercise Joint Sea 2025 also indicates a degree of coordination in maritime security and stability in their neighbourhood.

In May 2025, when both leaders met in Moscow, their talks indicated that China is keen to expand industrial cooperation, agriculture, and other strategic industries, including energy.⁶ It is China’s way of extending the international trading system by protecting its industrial supply chains as the West attempts to reduce its dependence on China. Most importantly, China would have to ensure that its cooperation with Russia strengthens its plans to advance “high-quality development” within China. High-quality development would shift towards a consumption-based economy with balanced growth, leveraging scientific and technological innovation to enhance the productivity of the industrial supply chain.

The concept of strategic coordination is not new. China and Russia have formally stated that they would have a partnership based on “strategic coordination” since 1996, which includes high-level political meetings, a system of bilateral coordination and guidance for cooperation, a system of consultation on international issues, and a system of non-governmental exchanges.⁷ However, since 2022, the relationship has shown greater collaboration and an intention to deepen their strategic

³ [“Joint Declaration of the PRC and the Russian Federation on Further Strengthening Cooperation to Uphold the Authority of International Law”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, 9 May 2025.

⁴ Wang Yi, [“China and Russia Have Forged a New Paradigm of Major-Country Relations That Differs Entirely from the Obsolete Cold War Approach”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, 7 March 2024.

⁵ Dzirhan Mahadzir, [“Russia, China Wrap Fifth Annual Joint Patrol”](#), *USNI News*, 25 August 2025.

⁶ Mo Jingxi, [“China, Russia to Further Deepen Ties”](#), *China Daily*, 15 May 2025.

⁷ [“China and Russia: Partnership of Strategic Cooperation”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China.

coordination and partnership, particularly in expanding economic relations.⁸ The enthusiasm of entrepreneurs on both sides to deepen cooperation and their strong interest in advancing energy, industrial, scientific and technological, and other areas are examples.

Despite such cooperation, challenges arise when attempts to build bilateral relations extend beyond balancing strategies. Broadly similar geopolitical interests ensure a certain level of coordination in the international system, such as replacing Chinese consumer and industrial goods in the Russian market to counter sanctions on Russia and military and defence cooperation against security threats in the neighbourhood. The bilateral relationship, however, faces challenges in converting tactical cooperation into a long-term, deeper strategic collaboration and coordination.

Challenges in China’s Russia Relationship

One of the most consequential parts of their bilateral relationship is energy cooperation.⁹ For Russia, energy remains the most essential tool for strategic collaboration and is fundamental to its strategy to diversify its energy exports and maintain geopolitical influence. After its plan to integrate its economy with the West failed to materialise, Russia's policy initiatives indicate that it is turning towards Asia for its long-term security interests. One of the defining features of that security is its economic and political power as an energy supplier.

To deepen strategic cooperation, both China and Russia have agreed to increase gas supplies from the existing Power of Siberia 1 (PoS 1) pipeline from 38 billion cubic meters (bcm) to 44 bcm.¹⁰ Moreover, they agreed to increase the gas supply for the Far Eastern Route to 12 bcm, up from the 2022 agreement, which provided 10 bcm to China.¹¹

However, the defining agreement for Russia, which would have deepened its strategic coordination into long-term cooperation, is the construction of the Power of Siberia (PoS 2) gas pipeline. If China and Russia were to expand their energy cooperation, a demand more from the Russian side as it attempts to diversify its energy exports through the Russia Eastern Gasification System, then there would be a need for an

⁸ [“China-Russia Relations in the New Era”](#), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), December 2024.

⁹ Wang Lin, Su Nan, Qu Peiran, [“中俄推动能源高质量互利合作” \(China and Russia Promote High-Quality Beneficial Energy Cooperation\)](#), *China Energy News*, 12 May 2025.

¹⁰ [“Gazprom to Supply Over 38 bcm of Gas via Power of Siberia to China in 2025”](#), TASS, 20 October 2025.

¹¹ Ibid. Also See, [“China and Russia Agree to Build Pipeline Section in the Far East”](#), *Global Times*, 2 November 2023; [“Gazprom Signs New Agreement to Construct, Operate Cross-Border Section of Far Eastern Pipeline in China”](#), Interfax, 20 June 2025.

expansion of existing pipelines and construction of new ones, such as PoS 2, which would take massive investment and would have depended on the long-term strategy of China. Initially, due to Russia’s insistence that China fund the pipeline on the Russian side, and differences in pricing issues and supply routes, China was hesitant to agree to a deal. Moreover, Russia has supplied gas to China via the Power of Siberia 1 pipeline since 2019.

Nevertheless, during the SCO summit in Tianjin in 2025, Russia and China were able to conclude a (legally binding) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the construction of PoS 2 gas pipeline and Soyuz Vostok pipeline through Mongolia, according to Gazprom. However, the MoU does not specify the final price, although it indicates that the Chinese side has become more accommodating in the negotiations. One of the sticking points, apart from the pricing and funding for pipeline construction on the Russian side, has been the route through Mongolia. From a Chinese perspective, it stalled the negotiations because it had reservations about the pipeline crossing through a third country that has complicated historical relations with China and is strategically closer to Russia.

Earlier, China was sceptical about the pipeline route through Mongolia, as it posed risks for China. They were apprehensive that a closer relationship between Russia and Mongolia would eventually allow Russia to control supply chains to China and, in a crisis, deny gas supplies. Clearly, the strategic interests of Russia, China and Mongolia would have to be accommodated among themselves. China became more conciliatory after Mongolia agreed to reduce transit fees and to establish a cross-border railway link between China and Mongolia.¹²

Despite such concerns, Chinese perspectives have shifted to recognise that Russia's penetration into the Mongolian political system has made it more amenable to stable energy cooperation, reflecting a conciliatory attitude from the Chinese side.¹³ For China, ensuring long-term energy security at affordable costs is crucial. According to a news report, China was negotiating a price of 100 dollars per thousand cubic meters, compared with European prices ranging from 250 to 300 dollars per thousand cubic meters.¹⁴ The politics of the pipeline is that China would not want any political factor to disrupt the energy security. Therefore, ensuring the stability of the trilateral cooperation became a significant priority.

However, other challenges are galore. From a Chinese perspective, the investment is considered significant because the Chinese or cross-border sections would have to

¹² Zhang Xin, [“After 20 Years, The Two Points of Contention Between China, Russia and Mongolia Have Been Finally Resolved”](#), *Guancha*, 5 September 2025.

¹³ Wen Shaoqing, [“蒙古国的“茶杯风暴”，会影响西伯利亚力量 2 号管道吗？” \(Will Mongolia’s Teacup Storm Affect the Power of Siberia 2 Pipeline?\)](#), *Guancha*, 28 October 2025.

¹⁴ Ibid.

be funded by China. In return, China insisted on lower gas prices, as it would become a long-term customer and provide Russia with assured energy security. From a Chinese perspective, the denial of Russia’s entry into Western markets would limit its negotiating options. There are no confirmed reports of the pricing arrangements between Russia and China.

However, China would not agree to a European pricing arrangement, as it believes that pricing is a long-term matter and that flexible pricing arrangements might be prone to changes in the geopolitical environment, climate factors, and technological risks. Moreover, China’s clean energy strategy indicates that it is diversifying its clean energy sources, such as wind, solar and hydrogen. From a Chinese perspective, although China had driven a hard bargain, Russia would also benefit from the additional economic activity that pipeline construction would create in the region.

On the other hand, China is keen to expand economic and industrial cooperation with Russia. For instance, both countries are working towards implementing the Russia–China Economic Cooperation Plan before 2030 and strengthening the connection between the Eurasian Economic Union and the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative. The Pre-2030 Development Plan on Priorities in China–Russia Economic Cooperation also involves improving the trade relations between the two countries.

Even such cooperation is under pressure from US secondary sanctions on Chinese financial institutions. It underscores China’s sensitivity to US economic pressure and to changes in its dual-use exports. The comprehensive development plan, intended to help the two countries build a new-type industrial chain, must be viewed from this perspective. For instance, a critical reason for China to expand its energy cooperation with Russia is to reduce the risk of energy supply disruptions in the maritime domain, triggered by the US.¹⁵

The success of these pressures on Chinese behaviour indicates a limit to Chinese support, and the partnership suffers from issues of expediency. That strategic partnership does not mean that China would concede on matters of energy security that favour Russia. In fact, its negotiations with Russia are driven by China’s energy demands and its diversification strategy, rather than by the aim of ensuring strategic coordination with Russia. Moreover, historical factors, such as Imperial Russia’s policies towards China, which resulted in significant territorial losses, also contribute to a lack of strategic trust in China’s policies. This makes concessions that much harder and commitment to long-term strategic coordination much tougher.

¹⁵ Wen Shaoqing, “[穿越蒙古国的中俄天然气管道，不仅仅是几千公里的钢管](#)” ([The China-Russia Natural Gas Pipeline Crossing Mongolia is More Than a Just Thousands Kilometres of Steel Pipes](#)), *Guancha*, 27 November 2024.

About the Author



Dr. M. S. Prathibha is Associate Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

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