NIDS China Security Report 2026

Imbalanced Partnerships

China, Russia, and North Korea

MASUDA Masayuki, YAMAZOE Hiroshi, and ASAMI Asaki

National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan

Contributors

MASUDA Masayuki: Introduction, Chapter ONE, Conclusion
Head, China Division, Regional Studies Department
Major publications: *The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2023);『ウクライナ戦争の衝撃』（インターブックス、2022年）; *Primed for Deterrence? NATO and the Indo-Pacific in the Age of Great Power Competition* (Brussels: Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, 2025).

YAMAZOE Hiroshi: Chapter TWO
Head, America, Europe, and Russia Division, Regional Studies Department
Major publications: "Russia's Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning 'Sphere of Influence'," in *The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*, ed. Masuda Masayuki (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2023); "The Growing Influence of China as Seen from Central Asia and Russia: Cooperation in Eurasian Space and Pursuit of Autonomy," in *NIDS China Security Report 2020: China Goes to Eurasia* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2019); "Russia's Eastward Approach to East Asia: The Qing, Japan, and Boundary Issues with Russia," in *A World History of Suzerainty: A Modern History of East and West Asia and Translated Concepts*, ed. Okamoto Takashi (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2019).

ASAMI Asaki: Chapter THREE
Fellow, Asia and Africa Division, Regional Studies Department
Major publications: "The U.S.-ROK Alliance and the ROK's Choices: Considerations on Extended Deterrence and Nuclear Armament," *NIDS Commentary* (November 2024);「北朝鮮の『国防科学発展及び武器体系開発5ヶ年計画』に関する考察―現在地と展望」『NIDSコメンタリー』（2024年1月）;「尹錫悦政権と戦時作戦統制権の移管問題」『NIDS コメンタリー』（2023年5月）;「北朝鮮の軍事態勢――金正恩政権における核・ミサイルと通常戦力の変化およびその狙い」『安全保障戦略研究』第2巻第1号（2021年）.

Editorial Team: SHOJI Tomotaka, JINGUSHI Akira, TANAKA Ryosuke, GOTO Yohei, KANEKO Reito, AITA Moriki

NIDS China Security Report 2026

Imbalanced Partnerships: China, Russia, and North Korea / MASUDA Masayuki, YAMAZOE Hiroshi, and ASAMI Asaki

Published by
The National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan
5-1 Ichigaya Honmura-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-8808, Japan
Website: https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/

Translated by INTERBOOKS

ISBN 978-4-86482-151-3 Printed in Japan

Preface

The *NIDS China Security Report* series published by the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) presents the results of studies by NIDS researchers regarding China-related security issues to a wide range of domestic and international readers. The subjects covered are selected based on their medium- to long-term relevance for understanding security affairs regarding China, and the content extends beyond military matters to also encompass politics, economics, and international relations more broadly.

The theme of the *NIDS China Security Report 2026* is "Imbalanced Partnerships: China, Russia, and North Korea." Recent events, particularly Russia's aggression against Ukraine, have drawn increased attention to growing cooperation between China and Russia, as well as between North Korea and Russia. At the same time, a military parade was held in Beijing in September 2025 that brought together President Xi Jinping, President Vladimir Putin, and President Kim Jong Un. During the parade, a China-North Korea summit was also held, reinforcing the continuing China-North Korea cooperation and the deepening ties among the three countries. From Japan's security perspective, the nature of the trilateral cooperation has emerged as one of the key issues essential for consideration. In this report, researchers specializing in China, Russia, and North Korea draw on their expertise to examine the background and current dynamics of the bilateral and trilateral cooperation and discuss future prospects. We take pride in presenting this report, which offers fresh perspectives and strategic insights on this theme.

As stated above, the selection of themes and the analysis in the *NIDS China Security Report* are conducted independently by NIDS researchers based on their respective expertise. Therefore, this report expresses the individual views of the authors and does not represent those of the Government of Japan, the Ministry of Defense, or NIDS. Responsibility for the content lies with each researcher.

The lead author of the *NIDS China Security Report 2026* is MASUDA Masayuki, with contributions from YAMAZOE Hiroshi and ASAMI Asaki. For details on each author's chapters and affiliation, please refer to the beginning of the report. Editing and public relations were handled by JINGUSHI Akira, TANAKA Ryosuke, GOTO Yohei, KANEKO Reito, and AITA Moriki.

We hope this report will stimulate discussions both in Japan and abroad on China-related security issues, while also contributing to broader dialogue and exchanges on security issues extending beyond China.

November 2025

SHOJI Tomotaka, Director of the Regional Studies Department

Editor-in-Chief of the *NIDS China Security Report 2026*

Contents

Summary

Chapter ONE
China's Global Diplomatic Posture under Great-Power Competition: An Asymmetrical Sino-Russian "Strategic Cooperation"

As great-power competition intensified, the political discourse in China on its diplomatic posture has seen the emergence of two narratives aimed at countering and confronting the United States and the broader Western world. One emphasizes expanding the strategic horizon toward the Global South, comprised of developing countries and emerging economies, and sets the goal of building a "community of shared future for mankind." This narrative aims to present an alternative to the Western model of modernization. The other emphasizes that China's national security is being threatened over the Taiwan issue and the South China Sea disputes. This narrative has prompted Beijing to bolster military and other more direct responses to the great-power competition and flashpoints in China's periphery.

Sino-Russian relations can be contextualized within both of these narratives. Notably, the two countries have advanced "strategic cooperation," especially military-to-military cooperation, to resist U.S.-led alliance strategy in the Indo-Pacific. China has conducted joint military exercises and joint patrols with Russia to verify necessary military and combat capabilities and send signals externally. Russia is increasingly supporting China's military and combat objectives in its maritime periphery, while China distances itself from directly contributing to achieving Russia's military objectives in the European theater.

The above suggests a divergence in the foreign policy strategies of China and Russia. While they concur on the principle of opposing and resisting U.S. hegemonism, there is a significant difference in attitude toward the international system between China and Russia, a disruptive actor that launched a military invasion of Ukraine in violation of the principles of international relations enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Charter. The available policy instruments also vary. Whereas Beijing seeks to maintain strategic balance using a wide range of instruments, Moscow has tended to resort more readily to military measures to maintain and restore balance. This was illustrated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and by Russia's rapprochement with North Korea. They appear, in China's eyes, as actions that undermine stability and strategic balance in Northeast Asia.

(MASUDA Masayuki)

Chapter TWO
Russia's War and International Norms: Concerns over Its Relations with China and North Korea

Russia launched a military operation on February 24, 2022 and is embroiled in a prolonged war in Ukraine. As a result, many Western countries have suspended contact and trade with Russia, severely restricting its access to funds and materials. Furthermore, Russia transitioned into a long-term phase of expending vast human and material resources on military operations, with the safety of its own population deteriorating. In this state of "quasi-emergency," Russia developed trade and diplomatic relations with non-Western countries, and to the extent that stability in Russian society is maintained, increased troop mobilization and arms production. While it achieved advances by securing advantages on the front lines, it still remained a distant goal to compel Ukraine's subjugation, creating a parallel incentive to discourage countries from supporting Ukraine. Russia's measures related to nuclear weapons have been motivated less by urgent tactical necessity than by their effect as "cards of fear" that heighten Western concerns about dangerous escalation and the erosion of international norms. This, in turn, has forced Western countries to exercise caution in providing military support for Ukraine.

For Russia, the circumstances have made it even more necessary to strengthen relations with China and demonstrate its intention to diminish the U.S. role in the international order. Indeed, Russia has obtained funds and materials necessary for military operations through its trade with China, and conducted more joint military exercises and joint patrols in East Asia and the Western Pacific. At the same time, however, Russia has taken actions that disregard the concerns of friendly countries, including China. By declaring the deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus, among other moves not necessarily premised on coordination with China, Russia has raised fears about the weakening of international norms. Regardless of whether Russia and China are cooperating closely, the actions of both have led to an increasing number of alarming developments.

Under "quasi-emergency" conditions, Russia's posture shifted to undermining the UN Security Council's sanctions against North Korea, precipitating a rapid expansion of their military cooperation. This has allowed Russia to obtain large quantities of artillery shells essential for sustaining high-intensity military operations in Ukraine, as well as replenish its stock of ballistic missiles and troops. By cooperating with Russia, North Korea appears to have made some gains, including obtaining political support for weakening the sanctions regime, enhancing conventional force capabilities, and acquiring access to military technology. This is another facet of Russia's "cards of fear" and is heightening the international community's security concerns over Russia and North Korea.

(YAMAZOE Hiroshi)

Chapter THREE
North Korea's Foreign Policy and Regime Survival: Strategic Choices between Great Powers

North Korea has been forced to pursue strategies in order to ensure the survival of its regime within a strategic environment surrounded by great powers. The country has sought to maintain its regime by negotiating directly with the United States at times and by practicing equidistant diplomacy with China and Russia at others, while continuing to secure independent options. *Juche*, the idea that North Korea will maintain its independence by making its own choices, forms the backbone of the country's ideology, politics, economy, and national defense. Specifically, to guarantee "self-reliance in defense," North Korea has focused on strengthening its deterrence capabilities against the United States by developing nuclear weapons and missiles. North Korea has made this strategic choice in order to be able to defend itself without relying on other countries.

As it develops its capabilities as a de facto nuclear state, North Korea is also selectively engaging with China and Russia to strengthen its position on the international stage. Although the country has not taken formal steps to strengthen its relations with China, the "traditional friendship" between the two countries remains generally intact. This is especially evident in economic relations, as China remains North Korea's largest trading partner. North Korea is also taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the Russo-Ukrainian War to expand its economic ties with Russia; however, it still cannot ignore China. On the other hand, in terms of political and diplomatic relations, China's role remains secondary in relations between North Korea and the United States. Even if there are new developments between the United States and North Korea, similar to the 2018–19 U.S.-North Korea summits, China will likely play only a limited role. This suggests that North Korea has become capable of confronting the United States on its own by securing more independent options through enhanced deterrence against the United States.

North Korea's relations with Russia have grown closer as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian War. North Korea has supported Russia's actions, providing Russia with arms and deploying troops. In return, North Korea is believed to be receiving military technology and energy assistance from Russia. North Korea has short- and long-term interests in maintaining closer ties with Russia, and it is currently working to build up its military capabilities while grappling with economic uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and flood disasters. Over the long term, in particular, it is believed that North Korea expects Russia to endorse its status as a nuclear state. North Korea is thus focusing on maximizing its interests by expanding its strategic choices between the great powers. This would ensure the survival of its regime and enable the pursuit of its policy toward the United States, which is partially motivated by future negotiations with the United States.

(ASAMI Asaki)

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AI	artificial intelligence
ATACMS	Army Tactical Missile System
AUKUS	security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCG	China Coast Guard
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease-2019
CPC	Communist Party of China
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GCI	Global Civilization Initiative
GDI	Global Development Initiative
GSI	Global Security Initiative
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
MOOTW	military operations other than war
MSMT	Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDB	New Development Bank
NDC	National Defense Commission
New START	New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	PLA Navy
POW/MIA	Prisoner of War/Missing in Action
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies
SAR	synthetic aperture radar
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VBSS	visit, board, search and seizure
WPK	Workers' Party of Korea

NIDS China Security Report 2026

Imbalanced Partnerships: China, Russia, and North Korea

Sputnik/Jiji Press Photo

Introduction

China's Expanding Partnerships in the Non-Western World

MASUDA Masayuki

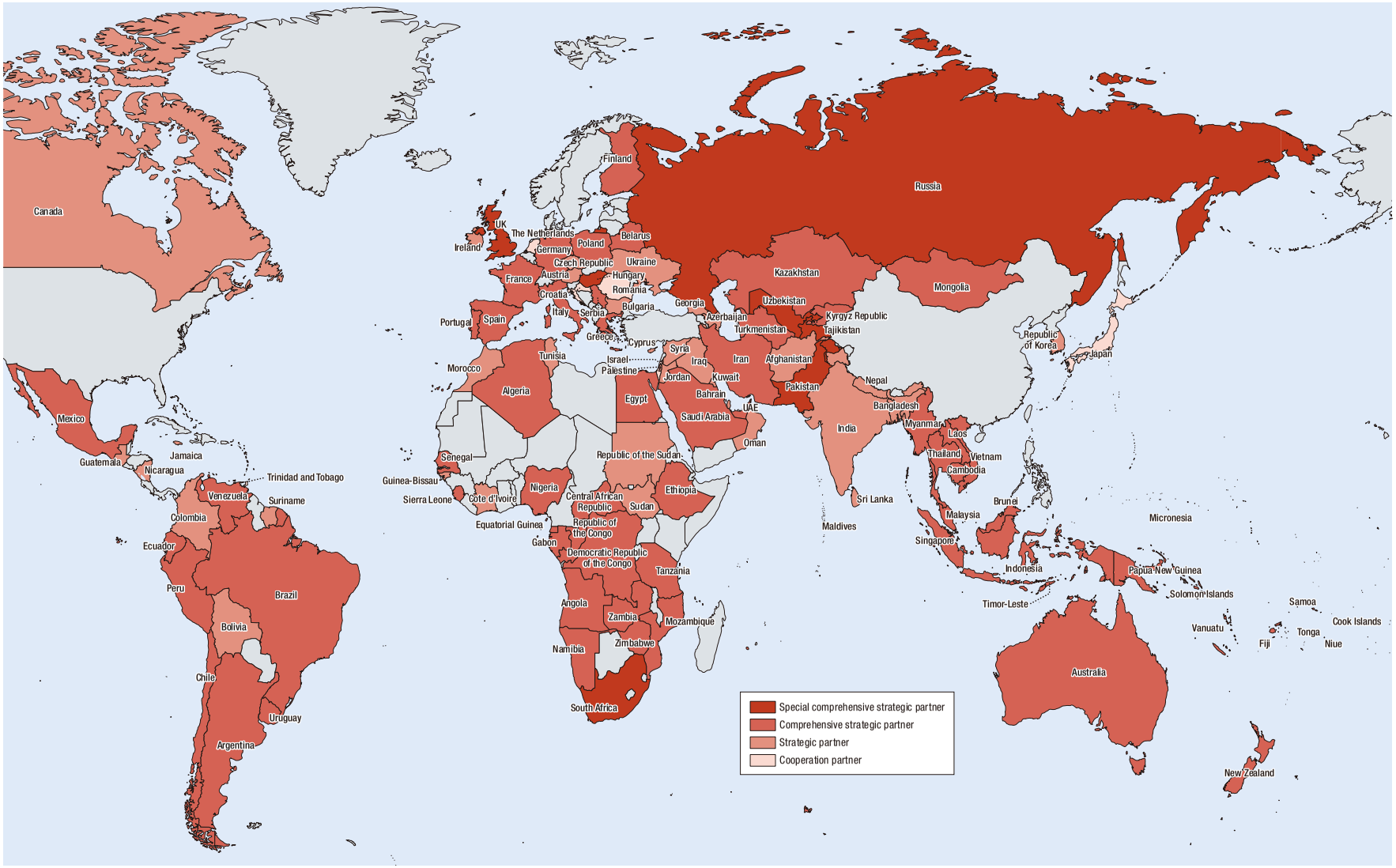
China pursues a global strategic horizon. At the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs Work held in Beijing in late December 2023, it was made clear that Beijing has "expanded a comprehensive strategic layout and formed a wide-ranging, high-quality global network of partnerships" since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held in November 2012, in other words, in the Xi Jinping era.[1] As of 2024, China had "partnership" relations with 106 countries and organizations and had agreed to upgrade relationships with 52 of them.[2]

China had "partnerships" with 56 countries and organizations when Xi Jinping became the CPC's General Secretary in 2012.[3] In the following year, Xi affirmed the strengthening of diplomacy with neighboring countries and regions and also advocated for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), thereby accelerating diplomatic efforts aimed at building partnerships. By 2014, China had partnerships with 72 countries and organizations. Their geographic distribution was Asia around 40% and Europe around 30%. At the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs Work in November 2014, Xi indicated that partnerships would be expanded on a global scale, saying, "We should make more friends while abiding by the principle of non-alignment and build a global network of partnerships."[4]

At the 19th CPC National Congress in October 2017, Xi vowed to "actively develop global partnerships." It was confirmed that China would expand and upgrade partnerships with major powers, neighbors, and developing countries. Yet, there was limited progress in establishing partnerships with the West. Due to the emergence of U.S.-China strategic competition, the Xi administration and the first Donald Trump administration did not see eye to eye on the idea of a "new type of great-power relations," which had been China's precondition for partnering with the United States. The Chinese leadership and major media outlets virtually stopped mentioning the China-U.S. "new type of great-power relations."[5] Meanwhile, in Europe, the perception of China as an economic and security risk increased in the late 2010s. In *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook* released in March 2019, China was identified as a "partner," an "economic competitor," as well as a "systemic rival."[6]

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 and Russia's aggression against Ukraine launched in 2022 exposed the geopolitical competition, including a conflict of values, between the China-Russia camp and the West, that is to say, great-power competition. Beijing continued to deepen its partnership with Moscow, emphasizing opposition to "hegemonism, unilateralism, and protectionism."[7] The G7 members, for their part, strengthened unity by emphasizing their "shared belief" in values such as democratic principles and respect for the rule of law. This great-power competition fueled an "East-West rivalry" that greatly diminished prospects for partnerships between China and Western countries. By 2024, the percentage of Western countries comprising China's global partnership network decreased to 15%. In short, China's global partnerships have expanded primarily with Russia, other former Soviet countries, as well as developing countries and emerging economies—in other words, non-Western countries.

Figure 0.1 China's Global Partnership Network in 2024



Source: Prepared by the author based on the website of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era" with Russia is ranked at the top among China's diplomatic partnerships. China had more than 80 partnerships containing the word "strategic" as of 2024. The inclusion of "strategic" depends on whether the two countries aspire to have a long-term, all-inclusive, and global relationship.[8] On the premise that the relationship is of long-term importance, a strategic partnership aims to promote all-inclusive cooperation across sectors, as well as coordination that emphasizes international influence. Moreover, the inclusion of "comprehensive" suggests that the cooperation is broadened to include military and security cooperation.[9] Chinese experts regard partnerships designated as both "comprehensive" and "strategic" as among the highest levels of partnership.[10] The China-Russia partnership falls into this category.

The Sino-Russian Joint Statement of May 2025 notes, "China-Russia relations have reached the highest level in history and continue to develop stably in all directions, setting an example for building a new type of international relations and becoming a model for cooperation between major countries and the largest neighboring countries in today's world."[11] The elevation to the "highest level" is evident in economic relations. Bilateral trade in 2022 increased by 29.3% year on year to US$190.2 billion and in 2023 to US$240.1 billion.[12] The goal of raising total bilateral trade to US$200 billion by 2024 was achieved ahead of schedule. Similarly, Chinese exports to Russia increased, rising by 46.9% year on year in 2023 to US$110.9 billion—more than double the pre-pandemic amount.[13] The "highest-level" relationship is likewise evident in the development of military-to-military relations. The Chinese and Russian forces have participated in each other's strategic exercises since 2018. While the scenarios of joint military exercises originally focused on "military operations other than war" (MOOTW), such as vessel escort, search and rescue, counter-hijacking, and replenishment, in recent years the scenarios have focused on more combat-oriented traditional "war-fighting operations." In East Asia, maritime and aerial joint patrols are also conducted regularly. Moreover, China and Russia have sought to "further advance" cooperation in theaters, services, and military education to raise military cooperation to an "even higher level."[14]

How should this China-Russia partnership be characterized? The relationship, especially the China-Russia military relationship, has been a topic of growing discussion in Western countries. Typically, the components and criteria of an alliance are applied to assess the post-Cold War development of China-Russia military relations and their current status. For example, Alexander Korolev of the University of New South Wales in Australia argues that Sino-Russian relations increasingly satisfy the conditions for an alliance according to the following indicators: an alliance treaty or other agreement on military coordination in the event of a crisis, a mechanism of regular military-to-military consultations, military-technical cooperation, regular military drills, and confidence-building measures.[15] However, whether China-Russia relations are approaching an alliance should not be debated solely from the perspective of military relations. The 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between China and Russia itself stipulates that their relationship is not "directed against any third country,"[16] signifying that the relationship is not an alliance.[17] Even when the treaty

Signing ceremony for the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, February 1950 (Sputnik/Jiji Press Photo)

was extended in 2021, both sides reaffirmed that "The Sino-Russian relationship is not a military and political alliance, such as those formed during the Cold War."[18]

The differences between an alliance and a partnership are worthy of note in this context. Chinese strategists point to mainly the following three differences.[19] The first is whether there is a hypothetical enemy. An alliance is an exclusive arrangement directed against third countries, whereas a partnership embraces relationships with third countries. The second is how security is ensured. An alliance stresses military instruments, while a partnership prioritizes political cooperation and aims to ensure security through wide-ranging means. The third is whether the countries are in a hierarchical or subordinate relationship. In an alliance, the interests of a weaker state are often sacrificed to the interests of a stronger state. In a partnership, consensus is pursued through consultation. This understanding of alliances may not necessarily be accurate today. Nevertheless, it is China's rule of thumb derived from its Cold War alliance with the Soviet Union. Beijing's objective is not to embed more alliance-like elements into the partnership with Moscow. Put differently, on the premise that autonomy is ensured, China aims to expand its strategic horizon by expanding and enhancing partnerships through diverse policy instruments. Its relationship with Russia is no exception.

It is not difficult to imagine that there are considerable discrepancies and disagreements between China and Russia, which are considered to have achieved the highest-level relationship in history. There may emerge contradictions between China, which attempts to expand global partnerships using not only military but also economic and other diverse policy instruments, and Russia, which relies on more hardline, military-focused instruments. Moreover, the noticeably closer relations between Russia and North Korea since 2023 has presented a challenge both to China-Russia relations and to China's partnership diplomacy. Article 8 of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation stipulates, "The contracting parties shall not enter into any alliance or be a party to any bloc nor shall they embark on any such action, including the conclusion of such treaty with a third country which compromises the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other contracting party." Russian diplomacy that led to the June 2024 signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty with North Korea, in which Russia agreed to establish a de facto alliance, may run counter to the treaty with China. At the same time, North Korea has sought to reinforce deterrence by exploiting the great-power competition and by creating a "new Cold War" narrative. In this process, Pyongyang concluded a treaty with Moscow and sent forces for Russian military operations. Due to such developments, China's promotion of partnership diplomacy appears further at odds with its

principles in Northeast Asia.

This report examines Chinese, Russian, and North Korean diplomacy amid intensifying great-power competition. Chapter ONE analyzes China's partnership diplomacy as an attempt to expand the strategic horizon, shedding light on underlying opportunity and threat perceptions. It discusses China's "strategic cooperation" with Russia in response to the great-power competition concentrated in China's periphery. In particular, it looks at deepening military-to-military relations and their characteristics from the lens of China's threat perception. Finally, it assesses how China perceives the rapprochement between Russia and North Korea.

Chapter TWO explores the logic by which Russia has managed its relations with China and North Korea. As it continues its military operations in Ukraine, Russia has undermined international norms and is increasingly relying on means that instill fear in the West. This chapter explains the logic by which Russia has promoted cooperation with China, inflicted damage to the functions of international norms from a position contrary to Beijing's, and prominently advanced military cooperation with North Korea.

Chapter THREE examines the survival strategy of the Kim Jong Un regime. Specifically, it assesses North Korean diplomacy to establish a more robust "self-reliance in defense"—namely, North Korea's status as a "nuclear state." North Korea has been building up nuclear and missile capabilities to lend credibility to a new nuclear doctrine that aims to strengthen deterrence and secure escalation dominance. China's role in this context is virtually nil and confined mostly to the economic sphere. In addition, this chapter reviews Pyongyang's strengthening of ties with Moscow and the military and diplomatic benefits it renders to North Korea in the short and long term.

NIDS China Security Report 2026

Imbalanced Partnerships: China, Russia, and North Korea

Chapter ONE

China's Global Diplomatic Posture under Great-Power Competition

An Asymmetrical Sino-Russian "Strategic Cooperation"

MASUDA Masayuki

Introduction

Since the latter half of the 2010s, as great-power competition intensified, the political discourse in China on its diplomatic posture has seen the emergence of two narratives aimed at countering and confronting the Western world, including the United States. One is about expanding the strategic horizon toward the Global South, comprised of developing countries and emerging economies. It sets the goal of building a "community of shared future for mankind" (人类命运共同体) to present an alternative to the Western model of modernization. The other narrative emphasizes that China's national security is being threatened over the Taiwan issue and the South China Sea disputes, and seeks to maintain strategic balance with the strategic moves of the United States, its allies, and other Western countries.[1] This narrative has prompted Beijing to bolster military and other more direct responses to the great-power competition unfolding in China's periphery, especially to the regional flashpoints.

From Beijing's viewpoint, its relations with Moscow can be contextualized within both of these narratives. China has touted its post-Cold War partnership of "non-alliance, non-confrontation" with Russia as a new model of major-country relations, or as embodying a new security concept.[2] The Xi Jinping leadership's concept of a "community of shared future for mankind" for building a new type of international relations characterized by "mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation"[3] was originally presented during Xi's first overseas visit to Russia as president in March 2013. A decade later, Xi remarked that, after raising the idea of a "community of shared future" in Moscow, he proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), all of which have "enriched [China's] vision for a community with a shared future for mankind and provided practical pathways toward it."[4]

The purpose of China's "strategic cooperation" with Russia is reportedly for maintaining "global strategic stability" in an environment where major powers—particularly the United States and China—compete for influence and superiority.[5] In May 2025, the Chinese and Russian leaders issued a joint statement on the 80th anniversary of the "victory in China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the Soviet Great Patriotic War." In the statement, they criticize the strategic moves of the United States and its allies for undermining existing security architectures in various regions of the world, and note that "China and Russia will strengthen coordination and cooperation to resolutely respond to the U.S. implementation of 'dual containment' against China and Russia."[6] Both narratives are thus consciously framed with an awareness of countering the strategic moves of the United States and its allies.

This chapter outlines the two narratives on Chinese diplomacy, alongside reviewing China's political discourse and policy trends that have emerged amid the intensifying great-power competition. It then illuminates the characteristics and the current standing of China-Russia "strategic cooperation,"

which has been strengthened in the context of the narrative on maintaining strategic balance, using the development of military-to-military relations as a case study. Lastly, this chapter examines how Beijing views the deepening relationship between Russia and North Korea since 2023.

China's Assertive Diplomacy and Military Posture amid Great-Power Competition

"Chinese-Style Modernization" versus the Western Model[7]

Xi Jinping's China is accelerating efforts to shape a new international order, one that is increasingly competitive and even confrontational vis-à-vis the Western world. In particular, following the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 2022, General Secretary Xi began to critique the Western-led international order more explicitly within the administration. At the 20th Party Congress, Xi stated that an important task of the Party will be to "advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts" through "Chinese-style modernization" (中国式现代化).[8] Contraposing Chinese-style modernization with the Western model, he vowed to further cement China's distinct path to development "under the leadership of the Party." Xi portrayed a critical image of the West to senior officials.[9] For example, in a February 2023 address to senior Party and government officials, Xi harshly criticized the Western model of modernization, claiming that "their fundamental nature, which prioritizes capital above all else, advocates the law of the jungle, tolerates the divide between rich and poor, and champions hegemonism and power politics, remains unchanged." According to Xi, "Chinese modernization has dispelled the myth that modernization is synonymous with Westernization," and as a result, "It presents an alternative pathway to modernization, broadening the choices available for developing countries as they pursue their own modernization."[10]

As Xi Jinping's remark implies, Chinese diplomacy based on the thesis of Chinese-style modernization is striking a more confrontational posture toward the Western world. The anti-Western posture is particularly pronounced when China attempts to align itself with the positions of developing countries. In his February 2023 address, Xi referred to Chinese-style modernization as a new alternative, noting that "some developing countries, ignoring their unique realities and histories, blindly copied the Western model. This approach was ill-suited to their circumstances, and most ended up in prolonged economic stagnation and persistent social and political unrest."[11] During the

A sign for "Chinese-style modernization" on a street corner in Beijing, April 2025 (Photo taken by the author)

Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in September 2024, Xi commented, "Modernization is an inalienable right of all countries. But the Western approach to it has inflicted immense sufferings on developing countries."[12] At the 2021 FOCAC ministerial conference, Xi had stated, "China and Africa have forged unbreakable bonds in our struggle against imperialism and colonialism."[13] At the 2024 FOCAC summit, Xi stated to the same effect and criticized the Western model of modernization. Such sharp criticisms of the West were not observed during the Hu Jintao period. From 2023, Xi Jinping began to weave criticisms of the Western model even within the BRICS framework. In April 2025, during his visit to the Shanghai headquarters of the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS with the purpose of mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries, Xi critiqued, "Traditional Western multilateral financial institutions have either been slow to act or have cooperated with restrictive conditions."[14] He stressed that, in "sharp contrast," China's and BRICS's approach attach importance to providing more "high-quality, low-cost, and sustainable" infrastructure financing.

Chinese-style modernization, which stands in contrast to the Western model, demonstrates China's "confidence" in its distinct characteristics. On the centenary of the CPC's founding in July 2021, Xi declared, "We have realized the first centenary goal" (第一个百年奋斗目标) of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and resolving the problem of absolute poverty.[15] He called for further unity in realizing the "second centenary goal" (第二个百年奋斗目标) of building a "great modern socialist country" in all respects. At the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, Xi made a similar remark, affirming that the Party will provide overall leadership toward realizing the "second centenary goal" and noting that the Party will "strengthen [its] confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture" with Chinese characteristics.[16] In addition, at the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs Work held at the end of 2023, Xi again urged Party members to remain confident, explaining that, following the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, Chinese foreign policy has "showcased distinct Chinese characteristics, style and ethos" and "established the image of a confident, self-reliant, open and inclusive major country." Specifically, he urged Party members to: 1) stay "confident in the path, theory, system, and culture," as noted by Xi at the 20th Party Congress, and continue to pursue the diplomatic goal of building a "community of shared future for mankind," and 2) stay "confident in history," including in the future outlook. At the conference, it was noted that "The overall direction of human development and progress will not change, the overall dynamics of world history moving forward amid twists and turns will not change, and the overall trend toward a shared future for the international community will not change. We must have full confidence in these trends of historical impact."[17] These so-called "three unchanged" (三个不改变) are considered the "important conclusions" on China's strategic environment. As discussed later, as great-power competition intensified from the early 2010s, pessimistic views of the international situation spread in China. In late 2023, by affirming the new conclusions, known as the "three unchanged," the Xi Jinping leadership provided a rationale for setting the strategic horizon of Chinese diplomacy more proactively.

China's Desire to Expand Its Strategic Horizon

The Xi Jinping leadership provided a rationale for expanding the strategic horizon of Chinese diplomacy, judging that the relative position of the Western world was in decline. According to Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the "three unchanged" was proposed based on analyses of the major changes in the international balance of power, of the transformation and reshaping of the international system and order, and of the interplay between different concepts and ideas on a global scale.[18] Xi's assessment, especially of the changes in the balance of power, is captured in the following phrase from his February 2023 address: "the East is rising while the West is in decline" (东升西降).[19] Although Xi is believed to have already mentioned this phrase in his speech at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC in October 2020, as well as in a speech to senior officials in January 2021, this phrase does not appear in the published version of either speech.[20] According to Chen Yixin, secretary of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, and others who attended the conferences, Xi mentioned the phrase in his January 2021 speech in sharing his outlook on future trends.[21] In his 2023 speech, Xi repeated the phrase, likely to describe the prevailing situation. This is evident from his reference to "the marked contrast in the new era (from the inauguration of the Xi administration to the present day) often described as 'the East is rising while the West is in decline' and 'order in China versus chaos in the West' (中治西乱)" (parenthetical explanation added by the author). Xi articulated this more penetrating recognition of China's strategic environment in early 2023, and this recognition was published at a later date.[22]

Since 2023, Chinese entities, including Party and government institutions and think tanks, have conducted examinations and evaluated China's international initiatives based on this new recognition of the situation. The assessments have highlighted China's stepped-up efforts to implement the "three global initiatives"—the GDI, the GSI, and the GCI proposed by Xi Jinping since 2021. Among them, the activities under the GDI, or economic approaches, form the core of the three global initiatives. The Group of Friends of the GDI, which was established by China and the United Nations (UN) in 2022, has been joined by 82 countries as of 2024.[23] The group holds not only working-level but also ministerial-level dialogues and has helped foster consensus-building.[24] In addition, to promote practical cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies, China has established more than 30 domestic platforms for, but not limited to, policy coordination, human resource development and training, and surveys and research.[25]

In 2023 and 2024, China contributed US$330 million in financing to the Asian Development Fund established by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Additionally, China increased its total funding for the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, which was upgraded from the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund as proposed by Xi, to US$4 billion.[26] China has also supported over 1,000 projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on capacity-building assistance. Since proposing the GDI, China has reportedly implemented training projects

for over 60,000 people through more than 2,000 capacity-building projects for developing countries.[27] Through providing such assistance—namely, extending benefits to developing countries—China is enhancing "support for the development and revitalization of countries in the Global South." The ultimate aim is to consolidate the trend of "the East's rise" (东升), which brings about "the West's decline" (西降).

Similarly, China has attempted to strengthen GSI activities. Specifically, Beijing has contributed personnel, equipment, financing (for budgets and funds), and experience (through training and other capacity-building assistance) for UN peacekeeping missions. This represents less a new initiative and more an extension of China's existing peacekeeping policy. Notably, the GSI implements measures to support the "improvement and reinforcement of UN peacekeeping," as announced by President Xi Jinping at the second Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping in September 2015.[28] So far, China's activities have centered on trumpeting the ideas and principles of the GSI and securing international support. In February 2023, the Chinese government issued a concept paper on the GSI outlining its basic approach, as well as 20 priority areas for cooperation at the global, regional, and functional levels.[29] Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in the three years since Xi proposed the GSI in April 2022, more than 120 countries, regions, and international organizations expressed support for the initiative, and the GSI has been written into more than 120 bilateral and multilateral documents agreed upon by China.[30] In short, China seeks to secure majority international support.

In addition, what is interesting in China's discussions of the GSI is the intention to strengthen concrete engagement with regional security challenges and policy issues that span across regions. At the regional level, China has been implementing the "nine programs" of practical cooperation, covering the economic, social, cultural, security, and other fields agreed with Africa in 2021. In the security area, Chinese support has included building urban security surveillance systems, managing small arms, providing equipment to combat terrorism, and supplying research facilities for criminal investigations. China has also cooperated with Latin American and Caribbean countries on military education, military medicine, and disaster prevention and mitigation. With Pacific Island countries, China has collaborated in providing capacity-building assistance and policy support for disaster prevention, disaster mitigation, and public health.[31] Furthermore, China is exploring ways to play a leading role in rule-making in emerging domains, such as artificial intelligence (AI). In November 2022, Beijing released the Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Strengthening Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence, and has attempted to strengthen BRICS cooperation in this field.[32] Beijing has reached out to BRICS members about establishing a working group for consensus building on information exchange, technology collaboration, and the modalities of AI governance. As of May 2025, the working group has not yet been established, though consultations through the BRICS Institute of Future Networks Study Group on AI are being considered.[33]

Priority has been given to BRICS in expanding the strategic horizon toward developing countries

and emerging economies, and China has maintained a cooperative relationship with Russia within the BRICS framework. While confirming the proximity of their positions on international affairs, the two countries have striven to coordinate policies within their participating international organizations and frameworks. Especially from 2015–2016 onward when the Xi Jinping leadership shifted toward pushing for global governance reform, citing the "profound changes" in the international balance of power accompanying the rise of developing countries and emerging economies, China and Russia have sought to align their views in this same context. For example, the China-Russia Joint Statement of July 2017 declared that the two countries would work together as neighbors, victors of World War II, permanent members of the UN Security Council, and "major emerging market countries" to "promote the development of an international order that is more just and reasonable."[34] Emphasis was placed on expanding BRICS' influence in the international political economy and on developing and evolving the mechanisms to this end.[35] At the 22nd regular meeting between the Chinese and Russian prime ministers in October 2017, as well as the bilateral summits in June 2018 and June 2019, the two sides confirmed that they would deepen dialogue and cooperative relations with non-BRICS developing countries and emerging economies and with international organizations, using the BRICS Plus model proposed by Xi at the 2017 BRICS Summit.[36]

BRICS Plus is a mechanism for cooperation between BRICS members, other countries, and institutions regardless of membership. China appears to have launched this mechanism with a view to expanding BRICS membership, reminiscent of the January 2024 expansion that added Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[37] At the virtual BRICS Summit in June 2022, which was hosted by China, Chinese President Xi Jinping referred to BRICS Plus activities and proposed the membership expansion process, stating, "Bringing in fresh blood will inject new vitality into BRICS cooperation and increase the representativeness and influence of BRICS."[38] Professor Wu Zhicheng, deputy director of the Institute of International Strategy at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee, expressed his understanding that "The BRICS Plus mechanism, proposed and created by President Xi Jinping, has laid a solid foundation for BRICS expansion."[39] China and Russia also coordinated in the membership expansion process. At a virtual meeting with President Putin in late December 2022, President Xi stated that China will work with Russia to advance BRICS membership expansion, and invited Russia to join China in "making BRICS a more formidable player" on the international scene.[40] In addition, during Xi's visit to Moscow in March 2023, the two sides agreed to expand the membership of BRICS and the NDB and to pursue BRICS Plus cooperation.[41] The two countries have also encouraged emerging economies to participate in BRICS.[42]

Great-Power Competition in China's Periphery

Despite the emphasis on "confidence" in Chinese politics and pursuit of an expanded strategic horizon to the Global South, the Xi leadership does not necessarily hold an optimistic outlook on China's strategic environment. Foreign Minister Wang Yi, while noting that "The Global South is gaining

a stronger momentum" in the trend toward multipolarity, expresses the view that "consensus is yet to emerge" on how to advance the multipolar process and in what way countries participate in this process."[43] Furthermore, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020, the perception emerged in China that the collective rise of developing countries had been hampered by the pandemic. In other words, the pandemic, combined with a global economic slowdown coinciding with the rise of anti-globalism, had a significant impact on developing countries and emerging economies, which generated disparities in their recovery processes. As a result, the discourse in China on the realization of a multipolar world order became increasingly pessimistic.[44] Moreover, on "the East is rising while the West is in decline" debate, Chinese opinions have not fully converged on whether focus should be placed on the reality or trends. In short, some experts argue that the reality is "the East is weak and the West is strong" (东弱西强) and question whether this can truly be reversed.

At the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs Work held in late 2023, the following view of the international situation was confirmed as underlying the "three unchanged": "Great transformation is *accelerating* across the world (世界大变局加速演进). Changes of the world, of our times, and of historical significance are unfolding like never before, and the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation" (italics added by the author).[45] The observation that "great transformation is accelerating" is one that the leadership began to articulate in late 2019 onward. They began to mention the "acceleration of great transformation" in a negative context, citing uncertainties in the international environment, particularly developments that run counter to the trend of multipolarity.

At the center of these uncertainties is the intensification of geopolitical great-power competition. With the Xi Jinping administration tightening control over domestic politics and society, as well as making headway in changing the status quo in the South and East China Seas, the U.S. Barack Obama administration's (2009–2017) approach of engaging China began to erode by the mid-2010s.[46] The first Donald Trump administration (2017–2021) adopted a comprehensive competition approach by regarding China as a strategic rival. The Joseph Biden administration (2021–2025) also upheld the strategy of strategic competition toward China, and sought to maintain a "liberal international order" by strengthening security and economic cooperation with allies and partners. Such U.S. strategic moves, particularly those under the Biden administration, were sharply criticized by China as hegemonic acts.[47] As for the China policy of the second Trump administration, which was inaugurated in January 2025, Chinese experts have discussed the possibilities of the United States continuing and changing its hegemonic behavior.[48] While there is no consensus so far, the majority views that the U.S. alliance network has been maintained in the military domain, and that there has been no fundamental change in the competition strategy toward China adopted by the United States and its allies in the advanced technology domain.

Furthermore, Beijing is highly wary that converging threat perceptions toward China have, in part, strengthened "strategic cooperation" between Japan and Europe, including the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Zhang Boyu and Guo Ge at the Chinese Academy

of Social Sciences (CASS) write, "As members of the so-called 'common values' camp led by the United States," Japan and Europe have "enhanced the interoperability of the U.S. alliance system and elevated Japan's strategic position. This has further complicated the situations in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait."[49] They forecast that such cooperative relations between Japan and Europe will continue to deepen even after the second Trump administration takes office. Zhang and Guo posit that great-power competition "will increase global uncertainties and revert international politics to an era of power politics." In particular, NATO member states' increased involvement in the Indo-Pacific and enhanced security cooperation with the Indo-Pacific Four (Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea [ROK]) have been severely critiqued in China as the "Asia-Pacificization" of NATO. Similarly, the quadrilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States, Australia, and India (Quad); the security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS); as well as trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States, and the ROK and among Japan, the United States, and the Philippines have been strongly criticized as the "NATO-ization" of the Asia-Pacific.[50]

As geopolitical great-power competition intensified, Beijing's outlook for developing relations with major powers has receded, especially with Western major powers such as the United States, which had been at the top of China's diplomatic agenda. At the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping spoke about the goal of building a "framework for major country relations featuring overall stability and balanced development" by "promot[ing] coordination and cooperation with other major countries."[51] However, from 2019 onwards, there has been a sharp decline in the leadership and official media outlets' references to great-power "coordination and cooperation" on which the framework was predicated, especially to the possibility of cooperation. At the 20th Party Congress in 2022, the term "cooperation" was replaced with "positive interaction."[52] Furthermore, the Report on the Work of the Government, a report delivered at the National People's Congress held annually in March, has stopped making direct references to diplomatic achievements in great-power relations (as of March 2025). The last time was the March 2019 report, which, in discussing diplomatic achievements from the previous year, noted that "China's relations with other major countries remained generally stable."[53]

Great-power competition is unfolding mainly in China's periphery—namely, over disputes surrounding Taiwan, the South and East China Seas, and the Korean Peninsula. China's leadership and authorities emphasize that the Taiwan issue is at the "core of China's core interests" and have stepped up military pressure to rein in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship that grew under the Biden administration. Ever since then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has bolstered drills around Taiwan. The PLA has conducted combat-style drills designed to enhance joint operations capabilities in a Taiwan contingency scenario. In addition, the PLA has continuously deployed units to areas around Taiwan before and after such exercises, maintaining readiness to scale up operations in response to developments in Taiwanese politics and U.S.-Taiwan relations.

A PLA Army unit launching a long-range missile during a military exercise near Taiwan, August 2022 (Xinhua/ Kyodo News Images)

After Lai Ching-te whom Beijing views as "stubbornly stuck to the separatist position of Taiwan independence" assumed the Taiwanese presidency in May 2024, Beijing carried out two rounds of military exercises named "Joint Sword" as a warning to Taiwan. Furthermore, after Lai criticized China as a "foreign hostile force" in March 2025, the PLA conducted the Strait Thunder-2025A joint operations exercises around Taiwan in early April, mobilizing the army, navy, air force, and rocket force. According to the PLA Eastern Theater Command, the exercises focused on sea-air combat readiness patrols, battlefield dominance, strikes on sea and ground targets, and blockade and management of key areas and sea routes, and other tactics, and were conducted to serve as a "serious warning and powerful deterrent" to Taiwan independence forces.[54]

Similarly, in the South China Sea, China has increased physical pressure on the Philippines. In particular, China has escalated obstructions of Philippine resupply missions to the naval outpost at Second Thomas Shoal. China Coast Guard (CCG) and Maritime Militia vessels have repeatedly engaged in obstruction activities against the Philippines, and the government vessels of the two countries collided in October 2023. In May 2025, two PLA Navy (PLAN) frigates carried out high-risk maneuvers to block the entry of the Philippine Navy's vessel in waters near Scarborough Shoal over which the two countries have competing claims. In addition, the PLAN deployed a fleet that included aircraft carrier CNS *Shandong* to waters off northern Philippines, coinciding with the U.S.-Philippines joint exercises conducted from April to May.

These developments have led the United States to reaffirm its military commitment to the Indo-Pacific. For example, the U.S. Department of State has characterized China's military actions around Taiwan as "aggressive military activities" and stated that the United States' "enduring commitment" to its allies and partners, including Taiwan, continues.[55] U.S.-Philippines alliance cooperation has likewise been strengthened. In 2023, joint patrols in the South China Sea were resumed. That same year, four new sites were designated for use by the U.S. forces under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, and in May, the two countries reached agreement on the Bilateral Defense Guidelines. The guidelines reaffirmed that mutual defense commitments would be invoked in the event that either country were attacked in disputed areas, and included U.S. commitments to modernizing the Philippines' defense capabilities and deepening interoperability in order to strengthen the combined deterrence of the two countries.[56]

Within China, discussions have emerged about changes in the military postures of the United States and its allies in response to the Taiwan issue, the South China Sea disputes, and the situation

on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the possibility of U.S. military intervention and of a U.S.-China military stand-off.[57] Thus far, there are no signs that Beijing will alter its military posture and activities. On the contrary, Chinese experts have underlined the need to strengthen China's military presence in response to these circumstances. The CASS 2024 annual report describes the actions of Taiwan and the Philippines as attempts to "change the status quo," and argues that maintaining and strengthening China's military presence is essential for deterring such attempts.[58] In this regard, there is no consensus between China and East Asian countries on the "status quo" to be maintained.

Deepening Sino-Russian "Strategic Cooperation" in the Indo-Pacific

Military-to-Military Relations with a More Geopolitical Dynamic

In addressing the great-power competition concentrated in China's periphery, particularly the flash-points, China has also placed priority on "strategic cooperation" with Russia. "Strategic cooperation" between China and Russia is defined as coordination and cooperation for maintaining the global or regional strategic balance, and refers to mutual cooperation with a strong geopolitical dynamic. Ever since Vladimir Putin assumed the Russian presidency in 2012 and Xi Jinping the Chinese presidency in 2013, "strategic cooperation" has been emphasized in the context of their bilateral relations. Moreover, as great-power competition deepened in both China's periphery and the European theater from the latter half of the 2010s, "strategic cooperation" has also advanced between the Chinese and Russian armed forces.

In early April 2018, Wei Fenghe, who was appointed Chinese Minister of National Defense the previous month, visited Russia as his first overseas destination. The Chinese side explained that the purpose of the visit was to "help deepen practical cooperation between the two militaries and enrich and develop the comprehensive and strategic partnership of cooperation between the two countries."[59] During his meeting with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Wei stated that "China and Russia are aligned at a high level on key international issues, and China is determined to further consolidate its strategic interaction with Russia."[60]

The "Joint Statement on Developing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era," signed by the Chinese and Russian presidents in June 2019, explicitly states that they will "elevate military-to-military relations to a new level."[61] Specifically, the statement called for strengthening strategic communication between defense authorities and armed forces, deepening military mutual trust, strengthening military-technology cooperation, further evolving joint military exercises, and enhancing mechanisms for practical cooperation. Of note is the leaders' agreement to further evolve joint military exercises. Previous joint statements by the two have referred to "further

evolving" military cooperation or overall military-to-military relations and to "continuing to implement" specific cooperation projects. The 2019 joint statement indicated that the Chinese and Russian leaders agreed to further evolve joint military exercises.

Before reaching the above agreement of the late 2010s that accelerated the development of military-to-military relations, the Chinese and Russian forces had already begun conducting more geopolitically-oriented joint exercises by the mid-2010s. Launched in 2012, the Joint Sea exercises between the two navies (see Table 1.1) were initially centered around "military operations other than war" (MOOTW), such as vessel escort, search and rescue, anti-hijacking, and replenishment.[62] After Joint Sea-2015 was conducted in two phases, China-Russia joint military exercises became more geopolitical in character. Joint Sea-2015, hosted by Russia in May 2015, was held following Russia's "annexation" of Crimea in southern Ukraine in the previous year, which China effectively acquiesced to, and amid the process of further strengthening Sino-Russian relations. Joint Sea-2015 was the largest exercise the PLA had ever conducted with a foreign navy. Moreover, the choice of the Mediterranean Sea as the site for the first phase was geopolitically symbolic.

Joint Sea-2016 in September 2016 was hosted by China in the South China Sea. In July of that year, an arbitral tribunal's award was issued on the China-Philippines dispute over sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. It was only two months afterwards that the Chinese and Russian forces carried out joint exercises in the South China Sea, which included drills in air defense, anti-submarine warfare, joint search and strike operations in maritime and air domains, and island seizure—in short, traditional "war-fighting operations." Many Chinese experts understood Joint Sea-2016 to be a demonstration of Russia's political support for China on the South China Sea issue.[63] At the time, with the U.S. Obama administration announcing a "rebalance to Asia and the Pacific," Chinese strategists argued that hedging against China would form the baseline of the United States' long-term strategy. In order to counter the anticipated rise in U.S. strategic pressure, developing China-Russia relations was perceived as indispensable.[64] Specifically, Chinese strategists discussed the importance of introducing advanced weaponry from Russia and increasing its political support on the South and East China Sea issues. The shift in the nature of Sino-Russian joint military exercises could be understood from this context.

A PLAN frigate launching a rocket during the Joint Sea-2019 exercise between China and Russia, May 2019 (Xinhua/Kyodo News Images)

In early June 2017, the Chinese and Russian defense ministers signed a roadmap for the development of bilateral military cooperation. The roadmap itself was prepared by the Russian side, and according to Beijing, a detailed implementation plan had not been shared as of signing.[65] China's Ministry of National Defense described

Table 1.1 "Joint Sea" Combined Exercises between the PLA and Russian Navies

Name of Exercise	Dates	Place	Feature
Joint Sea-2015 (I)	May 11–21, 2015	Mediterranean Sea	
Joint Sea-2015 (II)	August 20–28, 2015	Sea of Japan	First-ever joint landing drill First-ever participation by the PLA Air Force
Joint Sea-2016	September 12–19, 2016	South China Sea	First-ever use of a command and communications system dedicated to Joint Sea
Joint Sea-2017 (I)	July 21–28, 2017	Baltic Sea	
Joint Sea-2017 (II)	September 18–25, 2017	Sea of Japan Sea of Okhotsk	First-ever submarine rescue drill
Joint Sea-2019	April 29–May 4, 2019	Yellow Sea	First-ever ship-to-air missile drill
Joint Sea-2021	October 14–17, 2021	Sea of Japan	First-ever joint minesweeping drill
Joint Sea-2022	December 21–27, 2022	East China Sea	First-ever blockade and visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) drill
Joint Sea-2024	July 14–17, 2024	South China Sea	Established a joint command center comprised of PLA and Russian naval combined teams

Sources: The website of the PRC Ministry of National Defense and Chinese news reports.

after the signing that the roadmap "concretely manifests strategic cooperation and is advantageous for both sides to address new threats and challenges in the security field together." In sync with the qualitative changes in the aforementioned Joint Sea exercises, in 2018 China participated in Russia's large-scale strategic exercise Vostok-2018 by sending a sizable contingent of 3,200 troops, 900 tanks and military vehicles, and 30 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. The PLA's participation in an exercise that was not a bilateral or multilateral exercise and had previously been conducted by Russia alone or only with its allies indicated that Sino-Russian military cooperation had progressed to a higher level. In Vostok-2018, units faced off against each other at all levels, not merely at the strategic level, and Russia treated China as a "friendly force."[66] Since then, the PLA has participated in Russian strategic exercises almost every year. In 2021, the Sino-Russian joint strategic and campaign exercise, Zapad/Interaction-2021, was staged on Chinese territory. In this exercise in which China is said to have taken the lead,[67] Russian forces tested joint operational capabilities sometimes using Chinese equipment, such as armored fighting vehicles and infantry fighting vehicles, under a plan drawn up by China.[68] In the exercise, a China-Russia joint command and communications system was employed, and for the first time in the history of Sino-Russian joint exercises, combined teams were formed, planned, trained, and drilled together.[69] New equipment accounted for 81.6% of the equipment the PLA deployed in the exercise.[70]

Furthermore, strategic cooperation in the military field has evolved into joint operations since

2019. In July of that year, China and Russia conducted a joint bomber flight for the first time. China deployed two H-6K long-range bombers and Russia two Tu-95 strategic bombers for a joint flight over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. This joint flight referred to by both sides as "joint strategic patrol" had "great strategic significance," according to a *PLA Daily* article published at the end of the year. It assessed that the joint flight "improved the level of strategic cooperation and the joint operation capabilities" of the Chinese and Russian forces, and "showed the international community the firm determination of China and Russia to safeguard national security and jointly maintain global strategic stability."[71]

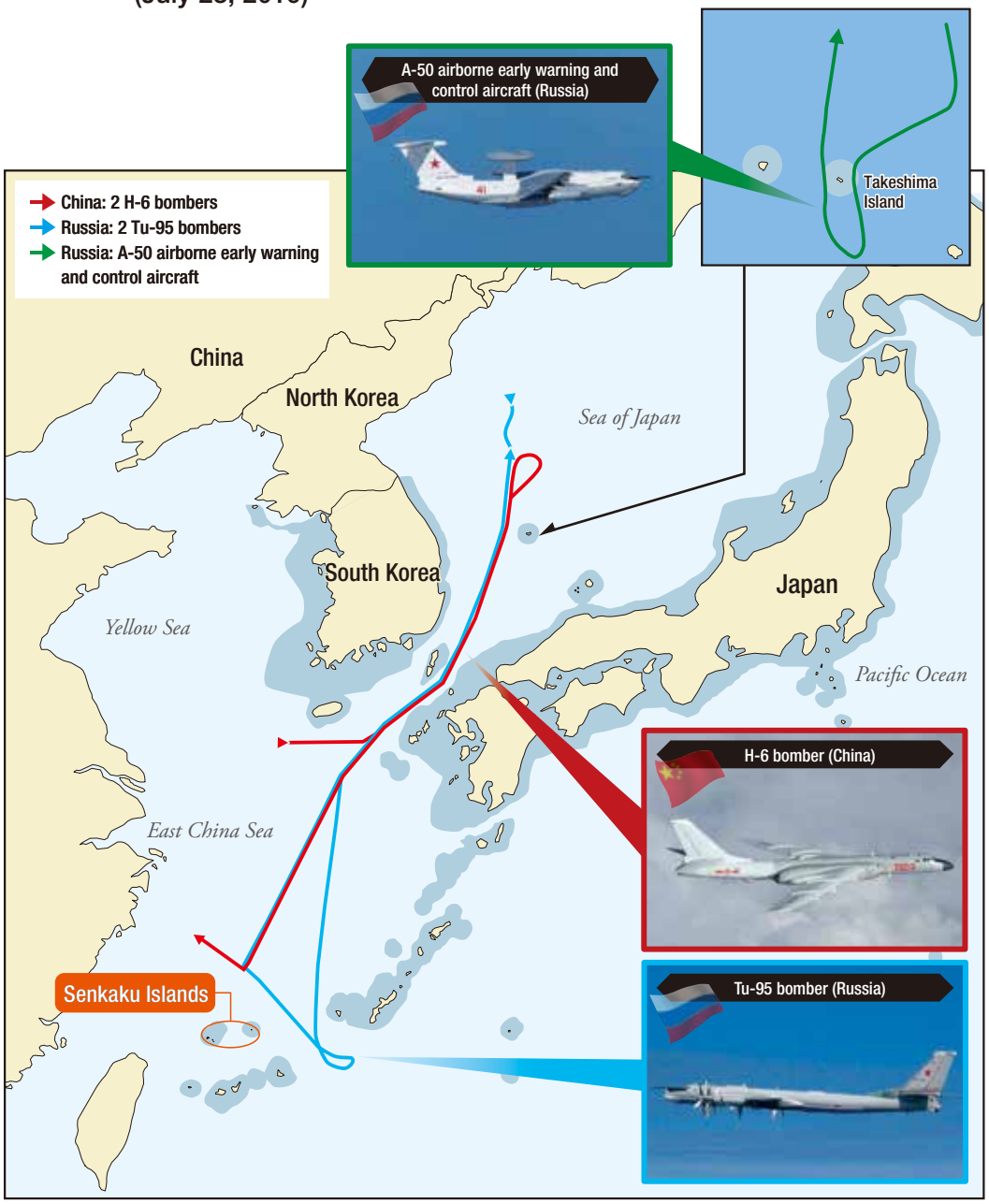
Joint flights by Chinese and Russian air forces are conducted annually, and the two countries have gradually expanded the scale and scope of their "joint strategic patrols." In the 2020 and 2021 joint flights, the Chinese and Russian air forces flew in formation. In the fourth joint flight in May 2022, China deployed its usual two H-6K bombers as well as two additional H-6K bombers, while Russia's two Tu-95 bombers were joined by an IL-20 intelligence-gathering aircraft. The Chinese and Russian air force bombers flew over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea and then over the western Pacific Ocean. In November of the same year, the fifth joint flight was conducted, in which China reportedly deployed bombers as well as two J-16 fighters and a Y-20 aerial tanker.[72]

The joint flights between China and Russia are tending to take place over longer durations and distances. The sixth joint flight in June 2023 and the ninth in November 2024 were held over two days, and the former proceeded toward Guam. The eighth joint flight in July 2024 was conducted over the Chukotka Sea, the Bering Sea, and the northern Pacific off the coast of Alaska. While Russian military aircraft regularly fly in this airspace, Chinese military aircraft entered it for the first time through this joint mission. The joint flight off Alaska, escorted by Russian fighters, lasted more than five hours, and Chinese and Russian bombers approached just 200 miles off the U.S. mainland.[73] Aircraft participating in joint flights have also become more diverse. In recent China-Russia joint flights over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea, bombers and fighters have been seen with electronic warfare aircraft, patrol aircraft, aerial tankers, and intelligence-gathering aircraft.[74]

In October 2021, following Joint Sea-2021 staged in the Sea of Japan, Chinese and Russian naval vessels conducted their first joint maritime cruise. Chinese and Russian vessels sailed from the Sea of Japan through the Tsugaru Strait into the western Pacific Ocean, crossed the Osumi Strait, and arrived in the East China Sea.[75] In the third joint maritime cruise from July to August 2023, anti-submarine warfare drills were conducted in coordination with Russian maritime patrol aircraft, while the fourth joint maritime cruise in July 2024 was conducted in the South China Sea for the first time.

China contends that its joint operations with Russia contribute to "maintaining global strategic stability" and constitute a new form of strategic interactions.[76] In November 2021, the Chinese and Russian defense ministers signed the "Roadmap to Expand Military Cooperation" for 2021–2025. While its details have not been disclosed, China Central Television reported that the roadmap included "strengthening joint patrols and joint exercises."[77] Likewise, the Joint Statement from the China-Russia

Figure 1.2 The First Joint Flight by Chinese and Russian Bombers and Other Aircraft (July 23, 2019)



Sources: Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2021*, 130; 統合幕僚監部 [Joint Staff]「中国機及びロシア機の東シナ海及び日本海における飛行について」(2019年7月23日); Yonhap News Agency, July 23, 2019.

leaders' meeting in March 2023 confirmed that the two countries would "regularly organize maritime and aerial joint patrols and joint exercises."[78] The Joint Statement of May 2025 stated that the two would "expand the scale and scope of joint exercises."[79]

As the above analysis shows, the geopolitical perspectives of China and Russia are broadly aligned with respect to the Indo-Pacific region. "Strategic cooperation" between the Chinese and

Russian militaries was advanced in joint response to the great-power competition concentrated in China's periphery, especially to the flashpoints. The scenarios of joint military exercises are already centered around traditional "war-fighting operations," and the operational scale and scope of joint flights and joint maritime cruises have expanded. It is expected that bilateral military cooperation in these formats will continue and be conducted regularly, and that a range of military cooperation will be explored based on the geopolitical environment and international circumstances facing both countries.

The Asymmetries of "Strategic Cooperation"

What will be the eventual results of closer military-to-military relations and broader bilateral relations? Some speculate the establishment of a China-Russia alliance. Sergei Luzyanin, director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, suggests that, while it is only a hypothesis, "Russia and China already have the foundation for establishing a formal alliance in the military and military-technology fields. Once their political leaders decide on it, an alliance would become a reality."[80] In China, a Sino-Russian alliance has also been discussed in a limited context. Wang Haiyun, who served as a Chinese defense attaché in Russia in the early 2000s, has argued that building a China-Russia "quasi-alliance" was possible as a joint response to the strengthening Japan-U.S. alliance.[81]

These arguments assume similarities in Chinese and Russian strategic interests. Wang, who proposed a limited China-Russia alliance, reasons as follows. First, the two countries have a similar strategic environment. He underscores that the emergence of the United States as a "sole super-hegemon" (一超独霸) in the aftermath of the Cold War created an "imbalanced international power structure," and "China and Russia are facing U.S. strategic suppression and pressure." Second, the two countries have similar strategic objectives. "China and Russia's goal is to promote global multipolarity and to become important poles in a future multipolar world." Third, the two countries have similar strategic needs. Both China and Russia seek "a peaceful and stable environment for development and an international order that is fair, reasonable, and democratic." Fourth, the two countries have similar international responsibilities and share "common responsibilities as permanent members of the UN Security Council." Fifth, the two countries are pursuing similar strategic choices, noting that China and Russia have "very similar positions on international issues." On this basis, Wang argued that "If Russia maintains its mightiness and China-Russia strategic cooperation continues, it will become difficult for the United States to concentrate its strength on countering China."[82]

By the eve of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Beijing and Moscow had come to emphasize the convergence of their strategic interests. In early February, President Putin visited China for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games and held his 38th meeting with President Xi Jinping. One of the expected outcomes, according to Xi, was that "China and Russia will strengthen coordination and cooperation on international issues and raise their voice on global governance."[83] After the meeting, the "China-Russia Joint Statement on the International Relations Entering a New

Era and the Global Sustainable Development" was released.[84] The statement was described as demonstrating the two countries' "common positions" on "democracy, development, security, and order."[85] It stressed the legitimacy of their political systems, stipulated a range of strategic and practical cooperation in the international arena, and presented common positions on international politics and security. From both the remarks made on the summit meeting and the joint statement, it is evident that the purpose of Sino-Russian "strategic cooperation" is to maintain strategic stability in a global and regional context and in a comprehensive manner, and that such cooperation included joint response to NATO's eastward enlargement, the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, and AUKUS established in 2021.

However, Russia's aggression against Ukraine cast doubt in Chinese society, specifically on the convergence of strategic interests on which the strategic cooperation is premised. Shortly after Russia launched its military invasion, some leading intellectuals posted an open letter on Chinese social media and other platforms, declaring that they "strongly oppose Russia's war against Ukraine." The letter criticized Russia's actions as "trampling on the principles of international relations" and called for a reassessment of the China-Russia relationship.[86] With the war's prolongation, many Chinese experts have begun to point out differences between the Chinese and Russian attitudes toward the international order.[87] The two countries most certainly continue to have a shared interest in resisting U.S. strategic pressure. Yet, Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a departure from what Wang Haiyun worded as a "peaceful and stable environment for development" and from their "common responsibilities" as permanent members of the UN Security Council. This has cast doubt over continued cooperation with Russia in Chinese society.

Even while ideological doubts have emerged in Chinese society over the convergence of strategic interests, there is still a perceived need to counter U.S. strategic pressure. China's leadership and diplomatic authorities have increasingly focused on this need, asserting that there is no change in the direction of China-Russia relations. Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that Sino-Russian relations have remained on the "right course" and that "China is ready to work with Russia to act on the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, and promote China-Russia relations in the new era to higher levels."[88] At the end of October 2022, following the 20th Party Congress, Foreign Minister Wang held a phone meeting with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, during which Wang expressed China's unwavering support for Russia "under the leadership of President Putin to achieve strategic development goals against all the odds and disturbance, and to further establish Russia's status as a major country" and reiterated China's wish to take the bilateral relationship to higher levels.[89]

The diplomatic process emphasizing the robustness of China-Russia relations was further cemented during President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia in March 2023. Xi stressed, "To consolidate and develop China-Russia relations is a strategic choice China has made on the basis of its own fundamental interests and the prevailing trends of the world. China is firm in keeping to the general direction of strengthening strategic coordination with Russia."[90] The joint statement issued after the leaders' meeting describes China-Russia relations as "mature, stable, independent, and tenacious"

and states that China is interested in "a strong and successful Russia."[91] Furthermore, the May 2025 joint statement affirmed that "China-Russia relations have unique strategic value and internal driving force." It mentioned that cooperation between China and Russia neither targets any third country nor is "subject to the influence of any third country."[92] This could be understood as a rebuttal to U.S. and Western policies toward China and Russia. On the wording, Foreign Minister Wang Yi explained, "No force can interfere with [China and Russia] achieving development and rejuvenation, respectively."[93]

Noteworthy is how asymmetrically Sino-Russian strategic cooperation, particularly the military relationship, has developed. First, military-to-military relations have developed basically by way of Russia extending cooperation to China. As already noted, the 2017 roadmap for military cooperation was prepared by Russia. At that time, Russia was actively pursuing military diplomacy across Asia, including with the Philippines, Vietnam, and India. Moscow also signed a roadmap for military cooperation with India, which faced heightening tensions with China over border issues.[94] At the beginning, Beijing did not actively go along with Moscow's military diplomacy and may have had concerns about Russia's deepening military ties with neighboring states with which China had disputes. The Chinese media initially did not report on the roadmap's signing, and the Chinese Ministry of National Defense only confirmed it three weeks later.

Notwithstanding this, China subsequently accorded prominence to the roadmap, none other than because the partnership between China and Russia was ranked at the top in Chinese diplomacy and because significance was attached to military cooperation with Russia. Prior to signing the roadmap, the two countries had already conducted missile defense exercises in addition to the joint field training military exercises mentioned above. The 2016 joint statements by their heads of state on global strategic stability expressed concern over the deployment of the land-based Aegis system (Aegis Ashore) in Europe and the planned deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in the ROK.[95] In response to these deployments, China and Russia conducted their first computer-simulated missile defense exercise under the codename Aerospace Security-2016.[96] The year was added to the codename, suggesting that this exercise could be held regularly. In December 2017, Aerospace Security-2017 was conducted, which simulated cooperation in operational planning, command, and firepower combat.[97] They are regarded as elementary exercises to verify the functions of Russia's S-400 and China's HQ-9 theater missile defense systems.[98] Yet, at a Valdai Club meeting in October 2019, President Putin remarked that Russia was "helping our Chinese partners create a missile attack warning system."[99] Additionally, during President Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow in March 2023, the nuclear authorities of both countries agreed on a program for long-term cooperation, which included the construction of fast-neutron reactors that produce plutonium in China.[100] These cooperation have the potential to contribute to China's nuclear buildup.

The second asymmetry of China-Russia strategic cooperation is that China's cooperation with Russia has unfolded mainly in the economic field. Total bilateral trade rose 29.3% year on year to US$190.2 billion in 2022 and reached US$240.1 billion in 2023,[101] achieving the US$200 billion

target by 2024 ahead of schedule. Russian exports of oil and natural gas to China have increased in particular. In 2023, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia to become China's largest supplier of crude oil, while Russian exports of natural gas to China increased 61.7% year on year to US$6.4 billion.[102] China effectively offset much of the decline in Russia's energy exports to Europe. That same year, Chinese exports to Russia also grew sharply, rising 46.9% year on year to US$110.9 billion, more than double the pre-pandemic volume.[103] In particular, there was a surge in exports of vehicles, aircraft, transportation equipment, and electronics. This is attributed to the disruption of Russian supply chains caused by Western economic sanctions, and it indicates that China has been meeting Russia's demand for products following the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War. In 2023, China's share of Russia's total trade doubled from pre-war levels to approximately 40%, and China's share of Russia's imports reached 52%. Chinese exports to Russia include machine tools, microelectronics, and other components that could be used in weapons manufacturing. A spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated, "China consistently handles the export of military products prudently and responsibly and strictly controls the export of dual-use articles, including drones for civilian use."[104] Even then, the rapidly expanding China-Russia economic relationship is supporting Russia's ability to sustain its war effort against Ukraine.

Nevertheless, China's cooperation with Russia in the military sector itself has been limited. Their joint exercises and patrols have focused primarily on verifying some of the scenarios and capabilities that the PLA and CCG may be envisioning for operations against Taiwan, such as maritime blockade and visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) of ships. In other words, the joint exercises and patrols are tailored mainly to China's military and combat needs.[105] A report by RAND predicts that China and Russia will use joint exercises to develop concepts of operation and countermeasures for offsetting U.S. and Western military advantages, giving the example of the first ship-to-air missile drill conducted during Joint Sea-2019.[106] That said, at this time, high-intensity contingency scenarios do not appear to be shared between the Chinese and Russian armed forces. According to the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, Sino-Russian joint exercises and operations contribute to enhancing the level of military-to-military *xiezuo* (协作).[107] The Chinese term "xiezuo" means mutual collaboration and is not preconditioned on unity.[108] Of note is that China does not seem eager to conduct military cooperation that would directly serve Russia's military objectives or needs in the European theater. Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, China has continued to strengthen its military and security relations with Russia through joint military exercises, patrols, and expanded military contacts. However, as was already mentioned, these activities are carried out in view of China's military and security challenges in the Asia-Pacific and do not constitute cooperation directly linked to the Russo-Ukrainian War.

New Russia-North Korea Ties

From the standpoint of strategic balance in the region, especially Northeast Asia, the rapprochement between Russia and North Korea since 2023 has created a new uncertainty for China. Notably, Article 4 of the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty" signed by the Russian and North Korean leaders in June 2024 stipulates that "In case any one of the two sides is put in a state of war by an armed invasion from an individual state or several states, the other side shall provide military and other assistance with all means in its possession without delay in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and the laws of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Federation." This text infers that the two countries agreed to form a de facto military alliance. The Chinese Foreign Ministry avoided making a direct comment, stating that Russia and North Korea are sovereign states and how they develop their bilateral relations is their matter.[109]

In China, some take seriously the impact of Russia-North Korea rapprochement, fearing that it may escalate the confrontational dynamics on the Korean Peninsula. The annual report of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations contends that the clashes between Russia and Ukraine brought about "new developments" in the situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula. Specifically, it argues that the United States is working more closely with Japan and the ROK to "reinforce its alliance system in Northeast Asia," and predicts potential intensification of great-power competition and further escalation on the peninsula.[110] Zhang Tuosheng, senior research fellow at the Grandview Institution, presents a more serious assessment. "On the one hand, political and military cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the ROK has been upgraded on the whole, bringing the three countries closer to a quasi-alliance. On the other hand, the partnership among China, Russia, and North Korea has been strengthened continuously. In particular, the growing military cooperation between Russia and North Korea is drawing attention. If this trend of confrontation continues, it will inevitably have a profoundly negative impact on the regional security situation."[111] Zhang worries that the "development of North Korea's nuclear capabilities will trigger a domino effect" in the medium to long term, which will lead to the nuclearization of Japan and the ROK and, as a result, an "all-out collapse" of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.

To avert these future scenarios, Zhang calls on China to adhere to the principle that Russia and North Korea are "partners but not allies." In summary, he suggests that China should keep a certain distance from the moves to deepen Russian-North Korean military cooperation.[112] Zhang further argues that China should maintain its "neutral position" in the Russo-Ukrainian War and to the "basic policy of realizing peace, stability, and denuclearization" on the question of the Korean Peninsula.

Chinese diplomatic authorities, likewise, have sought to avoid escalating confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. In this context, Beijing has placed particular emphasis on trilateral cooperation among China, Japan, and the ROK. The joint declaration of the ninth trilateral summit held in May 2024 for the first time in four and a half years states: "We reaffirmed that maintaining peace, stability

and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia serves our common interest and is our common responsibility. We *reiterated positions* on regional peace and stability, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the abductions issue, respectively. We agree to continue to make positive efforts for the political settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue" (italics added by the author).[113] Nonetheless, Chinese diplomatic authorities have struggled to maintain the basic position of supporting "denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula. Between April 2024 and the ninth trilateral summit in May, Foreign Ministry spokespersons, diplomats, and others claimed that China's basic position remained unchanged, while avoiding references to denuclearization of the Peninsula. This was because such references were expected to provoke a backlash from North Korea. On the day that the joint declaration was released, the North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson emphasized, "'complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula' has already died out theoretically, practically and physically."[114] Whereas the outcome document of the eighth trilateral summit in December 2019 states, "We are committed to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," the wording on "denuclearization" in the 2024 joint declaration was toned down to "We reiterated positions," presumably to reflect China's preferences. Chinese diplomatic authorities underscored the need to "calm the situation" as a precondition for dialogue.[115]

China's white paper published in May 2025 titled, *China's National Security in the New Era*, states that China "remains committed to a political solution of the Korean Peninsula issue. It has worked to promote simultaneous progress in establishing a peace mechanism and advancing denuclearization, so as to address the legitimate concerns of all parties in a balanced manner."[116] However, on September 4, when Chinese President Xi Jinping held a meeting for the first time in six years with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un after attending the military parade commemorating the "80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War" in Beijing on September 3, Xi may not have mentioned denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, even while reaffirming that China's position on developing their bilateral relations had not changed.[117] The Russia-North Korea rapprochement has brought into sharper focus the great-power competition surrounding the strategic environment on the Korean Peninsula, and it seems China perceived that the competition could turn into "bloc confrontation."[118] Regarding the China-North Korea leaders' meeting on September 4, North Korea's *Rodong Sinmun* reported that the leaders "informed each other of the independent policy stands maintained by the parties and governments of the two countries in the field of external relations," suggesting that China may have asked for an explanation on North Korea-Russia relations.[119] Nevertheless, it is not easy for China to find a point of equilibrium between Russia and North Korea, on the one hand, and Japan, the ROK, and the United States, on the other.

Conclusion

China's diplomatic strategy must strike a difficult balance deciding where Russia and the China-Russia relationship fit in. There are two coexisting and confronting narratives in the domestic political discourse on Chinese diplomacy. One articulates presenting a model and providing benefits, especially to Global South countries in view of the competition and confrontation with the United States and the rest of the Western world. The other articulates responding to U.S. moves and alliance strategy and using more direct means to maintain strategic balance. The former narrative reflects China's turn toward more proactive engagement with the Global South, primarily through economic instruments, as a longer-term response to deepening great-power competition. China and its highest-level partner, Russia, have agreed on supporting the Global South. Sino-Russian cooperation in this context prioritizes not economic initiatives, but rather, working with developing countries and emerging economies to develop the discourse on international order that is aligned with their respective positions.

In the Indo-Pacific, however, China and Russia are increasingly focused not on providing benefits and security to third countries, but on maintaining a strategic balance that is ideal for themselves. Amid the great-power competition, U.S. alliance strategy has been reinforced in around China and Russia. In response, China and Russia have advanced "strategic cooperation," especially military-to-military cooperation. Specifically, to address the great-power competition concentrated in China's periphery, particularly the flashpoints in the Taiwan Strait and the South and East China Seas, China has conducted joint military exercises and joint patrols with Russia to verify necessary military and combat capabilities and send signals externally.

Russia is increasingly supporting China's military and combat objectives in its maritime periphery, while China distances itself from directly contributing to achieving Russia's military objectives in the European theater. If Beijing were to provide more direct military cooperation to Moscow, it would deviate from China's diplomatic strategy of presenting a model and providing benefits to third countries. Furthermore, on the Russo-Ukrainian War, China has expressed understanding for Russia's security concerns while continuing to adopt a neutral position. The two countries have also taken a divergent attitude toward the international system. While they concur on the principle of opposing and resisting U.S. hegemonism, China—compared to Russia—is a system player on the international stage, including the UN. China's attitude toward the international system differs significantly from that of Russia, a disruptive actor that launched a military invasion of Ukraine in violation of the principles of international relations enshrined in the UN Charter.[120]

Moreover, the available policy instruments vary between China and Russia. The tools at China's disposal for maintaining strategic balance are wide-ranging, as suggested by initiatives such as the GDI, the GSI, and the GCI. China's three global initiatives themselves maintain strategic balance through a range of instruments. By contrast, Russia's tools are largely confined to the military domain.

It has few, if any, economic instruments for maintaining or restoring balance, resulting in a tendency to readily resort to military measures. This was illustrated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and by Russia's rapprochement with North Korea. Such actions may appear, in China's eyes, as undermining the stability and strategic balance in Northeast Asia. In sum, China-Russia relations are strengthening the centripetal force in resisting the United States and the rest of the Western world, especially U.S. alliance strategy, while centrifugal forces are emerging simultaneously.


Sputnik/Kyodo News Images

Chapter TWO

Russia's War and International Norms

Concerns over Its Relations with China and North Korea

YAMAZOE Hiroshi

Introduction

Russia was aligned with those maintaining the international system until 2021. Even while facing serious confrontations with Ukraine and the West, Russia had numerous dialogue channels for coordinating interests and easing tensions, and acted to restrain North Korea's dangerous development of military capabilities. However, on February 24, 2022, President Vladimir Putin launched a "special military operation." The protracted aggression against Ukraine that followed has brought dramatic changes to Moscow's behavioral pattern. Russia used force against Ukraine in a manner that deviated substantially from international norms, resulting in the severance of contact and trade by many Western countries. Consequently, Russia deepened its cooperation with China in order to create favorable conditions for its military operations. Furthermore, it shifted to breaching United Nations (UN) Security Council sanctions against North Korea, and began facilitating North Korea's military enhancement through munitions provision and joint military operations.

In light of the needs arising from Russia's extraordinary circumstances, which are referred to here as a state of "quasi-emergency," this chapter attempts to explain relations with China and North Korea from Russia's perspective. While the situation has not called for the declaration of national martial law, Russia—largely cut off from standard diplomatic and economic interactions with the West—is attempting to manage state affairs focused on military operations. This requires procuring supplies and funds from abroad by evading economic sanctions, securing and supplying large numbers of troops and military goods without disrupting social and economic stability, and continuing to inflict damage on Ukraine. However, sustaining military operations alone has not achieved the surrender of Ukraine. Hoping to erode Western support that serves as an obstacle, Russia has employed methods that spread fear in Western societies while weakening the effectiveness of international norms. In this chapter, these methods are called the "cards of fear." It assumes that Russia has gradually instilled the fear of nuclear use and the fear of North Korea's military enhancement, expecting that the West would become fearful of escalation and exercise caution in confronting Russia.

The first section explains the circumstances of this "quasi-emergency." The second section outlines Russia's relations with China, describing how the two countries have advanced their respective interests by working together, as well as how their diverging actions are creating risks for neighboring countries. The third section provides an overview of the noticeably closer military cooperation between Russia and North Korea, highlighting the advantages for Russia in terms of military operations and "cards of fear." Through these analyses, this chapter examines what risks the three countries are posing to neighboring countries and by what logic.

Russia's Continued Military Operations and Order-Breaking Behavior

Failed Great-Power Aspirations and "Quasi-Emergency"

Since 2014, Moscow has continued to violate the sovereignty of Ukraine and the human rights of its population by treating the Crimean Peninsula as territory it unilaterally annexed, and by deploying military forces to sustain the separatists entrenched in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine. Finding these actions intolerable, Western countries initiated economic sanctions on Russia, which then retaliated with coercive measures against the West, including dangerous close-air encounters and cyberspace operations. Notwithstanding this, Russia actively pursued high-level dialogues, played a role in maintaining the international order in fora such as the UN Security Council, and kept coercive measures limited so as not to undermine these efforts. However, on February 24, 2022, President Putin of Russia declared the start of a "special military operation." Pledging "demilitarization and denazification" of Ukraine, the operation openly invaded another country's territory aiming to subjugate its capital. The violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and the human rights of its population increased considerably in degree, provoking strong backlash and dismay in the international community. But, because Ukrainian capabilities exceeded and Russian capabilities fell short of Russian planners' expectations, Russia failed to seize the capital and to incorporate Ukraine into its sphere of influence and reconstruct great-power relations in its favor.[1]

From February to April 2022, Russia conducted direct talks with Ukraine on ceasing hostilities. However, after narrowing down the main points in the March 29 Communique, Russia presented a position that diverged significantly from Ukraine's in the April 15 draft treaty. Consequently, the bilateral negotiations were brought to a halt.[2] If the two parties had not suspended the talks, they could have agreed on a draft treaty and established multilateral commitments, leading the way to Ukraine's neutrality and Russia's withdrawal. In actuality, Russia continued its military operation beyond April, while Finland and Sweden pressed for accession into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), becoming members in April 2023 and March 2024, respectively. Ukraine became further integrated into Western military arrangements, raising popular aspirations for NATO membership.

After Russia launched its military operation and failed to achieve its initial objectives, Moscow found itself continuing the military operation over a long term. As a result, its foreign relations have changed in unprecedented ways. Many Western countries severed their diplomatic and economic ties, making it difficult for Russia to obtain funds and supplies freely from overseas. To secure funds and supplies, Russia began to engage in behavior deviating from international norms. It enhanced military cooperation with Iran and North Korea in violation of UN Security Council resolutions and leveraged such cooperation for its military operation against Ukraine. Even in the post-Soviet space where it asserts dominance, Russia could not subjugate Ukraine, could not compel Belarus and other allies

in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to join the military operation, and has been unable to establish a sphere of influence that allows it to exercise dominant power comparable to the former Soviet Union.[3] Domestically, amid a tense, great struggle with Western powers, priority has been placed on the arms industry over the civilian sector, and Russia has seen a rise in threats to legal stability and human rights protection.

In this chapter, this extraordinary situation in Russia is termed a state of "quasi-emergency." Getting out of it is not easy for the Putin administration that created it, leaving it with no choice but to persist until the "special military operation" can be brought to an end by delivering on its goals. Compromising on stated objectives—for example, ending the operation only with territorial gains without resolving the "threat posed by the Kyiv regime"—would imperil the administration, and the Kremlin did not find itself compelled to accept such compromises. In continuing the campaign, the Putin administration reinforced the narrative that it did not fail to subdue Ukraine, a lesser power. Rather, it was compelled to carry out a large-scale defensive war in response to the large-scale war waged by the entire West, which is using Ukraine to undermine Russia and the international order. Despite this, Russia did not undertake full-scale wartime mobilization with a sense of urgency that the entire nation was under existential threat, as during the German-Soviet War. Russia has preserved much of ordinary civilian life as a foundation for governance and productive capacity, and has leveraged its trade and diplomatic relations with non-Western countries. The state bureaucrats of the strengthened presidential subsidiary bodies have played a role in meeting the demands of governance—maintaining civilian industry and social stability while increasing arms production.[4]

In this restricted state of "quasi-emergency," the deployable assets are limited, making the subjugation of Ukraine a distant goal for Russia. To put it within reach, it became necessary to dissuade Western countries, especially the United States, from providing support to Ukraine.[5] Not having the choice to offer concessions acceptable to Western countries and improve relations, the Putin administration has relied exclusively on hardline measures.

The sudden onset of a "quasi-emergency" has transformed Russian society. On March 4, 2022, Russia enacted a law that punishes those who disseminate information contrary to the official account of the "special military operation." Protests broke out against the war but were suppressed. Russian news coverage and discourse also aligned with state-propagated narratives, and it became difficult to identify problems or make corrections.

In March, the Ukrainian forces repelled Russia's offensive in northern Ukraine, including Kyiv region, and in early May, forced the withdrawal of the Russian military that was approaching Kharkiv, a key city in the northeast. In early September, Russian forces in eastern Kharkiv region, which had maintained forward positions capable of threatening northern Donetsk region, were attacked and suffered a significant retreat. In the wake of this defeat, President Putin, asserting that Russia and the areas of operations were increasingly under the threat of Western forces, announced that he supports the holding of referendums in the areas of operations by local authorities to determine their future, and

issued an executive order on the partial mobilization of reservists.[6] Across Russia, local authorities implemented mandatory conscription in violation of procedures, while Russian citizens fled to other countries and protested against the military call-up.[7]

On September 30, President Putin signed documents on the annexation of the Ukrainian territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson to the Russian Federation, claiming to fulfill the wish expressed by the residents in the four regions. By doing so, Russia effectively expanded its own territory that it was obliged to defend. Moreover, the territory included areas such as northern Donetsk region that remained under Ukrainian rule. This meant that, if hostilities were to end along the existing front lines, Russia would have to accept continued Ukrainian occupation of its territory. The objectives of the "special military operation" were unachieved in March 2022, and in September, when the front lines had retreated, Russia assumed an additional obligation to "restore Russian territory," further widening the gap between the operation's objectives and the reality.

On October 19, Russia declared martial law under Article 87 of the Constitution and the 2002 law "On Martial Law" in the four regions, in other words, Ukrainian territories it did not govern before February 2022.[8] At the same time, by Executive Order No. 756, it declared a "medium level of readiness" in six adjacent regions, such as Kursk and Belgorod regions in the Russian Federation, and the Ukrainian territory of Crimea unilaterally governed by Russia since March 2014; an "advanced level of readiness" in many western areas including Moscow; and a "basic level of readiness" in other areas.[9] Through these measures, it became legal for Russian military and administrative authorities to impose restrictions on certain civil rights for national security purposes. From Ukraine's perspective, Russia unilaterally legalized depriving Ukrainian citizens of rights, including freedoms and property, as well as their detention, forced deportation, and mobilization.[10]

During this period, Russian forces near Kherson, on the northwestern bank of the Dnipro River, and their supply routes were under sustained attack, and in early November, Russian troops were forced to withdraw to the river's southeastern bank. This further widened the gap between the objectives of the "special military operation" and the reality. In the more than two and a half years of operations that followed, the Russian military occupied several Ukrainian defensive positions but could not secure key cities home to many residents to claim the major achievement of "liberation of residents."

The fact that President Putin did not hold his annual "Direct Line" with citizens or large press conference in December 2022 suggested that it was difficult to confidently explain Russia's situation and future to the public. The presidential address was also not delivered after April 2021. Although the Constitution requires the president to deliver an address to the Federal Assembly every year, President Putin did not give one in 2022, more specifically, between April 21, 2021 and February 21, 2023.

The Russian Armed Forces continued to face a shortage of personnel, and the military operation was achieving little success. Against this backdrop, the irregular paramilitary organization, the Wagner Group ("Wagner"), rose in prominence after engaging in fierce combat. As the establishment of a paramilitary organization not under the state's chain of command is prohibited under Article 13

of the Constitution, Russian authorities did not officially acknowledge the existence of Wagner units, which were active in eastern Ukraine since 2014 and in Syria since 2015. However, in the latter half of 2022, Wagner's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, began to advertise the group's military successes, and its profile grew in Russian society. Wagner recruited combatants from Russian prisons on the condition that convicts who fulfilled a fixed-term contract would be released. Although the mortality rate among convict combatants in battle was high, some completed their contracts and returned to Russian society. Upon their return, several have reportedly committed violent crimes again.[11] Unlawful acts were also rampant across Wagner units, including sledgehammer executions of mercenaries who were repatriated in prisoner exchanges.[12]

Wagner deployed forces to Bakhmut in eastern Donetsk region and turned it into a fierce battleground. Prigozhin repeatedly praised Wagner's achievements while condemning the Russian Ministry of Defense for its poor performance and for providing insufficient supplies to Wagner. He hinted that his forces would withdraw from combat and questioned Russia's reasons for waging war against Ukraine. Wagner units continued the offensive in Bakhmut, and despite suffering heavy losses, captured the city in May 2023. Meanwhile, the Russian Ministry of Defense moved to bring Wagner and other irregular paramilitary organizations under its command. To resist these efforts, he launched an armed uprising on June 23, demanding reforms from the ministry's senior officials, and on the following day, his forces advanced northward from Rostov-on-Don. The Putin administration then made a deal with Prigozhin, in which he agreed to reorganize Wagner in exchange for his safety. Russian authorities subsequently tightened their control over Wagner's chain of command, and on August 23, the plane carrying Prigozhin and others crashed, killing the group's leadership.

On March 7, 2024, the United States warned Russia that an Islamist group might carry out a terrorist attack. On March 19, President Putin insisted that Western countries and Ukraine were orchestrating terrorist attacks and that recent provocative statements were aimed at destabilizing Russia.[13] On March 22, armed attackers opened fire at the Crocus City Hall venue near Moscow, killing more than 140 people. Although Islamic State-Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for the attack, President Putin shifted blame to Ukraine, asserting that the perpetrators had headed to Ukraine. Data on terrorist attacks released by Russian authorities over the preceding years show that those attributed to Islamist militants had sharply declined since 2022, with most cases attributed to Ukrainians.[14] In a state of "quasi-emergency," Russia has become unable to discern facts accurately and respond accordingly, casting doubts on its ability to ensure national and public safety.

Changes in Russian Foreign Policy

On February 21, 2023, Russia revoked the 2012 executive order on foreign policy, which contained the "principles of pragmatism, transparency, and a multi-vector approach," and on March 31, revised "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation." The revision included a substantial rewriting, mainly about how the values of Western countries, particularly Anglo-Saxon countries such

as the United Kingdom and the United States, are putting a strain on Russian values and interests. This represented a major turning point in Russian diplomacy.[15] The International Criminal Court's issuance of an arrest warrant for President Putin in March 2023 placed further constraints on his summit diplomacy. For example, he did not attend the BRICS Summit held in South Africa in August.

Grain storage facilities for export destroyed by Russian missiles, Odesa, July 21, 2023 (ZUMA Press/Kyodo News Images)

Although Russia's commencement of military actions in the Black Sea led to a sharp decline in maritime transport, the Black Sea Grain Initiative was launched with Turkey's mediation on July 22, 2022 as a UN program, with the participation of Ukraine and Russia, assuring the safe transport of grain through the Bosporus Strait. However, in the summer of 2023, Russia announced that it would not agree to extend the initiative unless its demands were met, and the initiative expired on July 17. While Russia claimed that its grain exports were obstructed, Russia's grain exports reached an all-time high between July 2022 and June 2023, at approximately 57 million tons.[16] During this period, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and other African heads of state met with President Putin on June 17, 2023 and presented a peace proposal that included measures to stabilize food markets. At the Russia-Africa Summit on July 28, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi urged Russia to return to the grain initiative.[17] On July 19, shortly after the initiative's expiration, Russia launched missile strikes on the Odesa grain storage facilities in Ukraine. As the grains were destined for China, China's delegation to the UN joined in calling for the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.[18] However, despite requests from African countries and China to stabilize the international grain market, Russia prioritized attacks on Ukraine.

On June 14, 2024, President Putin delivered an address at an expanded meeting with senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the outset, he touched on the rise of the Global South, African countries, and Latin American countries, and underscored cooperation with the BRICS countries, which he was scheduled to host in Kazan, central Russia, in October, as well as discussions on global issues with countries that were ready for dialogue. The remainder of the address was mostly devoted to his claims and demands on Ukraine. President Putin emphasized that the fundamental problem lay in the West turning Ukraine against Russia as part of the assault on the country, and that despite continued efforts to resolve the problems since the coup in 2014, it was compelled to launch the special military operation in 2022. The objectives included protecting the people in Donbas, restoring peace, and demilitarizing and denazifying Ukraine, all to avert threats to Russia and to restore balance in the sphere of security in Europe. He stated that Russia would immediately start negotiations if Ukrainian forces pledge and begin to withdraw from all areas within the administrative borders of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions.[19] In this speech, President Putin prioritized

presenting his own detailed interpretation of events by listing demands that were unacceptable to Ukraine and its partners. He offered almost no concrete guidance or rationale behind Russia's actions to the countries with which it sought to develop diplomatic relations. He also showed no inclination toward peace by engaging with the conflict resolution proposal made by China and Brazil on May 23 and did not touch on Russia's relationship with North Korea. Through 2025, this address has provided a point of reference for Russia's basic policy on Ukraine.[20]

Nuclear Weapons as "Cards of Fear"

The Putin administration has used fears of nuclear disaster and nuclear use as "cards of fear." Russia has occupied the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant since March 2022 and has frequently accused Ukraine of shelling it, while reports have also indicated that Russia itself brought in the explosives.[21] By not fulfilling its responsibility to keep the plant away from danger, and by making it intentionally dangerous, Russia stoked fear that the conflict could cause serious, widespread damage in the form of a nuclear disaster. Such "cards of fear" have been employed repeatedly by Russia.

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was the sole remaining treaty for nuclear arms control between Russia and the United States. Russia exchanged data with the United States under the treaty in September 2022 but declared suspension of implementation of New START on February 21, 2023. On March 25, plans to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus were announced.[22] On June 13, Sergei Karaganov, a prominent researcher close to President Putin, published an article arguing that if Russia uses nuclear weapons at an early stage, the West would see Russia's resolve and end its hostile actions. In contrast, on October 5, President Putin stated that there is no situation imaginable where something would threaten Russian statehood and that it was unnecessary to revise the nuclear-use criteria. Instead, he announced the withdrawal of Russia's ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.[23]

Escalation concerns have also expanded the discourse to include the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), a surface-to-surface missile with a range of approximately 300 kilometers that can be launched from the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS). On June 25, 2024, the Russian Ministry of Defense condemned Ukraine and the United States for their attacks on Crimea using ATACMS missiles.[24] On September 12, President Putin stated that the use of Western-made long-range precision weapons on Russian territory would correspond to the West's direct involvement in the war, which would change the nature of the conflict and necessitate Russia to make appropriate decisions.[25] Subsequently, on November 17, it was reported that President Joseph Biden authorized Ukraine's use of ATACMS against targets on Russian territory, taking into account the growing involvement of North Korea as a belligerent.[26] In response, on November 19, President Putin revised the criteria to enable Russia to also use nuclear weapons when a non-nuclear-weapon state wages an attack with the support of a nuclear-weapon state. Following an ATACMS attack on a military facility in Bryansk region in western Russia, Moscow on November 21 attacked Dnipro in eastern Ukraine

Table 2.1 Major Related Events

Russia's Operation against Ukraine	China	North Korea
2022		
Feb. 24 ● Special military operation launched	Jan. 3 ● Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races	Feb. 28 ● Denounced the U.S. over Ukraine
Sep. 21 ● Partial mobilization announced	Feb. 4 ● China-Russia Joint Statement, limitless relations emphasized	Mar. 2 ● Voted against resolution demanding Russian withdrawal at the UN General Assembly
Sep. 30 ● Process to annex four regions of Ukraine began	Sep. 15 ● China conveyed concerns to Russia at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit	Mar. 25 ● Mandate of UN Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts extended
Oct. 1 ● Withdrawal from Lyman		
Nov. 9 ● Withdrawal from Kherson		
2023		
Feb. 21 ● Suspension of implementation of New START announced	Feb. 24 ● "Position on the Political Settlement" released	Mar. 23 ● Mandate of UN Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts extended
Mar. 25 ● Deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus announced	Mar. 21 ● China-Russia Joint Statement, new deployment of nuclear weapons denied	Jul. 27 ● Defense Minister Shoigu attended Korean War victory ceremony in Pyongyang
Jun. 13 ● Talk of revising Russia's nuclear weapons criteria	Jul. 19 ● Russia damaged grain in Ukraine destined for China	Sep. 13 ● State Affairs Commission President Kim Jong Un held a meeting with President Putin at the Vostochny Cosmodrome
Oct. 5 ● Revision of Russia's nuclear weapons criteria denied	Aug. 5 ● Attended peace formula meeting in Saudi Arabia	Oct. 13 ● The U.S. indicated that artillery shells were exported from North Korea to Russia
		Oct. 18 ● Foreign Minister Lavrov held a meeting with Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui in Pyongyang
		Dec. 30 ● Russia used North Korean-made missile according to U.S. finding
2024		
May 10 ● New offensives on northern Kharkiv region	May 16 ● China-Russia Joint Statement	Mar. 28 ● Russia rejected extending the mandate of UN Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts
Jun. 14 ● Speech at an expanded meeting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	May 23 ● China and Brazil called for a peace talk	Jun. 19 ● President Putin held a meeting with State Affairs Commission President Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang, "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty" signed
Aug. 6 ● Ukrainian forces' incursion into Kursk region	Jun. 15 ● Did not attend the Summit on Peace in Switzerland	Sep. 13 ● Security Council Secretary Shoigu held a meeting with State Affairs Commission President Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang
Aug. 15 ● Pokrovsk offensive intensified, Ukraine called for evacuation	Jul. 24 ● China-Russia joint bomber patrol approached Alaska	Oct. 18 ● ROK National Intelligence Service confirmed the training and dispatch of North Korean troops
		Oct. 23 ● The U.S. indicated that North Korean troops were seen in the battlefield
Nov. 19 ● Nuclear-use criteria revised		Nov. 6 ● Russian Federation Council approved the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty"
Nov. 21 ● Intermediate-range ballistic missile used in airstrike		
2025		
		Jan. 9 ● Two North Korean soldiers taken prisoner
Apr. 26 ● Russian Chief of the General Staff reported recapture of Kursk region, mentioned North Korean troops		
Apr. 28 ● Russian President expressed gratitude to North Korean troops	May 8 ● China-Russia Joint Statement	Apr. 28 ● North Korea announced its troops' participation in Russian operations

Source: Compiled by the author.

using the newly developed Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile launched from approximately 800 kilometers away.[27] On November 25, a strike staging area at the Khalino air base in Russia's Kursk region was struck by ATACMS missiles.[28]

Despite President Putin's statements on nuclear weapons and his use of ballistic missiles as discussed above, they were not driven by actual operational necessity. His warnings about the use of ATACMS, the subsequent announcement on nuclear-use criteria, and the employment of ballistic missiles did not mark an escalation to a new phase of operations, nor did they bring an end to Ukraine's use of ATACMS. As of November 2024, Russia was not verging on defeat, a crisis that would compel reliance on nuclear weapons—not any more than in September 2022, when Russian forces suffered a major setback in northeastern Ukraine and faced further risk of defeat, or in October 2023, when President Putin denied the need to revise the nuclear-use criteria. Russia has inflicted greater damage on Ukraine through numerous other means than with a single Oreshnik missile.

Russia's reference to nuclear weapons can be interpreted as an instance of playing a "card of fear" for raising awareness about nuclear escalation risks. By revealing several cards in phases, President Putin made the Biden administration particularly cautious in its calculations to avoid nuclear escalation. "Cards of fear," such as revising the nuclear-use criteria, lose their impact once the card is played. For this reason, in response to the U.S. measure, President Putin may have hinted at playing this card before actually playing it. The Oreshnik missile was also a one-time card that could send a strong message to the United States. Due to the gradual effects rendered by the "cards of fear," the Biden administration seems to have taken each potential risk seriously and delayed major decisions repeatedly, slowing the pace of U.S. support for Ukraine.

Coordination and Non-coordination with China

Advancing the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation

Russia deteriorated its relations with Western countries in 2014, which in turn increased its incentive to develop closer ties with China. The ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, held in Moscow on May 9, 2015, was not attended by major Western leaders, and Chinese President Xi Jinping was received as a distinguished guest. At the Russia-China leaders' meeting on May 8, a total of 32 documents were signed. Among them was the joint statement on comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation and promoting mutually advantageous ties, which included commitments to: develop closer relations between the Russian Presidential Executive Office and the General Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, pass on the memory of resisting German fascism and Japanese militarism, cooperate on energy such as gas pipelines, oppose unilateral sanctions based on Cold War thinking, deepen cooperation between the Belt

and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union, respect the legitimate interests of all regions and citizens of Ukraine, and promote the Six-Party Talks on the Korean Peninsula.[29]

The joint statement issued in Moscow on May 8, 2025, on deepening the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation in the new era to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the victory in World War II and the establishment of the UN, included commitments to: preserve an accurate historical memory of both countries' victories in war, respect strategic autonomy, disavow resisting against third countries, promote military cooperation such as joint patrols, promote settlements in local currencies, oppose unilateral economic measures, oppose the strengthening of and coordination within NATO and Indo-Pacific concepts, oppose pressuring North Korea, and remove the root causes of the Ukraine crisis.[30] On this occasion, Russia and China signed 28 documents, including two joint statements, and confirmed the progress made in their cooperative relations.

Over the course of these 10 years, Russia and China have come to describe their bilateral relationship as a "comprehensive strategic partnership" based on the 2001 Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. At every leaders' meeting, they highlight that bilateral relations had advanced to a higher level than before. While emphasizing the closeness of their relationship, Russia and China have denied the creation of an alliance like that of Western countries and have called for international frameworks independent of the West. One study characterizes strategic partnership as an interstate relationship that preserves a high degree of freedom in an international environment unsuited for balancing and bandwagoning.[31] Rather than being bound by the obligations of an alliance, both Russia and China appear to place greater importance on cooperating in areas with shared interests while maintaining strategic autonomy. Even so, in the past decade, as issues in conflict with Western countries increasingly overlap, Russia has referred to East Asian issues and China to European issues ever more frequently.

A joint report by Europe-based researchers indicates that China has played the most significant role in enabling Russia's war and has become a threat to Europe, citing the increase in China-Russia trade in 2023 by 26.3% from the previous year to US$240 billion, of which Chinese exports to Russia, including industrial goods, amounted to US$111 billion and Chinese imports from Russia, including energy, amounted to US$128 billion.[32] Russia has lost much of its revenue from energy exports to Europe, along with access to European technological supplies (machine tools and dual-use goods). China has been the biggest substitute for Europe[33] and is now a source of Russia's foreign currency and manufacturing capacity.

Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which has low trade barriers for Russia, and appear to be serving as intermediary countries for importing supplies.[34] Russian researcher Ivan Zuenko describes that while China's growing presence in various spheres in Central Asia does not always align with Russian interests, it is preferable to Western presence and is contributing to regional economic revitalization.[35]

Russia and China have formulated a roadmap for space cooperation for 2021–2025. In

September 2022, they agreed on plans to deploy stations for Russia's GLONASS navigation system in Changchun, Urumqi, and Shanghai, and for China's BeiDou navigation system in Obninsk, Irkutsk, and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.[36]

Russia has also been cooperating with China on military capabilities. After exporting large volumes of equipment to support the modernization of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the 2000s, agreements were reached to export the S-400 surface-to-air missile system and the Su-35 fighter jet to China for the first time in 2014 and 2015, respectively. Thereafter, there has been a noticeable rise in joint military exercises. Joint naval exercises have been conducted since 2012, sometimes in European waters. In 2018, the PLA began participating in Russia's strategic-level military exercises in a military district that the Russian Armed Forces considers most important.[37]

In July 2019, bombers of Russia and China, in coordination with their common airborne early warning and control aircraft, conducted the first joint patrol flight over the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan. Since then, patrols have been carried out regularly, once or twice a year. On July 24, 2024, patrol aircraft approached the state of Alaska, causing fighter jets of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) to scramble in response.[38] Joint patrols around Japan by Russian and Chinese navies have also been conducted more regularly.

Russia, while having a limited diplomatic and economic presence in the Pacific region, has a comparative advantage in military operation experience. This is considered to give Russia leverage in its relationship with China. Although much of Russia's land and air assets have been moved westward for the military operation in Ukraine, the closure of the Bosporus Strait has prevented the deployment of vessels to the Black Sea, making operations employing vessels and a few aircraft more sustainable in the Pacific. While joint bomber patrols demonstrate an increasing level of coordination, they are merely a component of joint operations by the standards of U.S. alliance network capabilities. Nevertheless, these activities allow China to gain training experience in diverse environments and to build confidence and trust in taking joint actions with Russia. Both countries have carried out occasional close approaches and airspace incursions that provoke Japan. As a consequence, increasingly serious scenarios must be anticipated, including unforeseen incidents in more dangerous situations and coordinated military actions in other theaters during times of heightened tension. Joint military actions suggest that Russia or China may create worrisome situations for Japan, through either coordinated or individual actions, and are also part of the "cards of fear" available to Russia.

Russia's Alignment and Non-alignment with China's Position on Military Actions

On Ukraine, the central issue for Russia that is in a state of "quasi-emergency," Beijing has adopted a stance generally favorable to Moscow. That is not to say that China and Russia's positions are aligned as if they were close allies. In this context, the country most clearly involved in Russia's military operations has not been a former Soviet republic like Belarus, a long-standing treaty ally and

CSTO member state, but rather North Korea, Russia's new partner. Iran is another country which has provided direct military support by supplying drones to Russia, although it denies it officially. By contrast, China's assistance has remained limited to broadly supporting Russia's resistance against Western pressure. Beijing has not endorsed Moscow's position that the Ukrainian administration is a Nazi regime, that the use of force is necessary to protect local ethnic Russians, and that the will of local ethnic Russians motivated the accession of the territories to the Russian Federation.

China also differs from Ukraine's partners that have been providing military, diplomatic, and economic support for Ukraine, maintaining that the exercise of its right to self-defense is necessary so long as Russia, which is infringing on Ukrainian sovereignty, refuses to restore Ukraine's rights and cease the use of force. China opposes such support on the grounds that it exacerbates the conflict and continues to call on both Russia and Ukraine to reach a political settlement, without condemning Russia's actions. China's diplomatic posture is favorable to Russia in not prejudicing the Russian position and having a shared objective of countering the United States. Furthermore, the trade relationship with China, as discussed above, is highly preferable for Russia's state administration and force readiness. Even while China is not a Russian ally, such a position has been made possible by the "comprehensive strategic partnership" framework. While Brazil, India, and South Africa likewise maintain positions that do not prejudice Russia, China is an influential major country that can jointly resist U.S. power, making it an exceptionally significant partner for Russia.

On February 24, 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis," a 12-item proposal including "respecting the sovereignty of all countries." The second item calls for "abandoning the Cold War mentality," which China itself wishes to emphasize.[39] Ukraine thought it was unpromising as the proposal did not include the withdrawal of Russian forces. By contrast, Russia welcomed it but did not present any concrete steps toward a ceasefire or peace negotiations. At a meeting on Ukraine's peace formula held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 5 to 6, 2023, Special Representative on Eurasian Affairs Li Hui attended from China and expressed eagerness in advancing multilateral peace discussions. Yet, China did not participate in the Summit on Peace in Ukraine held at Bürgenstock, Switzerland, on June 15 to 16, 2024, stating that a meeting without Russia did not meet the conditions of peace talks.[40]

On May 23, 2024, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly released the "Common Understandings between China and Brazil on Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis," which presented six common understandings, including pushing for the de-escalation of the conflict and a political settlement through dialogue.[41] However, in his aforementioned foreign policy address on June 14, President Putin did not touch on proposals for dialogue made by any friendly country, including China. Instead, he stressed rigorous demands for the commencement of dialogue, thereby further closing the path for dialogue proposed by China and Brazil. On September 10, during a meeting with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu of Russia commended the fact that the China-Brazil proposal

had garnered broad international support. When Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov addressed the UN General Assembly on September 28, he initially did not mention the May 23 China-Brazil proposal for a political settlement. Only after he was questioned during the press conference, he welcomed the proposal and stated that he had not yet heard the details and emphasized that the root causes of the conflict must be resolved.[42] Foreign Minister Lavrov's address was aligned with the policy direction President Putin had set out on June 14, and Russia did not give any indication of ending hostilities along the existing front lines.

As Russia was committed to continuing military operations, a stance which diverged from China's position, it was not inclined to accord maximum respect to China's proposal. If terminating military operations becomes advantageous, Russia may benefit from aligning its stance more closely with China's. During the three-year military operation, however, Russia has prioritized the use of force and the "cards of fear," stating only that China's stance is fair and has the support of many countries in the international community.

In other instances, the divergence of positions was even more pronounced. The China-Russia joint statement of March 21, 2023 had stated that all nuclear state shall refrain from deploying nuclear weapons outside their territories.[43] Yet, four days later, on March 25, President Putin announced that an agreement was reached with Belarus to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to the country.[44] Such a move would push the world in a dangerous direction, running counter to the global vision of nuclear control elaborated in the joint statement. It may have also prompted dissatisfaction from Beijing, even more than Russia's launch of missile strikes on Odesa that damaged grain destined for China, as already discussed. Nonetheless, it did not display dissatisfaction. In the Sino-Russian joint statement of May 16, 2024, the wording was revised to "nuclear weapons should not be deployed adjacent to nuclear states" to accommodate Russia's deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus.[45]

As these examples show, Russia has acted in ways that diverge from China's position. The examples do not lead to the conclusion that Russia does what Beijing wants due to a growing dependence on China. While China adopting a different stance from Russia's can be expected to apply some restraint on Russian actions, it should be borne in mind that Moscow may take dangerous actions even when they diverge from China's wishes or from bilateral agreements. Russia's cooperation with North Korea, which is examined in the next section, is another example in which Russia has acted contrary to China's position, even while Beijing attaches importance to North Korea in light of international cooperation and national interests.

An Iskander-M ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, October 26, 2023, during a military exercise in Russian territory (Sputnik/Kyodo News Images). The same system was reportedly deployed to Belarus.

Leveraging North Korea to Sustain the War and Erode the International Order

Military Cooperation with North Korea and the Weakening of the UN Sanctions Regime

President Putin of Russia visited Pyongyang in 2000, and he and National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea signed the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation. President Putin had not visited North Korea for many years since then. Russia was a member of the Six-Party Talks on security on the Korean Peninsula, which was hosted by China from 2003. While Russia defended North Korea's right to survival, at times it supported discussions on the abduction of Japanese citizens, an outstanding concern for Japan. Russia did not export weapons to North Korea and supported UN Security Council resolutions condemning North Korea's nuclear and missile tests in 2016 and 2017. When tensions heightened in 2017, Russia, alongside China, called for simultaneously suspending North Korea's nuclear and missile tests and the military exercises under the U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance. For Russia, North Korea was long a country that had issues to be addressed and was not a particularly close diplomatic partner.

This trend continued for some time even after Russia fell into a state of "quasi-emergency" in 2022, with no active efforts made to build a cooperative relationship with North Korea. Meanwhile, on February 28, 2022, North Korea issued a statement supporting Russia's military operation, and at the UN General Assembly on March 2, North Korea cast one of the five votes against a resolution condemning Russia's invasion. On July 13, Pyongyang affirmed Russia's position that the "Donetsk People's Republic" and the "Lugansk People's Republic" were independent states. However, it was Iran, which had not declared such a position, that first provided military-technical cooperation for Russia's military operation, and in September 2022, large numbers of Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones were confirmed on the Ukrainian battlefield.

That said, it appears that Russia was also trying to find other sources of military supplies. In July 2023, the ceremony marking North Korea's "victory" in the Korean War as a result of the armistice 70 years earlier, was attended by Russian Defense Minister Shoigu, along with Li Hongzhong, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China. The two are believed to have discussed the issue of military cooperation.

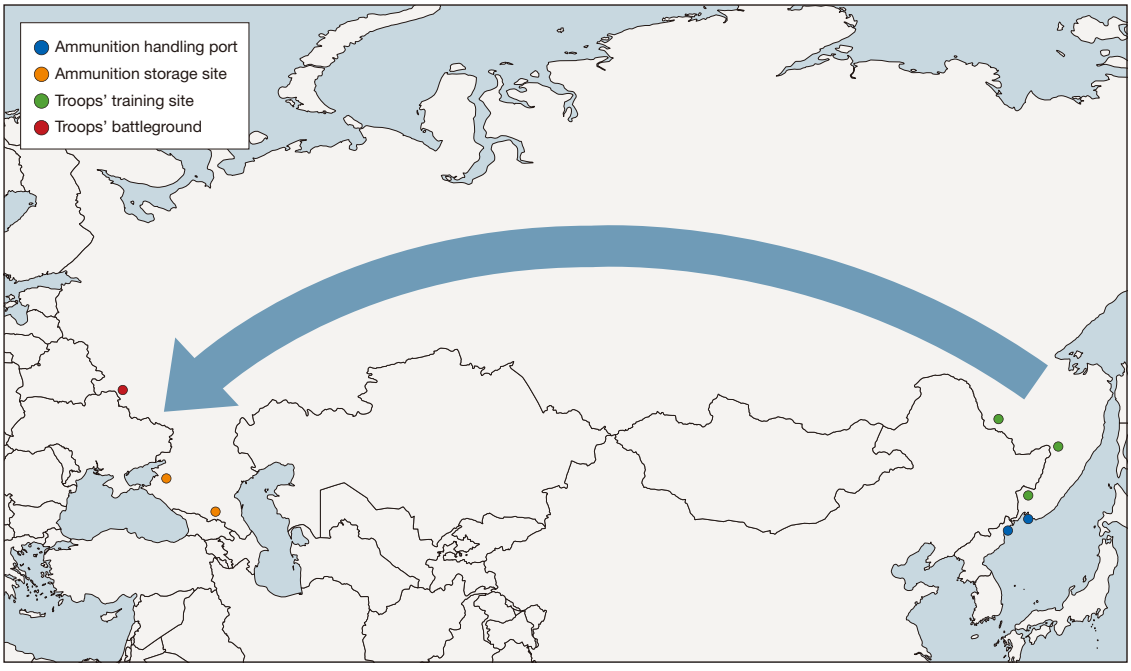
On September 13, 2023, President Putin held a meeting with Kim Jong Un, president of the State Affairs Commission, welcoming him at the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Amur region. That same day, North Korea launched missiles in the absence of its supreme leader. Yet, President Putin spoke about the potential for military-technical cooperation with North Korea without mentioning the missile launches. President Kim Jong Un then visited technology facilities related to space development and conventional weapons, including in Russia's Far East regions, signaling that acquiring Russian-made

technology had become a leading option for Pyongyang.

Around this time, Russia increased the flow of goods with North Korea and expanded the scope of trade to include items in violation of sanctions. Although neither government has disclosed these transactions, they can be tracked and verified mainly through satellite imagery and vessel position data. In October 2023, a research project on North Korea at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) published satellite imagery showing the construction of additional facilities at North Korea's Tumangang Station, located across the Tumen River from Russia's Khasan Station, suggesting an increase in cargo volumes.[46] The same project reported in December 2024 that Tumangang Station's logistics capacity had been expanded.[47]

Furthermore, it has become widely known that North Korea is supplying artillery shells to Russia. On October 13, 2023, the U.S. government revealed that North Korea was shipping artillery shells to Russia by sea. According to the United States, between September 7 and October 1, the Russian-flagged cargo vessel *ANGARA* departed Rajin port on North Korea's east coast and transported containers to Dunai in Primorsky Krai in Russia and those containers were then carried by rail to an ammunition depot at the Tikhoretsk airbase near the Black Sea.[48]

Figure 2.1 Artillery Shells and Troops Supplied by North Korea to Russia



Sources: Compiled by the author based on the CSIS website and media reports.[49]

On October 16, using commercially available imagery, the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) in the United Kingdom identified the movement of materials

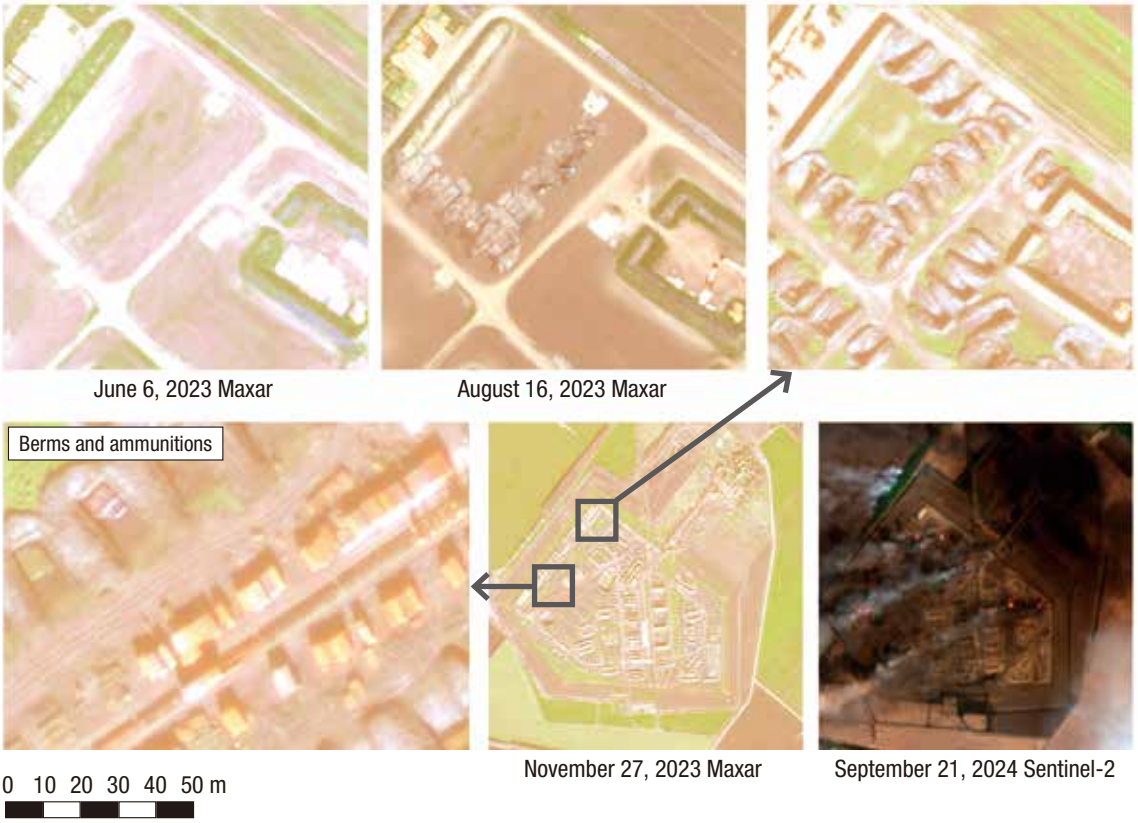
between North Korea and Russia and the accumulation of ammunition at Tikhoretsk.[50] The Ukrainian analytical group, Frontelligence Insight, indicated that Tikhoretsk had been used as an ammunition base throughout the war, and that expansion work began there in mid-August 2023.[51] In fact, satellite imagery of Tikhoretsk from June, August, and November 2023 show the construction of numerous earth berms for ammunition storage and the loading of containers. According to the images in Figure 2.2, in an empty area as of June, construction vehicles were present and berms were constructed by August (to prevent fires from spreading in the event of an ammunition explosion). By November, a storage facility had been completed where ammunition was likely stored. This site ceased to be used as an ammunition storage facility after it was attacked by Ukraine on September 21, 2024, resulting in the loss of a large quantity of ammunition, and some of the berms have since been removed.

A report by the analytical group, Open Source Centre, analyzed satellite imagery from September 2023 to March 2025 and found that four Russian-flagged cargo vessels made 64 round trips between Rajin port, North Korea and Dunai and Vostochny ports in Primorsky Krai, Russia. Based on the vessels' carrying capacity and the types of goods that can be loaded into containers, the report estimated that 15,809 containers transported at least between 4.2 to 5.8 million artillery shells (122 mm and 152 mm) to Russia.[52] According to figures cited in a RUSI report published in early 2024, Russia required 5.6 million shells, while its domestic production capacity was no more than 2.1 million.[53] According to the Open Source Centre's estimate, 2.7 to 3.7 million shells were supplied by North Korea over 12 months. The Russian military's long-term continuation of operations dependent on massive artillery consumption was in all likelihood impossible without North Korean supplies supplementing Russian stockpiles and domestic production.

On March 7, 2024, the Panel of Experts for monitoring the implementation of North Korea sanctions under UN Security Council Resolution 1718 identified such transfers based on member-state submission and open-source information.[54] On March 28, the UN Security Council deliberated and voted on extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts. Although 13 member states, including Algeria, voted in favor, the mandate was terminated by Russia's veto. Russia had approved the extension as of March 25, 2022, and March 23, 2023.[55] Nonetheless, on March 28, 2024, it shifted sides to undermining the effectiveness of the Security Council resolution, citing a fundamentally changed international situation. China abstained from voting, maintaining that economic sanctions are not a solution to problems. The ROK condemned Russia for employing an all-too-familiar tactic of introducing unacceptable demands to break consensus.[56] On September 26, 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov argued that the United States, the ROK, and Japan were enhancing a military posture encompassing nuclear weapons, and stated that because North Korea needs to defend itself with nuclear weapons and missiles, it made no sense to apply the term "denuclearization" to North Korea.[57]

Eleven like-minded UN member states jointly established the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team (MSMT) to continue the sanctions monitoring performed by the Panel of Experts. The report released by the MSMT on May 29, 2025 states that Russia and North Korea traded military supplies

Figure 2.2 Expansion of the Ammunition Storage Facility at the Tikhoretsk Base



Sources: Maxar Technologies; European Space Agency (ESA).

and deployed troops in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. Based on information from an MSMT participating state, the report mentions that, since autumn 2024, Russia had transferred air defense systems and electronic warfare systems and provided operational support to North Korea, as part of which the Pantsir surface-to-air system was transferred to North Korea.[58] A report by Conflict Armament Research referenced in the MSMT report investigated the remnants of a missile that struck Kharkiv in January 2024 and identified the missile as the North Korean-made KN-23 (Hwasong-11A) or KN-24 (Hwasong-11B) tactical ballistic missile.[59] According to the Main Directorate of Intelligence (GUR) of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, by June 2025 these missiles had improved in accuracy compared to those initially deployed and have a higher rate of hitting their targets.[60]

Participation of North Korean Troops in Russian Military Operations

In 2024, President Putin visited Pyongyang for the first time in 24 years, and on June 19, concluded the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty" with President of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un. Article 4, which stipulates that if either party comes under armed attack, the other party shall provide assistance, drew attention. North Korea called this treaty an alliance and made the full text public, while Russia did not call it an alliance and did not publish the full text immediately.[61]

The Ukrainian forces launched a surprise incursion into Russia's Kursk region on August 6 and seized control of, among other areas, the city of Sudzha, home to a gas pipeline metering station. Later, a military administration was established in the occupied areas. This marked the first time that the territory and population of the Russian Federation had been invaded and occupied by foreign troops. In response, Russia vowed to carry out a counterterrorism operation. It neither declared martial law citing foreign aggression, nor requested the CSTO's cooperation. In the military operation in Ukraine's Donetsk region, the Putin administration remained focused on deploying forces to make advances on the front lines, leaving insufficient troops to repel foreign militaries in Kursk region. According to Ukrainian forces, as of August, roughly 10,000 Russian troops were in Kursk region, including border guards, and as of mid-September, the force had grown to between 30,000 and 45,000 troops.[62]

In early October, reports began to emerge about sightings of North Korean soldiers on the battlefield. *Kyiv Post* and Interfax-Ukraine, citing Ukrainian military intelligence sources, reported that Ukrainian shelling near Donetsk on October 3 had killed 20 military personnel, including six North Korean officers.[63] On October 14, President Putin submitted a bill to the State Duma to ratify the Russia-North Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty signed on June 19, and the Federation Council approved its ratification on November 6.[64] On October 18, the ROK's National Intelligence Service indicated that North Korean troops were training in Russia's Far East and confirmed that 1,500 special forces personnel were to be deployed to the battlefield.[65] On October 23, Ukraine's GUR announced that the participation of North Korean troops had been confirmed on the battlefield in Kursk region, and that they were part of the estimated 12,000-personnel contingent trained at training facilities in Russia's Far East before deployment.[66] Ukrainian and U.S. analyses in early November estimated that the size of Russian forces in Kursk region had grown to approximately 50,000 troops, including more than 10,000 North Korean soldiers.[67] Neither Russia nor North Korea acknowledged the participation of North Korean troops or referred to any treaty obligations.

The North Korean units that Ukraine faced during this period played a role in absorbing Russian infantry losses in its high-casualty style of warfare. On December 23, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that 3,000 North Korean soldiers had been killed or wounded, and on December 27, John Kirby, U.S. National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications , estimated that 1,000 North Korean soldiers had been killed or wounded over the previous week alone.[68] As a result of these force deployments, Russia achieved advances on the front lines in Ukraine. While Ukraine maintained its military administration mainly in Sudzha by conducting limited counterattacks, the area occupied by Ukraine diminished from approximately 740 km² at the end of September to approximately 520 km² by the end of December.

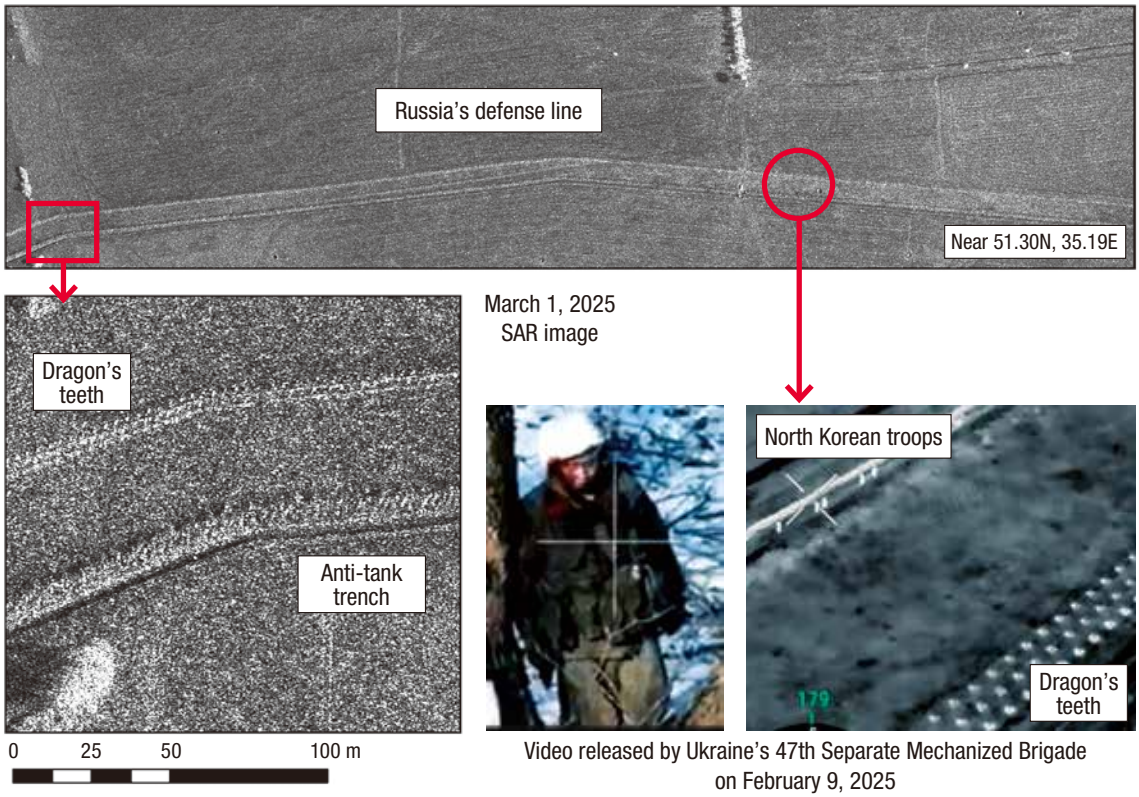
In January 2025, two North Korean soldiers were taken prisoner by Ukraine. According to reported estimates by Western officials, of the 11,000 North Korean troops who took part in combat, around 4,000 sustained casualties, including around 1,000 who were killed.[69] Later, North Korean troops pulled out of the front lines against Ukraine for some length of time but began to reappear

by February.[70] The images in Figure 2.3, taken from a video released by Ukraine's 47th Separate Mechanized Brigade on February 9, shows North Korean troops engaged in combat. The terrain and anti-tank defensive structures visible in the video match imagery confirmed with synthetic aperture radar (SAR).[71]

In the latter half of February, the Ukrainian forces observed North Korean units adapting to modern warfare, including operating electronic warfare equipment.[72] By March, Russian offensives were making noticeable gains, and on March 13, Ukrainian units abandoned Sudzha, their key occupation hub, withdrawing before suffering devastating losses from encirclement and annihilation.

On April 28, upon completing the operation in Kursk region, President Putin publicly acknowledged that North Korea as a state had sent troops and participated in the fighting. He stated that the two countries had provided mutual assistance under Article 4 of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty, and expressed gratitude to the North Korean troops for the capabilities shown in combat and for fighting bravely. Although it took about eight months, Russia was able to amass a force of around 50,000 troops by redeploying some of its elite units from Ukraine[73] and to replenish its forces, and succeeded in compelling the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces. Around 11,000 North Korean troops had

Figure 2.3 North Korean Units in Kursk Region That Engaged in Combat with Ukrainian Forces



Sources: @brygada47, Telegram; COSMO-SkyMed.

joined some of the Russian forces.[74] Although the alliance had been quickly established, North Korea became the only country to send troops to Russia's war, which even Belarus, Russia's long-standing ally, had not done. North Korea, in turn, has gained experience in modern warfare, which has further complicated the force-building dynamics on the Korean Peninsula.

Conclusion

After waging an unsuccessful "special military operation" in Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has remained in a state of "quasi-emergency" for more than three years, continuing a war with no clear way to end it. Especially as relations with the West stagnated, making it difficult to obtain foreign currency and strategic resources, Russia has adapted its economy to the demands of the "quasi-emergency" to secure the resources needed for military operations. The recovery from the "special military operation" revolved around the attacks on Ukraine's front and rear lines and the use of "cards of fear" that shake the resolve of states that support Ukraine. Russia has strengthened its cooperation with China to counter Western powers, following the same course as in 2015, and has leveraged Sino-Russian ties to pose risks to the West. While Russia appears to have deepened its dependence on China in some respects, it has also undertaken risky actions that do not seem to align with Beijing's wishes. These actions have extended not only to areas China could more easily tolerate, such as Ukraine and Belarus, but also to North Korea with which China has close links. Russia has gradually developed its relations with North Korea, securing artillery shells and ballistic missiles, concluding a partnership treaty, and bringing in North Korean troops. By doing so, Moscow has undermined the UN Security Council sanctions regime it once helped maintain, and has spread fears about the possible enhancement of North Korea's capabilities. Such moves have defied the cautious approach China has sought to uphold. It is possible that Beijing is concerned and alarmed about Russia's behavior, or that it is concerned but tacitly permitting Russia's behavior, or that it appreciates Russia's role in fostering instability. Notwithstanding whether Russia, China, and North Korea are taking closely coordinated actions, their activities have increasingly become a source of major concern for Western European countries, the United States, the ROK, and Japan.

The foreign policy initiated by the second Trump administration in the United States has opened a window of opportunity for Russia to expect the top Ukraine-supporting state to disengage, and has weakened Russia's incentive to use many "cards of fear." The United States, which had provided the most backing for Ukraine's resistance under the Biden administration, shifted to a mediator role under the Trump administration and has commenced dialogue that also takes Russia's will into account. If the Trump administration were to lift economic sanctions, normalize great-power relations with Russia, and terminate military support to Ukraine, Russia might be able to shed many of the conditions

that create the state of "quasi-emergency." In actuality, during the first 100 days of the Trump administration, although Washington established a unified stance with Ukraine and approached Russia about a ceasefire, the Putin administration demanded the resolution of the "root causes" of the war and did not take concrete steps toward ceasing hostilities. It could not turn the United States into its favor. The Putin administration adopts the position that the war should end when it can claim that the "root causes" have been resolved—a stance at odds with the Trump administration's position of ending the war through Russian and Ukrainian concessions and of keeping Ukraine as is. Unless the Putin administration chooses compromising with the United States, it will retain incentives to wield "cards of fear," making it highly likely to advance military cooperation with North Korea as well as execute dangerous actions in sync with or not in sync with China.

Chapter THREE

North Korea's Foreign Policy and Regime Survival

Strategic Choices between Great Powers

ASAMI Asaki

Introduction

Over a decade has passed since Kim Jong Un, president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), inherited leadership of the North Korean regime. During this time, North Korea has steadily increased its nuclear and missile capabilities. On the diplomatic front, however, the country has failed to achieve meaningful results, despite undertaking U.S.-North Korea summits and inter-Korean summits in 2018–19. In recent years, Pyongyang has leveraged its support for Russia's war in Ukraine to strengthen ties with Moscow. North Korea also continues its inseparable "lips and teeth relationship" with China. While North Korea's survival strategy has been influenced by the strategic environment surrounding the country, it has always centered on regime survival. For North Korea, regime survival means ensuring the survival of both the socialist regime and the supreme leader system. To this end, North Korea has sought to create a regime that is immune to threats from enemy states because of its nuclear capabilities. And, because the United States represents its greatest threat, North Korea sees its relations with the United States as directly tied to the issue of regime survival. At the same time, North Korea has exploited the support of China and Russia (Soviet Union) in its dealings with the United States, while also negotiating with both sides. Examining the composition of North Korea's foreign policy towards these countries provides valuable insight into its survival strategy.

Having accomplished some degree of deterrence against the United States through its nuclear development program, North Korea appears to be seeking to secure an international standing more favorable to itself while maintaining economic ties with China and strengthening its relationship with Russia. This chapter examines the role that recent China-North Korea relations and North Korea-Russia relations have played in North Korea's survival strategy, centered on regime survival. The first section of this chapter discusses the survival strategies North Korea has come up with to ensure the survival of its own regime amidst an international environment characterized by intensifying great power competition, particularly between the United States and China. This section focuses especially on North Korea's nuclear and missile development. The second section considers the future of North Korea's "traditional friendship" with China from two perspectives: economic and diplomatic-security relations. Finally, the third section examines North Korea's support of Russia's war in Ukraine, as well as the long-term benefits it expects from its recent close partnership with Russia.

North Korea's Survival Strategy and Its Relations with the Great Powers

North Korea's Choices in the Great-Power Competition

From the time of its establishment, the DPRK has been forced to pursue survival strategies in order to ensure regime survival within a strategic environment surrounded by great powers: the United States, China, and Russia (Soviet Union). During the Korean War in the early 1950s, North Korea received support from both China and the Soviet Union while facing off against the U.S.-led United Nations (UN) Command in Korea. In the 1960s, it pursued equidistant diplomacy between China and the Soviet Union amidst the Sino-Soviet split, advocated its own "Juche" ideology, and began to embrace self-reliance. According to Kim Il Sung, Juche ideology "represents an independent stand of doing away with the spirit of relying on others, of displaying the spirit of self-reliance and solving one's own problems on one's own responsibility under all circumstances."[1] Furthermore, Kim Il Sung explained that in order to realize Juche, the country must steadfastly uphold the principles of "self-reliance of ideology, independence in politics, self-sufficiency in the economy and self-reliance in defense."[2] Surrounded by great powers and due to the threat posed by the United States in particular, North Korea viewed "self-reliance in defense" as a matter of life and death. Its breakthrough solution was to develop nuclear weapons. Kim Il Sung was acutely aware of the necessity of developing nuclear weapons as early as the Korean War. News that the United States was considering dropping an atomic bomb on the northern part of the Korean Peninsula caused widespread panic among North Korean citizens, and this experience made the country deeply conscious of the psychological effects of nuclear weapons.[3] Burdened with this awareness, North Korea has since used "self-reliance in defense" to justify strengthening its military capabilities, especially nuclear development.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in a unipolar structure with the United States as the unipole, North Korea decided to step up its nuclear development program. During the two nuclear crises, North Korea demanded that the United States improve its "hostile policy toward the DPRK" as a condition for denuclearization.[4] However, negotiations with the United States made it clear that North Korea would not achieve favorable results, and that it would have to rely on nuclear weapons. In 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. The DPRK Foreign Ministry issued the following statement before the test: "The U.S. extreme threat of a nuclear war and sanctions and pressure compel the DPRK to conduct a nuclear test, an essential process for bolstering its nuclear deterrent, as a corresponding measure for defense."[5] From that point on, North Korea repeatedly conducted nuclear and missile tests, finally declaring the completion of the "state nuclear force" in 2017. In Pyongyang's view, this secured at least the minimum required for "self-reliance in defense."

Having declared the completion of its nuclear arsenal, North Korea once again attempted to enter into negotiations with the United States. From the standpoint of Juche ideology, ensuring

"self-reliance in defense" was North Korea's attempt at practicing diplomacy based on "independence in politics." Following the first U.S.-North Korea summit in June 2018, a joint statement was issued in which the two countries agreed to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations, build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, commit to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and recover Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) remains. At the summit, President Donald Trump mentioned the suspension of joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises, which North Korea perceived as a security threat, as long as dialogue between the United States and North Korea continued, as well as the possibility of lifting sanctions provided that progress was made in improving relations.[6] The United States did, in fact, follow up by announcing the suspension or scaling back of joint military exercises with South Korea. As part of this effort, the United States and South Korea launched a new, smaller-scale command post exercise, "Dong Maeng," which means "Alliance," in 2019. In consideration of the ongoing negotiations with North Korea, the Dong Maeng exercise was conducted in the form of a simulation of defensive operations only, excluding the counterattack portion. The Dong Maeng exercise was more reflective of South Korea's intention to accelerate the transfer of Wartime Operational Control to itself by verifying it through the exercise. For the United States and South Korea, this canceling or scaling back of existing exercises signified consideration for North Korea. However, North Korea made no secret of its frustration, stating that the exercise constituted "a wanton violation of the DPRK-U.S. joint statement and the north-south declarations in which the removal of hostility and tensions were committed to," and that it did not see improvement in the United States' hostile policy toward North Korea.[7]

At the second U.S.-North Korea summit in February 2019, North Korea requested that priority be given to lifting five sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions of 2016–17, as well as sanctions related to "items that hinder the civilian economy and people's livelihood."[8] North Korea's aim was to push for the removal of sanctions affecting its civilian sector and to overcome its deteriorating economic situation. Regarding denuclearization, it proposed that "all nuclear material production facilities in the Yongbyon area, including those for plutonium and uranium, will be permanently and completely dismantled through joint work by technical experts from both countries under the supervision of American experts."[9] On the other hand, the United States demanded the dismantling of all known North Korean uranium enrichment facilities, including those outside of Yongbyon.[10] Because of these differing priorities, the summit ended without an agreement being reached. For North Korea, dismantling its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon and other uranium enrichment facilities was unacceptable before seeing improvements in the United States' "hostile policy toward the DPRK" and the lifting of sanctions.

Throughout this series of U.S.-North Korea negotiations, North Korea also rapidly improved its relations with China, which requested the easing of sanctions against North Korea. From North Korea's perspective, improving relations with China while advancing negotiations with the United States was necessary in order to halt the economic deterioration caused by sanctions. While pursuing

"self-reliance" diplomacy with the United States and China, North Korea considered taking substantive steps toward denuclearization to be a threat to its ability to remain independent, and thus utterly unacceptable. Ever since the breakdown of negotiations with the United States, North Korea has been advancing its efforts to build an even stronger nuclear deterrence posture.

The Pursuit of "Self-reliance" through Nuclear Development

In 2021, North Korea announced its "Five-year Plan for the Development of the Defense Science and the Weapon System." With this Five-year Plan, North Korea seeks to solidify its status as a "nuclear state." It places particular emphasis on the development of tactical nuclear weapons. In 2022, it adopted a new nuclear doctrine titled the "Law on DPRK's Policy on Nuclear Forces," which lowered the threshold for nuclear use. This Policy on Nuclear Forces states that the first role of nuclear weapons is deterrence, while the second is to seize the upper hand in the early stages of war, i.e., to gain escalation-dominance. Article 6 lays out the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons, and it also mentions the possibility of the first use of nuclear weapons, which could occur not only in retaliation for an attack on North Korea, but also if an attack on the country is deemed imminent. To lend credence to these statements, North Korea is diversifying its means of delivery in accordance with the Five-year Plan. For example, North Korea announced that it had conducted ballistic missile launch drills simulating the use of tactical nuclear warheads, as well as successful launch tests of its solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), the Hwasong-18 and Hwasong-19.

North Korea has steadily increased its nuclear and missile capabilities through progress on its Five-year Plan, even more so than when the U.S.-North Korea negotiations took place in 2018–19. Such progress also signals both domestically and internationally that, as a "nuclear state," North Korea is no longer open to negotiating the possibility of denuclearization. Neither has Kim Jong Un been receptive to the possibility of negotiating with the second Trump administration. This can be seen from Kim's remarks at the opening ceremony of Military Hardware Exhibition Defense Development-2024: "We already did everything possible in the bilateral negotiations with the United States, and what we were eventually convinced of was not the superpower's will to co-exist with us but its domineering stand and unchangeably aggressive and hostile policy towards the DPRK."[11] This means that North Korea will not show up at the negotiating table as Pyongyang did the last time, when no agreement was reached on denuclearization or the lifting of economic sanctions.

Along with the developments in North Korea's nuclear policy, inter-Korean relations have also reached a turning point. Since 2019, North Korea has adopted "the principle of our state first," prioritizing state development over the interests of the Korean nation.[12] More decisive was its advocacy of the so-called "two-state theory." At a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) held at the end of 2023, Pyongyang declared that "north-south relations have been completely fixed into the relations between two states hostile to each other and the relations between two belligerent states, not the consanguineous or homogeneous ones any more."[13] With this

declaration, Pyongyang declared that the Republic of Korea (ROK) is no longer an entity for reconciliation and reunification. Defining North and South Korea as states in their own right means that it views the ROK as having no right to intervene in issues surrounding North Korea. It demonstrates North Korea's commitment to pursuing its foreign policy as an actual "nuclear state" and as an independent state on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea is also expected to approach negotiations with the United States by placing a stronger emphasis on "self-reliance in defense," that is, from the more robust posture of a "nuclear state." To do so, maintaining good relations with China and Russia is key, as is strengthening its nuclear and missile capabilities. China and Russia's opposition to additional sanctions on North Korea, as well as their support for relaxing existing sanctions, contributes to the creation of a favorable environment for North Korea. This is because their rejection of the sanctions imposed on North Korea in response to its nuclear development helps North Korea justify its position as a "nuclear state" in the international community. Ties with China and Russia are also important for improving North Korea's economic situation, which has deteriorated due to economic sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic. Stimulating trade with China is particularly necessary for North Korea's economy. On the other hand, North Korea has deepened its substantive economic ties with Russia through its support for the Russo-Ukrainian War. At the same time, becoming overly dependent on economic ties with China or committing only to strengthening cooperation with Russia are not necessarily desirable situations for North Korea. Becoming locked in a structure of dependence on China or Russia would limit North Korea's ability to pursue "self-sufficiency in the economy" and "independence in politics." Therefore, although North Korea is simultaneously strengthening its relations with China and Russia, in the long term, it seeks to negotiate directly with the United States from its position as a "nuclear state."

The Prospects of the "Traditional Friendship" Relations between China and North Korea

China-North Korea Economic Relations and North Korea's Quest for "Self-sufficiency"

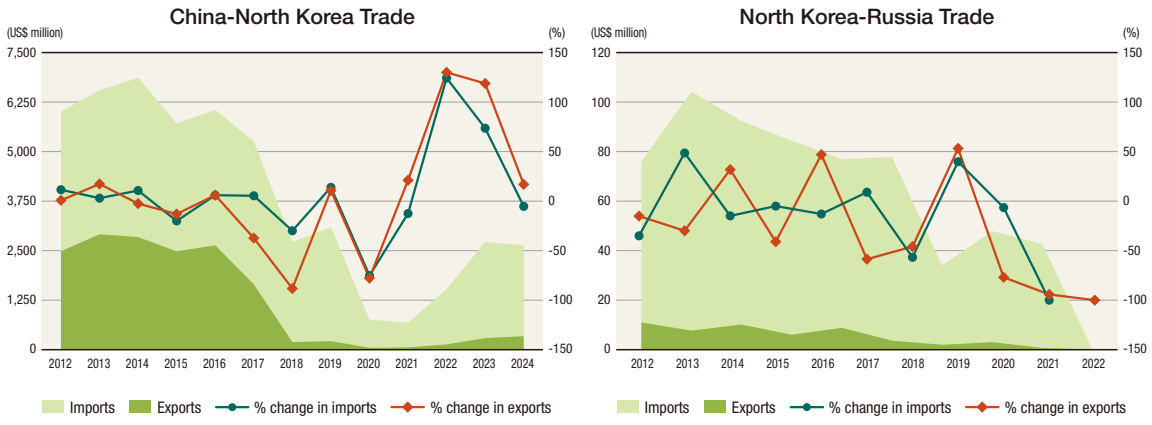
Relations between North Korea and China have been described as a "traditional friendship," a "lips and teeth relationship," and "friendly and cooperative relations." Traditional China-North Korea relations began with their anti-Japanese resistance and was strengthened by China's entry into the Korean War through the People's Volunteer Army. Over time, however, this "traditional friendship" between China and North Korea has become a mere formality. The DPRK-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, concluded by the two countries in 1961, is often described as a "dead letter."

As pointed out earlier, North Korea has upheld the "self-support in the economy" pillar of

its Juche ideology and has been rejecting capitalism and adhering to socialist economic policies. A closed economic system insulates North Korea from outside influences and is a key social structure for ensuring regime survival. However, this does not mean that North Korea has been entirely self-supporting. Economic ties between North Korea and China date back to the Korean War. China supported North Korea by providing free supplies and covering expenses incurred during the Korean War. China also assumed the debt for Soviet-made weapons.[14] Moreover, during the Arduous March a famine that struck North Korean in the mid-1990s, China provided food aid.[15] Although North Korea's foreign dependence amounts to only 9.5%, trade with China accounts over 90% of that amount.[16]

The gradual decline of economic relations between China and North Korea began in the midst of North Korea's repeated nuclear tests. In 2013, North Korea conducted its third nuclear test, and the UNSC responded by adopting the Resolution 2094, which imposed stricter financial sanctions and mandatory cargo inspections on North Korea. China voted in favor of the U.S.-led draft resolution without proposing any amendments.[17] One reason for this is thought to be the fact that, unlike with its previous nuclear tests, North Korea did not notify China in advance on this occasion.[18] Trade between China and North Korea began to decline thereafter. From 2016, the sanctions on North Korea began to extend to its civilian sector. In accordance with the UNSC sanctions resolution, China banned the export of crude oil and petroleum products to North Korea, the import of minerals, textiles, and seafood from North Korea, and the hiring of North Korean laborers. These items constituted North Korea's main sources of foreign currency revenue. Additionally, Security Council Resolution 2397 (2017) capped North Korea's annual imports of crude oil and refined petroleum products at 4 million barrels and 500,000 barrels, respectively. This is less than half of the 9 million barrels of oil that North Korea requires annually.[19] Figure 3.1 shows that trade between China and North Korea continued even after sanctions were imposed on North Korea. However, the trade volume fell significantly after the UNSC sanctions resolutions of 2016 and 2017. In particular, North Korean exports to China plummeted by 88.2% from 2017 to 2018, which widened North Korea's trade deficit.

Figure 3.1 China-North Korea and North Korea-Russia Trade



Source: Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, "Trends in North Korean Foreign Trade."

China agreed to sanctions extending to North Korea's civilian sector because it feared that, if North Korea's nuclear development continued unchecked, its impact would spread to neighboring countries.[20] North Korea was outspoken in expressing its dissatisfaction with China's actions. In a May 2017 commentary, the Korean Central News Agency criticized China for collaborating with the United States in opposing its nuclear development and strengthening sanctions, stating that "the DPRK's access to nukes poses a threat to the national interests of China. They [China] shifted the blame for the deteriorated relations between the DPRK and China onto the DPRK" (text in brackets added by the author).[21] The agency also made it clear that nuclear development would take precedence over relations with China, declaring, "One must clearly understand that the DPRK's line of access to nukes for the existence and development of the country can neither be changed nor shaken and that the DPRK will never beg for the maintenance of friendship with China, risking its nuclear program which is as precious as its own life, no matter how valuable the friendship is."[22] True to these words, North Korea continued to advance its nuclear and missile development programs, declaring the completion of its "state nuclear force" with a nuclear test in September 2017, followed by a launch test of the ICBM "Hwasong-15" in November.[23]

It was thought that relations between China and North Korea would reach a stalemate thereafter. However, the growing closeness between the United States and North Korea prompted the leaders of the two countries to resume their interactions. In June 2019, President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to North Korea to mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and North Korea. The day before his visit, North Korean media released a signed article by Xi Jinping. In this article, Xi mentioned that China's stance on charting the future course of friendly and cooperative relations with North Korea had not changed, regardless of the international situation, and that China supported the construction of socialism as beneficial to North Korea's economic development and the improvement of the lives of its people.[24] In April 2019, ahead of this summit meeting, a bridge connecting Jian, a city in China's Jilin Province, and Manpo, North Korea, opened to commemorate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations. Customs facilities were also constructed there.[25] In addition, around October 2019, North Korea began making road improvements for the New Yalu River Bridge connecting Dandong, China, and Sinuiju, North Korea, and constructing a logistics warehouse believed to store goods from China.[26] Thus, signs of improved economic relations began to be seen in response to the two leaders' interactions. However, as Figure 3.1 shows, the actual amount of total trade did not return to pre-sanctions levels. North Korean exports to China, in particular, remained stagnant.

The subsequent spread of COVID-19 only added to the difficulties of this situation. North Korea sealed its borders in January 2020. This caused imports from China to drop by 75% and exports by 77%, straining the North Korean economy. The following year, North Korea held the 8th Congress of the WPK, where President Kim Jong Un himself acknowledged the failure of the Five-year Strategy for National Economic Development (2016–2020). North Korea cited "sanctions and a blockade by

the United States and other hostile forces," the "terrible natural disasters," and the "global public health crisis" as factors behind the failure of its economic policies.[27] Kim Jong Un then presented a new Five-year Strategy for National Economic Development (2021–25). Based on "self-reliance" and "self-sufficiency," this strategy promoted projects intended to create the foundation of a self-sustaining economy and build a system that would not be affected by external factors.[28] However, while this "self-reliant" economy would be less susceptible to external factors, it risked contradicting the original goals of the strategy: economic development and improving people's lives. Its excessive focus on domestic resources would result in higher production costs and lower productivity.[29] For North Korea, which was forced to restrict trade with China despite the fact that trade had just begun to recover, the economic policies of "self-reliance" and "self-sufficiency" were a measure of necessity.

Economic activity between China and North Korea gradually resumed starting in early 2022. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that freight train operations had resumed on the Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge connecting Dandong, Liaoning Province, and Sinuiju, North Korea.[30] Further signs of activity could also be detected on the Chinese side: the resumption of the DPRK-China International Trade Fair, Air Koryo flights between Pyongyang and Shenyang, and freight truck operations between Sinuiju and Dandong.[31] Although such economic activity has been observed, trade has not yet returned to its full scale. In addition, North Korea's economic dependence on China is increasing despite the overall decline in trade with China. While imports from China have recovered to some extent, North Korea has also accumulated a US$20 billion trade deficit with China.[32] This indicates that, despite North Korea's claims of following an economic path of "self-reliance" and "self-sufficiency," it is still dependent on imports from China.

Thus, although North Korea has set "self-sufficiency in the economy" as its ideal and articulated "self-reliance" and "self-sufficiency" in its new Five-year Strategy for National Economic Development, there has been no significant change in its circumstances, and the country remains economically dependent on China. North Korea's trade with China far exceeds its trade with Russia. Therefore, even though North Korea has been strengthening its ties with Russia since the start of the Russo-Ukrainian War, it would not be realistically feasible for North Korea to bypass China in favor of Russia when it comes to economic matters. Depending on how the trade projects play out, North Korea's economic dependence on China will become even greater. This may go against North Korea's desire to achieve "self-sufficiency in the economy," but it can be said to be an unavoidable survival strategy needed to overcome international sanctions and economic stagnation.

The U.S.-North Korea Summits and China-North Korea Relations

The top priority in North Korea's stated principle of "self-reliance in defense" is its relationship with the United States. As discussed above, the two U.S.-North Korea summits during Kim Jong Un's regime were pivotal for North Korea's regime survival and nuclear policy. Changes in relations with China were also seen, and appeared to coincide with the U.S.-North Korea summits. This series of

moves suggests that North Korea's relations with China function as leverage in its policy toward the United States.

Relations between China and North Korea during the early years of Kim Jong Un's regime have not necessarily been good. One factor contributing to this was the fact that Kim Jong Un, as first chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), executed his uncle, Jang Song-thaek, who was NDC vice chairman and had strong ties with China. Another factor was that Xi Jinping, after being inaugurated as China's president in 2013, visited South Korea before North Korea. The tougher sanctions have also stalled relations between China and North Korea. North Korea began criticizing China in response to the imposition of UNSC Resolution 2270[33] on North Korea after its fourth nuclear test and ballistic missile launch test. In response to UNSC Resolution 2321,[34] which was imposed after the fifth nuclear test, North Korea condemned the sanctions as an inhumane measure and stated that "the great power in name only [China] has been dancing to tunes of the United States to defend that their despicable acts are not intended to affect our people's lives but [only] to prevent our nuclear program" (text in brackets added by the author).[35] In a separate commentary, the Korean Central News Agency also asserted that if China continues to impose economic sanctions, "it should get itself ready to face the catastrophic consequences in the relations with the DPRK."[36]

Despite these accusations through their official media, in practice, both sides appear to have been prioritizing diplomatic interests. China sought to simultaneously fulfill its responsibilities as both a nuclear-weapon state under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a permanent member of the UNSC, all while maintaining its influence in the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and securing equal footing with the United States as a signatory to the Korean Armistice Agreement.[37] While the United States adopted a policy of "maximum pressure and engagement" toward North Korea, China's stance was more restrained, consisting of a "dual-track" approach and "suspension-for-suspension" proposal. The "dual-track" approach, meaning moving forward with the denuclearization process while simultaneously establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, is China's primary strategy for dealing with the North Korea nuclear issue. The "suspension-for-suspension" proposal is a more concrete approach that aims to get both sides to mutually cease hostile actions, namely, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and the United States' and South Korea's large-scale joint military exercises. In contrast to the United States, which has indicated that it is willing to use force, China has shown a certain degree of consideration for North Korea, calling for a peaceful resolution through dialogue.[38] The foreign ministries of China and Russia also released a joint statement affirming

Kim Jong Un greeted Chinese President Xi Jinping, who was paying a state visit to North Korea, at the airport, July 2019 (Korean Central News Agency/Kyodo News)

the principles of China's "dual-track" approach and "suspension-for-suspension" proposal, as well as a joint initiative based on the Russian-proposed stage-by-stage Korean settlement plan.[39] As far as North Korea was concerned, even though it still condemned China, easing the economic sanctions with China's support was a necessary measure, as China was a permanent member of the UNSC. The DPRK Foreign Ministry accused the United States of coercing China and Russia into participating in the sanctions, as well as causing economic damage to various countries, including China and Russia, by imposing secondary sanctions.[40] It viewed China's participation in the sanctions as part of the United States' "hostile policy toward North Korea." For this reason, the strain on China-North Korea relations caused by the sanctions did not escalate to the point of affecting their diplomatic relations.

Then, in the run-up to the U.S.-North Korea summits, relations between China and North Korea suddenly grew closer. For the first time since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2397,[41] which was imposed in response to the test launch of the Hwasong-15 ICBM, North Korea began to refrain from criticizing China. Subsequently, China and North Korea held five summits between 2018 and 2019, and relations between the two countries began to improve. In March 2018, President Kim visited China for the first time.[42] The Korean Central News Agency reported: "The historical first visit [by Kim Jong Un] to China, aimed at carrying forward and developing the traditional DPRK-China friendship to a new and higher stage in line with the demands of a new era" (text in brackets added by author).[43] When negotiations broke down during the second U.S.-North Korea summit, casting a shadow over signs of improved relations with the United States, North Korea shifted its focus to bolstering its ties with China. As mentioned previously, President Xi paid a state visit to North Korea in June 2019. North Korea also sent a congratulatory message to China on the 70th anniversary of China's founding, emphasizing the development of friendly relations between China and North Korea.

Following this, China continued to defend North Korea within the international community. However, bilateral relations were not necessarily good. Although 2024 was the "year of DPRK-China friendship," the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and North Korea, no summit was held between the two countries and there were no significant high-level exchanges. In addition, the bronze plaque with footprints that was installed on a beach in Dalian, which Kim Jong Un visited with Xi Jinping during the summit meeting in May 2018, was removed. Displays proclaiming the friendship between China and North Korea were also removed or replaced.[44] The South Korean newspaper *JoongAng Ilbo* reported that Kim had called China a "sworn enemy," citing its increasingly strict crackdown on smuggling by North Korea as one of the reasons.[45] In their congratulatory messages on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, neither China nor North Korea mentioned the "year of DPRK-China friendship," nor made any notable efforts to strengthen friendly relations.

Since entering 2025, there have been sudden signs of improvement in relations between China and North Korea. On January 25, North Korean officials[46] were invited to a New Year's party hosted by the Chinese embassy in Pyongyang.[47] Chinese Ambassador Wang Yajun stated, "No matter how

the situation may change, our Party and government remain steadfast in their position to faithfully safeguard, solidify, and further develop the traditional friendship between China and the DPRK."[48] In response, Kang Yun Sok, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, expressed, "It is our consistent position to continuously strengthen and develop the traditional friendly and cooperative relations between the DPRK and China."[49] Additionally, during a meeting with Xinhua News Agency reporters, Ambassador Wang stated that "the year 2025 is of great significance for the respective development of China and the DPRK, and for the further enhancement of bilateral relations."[50]

This improvement in relations between China and North Korea may have been influenced not only by bilateral factors, but also by North Korean relations with Russia and the emergence of the second Trump administration. For North Korea, relations with the United States remain the main pillar of its foreign policy. Depending on North Korea's relations with the United States, the structure of China-North Korea relations will likely continue to fluctuate between mutual distrust and cooperation. However, given its closer relations with Russia as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian War, it is also possible that North Korea may seek to engage the United States, backed by Russia. This would not be a desirable situation for China.

On the other hand, doubts remain over the extent to which North Korea expects China to play an active role in its affairs. In his study on changes in nuclear strategy, Vipin Narang, former U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, used North Korea as an example and explained its situation as follows: "As long as China functions as a trusted third-party catalyst for the DPRK, Pyongyang is likely to maintain a limited and stagnant nuclear posture. However, if that trust erodes, the DPRK may shift to an asymmetric escalation strategy, in which it would preemptively use nuclear weapons in response to conventional threats."[51] As discussed in the first section, North Korea's Policy on Nuclear Forces does not rule out the first use of nuclear weapons.[52] Therefore, it can be assumed that North Korea is already in the process of shifting to an asymmetric escalation strategy. This would imply that China is not functioning as a trusted third party.

Following the above logic, it can be said that China-North Korea relations have functioned as a dependent variable of North Korea's policy towards the United States. In addition, having achieved a level of deterrence against the United States through its nuclear development program, North Korea appears to be gradually reducing its strategic dependence on China. Even if China were to put forward the "dual-track" approach or "suspension-for-suspension" proposal again, North Korea would not consider suspending its nuclear and missile development to be an acceptable proposition. Now that it is a "nuclear state," North Korea is more likely to adopt a more self-reliant diplomatic strategy when dealing with the United States. The expectations that North Korea has of China during this process are almost certain to differ from those of previous U.S.-North Korea negotiations.

Russia-North Korea Rapprochement and the Future of Bilateral Relations

North Korea and the Russo-Ukrainian War

North Korea and Russia are strengthening their ties as a consequence of the Russo-Ukrainian War. This fact stands as a painful reminder that, in terms of East Asia's security situation, the war in Ukraine is not just a fire on the opposite shore. Relations between Russia and North Korea have not always been good, even during the Soviet era. North Korea established a republic government north of the 38th parallel with the backing of the Soviet Union. With Stalin's support, North Korea prepared to start the Korean War. However, when the war broke out and North Korea found itself at a disadvantage, the Soviet Union handed over responsibility for supporting North Korea to China. The Korean Peninsula was not a major concern for the Soviet Union, and it operated under the understanding that it could leave individual issues in the Far East to China.[53] In addition, during the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s, North Korea engaged in equidistant diplomacy; it did not necessarily have close relations with the Soviet Union. In other words, North Korea has consistently maximized its own interests by making strategic choices between China and Russia. This section will examine North Korea's short- and long-term interests in maintaining close relations with Russia, how Russia-North Korea relations are likely to evolve in the future, and what this will mean for the international community and regional security.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, North Korea immediately declared its support for Russia. North Korea's core argument was a criticism of the U.S. and Western countries' hegemonic policies, and it maintained that invading Ukraine was within Russia's right to self-defense. The DPRK Foreign Ministry asserted that "the root cause of the Ukraine crisis totally lies in the hegemonic policy of the U.S. and the West which indulge themselves in high-handedness and arbitrariness towards other countries," and also decried the sanctions against Russia.[54] The ministry strongly condemned the United States' actions in particular, describing them as a double standard given its history of invading other countries. North Korea, in alignment with Russia, then recognized the independence of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Lugansk People's Republic."[55] Thus, since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War, North Korea has consistently upheld its support for Russia's position.

The Russo-Ukrainian War has also led to an increase in interaction between high-level Russian and North Korean officials.[56] In particular, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's attendance at North Korea's grand military parade to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Fatherland Liberation War (Victory Day) in July 2023, as well as at related events, gave the impression of closer military ties between Russia and North Korea. This was the first time North Korea had invited foreign delegations to visit since closing its borders due to the pandemic. On the same occasion, China sent a delegation led by Li Hongzhong, Politburo member of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. This delegation was welcomed to North Korea by Kim Song Nam, director of the

International Department of the Central Committee of the WPK, and other China experts.[57] In contrast, a group of military leaders, including Kang Sun Nam, minister of National Defense of the DPRK, showed up to welcome the Russian delegation.[58] This discrepancy suggests that North Korea is prioritizing cooperation with Russia in the military sphere. At the event reception, Defense Minister Shoigu delivered a congratulatory speech on behalf of Russia's President Putin. Putin expressed his gratitude, through the speech, for the firm support for Russia in its "special military operation" against Ukraine, as well as for the common interests of the two countries in countering the Western bloc that, in Moscow's view, obstructs a new world order.[59] It is highly unusual for a foreign participant to give a speech at a North Korean political assembly.[60] Throughout this series of events, North Korea showed great hospitality to the Russian delegation.

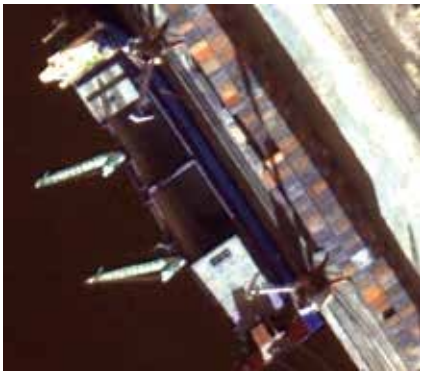
At the same time, it is important to remember that these actions indicate not only closer ties with Russia, but also, in the bigger picture, North Korea's policy towards the United States.[61] North Korea is aligning with Russia and enhancing its bilateral relations with the country because it stands to gain from the relationship as well. In return for cooperating with Russia, North Korea is thought to be receiving aid from Russia in the form of food and energy. However, military cooperation is where the country stands to gain the most.[62] North Korea is believed to be receiving military technology in return for providing arms to Russia.[63] In particular, there is a possibility that Russia is providing technical assistance for items listed in North Korea's Five-Year Plan, which it aims to complete by the end of 2025. For example, similarities have been noted between the underwater attack craft "Haeil," which was used by North Korea in its Unmanned Underwater Nuclear Attack training conducted in March 2023, and Russia's nuclear torpedo "Poseidon."[64] Russian technology may have also been used in the engine of the carrier rocket involved in the failed military reconnaissance satellite launch in May 2024. North Korea mentioned "the reliability of operation of the newly developed liquid oxygen plus petroleum engine" as the cause of the launch failure.[65] North Korea's use of these fuels is unusual, and it is possible that Russia provided the technology or the engine itself.[66] Furthermore, the warhead section of the Hwasong-19, which North Korea claims is "an ICBM of ultimate version," appears to be rounder than that of the Hwasong-18, suggesting a new engine is being used. Lawmaker Yoo Yong-weon of South Korea's People Power Party pointed out during a National Defense Committee meeting that the fact that the missile launch was conducted without conducting any new engine tests suggests that Russia may have provided the technology.[67] Additionally, it has been pointed out that Russia may also be secretly providing North Korea with hypersonic missiles, destroyers, and drone technology.[68] North Korean troops deployed in the Russo-Ukrainian War would also gain real experience on the front line, strengthening the operational capabilities of North Korean units. These facts point to the possibility that military cooperation between Russia and North Korea could accelerate North Korea's military buildup.

North Korea's long-term interest is, above all, to establish itself as a "nuclear state." In March 2024, Russia vetoed for the first time a draft resolution on renewing the term of the UN Panel of

Experts monitoring sanctions against North Korea, which resulted in the panel being disbanded. In response, North Korea's ambassador to the UN, Kim Song, expressed his country's gratitude to Russia, commenting, "The DPRK is deeply grateful to Russia for exercising its veto."[69] Russia's move acts as a tailwind for North Korea, enabling it to evade sanctions by weakening the system that monitors their implementation. According to a report by the Panel of Experts, North Korea generates about 50% of its foreign-currency income from cyberattacks.[70] It also estimates that 40% of the country's military development is funded by income from these cyberattacks. In this manner, North Korea has been able to exploit loopholes in the sanctions by engaging in cyberattacks and smuggling, even during the period when the Panel of Experts was operational. The disbandment of the Panel of Experts is expected to spur these developments. Sergei Shoigu, who became Secretary of the Security Council of Russia in May 2024, has signaled Russia's support for North Korea by asserting that there is a need to revise the UN's indefinite sanctions against North Korea and that the current sanctions must also be reviewed.[71] Sanctions against North Korea have been strengthened in response to the country's nuclear and missile development. Reviewing those sanctions would imply an eventual acceptance of North Korea's nuclear and missile development. This structure, whereby Russia—a permanent member of the UN Security Council—defends North Korea and China gives its tacit approval, creates a more favorable environment for North Korea to pursue negotiations with the United States as a "nuclear state."

Another long-term interest for North Korea is the development of economic cooperation. As discussed in the second section of this chapter, North Korea's economy has suffered due to economic sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite the country's claims of "self-reliance" in economic policy, it remains heavily dependent on China. It is estimated that North Korea's total trade with Russia increased to US$28 million by fall 2023, though this figure remains below pre-sanctions levels.[72] Trade with Russia is believed to be conducted through bartering. North Korea provides Russia with arms and ammunition and imports oil in return. According to one analysis, between September 2023 and March 2025, North Korea is estimated to have provided Russia with between 4.2 to 5.6 million (predominantly 122 mm and 152 mm) artillery rounds, mortars, 120 self-propelled howitzers, and 120 multiple rocket launchers.[73] These weapons are said to be supplied to the front line from North Korea's port of Rajin via the Russian ports of Dunai and Vostochny.[74] There is also an analysis that this supply of arms provides half of the weapons required by Russia on the front line, highlighting the extent of North Korea's contribution to the Russo-Ukrainian War.[75] On the other hand, Russian oil is transported from the port of Vostochny to North Korea's port of Chongjin, where tankers have been observed making round trips.[76] A report released in April 2024 by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) estimates that around 350,000 barrels of oil were supplied to North Korea between January and March 2024.[77] Sanctions imposed on North Korea since 2017 have limited the annual supply of refined petroleum products to North Korea to 500,000 barrels. Provided that 350,000 barrels were supplied by March, it would be feasible for the annual supply to

exceed 500,000 barrels. Such actions by Russia are a major tailwind for the North Korean economy. In addition, in April 2025, Russia and North Korea each held groundbreaking ceremonies for the construction of a motor bridge linking the borders of the two countries. This bridge is expected to serve as a "Road of Friendship" that will be the foundation for economic exchange between the two countries.[78]



Containers bound for Russia being loaded onto the roll-on/roll-off vessel *ANGARA* at the port of Rajin, November 24, 2024 (Maxar Technologies)

As described above, by reinforcing its close relationship with Russia, North Korea is strengthening its military capabilities, especially in the implementation of its Five-Year Plan, and solidifying its status as a "nuclear state." Simultaneously, it is strengthening its economic ties with Russia. North Korea would consider these interests to be sufficient grounds for cooperating with Russia.

The DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty

The most symbolic event in the honeymoon phase of the relationship between North Korea and Russia was the conclusion of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the DPRK and the Russian Federation (hereafter, DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty). On June 19, 2024, President Putin visited North Korea for the first time in 24 years and held a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The summit concluded with the two leaders signing the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty, demonstrating their commitment to further strengthening cooperation between the two countries. North Korea and Russia stated that the treaty's role is to "safeguard international justice against hegemonic attempts and any attempts to impose a unipolar world order," and emphasized its significance in countering the U.S.-centric global order.[79] This treaty can be seen as resulting from the alignment of interests between North Korea, which wants to lift sanctions and ensure the survival of its regime through negotiations with the United States, and Russia, which is currently at war with Ukraine. Also established in the treaty is Article 4, the so-called automatic intervention clause. Article 4 states, "In case either party is put in a state of war by an armed invasion from an individual state or several states, the other party shall provide military and other assistance with all means in its possession without delay in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and the laws of the DPRK and the Russian Federation." In April 2025, the Central Military Commission of the WPK announced that by the order of Kim Jong Un, it had dispatched "Combat Sub-units of Armed Forces" to the operation in Russia's Kursk and contributed to the recapture of territory.[80] This announcement demonstrated to domestic and international audiences that the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty was indeed a functioning treaty.

Upon signing the treaty, President Kim repeatedly emphasized the "alliance" between North Korea and Russia. He stated that "the conclusion of the treaty put the relations of the two countries

on a new higher stage called the relations of alliance," calling it "the great DPRK-Russia alliance, which will serve as a watershed in the history of the development of DPRK-Russia relations" and "the invincible relations of alliance."[81] In contrast, President Putin initially used far more subdued language, describing it as "the traditional friendly and good-neighborly relations between the Russian Federation and the DPRK." These statements offer a glimpse of the disparity in how North Korea and Russia perceive the partnership. Interpretations of the term "alliance" vary, so it is difficult to make a universal statement. According to the realist interpretation, "An alliance is a commitment by a state that anticipates the possibility of war and recognizes its own inability to cope alone, to undertake joint defense with other countries in order to deter war or to prepare for the eventuality of actual conflict. In addition to collective defense, alliances may also involve joint efforts in deterrence and crisis management."[82] In light of this definition, it is possible to call Russia-North Korea relations an alliance.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and President Putin of Russia shaking hands after signing the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty, June 2024 (Korean Central News Agency/Kyodo News)

On the other hand, it is necessary to carefully assess whether Russia would actually provide military assistance to North Korea in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. When signing the treaty, President Putin stated, "Russia has the willingness to make *political and diplomatic efforts* as ever to remove the danger of the recurrence of armed conflicts on the Korean peninsula and establish a long-term peace and stability structure in the region on the basis of the invariable principle of security [assurance]" (text in brackets and emphasis added by the author).[83] In the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, Russia's first step may be to seek a resolution through political and diplomatic means. At a meeting of BRICS high representatives on security issues, Sergei Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, stated that the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty is intended "to reduce the threat of war on the Korean Peninsula," indicating that Russia recognizes it as functioning primarily as a means of deterrence.[84]

From a deterrence standpoint, it is also necessary to discuss Russia's expectations and the potential for extended deterrence. There is no direct mention of extended deterrence by Russia in the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty. For example, in the "Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Security Guarantees within the Union State," which was concluded between Russia and its ally Belarus, there is a provision explicitly allowing Russia to extend its nuclear umbrella over Belarus. Article 6, paragraph 2, states: "Nuclear weapons of the Russian Federation may be used in response to the use of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction against any of the Parties, as well as in the event of aggression against any of the Parties using conventional weapons

that creates a critical threat to its sovereignty or territorial integrity."[85] This treaty clearly states that Russia may not only use nuclear weapons in retaliation against a nuclear attack, but that it may also use nuclear weapons first in response to a conventional attack. Taken together, it becomes clear that the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty does not constitute a Russian pledge of extended deterrence. Another important consideration is the fact that North Korea designates itself as a "nuclear state." North Korea possesses nuclear weapons for "self-reliance in defense." Relying on other countries for national defense would only restrict North Korea's ability to act independently and make its own decisions. In other words, extended deterrence by Russia could undermine North Korea's justification for possessing nuclear weapons. As long as the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty specifies military assistance to North Korea in the event of a contingency, its effectiveness as a deterrent against a conventional war with the United States or South Korea is greater than zero. On the other hand, it can be said that, at its current stage, cooperation between Russia and North Korea does not encompass the provision of extended deterrence.

Finally, the remainder of this section will consider the future outlook for Russia-North Korea relations. It will examine whether there is potential for Russia and North Korea to develop their alliance into a higher-level cooperative relationship from the perspective of the balance of threat theory by Stephen Walt. Walt proposed the balance of threat theory, arguing that states form alliances not only based on the distribution of power, but also in response to perceived threats.[86] In this theory, factors influencing the level of threat include aggregate power (such as population, industrial power, military capabilities, and technological capabilities), geographical proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions. The partnership between Russia and North Korea claims that it is formed in opposition to hegemonism and unipolar world order. Based on this assumption, do North Korea and Russia perceive the same level of threat in Walt's four factors? For example, in terms of aggregate power, North Korea's perception of the degree of threat posed by the United States differs from that of Russia. In terms of its land, natural resources, manpower, and overall military power, including nuclear weapons, North Korea is not even in the same league as the United States. Although Russia faces economic challenges and a declining population, the disparity in aggregate power with the United States is not as significant. The same can be said for offensive capabilities and aggressive intentions. As for geographical proximity, North Korea faces off against U.S. forces in South Korea along the military demarcation line that separates the two countries. Since Russia instead borders North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to the west, it is unlikely that the two sides will perceive the same level of threat in terms of geographic proximity. Therefore, Russia and North Korea may not always see eye to eye on the threat posed by hegemonism and unipolar world order.

Walt also discusses the roles that ideology and assistance play in the formation of alliances. Regarding ideology, he states that it is an important factor when neither party is facing an external threat, when both parties are equally threatened, or when ideological factors are the source of the threat.[87] By this logic, it is hard to argue that ideological solidarity between Russia, which is already

facing an emergency, and North Korea, which is under threat by the United States, will have a significant impact on their alliance. In the first place, the existence of ideological solidarity between Russia and North Korea is doubtful these days, given North Korea's history of developing its own Juche ideology and promoting self-reliance in order to distance itself from Soviet-style socialism. Next, regarding assistance, Walt explains that, although it is part of alliances, it is not an effective tool in isolation.[88] North Korea has supplied arms and ammunition and even deployed troops to Russia, but it is not certain whether this in itself can be an effective factor in their alliance.

As described above, Russia and North Korea have established stronger bilateral relations by concluding the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty, and their relationship can be called a de facto alliance. On the other hand, it is unlikely that Russia-North Korea relations will develop into a stronger alliance, such as the Japan-U.S. Alliance or U.S.-South Korea Alliance. However, there is still a need to carefully consider whether there is a possibility of Russia abandoning North Korea in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. Historically, Russia (Soviet Union) has shifted the responsibility for supporting North Korea onto China during the Korean War. However, this occurred before the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and the DPRK, and the only official framework for relations between the two countries at that time was the Agreement on Economic and Cultural Cooperation between the DPRK and the Soviet Union. If Russia fails to support North Korea in the event of a contingency despite the existence of the DPRK-Russia Partnership Treaty, it may lose credibility among its other allies. Therefore, as Secretary Shoigu mentioned, Russia is likely to place greater emphasis on its role in supporting North Korea in line with the Russia-DPRK Partnership Treaty, with the aim of deterring contingencies on the Korean Peninsula. How this Russian approach will play out in the context of North Korea's desired negotiations with the United States and regime survival is mostly unclear, but at the very least, the alliance will not restrict North Korea's actions.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the survival strategies adopted by North Korea in the midst of great-power competition, how it has ensured regime survival and developed nuclear weapons based on its Juche ideology, and how China-North Korea and Russia-North Korea relations have operated within this general framework. North Korea's diplomatic, security, and economic decisions can be seen as strategic choices made as part of its survival strategy, i.e., its policy towards the United States and regime survival. The present structure of North Korea's actions—its pattern of selecting between China and Russia—does not appear to be much different from that of the Cold War period. However, one major difference from the Cold War period is that North Korea can now confront the great powers as a de

facto "nuclear state" and exercise a certain degree of autonomy. North Korea is expected to maintain its strategy of reinforcing this autonomy while occasionally enhancing economic cooperation with China or military cooperation with Russia. In addition, it cannot be ruled out that North Korea will wait for the right opportunity to negotiate directly with the United States. The timing of such negotiations will not be solely determined by North Korea. It will also depend on various international developments, such as moves in the United States under the second Trump administration, the U.S.-China competition, and the course of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

North Korea's strategy will also have a major impact on the security environment in East Asia. As the two-state theory suggests, relations between North and South Korea have reached a stage where they are beyond repair in the short term. This issue has the potential to be a key turning point affecting not only on the Korean Peninsula, but also Japan's security. Now that North Korea recognizes South Korea as an enemy state, its opposition to security cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea will be stronger. Additionally, if North Korea practices self-reliance diplomacy and attempts to negotiate directly with the United States, Japan and South Korea may be left out of the loop. In this way, North Korea will continue to pursue autonomy by considering the respective relations between itself and the United States, the United States and China, China and Russia, and in East Asia, in order to create a favorable environment for itself.

Conclusion

A Dangerous Dynamic Involving China, Russia, and North Korea

MASUDA Masayuki

Beijing is accelerating its efforts to broaden the strategic and diplomatic horizons for shaping the international order by constructing a global partnership network, while strengthening its recognition of the power shift in international relations. In early 2023, Xi Jinping employed the phrase "the East is rising while the West is in decline" (东升西降) to describe the prevailing international situation. In parallel with these efforts, under the thesis of "Chinese-style modernization" (中国式现代化), Beijing has increasingly attempted to introduce an alternative model that competes with the Western-led international system, thereby further solidifying the situation of "the East is rising while the West is in decline."

In this endeavor, one of the most important partners for China is Russia. As it continues its military operations in Ukraine, Russia promotes the narrative that the values of Western countries, particularly Anglo-Saxon countries, oppress Russian values and interests; accordingly, Moscow has made it a top diplomatic priority to sustain cooperative relations with Beijing. The two countries are aligned on maintaining close economic and military-to-military cooperation, as well as on further supporting the Global South in the international arena to encourage "the East's rise and the West's decline." In this regard, China and Russia have identified a window of opportunity for countering the Western narrative of a U.S.-led liberal international order.

In the Indo-Pacific, China and Russia have increasingly focused on maintaining a favorable strategic balance against U.S. alliance strategies. This narrative does not entail providing benefits or reassurances to third parties in this region. The development of military-to-military relations between China and Russia, which is evident in the regularization of military exercises and joint sea and air patrols, as well as in the expansion in their scale and scope, can be understood in this context. Specifically, Russia has cooperated with China in addressing its great-power competition concentrated in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and Taiwan, especially in addressing regional flashpoints.

From Russia's perspective, as discussed in Chapter TWO, cooperation with China on security and military issues in the Indo-Pacific might be one of the cards that instill fear in the Western world, particularly the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies. Russia has hinted at expanding joint exercises and patrols, and at times, advancing military cooperation that would contribute to China's nuclear buildup. Although the truth of this remains unclear, it is fair to say that the development of Sino-Russian military-to-military relations has contributed to reinforcing China's operational capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.

However, it is unclear whether Beijing has fully consented to Moscow boosting and flaunting the "China card." Russia's prolonged military invasion of Ukraine has exposed frictions with China. Divergences also exist in their attitudes toward the existing international system. While both countries have intensified their critical rhetoric toward the Western world, they are not sufficiently aligned on the scope or tactics for countering such countries. For China, the existing international system centered on the United Nations (UN) remains an important forum for presenting its claims and principles. Russia, by contrast, has been cut off from diplomatic and economic relations with many Western countries and

institutions and derives little benefit from the existing international system. Consequently, Moscow has increasingly relied on tactics that induce fear in the international community, including the use of nuclear threats as a trump card. Although the two countries agree on the need to balance against U.S. and other Western strategic behavior, discrepancies in their approaches have begun to stand out.

Similarly, there is a considerable gap between the policy instruments available to the two countries. China aspires to strengthen military, security, diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations, especially with emerging and developing countries. This would give Beijing a comprehensive set of instruments to maintain the strategic balance. Its "three global initiatives"—the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative—reflect China's strategic thinking. Conversely, Russia's instruments are largely confined to military options. Moreover, it should be noted that Sino-Russian cooperation in the Global South has been limited to mutual endorsement of their respective discourses concerning the international order.

This gap in policy instruments has also resulted in different narratives being shared across the international community. China's narrative, revolving around economic instruments, emphasizes the provision of concrete support to display a model and deliver benefits to Global South countries. Russia, on the other hand, has continued its military operations in Ukraine and has stepped up efforts that undermine the existing international system. As the above suggests, it is far from easy to converge Chinese and Russian narratives on expanding strategic horizons.

The strategic discrepancies between China and Russia have manifested in both their bilateral relations and their respective approaches to North Korea. Regarding the former, as indicated in Chapter TWO, the divergence between Russia's position of continuing military operations in Ukraine and China's position of calling for a political settlement from Moscow and Kyiv is evident even in the leaders' revised agreement on managing nuclear weapons. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter ONE, China's diplomatic approach is to understand Russia's security concerns through summit diplomacy and strengthening economic ties. At the same time, China has kept its distance from direct involvement in addressing Russia's military challenges in the European theater. Considering Russia's active cooperation with China on security and military issues in the Indo-Pacific, the "strategic cooperation" between the two, particularly in military-to-military relations, has an asymmetric character.

Strategic inconsistencies exist between China and Russia, as well as China and North Korea, in how they perceive and address the Korean Peninsula issue. To sustain military operations in Ukraine, it is believed that Russia has sought to secure sources of military supplies, and since around 2023, the flow of goods has increased between Russia and North Korea. North Korean shipments of artillery shells to Russia have also been confirmed. Moreover, in 2024, Russia and North Korea concluded the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty," effectively establishing a de facto alliance. Indeed, under Article 4 of this treaty, which stipulates mutual assistance in the event of contingencies, North Korea sent troops to Russia's military operations. As examined in Chapter THREE, it was North Korea that was more proactive toward rapprochement. It was a diplomatic and military move aimed

at consolidating its status as a "nuclear state." Pyongyang hopes to acquire military technology, bolster economic relations, and weaken the sanctions regime on North Korea, and most of these aims appear to be materializing.

President Xi Jinping (center), President Putin of Russia (left), and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (right) watching the V-Day military parade from the Tiananmen viewing platform, September 3, 2025 (Kyodo)

For China, the recent developments between Russia and North Korea may appear to be worsening the strategic balance in Northeast Asia. One of China's basic positions on the Korean Peninsula issue is denuclearization. However, with North Korea forming an alliance with Russia and consolidating its status as a "nuclear state," even Beijing is finding it harder to urge Pyongyang to denuclearize. Official readouts of the summit meeting between Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un in September 2025 made no mention of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Additionally, there is speculation in China that Russia-North Korea military cooperation could trigger further trilateral cooperation among Japan, the United States, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Northeast Asia and, by extension, the strengthening of the U.S. alliance system. This has prompted Beijing to distance itself from Moscow-Pyongyang military cooperation. Even so, given the importance of "strategic cooperation" with Russia in balancing U.S. strategic pressure in the Indo-Pacific, as well as the unique character of China-North Korea relations, it is equally difficult for Beijing to detach itself completely from the developments in Russia-North Korea relations. The possibility also cannot be ruled out that Beijing might later approve military cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang. The joint appearance of the Chinese, Russian, and North Korean leaders at the Tiananmen viewing platform on September 3 is anticipated to act as a momentum for trilateral strategic coordination. As a result, Northeast Asia may see an intensification of a Japan-U.S.-ROK versus China-Russia-North Korea bloc confrontation dynamic.

Needless to say, the strategic dynamics among China, Russia, and North Korea have played out around their bilateral relationships. There is no military triangle in reality. The grand strategies of the three countries converge on balancing mainly against U.S. alliance strategies. Meanwhile, China and Russia have enhanced their "strategic cooperation" as they deem appropriate to counter U.S. alliance strategies, all the while retaining their respective spaces for autonomous action through a non-alliance "partnership" framework. Despite North Korean efforts to establish an alliance with Russia, it is doubtful that the two have reached a firm agreement on deterring a Korean Peninsula contingency. Nevertheless, by forming a de facto alliance with Russia, North Korea has increasingly taken actions as a "nuclear state" on the global stage. Close attention must be paid to how much China will tolerate such behavior and how China and Russia will coordinate on the Korean Peninsula. Russia has already

acted to establish an alliance with North Korea, which is attempting to solidify its status as a "nuclear state." China, for its part, appears to be avoiding references to the goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

In any case, it should be firmly borne in mind that Sino-Russian "strategic cooperation" leads to the enhancement of China's operational capabilities, while the Russian-North Korean rapprochement leads to the buildup of North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities. The asymmetric partnerships that have been established bilaterally among China, Russia, and North Korea, embodying both coordination and non-coordination and centripetal and centrifugal forces, coupled with the strategic dynamics generated by the partnerships, are heightening uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific security environment.

Introduction

1 “中央外事工作会议在北京举行” [The Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Is Held in Beijing], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], December 29, 2023.

2 施欣怡 [Shi Xinyi], “中国的伙伴关系升级模式：以中国与中亚国家伙伴关系为例” [China's Model of Partnership Upgrading: A Case Study of China's Partnership with Central Asian Countries], 国际展望 [*Global Review*], no. 6 (2024): 72-73.

3 门洪华 [Meng Honghua] and 刘笑阳 [Liu Xiaoyang], “中国伙伴关系战略评估与展望” [Review and Forecast of China's Partnership Strategy], 世界经济与政治 [*World Economics and Politics*], no. 2 (2015): 83.

4 习近平 [Xi Jinping], “中国必须有自己特色的大国外交” [China Must Have Its Own Characteristic Great Power Diplomacy] (November 28, 2014), in 习近平 [Xi Jinping], 习近平著作选读 [*Selected Readings from the Works of Xi Jinping*] vol. 1 (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2023), 320.

5 増田雅之 [Masuda Masayuki]「対立への岐路に立つ中国の対米政策」川島真、森聡編『アフターコロナ時代の米中関係と世界秩序』（東京大学出版会、2020 年）80-81 頁。

6 European Commission, *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook* (March 12, 2019).

7 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于深化新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明” [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], March 22, 2023.

8 増田雅之 [Masuda Masayuki]「中国の大国外交――『戦略パートナーシップ』をめぐって」『東亜』第 402 号（2000 年 12 月）85-104 頁。

9 项昊宇 [Xiang Haoyu], “中国的‘伙伴’关系有哪些？” [What Are China's “Partnerships”?], 学习时报 [*Study Times*], October 9, 2023.

10 张忠祥 [Zhang Zhongxiang] and 欧阳媚卉 [Ouyang Meihu], “中国与南非全面战略伙伴关系：成就、挑战与前瞻” [China-South Africa Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects], 西亚非洲 [*West Asia and Africa*], no. 4 (2024): 74.

11 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦在纪念中国人民抗日战争、苏联伟大卫国战争胜利和联合国成立 80 周年之际关于进一步深化中俄新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明” [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era between China and Russia on the Occasion of Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War and the Founding of the United Nations], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], May 9, 2025.

12 “中俄经贸合作稳步推进” [China-Russia Business and Trade Cooperation Advances Steadily], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], March 19, 2023; “韩正同俄罗斯总统普京共同出席第八届中俄博览会开幕式” [Han Zheng and Russia's President Putin Attend the Opening Ceremony of the 8th China-Russia Expo], 光明日报 [*Guangming Daily*], May 18, 2024.

13 李永全 [Li Yongquan], “携手谱写中俄关系新篇章” [Jointly Write a New Chapter in China-Russia Relations], 光明日报 [*Guangming Daily*], May 15, 2024; 国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics] ed., 国家统计年鉴 2020 [*National Statistical Year Book 2020*] (Beijing: National Statistic Press, 2020), 345.

14 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦在纪念中国人民抗日战争、苏联伟大卫国战争胜利和联合国成立 80 周年之际关于进一步深化中俄新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明” [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era between China and Russia on the Occasion of Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War and the Founding of the United Nations]; 国防部微信公众号 [National Defense Ministry WeChat Public Account], April 18, 2023.

15 Alexander Korolev, “On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation,” *Asian Security* 15, no. 3 (2019): 233-252.

16 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦睦邻友好合作条约” [Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], July 17, 2001.

17 周力 [Zhou Li], “忆‘中俄睦邻友好合作条约’的签署” [Memories of Signature of Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation], in 庆祝‘中俄睦邻友好合作条约’签署 20 周年文集 [*Essays Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Signature of Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation*], ed., 谢伏瞻 [Xie Fuzhan] and 伊·谢·伊万诺夫 [Igor Sergeevich Ivanov] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2021), 58-59. The drafting process of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation was led by the Chinese side with the aim of establishing the nature of good-neighborliness and friendly cooperation and the China-Russia non-alliance relationship. See 周力 [Zhou Li], ibid., 55-64; 周力 [Zhou Li] and 谢·尼·冈察洛夫 [Sergey Goncharov], “中俄睦邻友好合作条约诞生记” [The Birth of Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation], in 世代友好：纪念中俄建交 70 周年文集 [*Friendship of the Century: The 70th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between China and Russia*], ed. 周晓沛 [Zhou Xiaopei] and 谢·尼·冈察洛夫 [Sergey Goncharov] (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2019), 106-114.

18 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于‘中俄睦邻友好合作条约’签署二十周年的联合声明” [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the Twentieth Anniversary of Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], June 29, 2021.

19 门洪华 [Meng Honghua] and 刘笑阳 [Liu Xiaoyang], “中国伙伴关系战略评估与展望” [Review and Forecast of China's Partnership Strategy]; 孙德刚 [Sun Dagang], “论新时期中国的准联盟外交” [China's Quasi-alliance Diplomacy in the New Era], 世界经济与政治 [*World Economics and Politics*], no. 3 (2012); 周亦奇 [Zhou Yiqi], “当伙伴‘遇见’盟友：中国伙伴关系与美国同盟体系互道模式研究” [When Partners Meet Allies: A Study on Interaction between China's Partnership Network and U.S. Alliance System], 国际展望 [*Global Review*], no. 5 (2016).

Chapter ONE

1 增田雅之 [Masuda Masayuki]「習近平『一強体制』の危機感——悪化する中国の外部環境」『東亜』第 666 号（2022 年 12 月）54-55 頁；Masuda Masayuki, "Introduction," in *The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*, ed. Masuda Masayuki (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2023), 1-9.

2 乐玉成 [Le Yucheng],"不忘世代友好初心，共绘和平发展蓝图" [Not Forgetting Our Original Aspiration for Friendship, Drawing Up Together the Blueprint of Peaceful Development], in 庆祝‘中俄睦邻友好合作条约’签署 20 周年文集 [*Essays Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Signature of Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation*], ed. 谢伏瞻 [Xie Fuzhan] and 伊·谢·伊万诺夫 [Igor Sergeevich Ivanov] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2021), 23-24.

3 中共中央宣传部 [Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee] and 中华人民共和国外交部 [PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs] eds., 习近平外交思想学习纲要 [*Study Outline of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy*] (Beijing: People's Publishing House and Study Press, 2021), 58.

4 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"踔厉前行，开启中俄友好合作、共同发展新篇章" [Forging Ahead to Open a New Chapter of China-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Common Development], 新华每日电讯 [*Xinhua Daily Telegraph*], March 21, 2023.

5 "习近平抵达莫斯科" [Xi Jinping Arrives in Moscow], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], May 8, 2025.

6 "中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦在纪念中国人民抗日战争、苏联伟大卫国战争胜利和联合国成立 80 周年之际关于进一步深化中俄新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明" [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era between China and Russia on the Occasion of Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War and the Founding of the United Nations], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], May 9, 2025.

7 Regarding the relationship between the "Chinese-style modernization (中国式现代化)" thesis and Chinese diplomatic discourse and policies, see 増田雅之 [Masuda Masayuki]「中国外交の現在地——分断リスクを孕む地平拡大」『東亜』第 696 号（2025 年 6 月）70-77 頁 .

8 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜 为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗" [Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects] (October 16, 2022), in 二十大以来重要文献选编（上）[*Selected Important Documents Since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*], vol. 1, ed. 中央党史和文献研究院 [Institute of Party History and Literature of CPC Central Committee] (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2024), 15.

9 Regarding Xi Jinping's remarks on "Chinese-style modernization," see 鈴木隆 [Suzuki Takashi]「21 世紀の新たな近代化モデルとしての『中国式現代化』——2023 年 2 月 7 日の習近平演説について」『国際情勢紀要』第 95 号（2025 年 3 月）39-45 頁 .

10 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"以中国式现代化全面推进强国建设、民族复兴伟业" [Comprehensively Advancing the Building of a Strong Country and the Great Cause of National Rejuvenation Through Chinese Modernization] (February 7, 2023), in 二十大以来重要文献选编（上）[*Selected Important Documents Since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*], vol. 1, 235.

11 Ibid.

12 "习近平出席中非合作论坛北京峰会开幕式上的主旨讲话（全文）" [Keynote Address by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], September 6, 2024.

13 Xi Jinping, "Promote Friendly Cooperation between China and Africa" (November 29, 2021), in Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2022), 517.

14 "人类发展进步的大方向不会改变" [The General Direction of Human Development and Progress Will Not Change], 新华每日电讯 [*Xinhua Daily Telegraph*], May 1, 2025.

15 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"在庆祝中国共产党成立 100 周年大会上的讲话" [Speech at the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China] (July 1, 2021), in 习近平 [Xi Jinping], 习近平著作选读 [*Selected Readings from the Works of Xi Jinping*], vol. 2 (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2023), 476.

16 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜 为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗" [Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects] (October 16, 2022), in 二十大以来重要文献选编（上）[*Selected Important Documents Since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*], vol.1, 14, 19.

17 "中央外事工作会议在北京举行" [The Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Is Held in Beijing], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], December 29, 2023.

18 王毅 [Wang Yi],"深入贯彻中央外事工作会议精神 不断开创中国特色大国外交新局面" [Deeply Implement the Spirit of the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference and Continue to Create a New Situation in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics], 求是 [*Seeking Truth*], no. 2 (2024).

19 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"以中国式现代化全面推进强国建设、民族复兴伟业" [Comprehensively Advancing the Building of a Strong Country and the Great Cause of National Rejuvenation Through Chinese Modernization] (February 7, 2023), in 二十大以来重要文献选编（上）[*Selected Important Documents Since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*], vol. 1, 235.

20 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"关于构建新发展格局" [Construct a New Development Layout] (October 29, 2020), in 习近平著作选读 [*Selected Readings from the Works of Xi Jinping*], vol. 2, 364-374; 习近平 [Xi Jinping],"把握新发展阶段，贯彻新发展理念，构建新发展格局" [Grasp the New Development Stage, Implement New Development Concepts, and Construct a New Development Layout] (January 10, 2021), in ibid., 397-417.

21 “新发展阶段新在哪里？陈一新从八个方面进行阐释”[What Is New about the New Stage of Development? Chen Yixin Explains from Eight Aspects], 搜狐网 [Sohu.com], January 15, 2021; “习近平的三句话决定了中国由盛而衰”[Xi Jinping’s Three Words Determine China’s Rise and Fall], 中国瞭望 [China News], December 26, 2021.

22 The relevant passage from Xi Jinping’s February 2023 speech was not immediately made public. Xi’s view of the international situation—“The East is rising while the West is in decline”—did not become public until it was published in a collected volume in August 2024 and to the broader public in the *Qiushi* journal in January 2025.

23 杨依军 [Yang Yijun] et al., “同球共济 砥柱中流：习近平主席引领 2024 年中国特色大国外交述评”[Working Together and Standing Firm: President Xi Jinping Leads China’s Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in 2024], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], December 30, 2024.

24 “王毅出席‘全球发展倡议支持全球南方—中国在行动’主题发布活动”[Wang Yi Attends “Supporting the Global South through the Global Development Initiative: China in Action” Thematic Launch Event], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], September 27, 2024.

25 Ibid.

26 “South-South Cooperation for Development,” SSC/22/1, March 21, 2025.

27 习近平 [Xi Jinping], “弘扬和平共处五项原则 携手构建人类命运共同体：在和平共处五项原则发表 70 周年纪念大会上的讲话”[Carry Forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and Joining Hands to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind: Address at the Commemorative Meeting on the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence] (June 28, 2024), 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], June 29, 2024; “王毅出席‘全球发展倡议支持全球南方—中国在行动’主题发布活动”[Wang Yi Attends “Supporting the Global South through the Global Development Initiative: China in Action” Thematic Launch Event].

28 Masuda Masayuki, “China’s Peacekeeping Diplomacy: The Gap between Principles and Reality,” National Institute for Defense Studies (October 2021).

29 “The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper,” Xinhua, February 21, 2023.

30 “全球安全倡议提出三周年 外交部介绍有关情况”[The Third Anniversary of the Proposal of the Global Security Initiative, Briefing by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 界面新闻 [Jiemian News], April 21, 2025.

31 China Institute of International Studies, *Report on the Implementation Progress of the Global Security Initiative 2024*, July 2024, 49-51.

32 “Position Paper of the People’s Republic of China on Strengthening Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI),” CCW/CONF. VI/WP.2, December 20, 2021.

33 XVI BRICS Summit Kazan Declaration, “Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security,” Kazan, Russian Federation, October 23, 2024.

34 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于进一步深化全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination], in 中俄双边关系文件汇编 (2010–2019) [*Compilation of Documents on China-Russia Bilateral Relations: 2010–2019*], ed. 中华人民共和国外交部欧亚司 [Department of European-Central Asian Affairs, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2020), 877.

35 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于当前世界形势和重大国际问题的联合声明”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the Current Status of World Affairs and Important International Issues], in ibid., 671.

36 “中俄总理第二十二次定期会晤联合公报”[Joint Communiqué of the 22nd Regular Meeting of the Chinese and Russian Prime Ministers], in ibid., 760; “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦联合声明”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation], in ibid., 783; “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于发展新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Developing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era], in ibid., 881.

37 Argentina’s entry into BRICS had also been decided at the 15th BRICS Summit held in Johannesburg in August 2023. However, after the Javier Milei administration took office in Argentina in December 2023, it notified to BRICS members that the country would not be joining BRICS. “BRICS Invites Six Countries Including Saudi Arabia, Iran to Become New Members,” Reuters, August 24, 2023; “El Gobierno de Javier Milei Oficializó que la Argentina No Entrará a los Brics,” *La Nación*, 29 de diciembre de 2023.

38 习近平 [Xi Jinping], “构建高质量伙伴关系 开启金砖合作新征程：在金砖国家领导人第十四次会晤上的讲话”[Fostering High-quality Partnership and Embarking on a New Journey of BRICS Cooperation: Remarks at the 14th BRICS Summit] (June 23, 2022), 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], June 24, 2022.

39 吴志成 [Wu Zhicheng], “深化金砖战略伙伴关系 共建更加美好的世界”[Deepening BRICS Strategic Partnership and Jointly Building a Better World], 学习时报 [*Study Times*], September 20, 2023.

40 “习近平同俄罗斯总统普京举行视频会晤”[Xi Jinping Holds a Video Meeting with Russian President Putin], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], December 31, 2022.

41 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于深化新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], March 22, 2023.

42 “Remarks by H.E. Wang Yi at the BRICS Dialogue with Developing Countries,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, June 11, 2024.

43 王毅 [Wang Yi], “深入贯彻中央外事工作会议精神 不断开创中国特色大国外交新局面”[Deeply Implement the Spirit of the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference and Continue to Create a New Situation in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics].

44 増田雅之 [Masuda Masayuki]「『覇権のダウンスパイラル』に抗う中国――戦略バランスの維持を狙う大国外交」『外交』第85号（2024年5-6月）。

45 “中央外事工作会议在北京举行” [The Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Is Held in Beijing], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], December 29, 2023; “中国外交在百年变局中破浪前行” [China's Diplomacy Moves Forward amid Changes Unseen in a Century], 澳门日报 [*Macao Daily*], January 10, 2024.

46 森聡 [Mori Satoru]「アメリカの対中アプローチはどこに向かうのか――その過去・現在・未来」川島真、森聡編『アフターコロナ時代の米中関係と世界秩序』（東京大学出版会、2020年）49-51頁。

47 本书编写组 [The Book Writing Team] ed., 党的二十大报告学习辅导百问 [*100 Questions on Learning and Counseling in the Report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*] (Beijing: Study Press and Party Building Books Publishing House, 2022), 202-203.

48 See, for instance, 赵明昊 [Zhao Minghao], “技术鹰派、国家安全与美国对华战略竞争” [Technology Hawks, National Security and the U.S. Strategic Competition against China], 国际安全研究 [*Journal of International Security Studies*] 43, no. 1 (2025); 朱峰 [Zhu Feng] and 凌邦皓 [Ling Banghao], “从特朗普 1.0 到特朗普 2.0: 美国对华战略竞争政策透视” [From Trump 1.0 to Trump 2.0: An Analysis of U.S. Strategic Competition Policy toward China], 国际展望 [*Global Review*], no. 2 (2025).

49 张伯玉 [Zhang Baiyu] and 郭葛 [Guo Ge], “美国对华战略竞争视阈下的日欧全面战略合作解析” [An Analysis of Japan-Europe Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation in the Context of U.S. Strategic Competition with China], 国际政治研究 [*Journal of International Studies*], no. 1 (2025).

50 凌胜利 [Ling Shengli], “亚太地区安全机制构建与中国方案” [The Construction of Security Regime in the Asia-Pacific Region and Beijing's Proposal], 人民论坛·学术前沿 [*People's Forum*: *Academic Frontier*], no. 15 (2023); 刘作奎 [Liu Zuokui], “北约亚太化的话语叙事、路径及前景” [Discourse, Approaches and Challenges of NATO's Extension into the Asia-Pacific], 当代世界 [*Contemporary World*], no. 11 (2024); 吴敏文 [Wu Minwen], “美推进‘亚太北约化’危害地区安全稳定” [U.S. Push of NATO-ization of Asia-Pacific Jeopardizes Regional Security and Stability], 中国青年报 [*China Youth Daily*], August 8, 2024; “中国将军现场回应日本学者” [Chinese General Responds Live to Japanese Scholar], 中国新闻网 [China News Service], September 15, 2024.

51 习近平 [Xi Jinping], “决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利” [Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era] (October 18, 2017), in 十九大以来重要文献选编（上）[*Selected Important Documents Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*], vol. 1, ed. 中央党史和文献研究院 [Institute of Party History and Literature of CPC Central Committee] (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2019), 42.

52 Article 18 of the PRC Foreign Relations Law, which entered into force in July 2023, stipulates “promot[ing] coordination and positive interaction among major powers” as one of the goals and missions of building relations with foreign countries. “中华人民共和国对外关系法” [Foreign Relations Law of the People's Republic of China], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], June 29, 2023.

53 李克强 [Li Keqiang], “政府工作报告” [Report on the Work of the Government] (March 5, 2019), in 十九大以来重要文献选编（上）[*Selected Important Documents since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*], vol. 1, 844.

54 “东部战区组织陆海空火等兵力位台岛周边开展联合演训” [The Eastern Theater Command Conducts Joint Exercises involving Land, Sea, Air and Rocket Forces around the Island of Taiwan], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], April 1, 2025; “东部战区位台湾海峡中部、南部相关海域组织‘海峡雷霆-2025A’演练” [The Eastern Theater Organizes the “Strait Thunder-2025A” Exercise in the Relevant Waters in the Central and Southern Area of the Taiwan Strait], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], April 2, 2025.

55 “Response to China's Military Exercise Near Taiwan,” U.S. Department of State, April 1, 2025.

56 “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines,” U.S. Department of Defense, May 3, 2023.

57 中国社会科学院国际研究学部 [Academic Division of International Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] ed., 中国社会科学院国际形势报告2024 [*Chinese Academy of Sciences Report on International Situations 2024*] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2024), 33-34; 蔡亮 [Cai Liang] et al., 美日韩合作同盟化：进展与影响 [*The Alliance Formation of U.S.-Japan-R.O.K. Cooperation: Progress and Impact*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 2024), 35.

58 中国社会科学院国际研究学部 [Academic Division of International Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] ed., 中国社会科学院国际形势报告2024 [*Chinese Academy of Sciences Report on International Situations 2024*], 33.

59 “国防部新闻发言人答记者问” [The Spokesperson of the Ministry of National Defense Answers Questions from Reporters], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], March 30, 2018.

60 “中国高官访俄向美示威 俄在中俄边境系列系军演” [Chinese Senior Official Visits Russia to Demonstrate to U.S., Russia's Series of Military Exercises on the Sino-Russian Border], 美国之音 [VOA Chinese], April 4, 2018.

61 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于发展新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明” [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Developing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era], in 中俄双边关系文件汇编 (2010–2019) [*Compilation of Documents on China-Russia Bilateral Relations: 2010–2019*], 877.

62 Wang Xinjun at the Academy of Military Sciences compared military exercises between China and Russia with military exercises between Japan and the U.S., which are allies, and characterized the former as follows. Unlike the Japan-U.S. alliance, China and Russia "have neither a relationship of dependence (between allies) nor treaty obligations in wartime" (clarification within parentheses added by the author). China-Russia military exercises are "focused on responding to general security threats." Many of the military exercises between countries that have a non-military-alliance are "aimed at addressing non-traditional security" threats, and "there is no clear or specific hypothetical enemy." Moreover, Wang pointed out that both the degree of integration and the frequency of military exercises differ significantly from those under the Japan-U.S. alliance. 王新俊 [Wang Xinjun], "透视中俄与美日联演差异" [A Perspective on the Differences between Sino-Russia and the U.S.-Japan Joint Exercises], 人民日报海外版 [*People's Daily overseas edition*], July 13, 2013.

63 李永全 [Li Yongquan] ed., 俄罗斯发展报告 (2017) [*Annual Report on Development of Russia: 2017*] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2017), 211.

64 増田雅之 [Masuda Masayuki]「『ウクライナ危機』と中国――変わらぬ中露連携、抱え込むリスク」増田雅之編著『ウクライナ戦争の衝撃』（インターブックス、2022 年）66-69 頁；Masuda Masayuki, Yamazoe Hiroshi, and Akimoto Shigeki, *NIDS China Security Report 2020: China Goes to Eurasia* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2019), 2.

65 "就辽宁舰航母编队活动、军队院校调整改革等问题国防部新闻发言人答记者问" [The Spokesperson of the Ministry of National Defense Answers Reporters' Questions on Activities by Liaoning Aircraft Carrier Group, Adjustment and Reform of Military Educational Institutions and Other Issues], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], June 30, 2017.

66 Vostok-2018 not only signaled close China-Russia military ties to other countries, but also sent an unspoken reminder to China that Russia was both able and ready to defend the Far East, according to some reports. "Russia Starts Biggest War Games Since Soviet Fall Near China," *Moscow Times*, September 11, 2018.

67 "国防部新闻发言人答记者问" [The Spokesperson of the Ministry of National Defense Answers Questions from Reporters], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], August 27, 2021.

68 "'西部·联合-2021'演习回顾" [Review of the "Zapad/Interaction-2021" Exercise], 中国军网 [China Military Online], August 15, 2021.

69 Richard Weitz, *The New China-Russia Alignment: Critical Challenges to U.S. Security* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2022), 99.

70 "震撼！中俄联演 45 分钟投射弹药 265 吨" [Shocking: China-Russia Joint Exercise Fires 265 Tons of Ammunition in 45 Minutes], 中国青年网 [China Youth Daily Online], August 13, 2021.

71 徐琳 [Xu Lin], "走向世界的和平足迹：2019 年中国军队开展国际军事交流与合作回顾" [Peaceful Footprints around the World: Review of China's International Military Exchange and Cooperation in 2019], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], December 27, 2019.

72 劉蕭翔 [Liou Shiau-Shyang], "歷年中俄聯合空中戰略巡航評析" [Analysis of the Historical Sino-Russian Joint Air Strategic Cruises], 國防安全雙週報 [*Bi-Weekly Report of National Defense and Security*], no. 83 (2023): 35.

73 "Russia, China Conduct Strategic Bomber Patrol Near Alaska," *Moscow Times*, July 25, 2024; "Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles 'CQ' Brown Jr Hold a Press Conference," U.S. Department of Defense, July 25, 2024.

74 防衛省 [Japan Ministry of Defense]「中露軍事連携の概観」（2025 年 4 月）。

75 "深度互信 高度协同：中俄'海上联合-2021'军事演习和中俄首次海上联合巡航精彩回眸" [Deep Mutual Trust and High-level Coordination: A Look Back at the China-Russia "Joint Sea-2021" Military Exercise and the First China-Russia Joint Maritime Patrol], 新华网 [Xinhua Net], October 24, 2021.

76 "中俄首次联合战略巡航提升两军战略协作水平" [First Joint Strategic Patrol by China and Russia Enhances Strategic Coordination between the Two Militaries], 国防部网 [Website of the National Defense Ministry], August 29, 2019.

77 "军事制高点：中俄签署 2021 年到 2025 年两国军事领域进一步扩大合作发展路线图" [Military Commanding Heights: China and Russia Sign 2021–2015 Roadmap to Expand Military Cooperation], China Central Television (CCTV)-7, November 28, 2021.

78 "中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于深化新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明" [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], March 22, 2023.

79 "中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦在纪念中国人民抗日战争、苏联伟大卫国战争胜利和联合国成立 80 周年之际关于进一步深化中俄新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明" [Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era between China and Russia on the Occasion of Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War and the Founding of the United Nations].

80 谢·根·卢贾宁 [Sergey Luzyanin], "2019 年的俄罗斯和中国：战略伙伴、安全和发展" [Russia and China in 2019: Strategic Partner, Security and Development], in 东方—俄罗斯—西方：历史与现实 [The East—Russia—the West: History and Reality], ed., 王奇 [Wang Qi] et al. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2020), 463.

81 王海运 [Wang Haiyun], 新世纪的中俄关系 [*China-Russia Relations in the New Century*] (Shanghai: Shanghai University Press, 2015), 284-285.

82 Ibid., 151.

83 "习近平同俄罗斯总统普京举行视频会晤" [Xi Jinping Holds a Video Meeting with Russian President Putin], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], December 16, 2021.

84 “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”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], February 5, 2022.

85 和音 [He Yin], “为中俄关系发展注入更多生机活力”[Injecting More Vitality into the Development of China-Russia Relations], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], February 5, 2022.

86 濱本良一 [Hamamoto Ryoichi]「中国も衝撃だったロシアの対ウクライナ全面侵攻」『東亜』第 658 号（2022 年 4 月）27 頁。

87 Author’s conversation with Chinese scholars and experts in Beijing (October and December 2023).

88 “王毅分别同巴基斯坦、俄罗斯外长会谈”[Wang Yi Holds Separate Talks with the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and Russia], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], March 31, 2022.

89 “王毅同俄罗斯外长拉夫罗夫通电话”[Wang Yi Speaks on the Phone with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], October 28, 2022.

90 “习近平会见俄罗斯总统普京”[Xi Jinping Meets Russia President Putin], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], March 21, 2023.

91 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于深化新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明”[Joint Statement between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], March 22, 2023.

92 “中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦在纪念中国人民抗日战争、苏联伟大卫国战争胜利和联合国成立 80 周年之际关于进一步深化中俄新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系的联合声明”[Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination in the New Era between China and Russia on the Occasion of Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union’s Great Patriotic War and the Founding of the United Nations].

93 “铁肩担道义，历史鉴未来：习近平主席此次俄罗斯之行回望历史、着眼未来，传承友谊、捍卫正义，取得圆满成功”[Shoulder the Responsibility of Justice, and Remember History to Guide the Future: President Xi Jinping’s Successful Visit to Russia Looked Back on History and Focused on the Future, Carrying Forward Friendship and Defending Justice], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], May 11, 2025.

94 “Russia and India Sign Military Cooperation Roadmap,” TASS, June 23, 2017.

95 “中华人民共和国主席和俄罗斯联邦总统关于加强全球战略稳定的联合声明”[Joint Statement by the President of the People’s Republic of China and the President of the Russian Federation on Strengthening Global Strategic Stability], in 中俄双边关系文件汇编 (2010–2019) [*Compilation of Documents on China-Russia Bilateral Relations: 2010–2019*], 568-569.

96 李永全 [Li Yongquan] ed., 俄罗斯发展报告 (2017) [*Annual Report on Development of Russia: 2017*], 211.

97 “中俄这次联合反导的消息稿中，几个字的变化有玄机”[In the Press Release by China and Russia about the Joint Missile Defense Exercise a Few Changes in Wording Reveal Some Hidden Meaning], 环球时报 [*Global Times*], November 17, 2017; “中国首次赴俄参加俄军今年最大军演，中俄共同组建导演部”[China Participates in Russia’s Largest Military Exercise This Year for the First Time, China and Russia Jointly Establish a Joint Command Center], 澎湃新闻 [*The Paper*], August 20, 2018.

98 Vasily Kashin, “Chinese-Russian Ballistic Missile Cooperation Signals Deepening Trust,” East Asia Forum, February 20, 2021.

99 “Valdai Discussion Club Session,” President of Russia, October 3, 2019.

100 “China and Russia Sign Fast-neutron Reactors Cooperation Agreement,” World Nuclear News, March 22, 2023.

101 “中俄经贸合作稳步推进”[China-Russia Business and Trade Cooperation Advances Steadily], 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], March 19, 2023; “韩正同俄罗斯总统普京共同出席第八届中俄博览会开幕式”[Han Zheng and Russia’s President Putin Attend the Opening Ceremony of the 8th China-Russia Expo], 光明日报 [*Guangming Daily*], May 18, 2024.

102 “Major Russian Natural Gas Producer Set to Expand Business in China,” *Global Times*, February 8, 2024.

103 李永全 [Li Yongquan], “携手谱写中俄关系新篇章”[Jointly Write a New Chapter in China-Russia Relations], 光明日报 [*Guangming Daily*], May 15, 2024; 国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics] ed., 国家统计年鉴 2020 [*National Statistical Year Book 2020*] (Beijing: National Statistic Press, 2020), 345.

104 “中俄批驳北约秘书长转嫁矛盾”[China and Russia Criticize NATO Secretary-General for Shifting Contradictions], 环球时报 [*Global Times*], July 3, 2024.

105 Oriana Skylar Mastro, “Sino-Russian Military Alignment and Its Implications for Global Security,” *Security Studies* 33, issue 2 (2024): 283.

106 Mark Cozad et al., *Future Scenarios for Sino-Russian Military Cooperation: Possibilities, Limitations, and Consequences* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2024), 99.

107 “就近期涉军问题答记者问”[Answers Questions of Recent Relevance to the PLA], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], September 27, 2024.

108 商务印书馆辞书研究中心 [Commercial Press Dictionary Research Center] ed., 现代汉语学习词典 [*A Learner’s Dictionary of Modern Chinese*] (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2010), 1400.

109 “朝鲜与俄罗斯签署‘全面战略伙伴关系条约’，中方回应”[The DPRK and Russia Sign the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership], 中国新闻社 [China News Service], June 20, 2024.

110 中国现代国际关系研究院 [China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations], 国际战略与安全形势评估：2023-2024 [*Strategic and Security Review: 2023-2024*] (Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2023), 58.

111 张沱生 [Zhang Tuosheng], “管控东北亚地区安全风险，重启中日韩安全合作”[Managing Security Risks in Northeast Asia and Restarting China-Japan-South Korea Security Cooperation], 国际战略研究简报 [*International and Strategic Studies Report*], no. 163 (August 5, 2024): 2.

112 Author’s conversation with Chinese scholars and experts in Beijing (November and December 2024).

113 "Joint Declaration of the Ninth ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit," May 27, 2024.

114 "Press Statement of Spokesperson of DPRK Foreign Ministry," Korea News, May 27, 2024. The spokesperson of the North Korean Foreign Ministry issued a statement to the effect that "Hostile acts of infringing upon our inviolable national sovereignty will never be tolerated." The ROK "has brought a grave security crisis to the Korean peninsula and the rest of the Northeast Asian region by frantically strengthening military alliance for aggression with hegemonic forces outside the region." "To discuss the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula today constitutes a grave political provocation and sovereignty violation that totally denies the DPRK's inviolable sovereignty and constitution reflecting the unanimous will of all the Korean people." The statement also referred to the various U.S.-led military blocs throughout the Asia-Pacific region, including the Korean Peninsula, and to the United States and its allies' "ceaseless war drills for aggression," and emphasized that "'complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula' has already died out theoretically, practically and physically."

115 "中韩外交战略对话，双方商定加深经贸合作及人员交流" [China-South Korea Diplomatic Strategic Dialogue: Both Sides Agree to Deepen Economic and Trade Cooperation and Personnel Exchanges], 经济通 [etnet], July 25, 2024.

116 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Security in the New Era* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2025), 43.

117 "习近平同朝鲜劳动党总书记、国务委员长金正恩举行会谈" [Xi Jinping Holds Talks with Kim Jong Un, General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and President of the State Affairs Commission], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], September 5, 2025.

118 According to Kyodo News, the draft China-Russia Joint Statement of May 2025 was worded as follows: "China and Russia will further deepen mutual trust and cooperation between their militaries, expand the scale and scope of joint military exercises, *maintain the security of Northeast Asia*, and organize regular joint sea and air patrols" (italics added by the author). However, "maintain the security of Northeast Asia" was deleted as per China's request and with Russia's consent, indicating that China avoided acquiescing to bloc confrontation.「中ロ首脳 対日けん制削除」『静岡新聞』2025 年 5 月 26 日 ; "China, Russia Leaders' Statement Avoided Wording That Could Irk Japan," Kyodo News, May 25, 2025.

119 "朝鲜劳动党总书记、朝鲜民主主义人民共和国国务委员长金正恩同志与中国共产党中央委员会总书记、中华人民共和国主席习近平同志举行会谈" [Comrade Kim Jong Un, General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and President of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Holds Talks with Comrade Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and President of the People's Republic of China], 劳动新闻中文网 [Rodong Sinmun Chinese], September 5, 2025.

120 Bobo Lo, "The Sino-Russian Partnership: Assumptions, Myths and Realities," *Russie.Nei.Reports* 42, IFRI (March 2023): 17-18.

Chapter TWO

1 Regarding the Putin administration's aspirations and actions toward Ukraine, aspirations and actions in great-power relations with the West, and the resulting failure of its great-power vision, see Yamazoe Hiroshi, "Russia's Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning 'Sphere of Influence'," in *The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*, ed. Masuda Masayuki (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2023).

2 The March 29 Communique stipulated that multiple guarantor states would act to ensure Ukraine's neutrality and security. However, in the draft treaty of April 15, Russia added wording that would require a decision agreed upon by all guarantor states for a guarantor state to take action. Yamazoe Hiroshi, "Documents from the 2022 Russia-Ukraine Ceasefire Consultations," *NIDS Commentary* (National Institute for Defense Studies, April 15, 2025).

3 Yamazoe Hiroshi, "Russia's Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning 'Sphere of Influence'."

4 長谷川雄之 [Hasegawa Takeyuki]『ロシア大統領権力の制度分析』（慶應義塾大学出版会、2025 年）。

5 Christina Harward, "Russia's Weakness Offers Leverage," Institute for the Study of War (ISW), February 19, 2025.

6 «Обращение Президента Российской Федерации», President of Russia, September 21, 2022.

7 "Ukraine War: Hundreds Arrested as Russian Draft Protests Continue," BBC, September 25, 2022; "Ukraine War: Protests in Russia's Dagestan Region against New Draft," BBC, September 26, 2022.

8 «Указ о введении военного положения на территориях ДНР, ЛНР, Запорожской и Херсонской областей», President of Russia, October 19, 2022.

9 «Указ о мерах, осуществляемых в субъектах Российской Федерации в связи с Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 19 октября 2022 г. № 756», President of Russia, October 19, 2022; «"Война пришла на территорию России." Что значат указы Путина о военном положении и "уровнях реагирования" в регионах», BBC Russian, October 19, 2022.

10 "Putin's Decree on 'Martial Law' Is Another Crime of Russian Leadership against Ukraine – MFA," Ukrinform, October 19, 2022.

11 "A Wagner Ex-convict Returned from War and a Russian Village Lived in Fear. Then He Killed Again," AP News, June 27, 2023.

12 "Video Shows Sledgehammer Execution of Russian Mercenary," Reuters, November 14, 2022.

13 «Президент Российской Федерации Владимир Путин принял участие в расширенном заседании коллегии Федеральной службы безопасности», National Antiterror Committee, Russian Federation, March 19, 2024.

14 "FSB Says It Prevented 100 'Ukrainian Terror Attacks' in Past 2 Years," Novaya Gazeta Europe, March 23, 2024.

15 Hasegawa Takeyuki, "The Russia-Ukraine War and the Putin Regime's Survival Strategy," in *NIDS China Security Report 2024: China, Russia, and the United States Striving for a New International Order*, ed. Iida Masafumi (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2023), 37-38.

16 "Russian Grain Exports in 2023/24 May Slip from Record-high 2022/23–Lobby Group," Reuters, July 4, 2023.

17 “Russia Urged to Renew Ukraine Grain Deal at Africa Summit,” BBC, July 28, 2023.
18 Nataliya Butyrska, “Grain Deal Collapse Puts China’s Role in the Ukraine War under Scrutiny,” China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe, July 26, 2023.
19 «Встреча с руководством МИД России», President of Russia, June 14, 2024.
20 Examples include President Putin’s press conference in December 2024 and Foreign Minister Lavrov’s address in April 2025.
21 “Disaster Fears after Explosives Found Inside Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Plant,” *Newsweek*, May 4, 2023.
22 山添博史 [Yamazoe Hiroshi]「ロシアの核兵器をめぐる不安定――ウクライナ侵攻拡大後の威嚇効果の拡張と規範力の低下」『軍縮研究』第 13 号（2024 年）24-27 頁。
23 Ibid., 22-23.
24 “Russia Blames US for Crimea Deaths and Vows Response,” BBC, June 25, 2024.
25 «Ответ на вопрос представителя СМИ», President of Russia, September 12, 2024. This remark did not entirely align with the facts. The statement implied that he would set a line before allowing the adversary to approach the next new phase and send a warning message.
26 “Biden Allows Ukraine to Strike Inside Russia with Missiles,” BBC, November 18, 2024.
27 «Заявление Президента Российской Федерации», President of Russia, November 21, 2024.
28 David Axe, “‘It’s Exploding!’ A Russian Exclaims as Ukraine’s American-Made ATACMS Rain Down on a Front-Line Air Base,” Forbes, November 25, 2024.
29 «Совместное заявление Российской Федерации и Китайской Народной Республики об углублении всеобъемлющего партнерства и стратегического взаимодействия и о продвижении взаимовыгодного сотрудничества», President of Russia, May 8, 2015.
30 «Совместное заявление Российской Федерации и Китайской Народной Республики о дальнейшем углублении отношений всеобъемлющего партнерства и стратегического взаимодействия в новую эпоху в ознаменование 80-летия Победы Советского Союза в Великой Отечественной войне, Победы китайского народа в Войне сопротивления японской агрессии и образования Организации Объединенных Наций», President of Russia, May 8, 2025.
31 Vidya Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing without Alliances* (London: Routledge, 2010), 45.
32 Natalie Sabanadze, Abigaël Vasselier, and Gunnar Wiegand, “China-Russia Alignment: a Threat to Europe’s Security,” MERICS, June 26, 2024.
33 There has reportedly been a surge in Chinese exports of gaming consoles, which are allegedly being used in drone production.「中国ロシアへゲーム機の輸出急増 なぜ？背景に軍事転用か」NHK、2025 年 5 月 8 日。
34 Maria Snegovaya, Max Bergmann, Tina Dolbaia, Nicholas Fenton, and Samuel Bendett, “Back in Stock? The State of Russia’s Defense Industry after Two Years of the War,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), April 22, 2024.
35 Ivan Yu. Zuenko, “China’s Activity in Central Asia in Light of Russian Interests,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2025): 146-164.
36 «Россия и Китай подписали дорожную карту по спутниковой навигации», RIA Novosti, December 7, 2021; «РФ и Китай договорились о взаимном размещении спутниковых станций», *Kommersant*, September 27, 2022.
37 Yamazoe Hiroshi, “Russia’s Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning ‘Sphere of Influence’,” 82-83.
38 “China and Russia Stage First Joint Bomber Patrol near Alaska,” BBC, July 25, 2024.
39 中华人民共和国外交部 [PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs], “关于政治解决乌克兰危机的中国立场” [China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis], February 24, 2023.
40 “Why China Is Staying Away from the Swiss-led Ukraine Peace Process,” SWI swissinfo.ch, June 14, 2024.
41 “Common Understandings between China and Brazil on Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis,” United Nations General Assembly, May 23, 2024 (attached to the Letter on July 25, 2024).
42 «Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова по итогам недели высокого уровня 79-й сессии Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН, Нью-Йорк, 28 сентября 2024 года», Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, September 28, 2024.
43 «Совместное заявление Российской Федерации и Китайской Народной Республики об углублении отношений всеобъемлющего партнёрства и стратегического взаимодействия, вступающих в новую эпоху», President of Russia, March 21, 2023.
44 «Россия и Белоруссия договорились о размещении российского тактического ядерного оружия», TASS, March 25, 2023.
45 «Совместное заявление Российской Федерации и Китайской Народной Республики об углублении отношений всеобъемлющего партнерства и стратегического взаимодействия, вступающих в новую эпоху, в контексте 75-летия установления дипломатических отношений между двумя странами», President of Russia, May 16, 2024.
46 “Dramatic Increase in DPRK-Russia Border Rail Traffic after Kim-Putin Summit,” Beyond Parallel, CSIS, October 6, 2023.
47 “The New Russia-DPRK Economic Axis: Expansion of Tumangang and Khasan Railway Crossing,” Beyond Parallel, CSIS, December 18, 2024.
48 U.S. Mission to the UN, @USUN, X, October 13, 2023, https://x.com/USUN/status/1712874869707219266.
49 “Major Munitions Transfers from North Korea to Russia,” Beyond Parallel, CSIS, February 28, 2024; «Бойцов КНДР в РФ готовят на четырех полигонах: точные координаты (карта)», Focus, November 4, 2024.
50 James Byrne, Joseph Byrne, and Gary Somerville, “The Orient Express: North Korea’s Clandestine Supply Route to Russia,” Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), October 16, 2023.
51 Tatarigami, “Mapping North Korea’s Discreet Artillery Ammo Route to Russia,” Euromaidan Press, January 19, 2024.
52 “Brothers in Arms: Estimating North Korean Munitions Deliveries to Russia,” Open Source Centre, April 15, 2025; “Thousands of Troops, Millions of Shells,” Reuters, April 15, 2025.

53 Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, “Russian Military Objectives and Capacity in Ukraine Through 2024,” RUSI, February 13, 2024.
54 “Final Report of the Panel of Experts Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2680 (2023),” United Nations, March 7, 2024.
55 “Security Council Extends Mandate of Expert Panel Overseeing Sanctions against Democratic People’s Republic of Korea until 30 April 2023,” United Nations, March 25, 2022; “Security Council Extends Mandate of Expert Panel Overseeing Sanctions against Democratic People’s Republic of Korea until 30 April 2024,” United Nations, March 23, 2023.
56 “Security Council Fails to Extend Mandate for Expert Panel Assisting Sanctions Committee on Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” United Nations, March 28, 2024.
57 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Answer to a Question from Rossiya Segodnya News Agency, New York, September 26, 2024,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, September 26, 2024.
58 “Unlawful Military Cooperation including Arms Transfers between North Korea and Russia,” Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team, May 29, 2025, 13.
59 “Documenting a North Korean Missile in Ukraine,” Conflict Armament Research, January 2024.
60 “Russia Significantly Improved North Korea’s Shoddy KN-23 Ballistic Missiles, Ukraine’s Budanov Says,” *Kyiv Independent*, June 10, 2025.
61 “What’s Known, and Not Known, about the Partnership Agreement Signed by Russia and North Korea,” *Mainichi Newspapers*, June 20, 2024.
62 «Війська рф перекидають резерви на Курщину, у Силах оборони оцінили їх кількість», ArmyInform, September 14, 2024,
63 “Six North Korean Officers Killed Near Donetsk,” Ukrainska Pravda, October 5, 2024;「ドネツクでの北朝鮮士官死亡『事実の可能性高い』韓国国防相が言及」『朝日新聞』2024 年 10 月 8 日。
64 «СФ ратифицировал договор о всеобъемлющем стратегическом партнерстве с КНДР», TASS, November 6, 2024; «Путин напомнил, чем по сути является договор между РФ и КНДР», RIA Novosti, November 8, 2024.
65 [ROK] National Intelligence Service, “국정원 , 북한 특수부대 러 - 우크라 전쟁 참전 확인 ,” October 18, 2024.
66 @DIUkraine, Telegram, October 24, 2024, https://t.me/DIUkraine/4723.
67 “50,000 Russian and North Korean Troops Mass Ahead of Attack, U.S. Says,” *New York Times*, November 10, 2024.
68 “North Korean Troops Experience Mass Casualties on Ukraine Front Lines, White House Says,” Reuters, December 27, 2024.
69 “About 1,000 North Koreans Killed Fighting Ukraine in Kursk, Officials Say,” BBC, January 23, 2025.
70 “Zelensky Says North Korean Troops Back on Front Line,” BBC, February 8, 2025.
71 @brygada47, Telegram, February 9, 2025, https://t.me/brygada47/1228. The location has been identified by an OSINT user. imi(m), X, February 9, 2025, https://x.com/moklasen/status/1888305392817430814. SAR image taken by COSMO-SkyMed CSG satellite, HH polarization, on March 1, 2025.
72 Reuters, April 15, 2025.
73 Angelica Evans, “Ukraine’s Kursk Incursion: Six Month Assessment,” ISW, February 6, 2025.
74 “Unlawful Military Cooperation including Arms Transfers between North Korea and Russia,” 13.

Chapter THREE

1 「朝鮮民主主義人民共和国における社会主義建設と南朝鮮革命について――インドネシアのアリ・アハラム社会科学院で行った講義（1965 年 4 月 14 日）」『金日成著作集（第 19 巻）』（平壌：外国文出版社、1984 年）285 頁。
2 「朝鮮民主主義人民共和国における社会主義建設と南朝鮮革命について」286 頁。
3 太永浩 [Thae Yong-Ho]（鐸木昌之監訳）『三階書記室の暗号――北朝鮮外交秘録』（文藝春秋、2019 年）36-37 頁。
4 The first nuclear crisis is the period from North Korea’s announcement of its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993 to the signing of the Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in October 1994, following negotiations between the two countries. Through the U.S.–DPRK Agreed Framework, both parties committed to replacing North Korea’s graphite-moderated reactors and related facilities with light-water reactor power plants. South Korea and Japan would also provide support. The second nuclear crisis began when North Korea was revealed to have a uranium enrichment program in violation of the U.S.–DPRK Agreed Framework, leading to its withdrawal from the NPT in 2003. Despite the Six-Party Talks and trilateral talks between the United States, China, and North Korea, North Korea proceeded with its first nuclear test in 2006.
5 조선중앙통신「조선외무성성명 자위적전쟁억제력 새 조치 , 앞으로 핵시험을 하게 된다」2006 년 10 월 4 일.
6 조선중앙통신「김정은위원장 력사상 첫 조미수뇌상봉과 회담 , 공동성명 채택」2018 년 6 월 13 일.
7 조선중앙통신「남조선과 미국이 새로운 합동군사연습 개시」2019 년 3 월 7 일.
8 JTBC News「이용호 회견 “일부 해제만 요구”」2019 년 3 월 1 일.
9 Ibid.
10 “Remarks by President Trump in Press Conference, Hanoi, Vietnam,” Trump White House, February 28, 2019.
11 「무장장비전시회《국방발전 -2024》성대히 개막 경애하는 김정은동지께서 개막식에 참석하시여 기념연설을 하시였다」『로동신문』2024 년 11 월 22 일.
12 조선중앙통신「김정은위원장의 신년사」2019 년 1 월 1 일.
13 「조선로동당 중앙위원회 제 8 기 제 9 차 전원회의 확대회의에 관한 보도」『로동신문』2023 년 12 월 31 일.
14 今村弘子 [Imamura Hiroko]「中朝の経済関係と中朝辺境の変遷」岡洋樹編『移動と共生の東北アジア――中蒙露朝辺境にて』（東北大学東北アジア研究センター、2020 年）192-212 頁。

15 The Great Famine of 1995–2000. It is estimated that as many as three million people died from starvation.
16 정은이 , 전병곤 , 신종호 외「미중 전략경쟁시대 북중관계 변화와 우리의 대응방안」2022 년 12 월 30 일.
17 Shortly before North Korea conducted the nuclear test, an editorial in China's *Global Times* (online edition) noted, "If North Korea carries out a third nuclear test, it must pay the price. China will have no choice but to reduce its aid."
18 堀田幸裕 [Hotta Yukihiro]「北朝鮮の核問題と中国の制裁対応」『「不確実性の時代」の朝鮮半島と日本の外交・安全保障』（日本国際問題研究所、2017 年）133-144 頁。
19 「미중 전략경쟁시대 북중관계 변화와 우리의 대응방안」.
20 今村弘子 [Imamura Hiroko]「中朝経済関係――その変遷と実態」『アジア研究所・アジア研究シリーズ』第 104 号（亜細亜大学アジア研究所、2020 年 3 月）209-226 頁。
21 조선중앙통신「중국은 더이상 무모한 언행 하지 말아야 한다」2017 년 5 월 3 일.
22 Ibid.
23 In April 2018, at the Third Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the WPK, North Korea declared the completion of its "line of simultaneous development" (of the economy and the nuclear force) and issued a moratorium on nuclear missile testing, aiming to shift the focus of its policy toward socialist economic construction. In reality, however, no significant changes were observed in the structure of the North Korea economy, which remained centered on nuclear and missile development rather than economic construction.
24 『로동신문』「중조친선을 계승하여 시대의 새로운 장을 계속 아로새기자」2019 년 6 월 19 일.
25 This bridge was completed in 2016, but its opening was postponed and then put on hold due to the strained relations between China and North Korea.
26 황진태「포스트 코로나 시기 , 신의주의 도시공간 변화와 북중관계 전망」Online Series, CO23-13, 2023 년 4 월 6 일.
27 「우리 식 사회주의건설을 새 승리에로 인도하는 위대한 투쟁강령 조선로동당 제 8 차대회에서 하신 경애하는 김정은동지의 보고에 대하여」『로동신문』2021 년 1 월 9 일.
28 Ibid.
29 伊集院敦 [Ijuin Atsushi]「矛盾化抱えた『金正恩経済学』の 10 年――改革解放と安保・体制維持のジレンマ」伊集院敦編『金正恩時代の北朝鮮経済』（文眞堂、2021 年）11 頁。
30 The cargo from China appears to have consisted of everyday commodities and pharmaceuticals, which suggests that North Korea resumed the freight operations in order to secure much needed supplies rather than to increase exports to China.
31 「북중 , 7 년만에 무역전람회 개최...코트라 "교역재개가시적 조치"」『연한뉴스』2022 년 4 월 29 일 ;「北고려항공 , 새해들어 평양 - 선양 첫 운항...北인력 10 여명 中입국」『연한뉴스』2024 년 1 월 24 일 ;「中단둥～北신의주 화물트럭 3 년 10 개월 만에 운행재개」『연한뉴스』2023 년 11 월 17 일.
32 「북한 , 대중국 무역 누적 적자 200 억 달러 넘겨... "수출 없는 '구걸' 경제"」、VOA Korea、2024 년 4 월 10 일.
33 Sanctions imposed in response to the fourth nuclear test on January 6, 2016, and the ballistic missile launch on February 7. Provisions include mandatory cargo inspections, a ban on mineral resources, a complete prohibition on the import and export of military-related goods, tighter financial sanctions, an expanded ban on luxury goods, and increased surveillance of diplomats.
34 Sanctions imposed in response to the fifth nuclear test on September 9, 2016. Provisions added include a cap on coal exports and mandatory reporting of total exports, additional bans on mineral resources (prohibiting all exports of copper, nickel, silver, and zinc), stricter monitoring of diplomatic missions and assets, an expanded ban on luxury goods (including artwork and high-end furniture), and sanctions on vessels.
35 조선중앙통신「너절한 처사 , 유치한 셈법 - 주변나라가 대외무역 차단」2017 년 2 월 23 일.
36 조선중앙통신「남의 장단에 춤을 추기가 그리도 좋은가」2017 년 4 월 21 일.
37 倉田秀也 [Kurata Hideya]「北朝鮮『非核化』と中国の地域的関与の模索――集団安保と平和体制の間」『国際安全保障』第 46 巻第 2 号（2018 年）。
38 「中国外相『朝鮮半島は嵐の前夜、戦争が起きれば誰も勝者になりえない』」『ハンギョレ新聞』2017 年 4 月 14 日。
39 "中国外交部和俄罗斯外交部关于朝鲜半岛问题的联合声明" [Joint Statement by PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Korea Peninsula's Problems], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], July 5, 2017.
40 North Korea submitted a similar document (Letter dated 21 June 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary General (A/7/941–S/2017/535)) to the UNSC.
41 Sanctions imposed in response to North Korea's test launch of the "Hwasong-15" ICBM. Provisions added include an annual limit of 500,000 barrels of refined petroleum products, more stringent oil sector procedures, the repatriation of all North Korean laborers within two years, and strict measures on maritime transport practices.
42 The visit was unofficial, and no details were reported about what was discussed during the summit.
43 조선중앙통신「김정은위원장 중국 비공식방문」2018 년 3 월 28 일.
44 「'김정은 발자국' 지우고 북중 정상회담 사진 내리고...북 - 중 '이상 기류' [9 시 뉴스] / KBS 2024.06.11.」2024 년 6 월 11 일.
45 「[단독] 김정은 "中은 숙적" ...한국도 간中건군행사에 北 없었다」『중앙일보』2024 년 9 월 20 일.
46 The delegates from the DPRK were Kang Yun Sok, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, Won Kyong Ho, vice department director of the Central Committee of the WPK, and Pak Myong Ho, vice-minister of Foreign Affairs.
47 『로동신문』2025 년 1 월 26 일.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.

50 中华人民共和国驻朝鲜民主主义人民共和国大使馆 [Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea], "王亚军会见来朝履职的新华社平壤分社记者" [Wang Yajun Meets Xinhua News Agency Pyongyang Bureau Correspondent Arriving in North Korea], April 20, 2017.
51 Vipin Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers: North Korea and Iran," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2015): 73-91.
52 North Korea has hinted at the first use of nuclear weapons even before adopting its Policy on Nuclear Forces.
53 アナトーリー・ワシエリエヴィチ・トルクノフ（下斗米伸夫、金成浩訳）『朝鮮戦争の謎と真実』（草思社、2001 年）。
54 조선민주주의인민공화국외무성「조선민주주의인민공화국 외무성 대변인대답」2022 년 2 월 28 일.
55 Russia subsequently moved to unilaterally "annex" these and two other regions in Ukraine on September 30. The DPRK Foreign Ministry issued a statement supporting the move on October 4.
56 High-level exchanges have been reported across multiple fields, including, for example, the Russia-North Korea foreign ministers' meeting; the Russia-North Korea defense ministers' meeting; the Russia-North Korea Intergovernmental Committee for Cooperation in Trade, Economy, Science and Technology; the visit to Pyongyang by a delegation from Russia's Ministry of Culture; the meeting between a delegation from Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service and North Korea's Minister of State Security; the meeting between North Korea's Vice-Minister of Chemical Industry and Russia's Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade; the visit to North Korea by Russia's Minister of Natural Resources and Environment; the visit to Russia by a governmental economic delegation from North Korea; and the visit to Russia by a working-level delegation from North Korea's Ministry of Public Health.
57 조선중앙통신「중화인민공화국 당 및 정부대표단 평양 도착」2023 년 7 월 27 일.
58 「국방상 쎄르게이 쇼이구동지를 단장으로 하는 로씨야련방 군사대표단 평양 도착」『로동신문』2023 년 7 월 26 일.
59 조선중앙통신「1950 년 -1953 년 조국해방전쟁에서의 조선인민의 승리 70 돐을 경축하기 위한 기념보고대회 참가자들에게 전승절에 즈음하여 보내온 로씨야련방 대통령 울라지미르 울라지미로비치 뿌찐동지의 축하연설」2023 년 7 월 28 일.
60 연합뉴스「김정은 , 러 국방장관에 "국방협조 강화" ...2 박 3 일내내 함께해」2023 년 7 월 28 일.
61 堀田幸裕 [Hotta Yukihiro]「米中対立と朝鮮半島――米朝関係改善の挫折と対『中ロ』天秤外交への回帰」五十嵐隆幸、大澤傑編『米中対立と国際秩序の行方――交叉する世界と地域』（東信堂、2024 年）179 頁。
62 자유아시아방송「[오중석의 북한생각] 북 - 러 무기거래 언제까지 ?」2024 年 2 월 16 일.
63 It is not certain when North Korea began supplying weapons to Russia, but John Kirby, former U.S. National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications, has expressed the view that Russian Defense Minister Shoigu requested arms from North Korea when he participated in the events celebrating the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Fatherland Liberation War.
64 「북 , '핵어뢰' 수중폭발시험... "방사능 해일로 함선 · 항구 파괴" (종합 2 보)」『연합뉴스』2023 년 3 월 24 일.
65 조선중앙통신「조선중앙통신사 보도 군사정찰위성발사시 사고발생」2024 년 5 월 27 일.
66 「난데없이 엔진 바꾼 北... 'ICBM 아닌 척' 누리호따라했나」『연합뉴스』2024 년 5 월 28 일.
67 제 22 대 국회 제 418 회 제 5 차 , "국방위원회회의록" (2024.11.11.): 30-32 ;「"北 화성 -19 형 , 다탄두 ICBM 으로 개발되는 듯...러 지원 가능성"」『연합뉴스』2024 년 11 월 3 일.
68 「"北 , 극초음속 미사일로 '미사일방어망 돌파' 자신감 과시」『연합뉴스』2025 년 1 월 7 일;「탱크 뚜껑 노린다...北 , '가성비 순항미사일' 자폭무인기 공개 (종합)」『연합뉴스』2024 년 8 월 26 일;「북한판 이지스함 러 기술지원 받은 듯...미사일 · 레이더 등 유사」『연합뉴스』2025 년 4 월 30 일.
69 「ロシアの拒否権行使を北朝鮮が歓迎　国連安保理で『北』専門家パネル延長否決」日本テレビ、2024 年 4 月 12 日。
70 "Final Report of the Panel of Experts Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2680 (2023)," S/2024/215, March 7, 2024.
71 「러 쇼이구 "유엔 대북제재 고쳐야 : 북러조약 , 한반도전쟁 막아"」『연합뉴스』2025 년 5 월 1 일.
72 According to a report by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, the value of trade between Russia and North Korea peaked at US$104 million in 2013.
73 "Brothers in Arms: Estimating North Korean Munitions Deliveries to Russia," Open Source Centre, April 15, 2025; "Thousands of Troops, Millions of Shells: Inside North Korea's Vast Operation to Help Russia's War on Ukraine," Reuters, April 15, 2025.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 James Byrne, "Blood and Oil: Russian Oil Deliveries Follow North Korean Weapons Transfers," RUSI, March 26, 2024.
77 Ibid.
78 조선중앙통신「조로국경자동차다리건설착공식 진행」2025 년 4 월 30 일;「북러 잇는 두만강 자동차 다리 착공..."우정의 길"(종합 2 보)」『연합뉴스』2025 년 4 월 30 일.
79 「조선민주주의인민공화국과 로씨야련방사이의 포괄적인 전략적동반자관계에 관한 조약」2024 년 6 월 20 일.
80 로동신문「조선로동당 중앙군사위원회가 로씨야련방의 꾸르스크지역해방작전에 참전하여 영웅적위훈을 세운 조선민주주의인민공화국 무력 전투구분대들을 높이 평가」2025 년 4 월 28 일.
81 「《조선민주주의인민공화국과 로씨야련방사이의포괄적인 전략적동반자관계에 관한 조약》이 조인되였다 경애하는 김정은동지께서 울라지미르 울라지미로비치 뿌찐동지와 함께 조약에 서명하시였다」『로동신문』2024 년 6 월 20 일.
82 Tsuchiyama maintains that realist alliance theory alone cannot account for all alliances. To supplement realism, he also mentions interpretations based on liberal institutionalism and constructivism.
83 「《조선민주주의인민공화국과 로씨야련방사이의포괄적인 전략적동반자관계에 관한 조약》이 조인되였다 경애하는 김정은동지께서 울라지미르 울라지미로비치 뿌찐동지와 함께 조약에 서명하시였다」『로동신문』2024 년 6 월 20 일.
84 「러 쇼이구 "유엔 대북제재 고쳐야...북러조약 , 한반도전쟁 막아"」『연합뉴스』2025 년 5 월 1 일.

85 “Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Security Guarantees within the Union State,” December 6, 2024.
86 スティーヴン・M・ウォルト（今井宏平、溝渕正季訳）『同盟の起源――国際政治における脅威への均衡』（ミネルヴァ書房、2021 年）。
87 Ibid., 299.
88 Ibid., 356.

*Satellite imagery company Maxar rebranded to Vantor on October 1, 2025.