



# CHINA AND THE BATTLE OF COALITIONS

The 'circle of friends' versus  
the Indo-Pacific strategy

By  
Alice Ekman

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the advent of Xi Jinping as the President of the People's Republic of China in March 2013, China has focused on enlarging its 'circle of friends' (中国的“朋友圈” – *zhongguo de pengyou quan*)<sup>(1)</sup>, and on finally putting an end to the partial diplomatic isolation the country inherited from the Mao and Deng eras. Opposed to the concept of 'alliances', Chinese diplomacy has been particularly active in developing a network of partnerships since 2016, taking advantage of the Trump administration's withdrawal from several multilateral organisations. In recent years, Beijing has often counted on a group of more than 50 countries to support its position at the United Nations (UN) on various sensitive issues – including Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

The election of Joe Biden as President of the United States has not lessened China's diplomatic activism, although Beijing is aware that its coalition-building task is becoming harder at a time when Washington is rebuilding bridges with international allies and jointly consolidating the Indo-Pacific strategy.

China's coalition-building efforts are currently supported by Russia and a growing number of countries, and fuelled by strong resentment against the United States and its allies, as well as official rejection of NATO and, more recently, the US Indo-Pacific strategy. But the 'battle of coalitions' is more than a pragmatic quest for global military, diplomatic, economic or technological influence. It is also framing a competition between political systems, in a context of a growing ideological divide between the first and second-largest economies in the world. Through its diplomatic endeavours China is not only seeking to promote a specific type of domestic governance beyond

its borders, but also to restructure the global governance system. In particular, it wishes to craft a new approach to security and conflict intervention at the United Nations and other multilateral organisations.

At this point in time, the emerging polarisation of the international order is shaped by two distinct groups of countries with significant weight and the political drive to promote their own governance systems and norms. For this reason, the outcome of the 'battle of coalitions' that has started remains unpredictable. It is unclear whether China will be able to continue to enlarge its network of partners in the coming years.

The war in Ukraine is likely to accelerate the polarisation of the world into two camps – with a clear distinction between countries who are imposing sanctions on Russia, such as the United States, and those who are not, such as China. The breadth and scope of the sanctions, and their extraterritorial implementation, will restructure global trade and it is possible that several countries who are facing Western sanctions will decide to jointly and more actively promote alternative standards and norms in the fields of finance, logistics, military or space technology.

In any case, the process of polarisation will continue to be characterised by the global confrontation of two opposing political systems, with on one side authoritarian governments being more inclined to import surveillance tools and technologies from China, as well as to support China's and Russia's general opposition to regime change at the UN, and on the other side democracies being more active in joining forces to defend their values and

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(1) Expression frequently used by Xi Jinping, including in his 2019 New Year's Speech: 'Full text: 2019 New Year Speech by President Xi Jinping', CCTV/CGTN, 31 December 2018 (<https://america.cgtn.com/2018/12/31/full-text-2019-new-year-speech-by-president-xi-jinping>).

positions. Both poles will likely continue to enlarge their network of partners in parallel, tapping into the large group of countries who have so far avoided taking sides at the UN and at home, whether on human rights, territorial disputes or matters of technological competition.

All in all, Beijing's ambitious coalition-building strategy should not be underestimated, as China is managing to expand its network of partners despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic or the ongoing trade and technology tensions with the United States. The Chinese authorities' determination to shape a post-Western order remains strong and focused on a long-term agenda, with 2050 as the time horizon.

This *Chaillot Paper* suggests that, in this context, the EU and other members of the Indo-Pacific grouping need to reach out to a larger group of countries, beyond 'like-minded' partners. Through the swift and effective implementation of the Global Gateway strategy, the EU could renew and enhance cooperation on technology to provide global telecommunication networks and norms to third countries in a more interoperable and competitive way. But this alone would not be enough to modify the *rapport de force* at a time when coalition battle lines are hardening. The EU and its partner states could consider forging a larger and stronger coalition dynamic, by engaging in renewed and creative diplomatic activism to gather a diverse range of countries around positions and norms that the EU and its Member States considers important to defend. Such a strategy would need to be supported by a pragmatic methodology of implementation at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

# INTRODUCTION

‘Coalition building’ is becoming something of a mantra among US allies, especially since the election of Joe Biden to the US presidency and Washington’s efforts to rebuild ties with allies and partners through various frameworks, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS), the Indo-Pacific strategy or the Summit for Democracies.

While the United States’ activism in this domain has garnered a lot of attention, much less analysis has been devoted to China’s coalition-building efforts. The Chinese government has clearly stated its ambition in this regard on several occasions. In July 2017, State Councilor Yang Jiechi explicitly mentioned the building of a ‘global network of partnerships’, and the fact that, according to him, ‘China’s circle of friends has [already] covered the whole world’<sup>(1)</sup>. In June 2021, Xi Jinping stressed the need to ‘increase the appeal and effectiveness of the country’s international communication and enlarge the circle of friends who understand China’<sup>(2)</sup>. In April 2022, at the Boao Forum for Asia, the Chinese president mentioned a new ‘Global Security initiative’ that would be open to all countries<sup>(3)</sup>.

For Chinese diplomacy, one of the main challenges is to convince a maximum of countries to support its positions, both individually and

collectively at the multilateral level. While it is actively seeking to build coalitions, it is utilising a methodology and approach that is different from that of the United States. In particular, the Chinese government is openly opposed to the concept of ‘alliances’ and does not plan to sign any alliance treaty or build an alliance-like relationship with any of its partners (see chapter 1).

Initiated at the beginning of Xi Jinping’s mandate, China’s coalition-building efforts intensified during the Trump administration with the heightening of Sino-American trade and technological tensions, and took on a new dimension during the pandemic crisis in 2020–2021 (see chapter 2). China’s approach to coalition building is deliberately flexible and informal in many cases. Beijing’s mask vaccine diplomacy, targeting a range of countries, and in particular ‘friendly countries’, forms part of China’s differentiated approach towards partnerships.

One conduit among others through which Beijing has been promoting its international network of partnerships is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the massive global infrastructure project unveiled by China in autumn 2013. Since the launch of the BRI, China has lobbied countries to sign BRI memoranda of understanding (MoUs), which cover a variety of areas and are legally non-binding, and has organised ‘Belt and Road Forums’, which

## The Chinese government is openly opposed to the concept of alliances.

- (1) 中国共产党新闻网 [CPC News], 杨洁篪: 深入学习贯彻习近平总书记外交思想 不断谱写中国特色大国外交新篇章 [‘Full text of Chinese State Councilor’s article on Xi Jinping’s Diplomacy Thought: Yang Jiechi – Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping’s thought on diplomacy in a deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major-country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features’], 17 July 2017 (<http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0717/c64094-29410176.html>).
- (2) Xinhua, ‘Xi Focus: Xi stresses improving China’s international communication capacity’, 1 June 2021 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/01/c\\_139983105.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/01/c_139983105.htm)).
- (3) 习近平在博鳌亚洲论坛2022年年会开幕式上的主旨演讲 - 全文 (Full speech of Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum for Asia), official website of the Central government of the People’s Republic of China, 21 April 2022 ([http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-04/21/content\\_5686424.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-04/21/content_5686424.htm)).



it envisages as key platforms for multilateral dialogue and cooperation.

The present *Chaillot Paper* is structured in four parts. The first chapter analyses in detail China's ambition to build its 'circle of friends' and the motivations driving this ambition. The next chapter analyses the methodology and overall approach that Chinese diplomacy is adopting to pursue this aim, including at the UN, and then gauges its chances of success (chapter 3). A scenario for the year 2027 is envisaged in the last chapter, assessing in more concrete terms the potential evolution of China's network of partnerships, in comparison with the US-led alliance system and the deployment of the Indo-Pacific strategy, and the challenges and opportunities this may generate for Europe.

Given the geostrategic nature of the topic addressed, this paper takes into account a range of factors, including the evolution of China's domestic and foreign policy orientations, the expansion of its BRI initiatives in comparison with other connectivity strategies, as well as China's ideological objectives under Xi Jinping. It also explores the potential impact of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine – and related sanctions – on coalition-building dynamics. Ultimately, this *Chaillot Paper* aims to provide a broad and comprehensive understanding of China's international ambitions for the next five years.

# AMBITIONS

## Enlarging China's 'circle of friends'

### PARTNERSHIPS BUT NOT ALLIANCES

Undoubtedly, China is actively engaged in coalition building. It is noteworthy that the Chinese leadership has clearly and publicly stated its ambition in this regard since November 2014. Xi Jinping then proposed the idea of developing global partnerships at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, where he underlined the need for China to make more friends while abiding by the 'principle of nonalignment' and to 'build a global network of partners' <sup>(1)</sup>.

China's current attitude towards alliances is clear: it categorically rejects the concept of 'alliances' <sup>(2)</sup>. Beijing does not only oppose the US alliance system, which it considers totally illegitimate, but also any system of alliances. China's opposition to the alliance system has existed ever since the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, but it has been particularly vocal and explicit in its

posture since 2014. The current Chinese government views alliances negatively as outdated and too constraining, with too many obligations attached – in the sense that an alliance may require military intervention or financial contribution in support of an allied country, even in a situation where political divergences exist <sup>(3)</sup>. As a matter of fact, China has not signed any alliance treaty with any country except with North Korea in 1961, and even in this case, the treaty is considered as secondary to the bilateral relationship, which is not presented officially as an alliance.

China's resistance to the concept of alliances is fuelled by its strong opposition to the US military presence in Asia and beyond, and more generally its antagonism towards NATO <sup>(4)</sup>. Such resentment against both the United States and NATO has traditionally been present in China, since the Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai era, marked by ideological antagonism against the 'West' and its perceived imperialism, and has substantially intensified since May 1999, when an American B-2 aircraft accidentally bombed the Chinese

(1) Cao, D., 'Xi calls for expansion of global partnerships', *China Daily*, 9 September 2019 (<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201909/09/WS5d754883a310cf3e3556a5bd.html>).

(2) The word 'reject' itself features in official speeches, such as in a speech made by State Councilor and Minister of National Defence Wei Fenghe, 8th Xiangshan Forum, Beijing, 25 October 2018. Xi Jinping, in his opening speech at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit held in Qingdao on 10 June 2018, declared: 'We have forged a constructive partnership featuring non-alliance, nonconfrontation, and not targeting any third party.' Quotes first noted in Ekman, A. 'China's post-Alliance architecture in Asia: Launch of an ambitious restructuring process', in Green, M.J. (ed.), *Ironclad: Forging a New Future for America's Alliances*, CSIS, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. See also Ekman, A., 'China's "new type of security partnership" in Asia and beyond: A challenge to the alliance system and the "Indo-Pacific" strategy', CSS ETH Zürich, 22 July 2019 (<https://isnblog.ethz.ch/security/chinas-new-type-of-security-partnership>).

(3) Interviews and conversations conducted by the author in Beijing, Shanghai and Paris in 2016–2019.

(4) See for instance declarations of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the topic: 'China urges NATO to abandon outdated Cold War mentality', *Xinhua*, 26 January 2022 (<https://english.news.cn/20220126/8ac0570d96f94985bc331576c5bd8626/c.html>).

Embassy, as part of airstrikes on Belgrade by US-led NATO forces during operations against Serbia, killing three Chinese nationals. This event is still vividly remembered and commemorated by the Chinese authorities, who have never accepted the US explanation that the bombing was a mistake<sup>(5)</sup>. It marked a turning point in China's foreign policy and security orientations, reinforcing the conviction that China should reinforce its own capabilities to be better able to defend its 'national sovereignty, security and development interests', as reiterated in 2021 by Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe during a commemorative visit to Belgrade<sup>(6)</sup>. In parallel, the fact that China-related threats and challenges have increasingly begun to feature in NATO discussions in recent years has also generated concern in Beijing, and further hostility towards the organisation. In 2021–22, NATO has repeatedly been criticised in official Chinese discourse as being an outdated and illegitimate institution, a legacy of the Cold War that has, according to Beijing, no reason to exist today<sup>(7)</sup>. In this context, any country which is not a NATO member and may share with China, in one way or another, a post-NATO view of the world, is considered a natural security partner of the country.

China's plan is not to replace the US alliance system by its own rival system of alliances, but by a completely different, more flexible, set of security partnerships. For Beijing, security architecture, whether in the Asia-Pacific region or beyond, should not be based on any formal alliance system. Instead, it focuses on

the development of a network of partnerships that is built step-by-step at both bilateral and multilateral levels. In concrete terms, China is not ready to commit to any military support to a country in case of attack, nor does it expect this type of commitment from its partners. From China's perspective, a country can be considered a security partner in various ways, ranging from the regular conduct of joint military exercises to the endorsement of China's security concepts or positions. China expects partners to support its position diplomatically (at bilateral and multilateral level) on issues of core interest (Xinjiang, Hong Kong, South China Sea, Taiwan, among others) or at least not to oppose or criticise China's position on these issues. For China, economic, technological and security partnerships are intertwined and evolving, and a technology partner may develop into a security partner through the purchase of dual-use or military technology.

**F**or Beijing, security architecture should not be based on any formal alliance system.

## RESTRUCTURING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

China's coalition-building efforts form part of the country's ambition to restructure global governance. China is unhappy with the current global governance and security architecture, and is determined to remould it in line with its vision of a post-alliance world. The perception in Beijing is that for too long the country accepted an illegitimate global

(5) Nikkei Asia, 'Analysis: China never forgot night the US bombed its Belgrade embassy', 1 April 2021 (<https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/Analysis-China-never-forgot-night-the-US-bombed-its-Belgrade-embassy>).

(6) Ibid.

(7) See for instance press conference of Zhao Lijian, spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 26 January 2022: 'NATO is a Cold War remnant and its expansion is typical bloc politics. As the world's largest military alliance, NATO should abandon the outdated Cold War mentality and ideological bias and do things that are conducive to upholding peace and stability. China firmly opposes all kinds of small cliques. We reject the beggar-thy-neighbour approach and efforts to stoke geopolitical conflicts.' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian's regular press conference on January 26, 2022' ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202201/t20220126\\_10634282.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202201/t20220126_10634282.html)).

governance structure shaped by the West, which did not provide China with sufficient voting power or give it enough of a voice. The current leadership considers that China should be the leading norm-setter of the global governance system, and that it is now time to restructure it significantly, from within institutions whenever possible, as well as through external, new initiatives.

On the basis of this perception, over the last 20 years China has reinforced its participation in existing institutions and summits (it has hosted various multilateral summits and forums in recent years: G20, BRICS<sup>(8)</sup>, and SCO summits among others); but it has also, simultaneously, created new multilateral institutions and forums in which it aims to play an active role, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). China is active on a variety of fronts and has expanded its membership in all types of institutions, whether in the economic, security, health or cyber governance fields.

Xi Jinping's presidency has been marked by an acceleration of regional and global governance initiatives. China sees the current and next decade as a crucial period in which to cement the country's leading role in the reform of global governance and to achieve results. Indeed Beijing considers that a window of opportunity has opened now that China has consolidated its status as the second-largest economy in the world, and that, according to official perceptions, the 'West' is showing signs of decline as demonstrated by the withdrawal of certain countries from key international organisations (the United States under

the Trump presidency, in particular). Beijing also seems to see the Covid-19 crisis as having presented China with an opportunity to promote its diplomatic agenda, according to official declarations<sup>(9)</sup>. Indeed, even when the government was busy handling the crisis in Wuhan, Chinese diplomats remained very proactive in key multilateral organisations, and first and foremost at the World Health Organization (WHO), in defending their government's positions – specifically to deny that the virus had originated in China, to reject calls for an independent investigation on its national territory, and later to shape the strict conditions under which the investigation was conducted when it was finally allowed to take place.

This activism is accompanied by a shift in communication style. Chinese diplomats tended to follow established diplomatic communication standards between 2013 and 2019. But from 2019 onwards, the tone changed significantly and became more abrasive, echoing the diplomatic practices of the Mao era. Chinese diplomats now dare to communicate and act in ways that are not considered standard diplomatic practice, as a few recent examples indicate.

*'Unfortunate that @SecBlinken has once again inherited the "diplomacy of lying" from his infamous predecessor. A typical example of "the thief crying 'thief!' #Genocide was what the #US govt did to #AmericanIndians' stated Hua Chunying, a spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Twitter on 2 March 2022<sup>(10)</sup>, in response to Secretary Blinken's speech of 1 March accusing China of genocide and crimes*

## **The current leadership considers that China should be the leading norm-setter of the global governance system.**

(8) China is to host the 14th BRICS summit in 2022: 'XIV BRICS Summit' (<http://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/>).

(9) According to a declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 'Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng: Ravaging Pandemic and Unprecedented Changes Call for Great Solidarity and Endeavor', 5 December 2020: 'This year we have seen a typical example of "plot reversal" and shift of crisis into opportunity. In face of the pandemic going viral at an unprecedented speed and scale, we were united as one, paid hard efforts and made significant strategic achievements in a short period of time while President Xi Jinping personally directed the outbreak response. Amid the outbreak, the true freedom is the freedom on the basis of respecting science, and the most basic human rights are the rights to health and life. The pandemic did not become China's "Chernobyl Moment", but rather a "shining moment" for the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.' (<https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceme//mon/wjbxw/t1838524.htm>).

(10) Hua Chunying, Twitter, 2 March 2022 (<https://twitter.com/spokespersonchn>).

against Muslim Uyghurs<sup>(11)</sup>. The tactic typically used in Chinese diplomacy is to turn the accusation back against the Western accuser every time that China's behaviour or position is criticised.

*'Boy, your greatest achievement is to have ruined the friendly relations between China and Canada, and have turned Canada into a running dog of the US. Spendthrift!!!'* wrote Li Yang, Counsellor of the Department of Information of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Consul General of China in Rio de Janeiro, on 28 March 2021, in a tweet featuring a picture of Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau.<sup>(12)</sup>

China's coalition-building approach is hybrid: it is the result of a learning process that has fully integrated the lobbying tactics and negotiating techniques of established democracies, while at the same time reviving bold diplomatic practices and ideological language inherited from the Cultural Revolution.

## NORMATIVE AMBITIONS

China aspires to build a coalition of countries supporting its initiatives and most of all its positions on sensitive issues at the UN and in other multilateral frameworks. But in

its endeavour to restructure the global governance system it seeks not only to bolster its position within international institutions, but also to reshape the functioning and alter the norms, values and principles that underpin them. Beijing's normative ambitions are visible in both foreign policy and domestic policy terms.

In domestic policy terms, Chinese diplomacy has for instance been very active over the last 10 years in advocating for an alternative definition of 'human rights', 'democracy' or the 'rule of law' at the multilateral level. China has also actively promoted its own foreign policy concepts and innovations, such as 'Community of a shared future for mankind' or the 'Belt and Road initiative'<sup>(13)</sup>. This trend can also be detected in the Sino-Russian Joint Statement signed on the margins of the Beijing Winter Olympics, in which many Chinese official concepts feature prominently, and which articulates a lengthy alternative conceptualisation of 'human rights', giving priority to economic rights<sup>(14)</sup>.

Beijing does not hesitate to present its governance system to officials of developing countries as an example to emulate and learn from – for instance during delegation visits to China or during the various training sessions that the Chinese government periodically offers to them<sup>(15)</sup>. At the same time, China's official communication – conveyed in the Chinese language on national TV but also in foreign

(11) 'Blinken says Russian crimes "mounting by hour" in Ukraine', Reuters, 1 March 2022 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/blinken-says-russian-crimes-mounting-by-hour-ukraine-2022-03-01/>).

(12) Li Yang, Twitter, 28 March 2021 ([https://twitter.com/li\\_yang\\_china/status/1376139882461081604](https://twitter.com/li_yang_china/status/1376139882461081604)).

(13) On this, see Ekman, A., 'What if ... we avoided wordplay with China?', in Gaub, F. (ed.), 'What if ...? 14 futures for 2024', *Chaillot Paper* No 157, January 2020 ([https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP\\_157.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_157.pdf)); Ekman, A., 'China and the "Definition Gap": Shaping global governance in words', The Asan Forum, November 2017 (<https://theasanforum.org/china-and-the-definition-gap-shaping-global-governance-in-words/>).

(14) 'The Russian side notes the significance of the concept of constructing a "community of common destiny for mankind" proposed by the Chinese side to ensure greater solidarity of the international community and consolidation of efforts in responding to common challenges. The Chinese side notes the significance of the efforts taken by the Russian side to establish a just multipolar system of international relations' ... 'All States must have equal access to the right to development': Office of the President of Russia, Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, 4 February 2022 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>).

(15) Author's analysis of the syllabus of the training courses and seminars offered by the Chinese government for the year 2019. See for instance the official presentation of the seminar 'China's Experience, China's Social System and Public Policy', provided in 2019 by the Chinese government to 'government officials and administrators of public areas in developing countries', posted by the Ministry of Public Administration of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Summer 2019 (<https://mpa.gov.tt/Seminar%20on%20China%27s%20Experience%2C%20China%27s%20Social%20System%20and%20Public%20Policy>).

languages on social networks, such as Twitter – does not hesitate to emphasise the perceived weaknesses of other governance systems, and first and foremost Western democracies. This is not a new trend: in previous years, in its official statements China has sought to draw attention to, for instance, Europe's perceived economic decline, or the anticipated political demise of the EU following Brexit. But this discourse became more pronounced in 2020–2021: Chinese diplomacy has been particularly keen to underline the tensions existing between part of the population and the police in the United States, with explicit reference to the Black Lives Matter movement for instance<sup>(16)</sup>, or to state on a regular basis that Western countries are not managing the Covid-19 crisis as well as China is<sup>(17)</sup>.

Regarding foreign policy, Chinese officials have called for the establishment of a 'new type of international relations' (新型国际关系 – *xinxing guoji guanxi*), as well as of a 'new security concept' that would be based on 'partnership rather than alliance'<sup>(18)</sup>. Although no official definition of these concepts exists, they underline Beijing's aim to restructure the way states interact with each other, and its advocacy of a 'democratisation

of international relations'<sup>(19)</sup>, which implies that countries that are considered by China as developing/non-Western states should play a greater role at the UN and in key international organisations. In general terms, these concepts are based on a post-Western vision of the world, where NATO and the US-led alliance system would lose ground, both in terms of geographic presence but also normative influence at the UN and other multilateral organisations covering security issues.

China is also opposed to numerous international security concepts and practices. In particular, it has strong misgivings about the notion of regime change, whether in Syria, North Korea or Venezuela, and wishes to articulate this opposition in more systematic terms at the UN and other multilateral frameworks. Top officials in China publicly state that regime changes and the 'colour revolutions' that may lead to them are orchestrated by the West – and first and foremost the United States – to promote its own interests<sup>(20)</sup>. China's position on the matter is supported by Russia, and both denounce the West's 'interference in the internal affairs of others' and promote alternative security concepts in their multilateral and bilateral communications<sup>(21)</sup>.

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- (16) For instance, the Chinese delegation explicitly referred to it during the first (and tense) high-level meeting between the US and China held during the Biden administration, at Anchorage in Alaska in March 2021. US Department of State, 'Remarks – Secretary Antony J. Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Director Yang and State Councilor Wang At the Top of Their Meeting', Anchorage, Alaska, 18 March 2021 (<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-chinese-director-of-the-office-of-the-central-commission-for-foreign-affairs-yang-jiechi-and-chinese-state-councilor-wang-yi-at-th/>).
- (17) According to the Chinese Embassy in Paris, for instance, which posted texts on its website pointing at the perceived weaknesses of the local crisis management efforts.
- (18) For instance, at the general debate of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 28 September 2015, Xi Jinping declared that this concept would be based on 'partnership rather alliance' (<https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cesg/eng/jrzg/t1305051.htm>).
- (19) 'Russia and China, as world powers and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, intend to firmly adhere to moral principles and accept their responsibility, strongly advocate the international system with the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international affairs, defend the world order based on international law, including the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, advance multipolarity and promote the democratization of international relations, together create an even more prospering, stable, and just world, jointly build international relations of a new type': Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.
- (20) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Reviving the Cold War is anachronistic – Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng's exclusive interview with GuanCha.cn', 12 August 2020. See for instance this extract: 'Over the years, the United States has been acting with absolutely no respect for the law and justice when it goes around the world to incite color revolution here and there, grossly interfere in others' internal affairs, arbitrarily enforce long-arm jurisdiction, threaten use of force, and even carry out decapitation operations.' ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt\\_665385/zjyh\\_665391/202008/t20200812\\_678881.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/202008/t20200812_678881.html)).
- (21) 'Some actors representing but the minority on the international scale continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force; they interfere in the internal affairs of other states, infringing their legitimate rights and interests, and incite contradictions, differences and confrontation, thus hampering the development and progress of mankind, and incite the opposition from the international community': Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

This perception is fuelled by deep concerns that at some point China itself might become the target of such interference – as expressed by a senior representative from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an interview in August 2022: 'Some people in the United States have been spreading rumors and making slanderous attacks on China. If we always stay silent and do nothing about it, the international community will be easily misled by these lies. We should not forget that Iraq was destroyed because the United States displayed a little test tube containing washing powder, and Syria suffered military strikes because of a few staged photos of alleged chemical weapons attacks. We will never allow such tragedies to happen to China' <sup>(22)</sup>.

Regarding Hong Kong more specifically, Chinese official media and communication do not hesitate to accuse 'Western media' of seeking to foment a colour revolution on the territory <sup>(23)</sup>. While these claims are highly questionable, such distrust of the West is deeply embedded in China's foreign policy mindset and shapes China's normative activism. Ultimately, this deep-seated distrust fuels China's strong political ambition to form a coalition that would be able to block any form of 'Western interventionism'. No matter who the incumbent in the White House, this deep-rooted

and widespread perception prevails across the Chinese policymaking community. For instance, China's perception of the United States under the Biden presidency is still highly negative and based on the assumption that the United States is bent on waging war across the world, even after the effective withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and a framing of US-China relations in relatively less bellicose terms than under the Trump administration. In general terms, China's diplomacy considers that all Western actions in foreign countries are illegitimate, and frequently lists what are perceived as unjustified and negative interferences by the West in the internal affairs of others. <sup>(24)</sup> It has a different view of actions conducted by non-Western countries, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for which Chinese diplomacy has been keen to accuse the West as being primarily responsible <sup>(25)</sup>, and reiterates that it understands 'Russia's legitimate security concerns' <sup>(26)</sup>. The definition and perception of 'interventionism' or 'interferences' is therefore relative.

(22) 'Reviving the Cold War is anachronistic', op.cit.

(23) See for instance: Shen, Y., 'How Western media promotes color revolution: a case study of Hong Kong', *Global Times*, 9 September 2019 (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1164100.shtml>).

(24) See for instance, message by MFA spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Twitter on 23 February: 'Never forget who's the real threat to the world', accompanied by a graphic entitled 'USA Bombing List: The Democracy World Tour' listing over 30 countries bombed by the US in the last 65 years (<https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1496486130698813441?lang=fr>).

(25) See for instance, this answer from MFA spokesperson Hua Chunying during a press conference covering Russian-Ukrainian tensions: 'Many people are asking the US: Did the US respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia when US-led NATO bombed Belgrade? Did the US respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq when it launched military strikes on Baghdad on unwarranted charges? Did the US respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan when US drones wantonly killed innocent people in Kabul and other places? Did the US respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries when it instigated color revolutions and meddled in their internal affairs all around the world? It is hoped that the US take these questions seriously and abandon double standards.' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's regular press conference on February 23 2022' ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/202202/t20220223\\_10644886.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202202/t20220223_10644886.html)).

(26) See the official summary of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's remarks during a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 25 February 2022: 'Noting there is a complex and special historical context of the Ukraine issue, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Thursday told his Russian counterpart that the Chinese side understands Russia's legitimate security concerns': 'China understands Russia's legitimate security concerns', *People's Daily*, 25 February 2022 (<http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0225/c90000-9963062.html>).

## CHAPTER 2

# METHODOLOGY

## How China makes friends

### NETWORK BUILDING: RUSSIA AT THE CORE

China's approach to building coalitions can be summed up by three adjectives – informal, fast-paced and multilayered: *informal* because it prefers to build a flexible network of partnerships rather than formal alliances; *fast-paced* because it has significantly accelerated the consolidation of this network since 2014; *multilayered* because it is developing this network at various levels, encompassing local institutions, states and international organisations.

Network building between states is the most commonly favoured channel used by Beijing to enlarge its 'circle of friends' since 2014. A hierarchy exists among these 'friends' – a term that was originally used in diplomatic communication by the USSR and that was subsequently adopted by Mao Zedong, and that the current Chinese authorities are now using again. Some countries, such as Pakistan, Cambodia or Serbia, who are considered favourable to China's initiatives in general terms, due to their participation in BRI projects or to the fact that they have been recipients of vaccines

and medical assistance provided by China to combat Covid-19, are officially referred to as 'iron-clad friends'<sup>(1)</sup>.

In 2017, China's prioritised 'neighboring and major countries' to build its circle of friends, according to State Councilor Yang Jiechi<sup>(2)</sup>. But this hierarchy has evolved in recent years, especially since several countries perceived as 'major' by Beijing (e.g. the United States, France, Japan) have embraced the Indo-Pacific concept, and have been concerned and openly critical about recent developments in China, including in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

Since 2020, Chinese diplomacy tends to categorise the world in two main groups: 'Western countries' (including first and foremost the United States, but also the EU, Canada, Australia or Japan) and the rest<sup>(3)</sup>. Western countries are perceived as generally critical of/hostile to China and therefore not natural partners of Beijing. Some, such as Australia, have been hit with heavy trade sanctions in retaliation for Canberra's calls for an independent investigation into the origins of the virus (in addition to pre-existing tensions over Chinese political influence in the country, the South China Sea as well as other issues). More

(1) Xinhua, 'China to work with Pakistan to cement ironclad friendship, says Chinese FM', 2 March 2021 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/02/c\\_139778278.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/02/c_139778278.htm)).

(2) 'Since the 18th Party Congress, China has fully advanced its friendly relations with other countries, with neighboring countries and major countries being the priority of this pursuit, other developing countries serving as its foundation, and multilateral settings as its platform.' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, Official translation of Yang Jiechi's speech, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in a deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major-country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features', 17 July 2017 (<https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cegv/eng/zywjyh/t1479007.htm>).

(3) Analysis of the communications of Chinese diplomats on Twitter underlines this dichotomy.



recently, Lithuania has also been targeted with heavy sanctions in retaliation for the opening by Taiwan of a *de facto* embassy in Vilnius, using the name Taiwan (rather than 'Taipei'), on top of pre-existing tensions over other issues. The rest is mainly composed of developing and emerging countries, considered as the 'foundation' of China's network of friends. It is noteworthy that even though China is now the second-largest economy in the world, it continues to present itself in multilateral settings as a 'developing country' <sup>(4)</sup> and insists that 'China's vote in the UN always belongs to the developing world' <sup>(5)</sup>. This positioning may be explained by pragmatic motivations (preferential treatment/conditions on some issues – such as carbon emission reduction targets) but also by China's historical and ideological legacy – since Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the PRC has always claimed to be part of the developing world.

China has been able to exert a significant power of attraction over these countries in recent years. Observations of participation at China's security forums show that China is able to mobilise a large group of countries around its own agenda. For instance, the 2018 edition of China's Xiangshan forum gathered high-level representatives from ministries of defence from countries as diverse as Russia, North Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Serbia, Vietnam, Ecuador, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Cambodia, Belarus and Nepal <sup>(6)</sup>. This important display of symbolic power also

(4) As stated again by Prime Minister Li Keqiang at the NPC and CPPCC Annual Sessions 2021. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Premier Li Keqiang Meets the Press: Full Transcript of Questions and Answers', 11 March 2021 ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/202203/t20220311\\_10651148.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202203/t20220311_10651148.html)).

(5) Press conference of foreign minister Wang Yi: 'China champions equity and justice, and stands for equality among all countries regardless of their size. China's vote in the UN always belongs to the developing world.' Highlights of State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi's Remarks on Press Conference for the Fourth session of the 13th National People's Congress, 8 March 2021 (<https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cevu//eng/zt/T5/t1859480.htm>).

(6) Minister or Deputy Minister level. Observations and informal exchanges with Xiangshan Forum participants, October 2018, Beijing. First noted in 'China's post-Alliance architecture in Asia: Launch of an ambitious restructuring process', op.cit.

## Enlarging China's 'circle of friends'

A decade-long priority

### 2012

Nov ● Xi Jinping becomes General Secretary of the Communist Party of China

Official launch of the 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) Initiative (later renamed 'Belt and Road Initiative')

### 2014

Nov ● Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs calls for a 'new type of international relations' based on 'partnership rather than alliances'

### 2017

Jan ● China publishes White Paper on 'Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific'

Jan ● Xi mentions China's ambition 'to build circle of friends across the world' in Geneva speech

May ● BRI Forum (1st edition)

Jul ● First official mention of China's 'global network of partnerships' ambition

Aug ● New Security Concept issued by China

Amendments to the Chinese Constitution ● Mar  
Xi reaffirms need to enlarge China's 'circle of friends' in New Year's speech ● Dec

### 2019

Apr ● BRI Forum (2nd edition)

China holds leadership of four UN agencies ● Jun  
China and Russia block a bid at the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Sudan ● Jun  
15 countries sign the RCEP Agreement ● Nov

### 2021

Mar ● Launch of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations

Apr ● Launch of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers

Jun ● China calls for the 'enlargement of the circle of friends who understand China'

Jun ● A group of 60+ countries signs a joint statement supporting China's stance on Xinjiang at the UN Human Rights Council

Nov ● UN resolution on Promoting International Cooperation on Peaceful Uses in the Context of International Security

RCEP Agreement enters into force ● Jan  
Launch of the Group of Friends of Global Development Initiative ● Jan

Sino-Russian joint statement calling for a new kind of relationship between world powers ● Feb

Beijing hosts Winter Olympics ● Feb

China rejects the US Indo-Pacific strategy ● Mar

Xi Jinping mentions new 'Global Security Initiative' at the Boao Forum for Asia ● Apr

20th Party Congress ● Autumn

translates into some more concrete bilateral security agreements between China and a significant number of these countries. For instance, on the margins of the Xiangshan forum, and later the Valdai Discussion Club in October 2019, China and Russia announced that they were cooperating in the joint development of a ballistic missile early warning system.

Two different sets of like-minded actors are currently emerging. Just as democratic 'like-minded' partners exist, as exemplified by the US and the EU, there also exists a like-minded group of autocracies. Both China and Russia took part in the establishment and revival of the 'Like-Minded Group' (LMG). The coordination of the group has been undertaken by Russia, China and then Egypt since 2013<sup>(7)</sup>. By 2016, the LMG was a cross-regional group of more than 52 states, including Cuba and Venezuela among other countries, and became particularly active at the UN Human Rights Council in the following years. Beyond this specific group, China increasingly refers to like-mindedness in its official communications. In July 2021, a senior Chinese diplomat on behalf of a group of 'like-minded countries' expressed concerns over what he perceived as disinformation on multilateral human rights work.<sup>(8)</sup>

Among the like-minded countries, Russia has been described as the 'best friend of China' by Xi Jinping<sup>(9)</sup>. Beijing and Moscow have

reinforced military cooperation over the last 8 years – regularly conducting joint military exercises – but have also intensified cooperation at institutional level, through reinforced coordination at the UN and other multilateral institutions, to promote their positions on various international security issues<sup>(10)</sup>. As mentioned above, this cooperation is encouraged by conceptual convergence: both China and Russia perceive NATO and the US-led alliance system as illegitimate<sup>(11)</sup>. Both countries also consider that 'colour revolutions' are illegitimately orchestrated by Western powers to promote their own interests.

More recently, the signing on 4 February, on the margins of the Winter Olympics opening ceremony, of a China-Russia joint statement<sup>(12)</sup> confirms such a convergence of outlook between the two countries and shows that the bilateral *rapprochement* has been planned by the authorities in a strategic and detailed manner. The length and structure of the document clearly indicate that the bilateral relationship has consolidated rapidly in recent years and is now extremely cohesive, based on a shared post-Western view of the world order. China is certainly not alone in its efforts to restructure global governance. Among the 'profound transformations' the world is going through, the Chinese and Russian authorities jointly identify the 'transformation of the global governance architecture and world order'. They consider that 'a trend

## China continues to present itself in multilateral settings as a 'developing country'.

(7) Essam, A., 'The Like Minded Group (LMG): Speaking truth to power', Universal Rights Group's blog, 10 May 2016 (<https://www.universal-rights.org/blog/like-minded-group-lmg-speaking-truth-to-power/>).

(8) Xinhua, 'China, like-minded countries voice concern over disinformation on multilateral human rights work', 2 July 2021 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-07/02/c\\_1310040247.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-07/02/c_1310040247.htm)).

(9) CGTN, 'Xi and Putin, the helmsmen of China-Russia friend "ship"', 5 June 2019 (<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e3545444d35457a6333566d54/index.html>).

(10) Ekman, A., Saari, S. and Secrieru, S., 'Stand by Me! The Sino-Russian normative partnership in action', Brief No 18, EUISS, August 2020 ([https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2018%20China%20Russia\\_0.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2018%20China%20Russia_0.pdf)).

(11) 'Xi's Russia visit promotes bilateral ties to higher level: Chinese FM', Xinhua, 8 July 2017 ([http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017xivisitgermany/2017-07/09/content\\_30047553.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017xivisitgermany/2017-07/09/content_30047553.htm)).

(12) Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

has emerged towards redistribution of power in the world' <sup>(13)</sup>.

The document also states that 'friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no "forbidden" areas of cooperation', adding that 'the new inter-State relations between Russia and China are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era'. Although China and Russia are not allies by treaty, this document is of particular importance as it formalises the China-Russia security partnership and their mutual support <sup>(14)</sup> on specific issues, including Taiwan <sup>(15)</sup>, which marks a new step in the bilateral relationship.

Only a few weeks before the start of the war in Ukraine, the joint document stated that 'Russia and China stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, intend to counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, oppose colour revolutions, and will increase cooperation in the aforementioned areas.' It went on to add that: 'The Chinese side is sympathetic to and supports the proposals put forward by the Russian Federation to create long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe' <sup>(16)</sup>.

## THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: A NETWORK-BUILDING PLATFORM

In addition to bilateral channels of communication, the BRI is considered by China as a key instrument for enlarging its circle of friends. Since it was launched in autumn 2013, it has evolved into a platform of cooperation between countries. Behind the label of 'policy coordination' (政策沟通 - *zhengci goutong*) <sup>(17)</sup> – one of the official 'pillars' of the BRI – Chinese diplomacy has been very active in promoting the initiative as a network of countries, with related bilateral and multilateral meetings envisaged to take place on a regular basis.

The BRI is not only a way for China to address short-term economic issues (industrial overcapacity, economic slowdown, etc) through the development of infrastructure abroad; it is also seen as a tool to restructure regional and global governance <sup>(18)</sup>, with the creation of BRI satellite institutions such as the AIIB in 2014, the BRI platforms for commercial dispute arbitration or the Belt and Road forums.

The Belt and Road Forum organised in 2017 was attended by more than 20 heads of state, while in 2019, the second edition of the forum was attended by more than 30 heads of state. The BRI is designed as a work-in-progress that is constantly evolving, therefore the potential for creating BRI-related summits and cooperation mechanisms is unlimited. It is unclear when the next BRI forum will be

(13) Ibid.

(14) 'The sides reaffirm their strong mutual support for the protection of their core interests, state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and oppose interference by external forces in their internal affairs', *ibid*.

(15) 'The Russian side reaffirms its support for the One-China principle, confirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and opposes any forms of independence of Taiwan', *ibid*.

(16) *Ibid*.

(17) See for instance: '一带一路'倡议实施中的政策沟通' ['Policy communication of the One Belt One Road Initiative is being implemented'] published on 13 June 2017 on the Ministry of Commerce webpage: [www.mofcom.gov.cn](http://www.mofcom.gov.cn).

(18) The BRI official action plan published in March 2015 called for the creation of a 'balanced regional economic cooperation architecture' and 'new models of international cooperation and global governance.'

organised, but in any case China is making full use of the momentum generated by the BRI to rally countries behind its initiatives – more recently, since the beginning of the pandemic, under the label of 'Health Silk Road'. Even if the results of these forums have so far been limited in multilateral terms (the signature of non-binding joint *communiqués*), they provide Chinese diplomacy with many opportunities to reinforce bilateral ties on the margins of these meetings, through the signing of various bilateral agreements, often framed as 'Belt and Road memoranda of understanding' (BRI MoUs).

Since 2014, Beijing has also been pushing for the building of networks among local institutions of various kinds under the BRI label. For instance, networks of ports have been established, often supported by new twinning partnerships (for instance between the port of Marseille in France and the port of Shanghai, in 2018). Networks of cities have also been developed at the initiative of the Chinese central government. International networks of think tanks have been promoted by several Party-affiliated Chinese think tanks, as well as international networks of universities and research departments. The Chinese Communist Party is also active in consolidating its partnerships and exchanges with political parties across the globe, and in a comprehensive manner: not only does it continue to conduct networking with other communist/socialist parties, in the Maoist tradition, but it has also enlarged its networking activities to embrace political parties of all types, including right and far-right wing political parties<sup>(19)</sup>.

In addition to diplomatic activism at multilateral forums, both old and new, China has the capability to project influence and build coalitions through the economic and technological

assistance that it provides under the banner of the BRI. In particular, the provision of technological equipment and services (e.g. the Beidou satellite system, 5G network, artificial intelligence capabilities, etc) can forge strong bilateral ties, especially if these technologies include tools for surveillance and censorship used by authoritarian governments to maintain their grip on power.

In any case, China has shown readiness, since 2015, to provide concrete advantages to countries that have signed BRI MoUs, and/or host China-financed projects on their territories<sup>(20)</sup>. These advantages may include preferential access to senior Chinese government officials, Chinese loans, Chinese technologies or anti-Covid-19 vaccines and medical supplies. This phenomenon may be observed in various parts of the world even though the BRI is now known to be a double-edged sword in some instances. In its dealings with indebted countries, such as Sri Lanka or Montenegro, China has shown readiness to take measures curtailing their sovereign authority and ability to manage their own critical infrastructures.

## THE UN AND CHINA'S AMBITION TO REFORM GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

A half century has passed since the PRC joined the UN in 1971. Initially, in the 1970s and 1980s, China played a rather passive and low-key role in the organisation. Today, however, China considers the UN as an institution of paramount importance in the international system and is actively expanding its influence

(19) As underlined by the official statements on Party-to-Party relations and outreach, and news on exchanges with foreign parties: 中共中央对外联络部 => 外党之声 Website of the International Department of Central Committee of the CPC, 8 March 2022 (<https://www.idcpc.org.cn/wdzs/sjzd/>).

(20) Ekman, A. (ed.), 'China's Belt & Road and the World: Competing forms of globalization', Etudes de l'Ifri, Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri), April 2019 ([https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ekman\\_china\\_belt\\_road\\_world\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ekman_china_belt_road_world_2019.pdf)).

within the organisation. Official documents<sup>(21)</sup> which aim at clarifying China's 'new security concept'<sup>(22)</sup> emphasise the central role of the UN in global governance<sup>(23)</sup>. The centrality of the UN is also underlined in Xi Jinping's recent speeches and exchanges with the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in the context of the pandemic crisis<sup>(24)</sup>.

China has learned step-by-step how to build voting coalitions at the UN and in other multilateral arenas. As a legacy of Deng Xiaoping's 'low profile' foreign policy, China's diplomatic institutions were still lacking practical experience within international organisations, in the 1990s and, to a lesser extent, in the 2000s. At the time, China did not know how to build coalitions<sup>(25)</sup>. It was only in around 2012–2013 that a different Chinese diplomatic approach was observable at the UN. According to observers<sup>(26)</sup>, Chinese representatives then became very active, always present at meetings – of all sizes and levels – taking the floor and generally behaving in a much more assertive manner, while at the same time becoming more sophisticated in their lobbying tactics. For the first time, China started to promote its own initiatives at the Human Rights Council (in debates related to women's rights or health rights, for instance). But it quickly faced opposition from other members, and first and

## China has learned step-by-step how to build voting coalitions at the UN and in other multilateral arenas.

foremost from the United States (at the beginning of the Trump administration, when the United States was still a member of the Human Rights Council). The Chinese then adjusted their strategy, continuing to launch their own diplomatic initiatives, but often in a more ambitious and orchestrated way – for instance by repeatedly promoting and lobbying for an alternative definition of human rights focusing on rights to prosperity and economic development.

Chinese diplomacy is very active at both the UN headquarters in New York and other UN offices, such as the UN office in Geneva. It is also very active in the majority of the 15 UN specialised agencies. In these frameworks, Beijing is striving to reinforce

China's presence and representation at the highest levels. It successfully lobbied to obtain the leadership of four of the 15 agencies by 2020: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). It is also very adept at placing Chinese nationals appointed at lower, intermediary levels within the UN system.<sup>(27)</sup> In many of these organisations, China is not only working to reinforce its influence but also to change their governance rules and procedures. This is the case for

(21) Such as 'China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept', published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/xw/t27742.htm>).

(22) Which is hard to define but relates, according to official communication, to a 'common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable security concept.' See: 'Spotlight: "China view" helps build a better world', Xinhua, 29 August 2017 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/29/c\\_136565429.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/29/c_136565429.htm)).

(23) See 'China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept', op.cit. Extract related to the UN: 'An increasing number of countries wish to build national and international security on the basis of the following principles: —To conduct cooperation on the basis of the UN Charter, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and other widely recognized norms governing international relations, and give full play to the leading role of the United Nations (...)' See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Position Paper on China's cooperation with the United Nations', 22 October 2021 ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wjzcs/202110/t20211022\\_9609380.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wjzcs/202110/t20211022_9609380.html)).

(24) The Chinese president declared that 'China firmly upholds multilateralism, the international system with the United Nations at its core'. See: 'Xi's remarks on strengthening China-UN cooperation', Xinhua/ Ministry of National Defence of the PRC, 25 June 2021 ([http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-06/25/content\\_4888174.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-06/25/content_4888174.htm)).

(25) 'China was just really bad at it', according to Marc Limon, Executive Director of the Universal Rights Group, who recalled a failed attempt by China in 2011 to propose an amendment to a resolution supported by Austria on minorities. Interview, June 2021.

(26) Observations shared by Marc Limon, but also other UN watchers interviewed in the framework of this research.

(27) According to Richard Gowan, UN Director at the International Crisis Group. Interview, June 2021.

instance within the ITU, where China, along with Russia, is very proactively deploying a set of initiatives with the aim to reform internet governance. <sup>(28)</sup>

Chinese diplomacy is also trying to build bridges among institutions as much as possible, by encouraging for instance joint statements on issues it considers of national interest. It was active in promoting the joint statement issued by the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank on Covid-19 impacts on food security and nutrition, on the occasion of the Extraordinary G20 Agriculture Minister's Meeting held in April 2020 <sup>(29)</sup>. Beijing encourages overlap between the agendas of various institutions as much as possible. China has notably prioritised infrastructure development on its foreign and domestic policy agenda, and has moved it up the agenda of many multilateral institutions and forums (including the BRICS and the G20), often quite skilfully, over the last five years. But Beijing is also building bridges between existing institutions/multilateral cooperation frameworks and its own initiatives: it has for instance successfully promoted the signing of agreements on the BRI with international organisations – the majority of UN agencies have signed MoUs or Letters of Intent <sup>(30)</sup>.

China's activism in building bridges and creating linkages between institutions is accompanied by a range of tactics aimed at expanding its influence within UN bodies, including significant Chinese financial contributions to the

agencies and facilitation for more cooperation among secretariats, and most of all an active shaping of the multilateral agenda, which seeks alignment with China's priorities – especially, in some institutions such as UNESCO or the World Health Organization (WHO) after the withdrawal of the United States.

As Chinese diplomacy is highly centralised and characteristically applies the same strategic 'template' to different situations, it is not uncommon to observe similar types of initiatives from one institution to another. For instance, Beijing has been very active in proposing the creation of a development bank in a variety of multilateral frameworks – from the BRICS <sup>(31)</sup> to the SCO – in addition to the creation of the *ad-hoc* AIIB based in Beijing.

Although Chinese officials are much more proactive today and have developed professional lobbying and negotiation skills and practices, the general positioning is not radically different from four decades ago: China had always positioned itself on the side of the 'non-aligned' South. At the UN it has always been close to the Group of 77 (G77), the coalition of developing countries. The G77 is still a rather solid coalition at the UN today <sup>(32)</sup>. Many of the countries who support China's positions are members of the G77 – not all however. Recently, a group of countries self-designated 'The Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations' have emerged: established in March 2021, it includes 17 UN member states, among them

(28) 'The sides support the internationalization of Internet governance, advocate equal rights to its governance, believe that any attempts to limit their sovereign right to regulate national segments of the Internet and ensure their security are unacceptable, are interested in greater participation of the International Telecommunication Union in addressing these issues': Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

(29) The World Bank, 'Joint Statement on COVID-19 Impacts on Food Security and Nutrition', 21 April 2020 (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2020/04/21/joint-statement-on-covid-19-impacts-on-food-security-and-nutrition>).

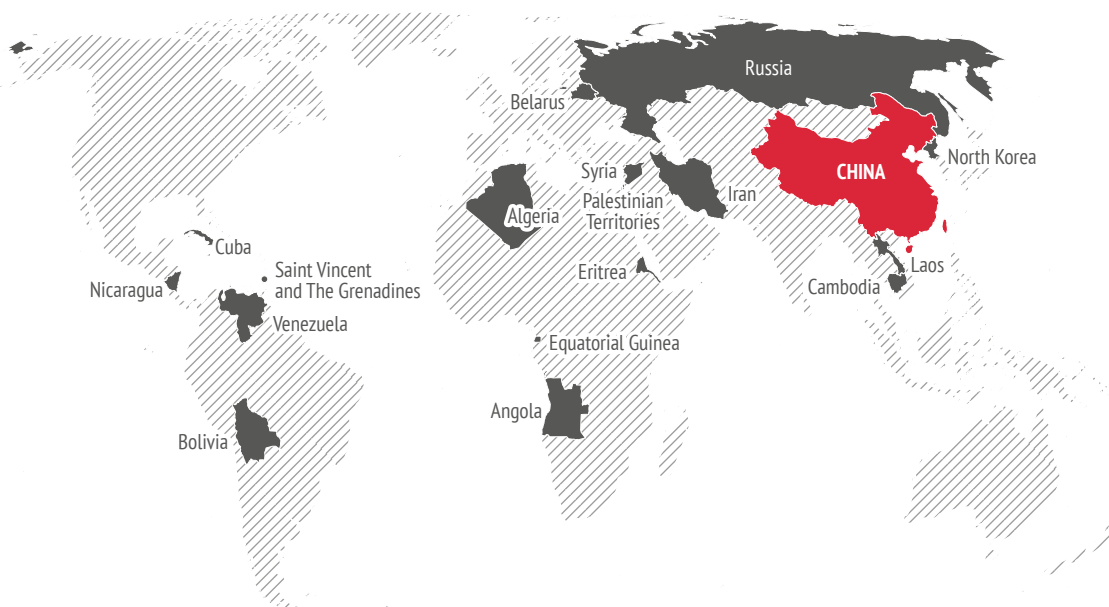
(30) For a comprehensive list of signatures, see: <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/26318/UN%20Agencies%20BRI%20Involvement%2002%20%2801%20Oct%202018%29.pdf?sequence=17&isAllowed=y>.

(31) BRICS is another label that China is trying to use to extend its network of partners, pushing for instance for the BRICS Plus/Outreach format as 'an effective mechanism of dialogue with regional integration associations and organizations of developing countries and States with emerging markets': Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Gothenburg, 'Xi calls for expanding "BRICS Plus" cooperation to address common challenges', 27 July 2018 (<https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cggg/eng/xwdt/t1581284.htm>); Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

(32) According to Richard Gowan, op. cit.

## New 'Group of Friends'

Countries participating in the launch of 'The Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations' in July 2021



Data: United Nations, 2021

China, Russia, Algeria, Iran, Belarus and Syria (see map).

The concept note of the Group (see page 46 in the annex to this volume) states that 'the world is seeing a growing resort to unilateralism, marked by isolationist and arbitrary actions, including the imposition of unilateral coercive measures or the withdrawal from landmark agreements and multilateral institutions, as well as by attempts to undermine critical efforts to tackle common and global challenges' (33).

China also pushed for the creation of another 'group of friends' in April 2021: 'The Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United

Nations Peacekeepers', gathering 49 countries and regional organisations, including China, Brazil, Indonesia and Rwanda – according to Chinese official media (34). This has been facilitated by the fact that China has been the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping operations budget in recent years (35). It is too early to assess the impact of these groups on voting dynamics at the UN, but it already confirms China's activism in building country groupings of various forms, with the ultimate aim to promote its positions and interests. In addition to the groups mentioned above, China's Permanent Mission to the UN launched a 'Group of Friends of Global Development Initiative' in January 2022, with

(33) See annex at page 46, as well as Nichols, M., 'China, Iran, North Korea seek support at U.N. to push back against unilateral force, sanctions', Reuters, 12 March 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/china-usa-un-int-idUSKBN2B336H>)

(34) United Nations, Press release, 24 May 2021 (<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14528.doc.htm>); 'China, 40 plus countries launch Group of Friends on Safety and Security of UN Peacekeepers', Xinhua, 28 April 2021 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/28/c\\_139911891.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/28/c_139911891.htm)).

(35) Gowan, R., 'China's pragmatic approach to UN peacekeeping', Brookings, 14 September 2020 (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>).

the official aim of speeding up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda<sup>(36)</sup>.

Whether in the field of economic or security governance, China is proactively taking the initiative to push for the drafting and the adoption of new resolutions in line with its interests. For instance, it was at the initiative of China, with the co-sponsorship of Russia, that the resolution entitled 'Promoting international Cooperation on Peaceful Uses in the Context of International Security' was adopted at the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in November 2021<sup>(37)</sup>.

It is noteworthy that while Beijing is actively building coalitions, it prefers not to draw attention to its role as the pilot of these efforts in many instances. For example, with regard to Myanmar/Burma, although China is very proactive on the issue at bilateral and multilateral levels, it took a back seat in June 2021 rather than appear as the leading country opposing the UN resolution calling for a stop to the flow of arms to the country and urging the military to respect November election results and release political detainees. Instead of China, it was Belarus who requested that the text be put to a vote and it was the only country to oppose it, while 36 countries abstained, including China and Russia, and 119 voted for the resolution<sup>(38)</sup>.

It was also Belarus who, in March 2021, delivered a joint speech on behalf of 70 countries at the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council, in support of Beijing's position – in particular emphasising that matters relating to Hong Kong are China's 'internal affairs' and should not be interfered with 'by external forces'<sup>(39)</sup>.

(36) Xinhua, 'Group of Friends of Global Development Initiative launched', 21 January 2022 (<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/20220121/81050f6ae91e49bc8e0b019f4eabb1d0/c.html>).

(37) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, The 76th UNGA First Committee Adopted Resolution Promoting International Cooperation on Peaceful Uses in the Context of International Security, 4 November 2021 ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjwb\\_663304/zjzg\\_663340/jks\\_665232/kjfywj\\_665252/202111/t20211104\\_10442353.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjwb_663304/zjzg_663340/jks_665232/kjfywj_665252/202111/t20211104_10442353.html)).

(38) Nichols, M., 'United Nations call for halt of weapons to Myanmar', 18 June 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/un-chief-urges-general-assembly-act-myanmar-2021-06-18/>).

(39) 'Belarus represents 70 countries to call for non-interference in China's internal affairs', Xinhua, 3 March 2021 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/05/c\\_139788101.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/05/c_139788101.htm)). See also the PRC's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on page 45 of the annex to this volume.



## CHAPTER 3

# ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

## China's coalition-building strategy

### WINNING BY NUMBERS

At the UN level, China's coalition-building efforts seem to have paid off, considering the number of countries Beijing has managed to mobilise in support of its most sensitive positions. On Xinjiang and Hong Kong, China's diplomacy manages to gather between 50 and 70 countries in support of its positions, either to oppose joint statements that are critical of China's stance on these issues, or to sign joint statements that are supportive of China's positions. In June 2021, when a group of more than 40 countries, led by Canada and including countries such as Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the United States, urged China to allow the UN Human Rights Chief immediate access to Xinjiang to investigate reports that more than a million people have been unlawfully detained there<sup>(1)</sup>, China was prompt in rallying more than 60 countries to oppose this move and any 'interference with China's domestic affairs on its Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Tibet Autonomous

Region under the excuse of human rights'<sup>(2)</sup> (see map overleaf).

Numbers matter at the multilateral level, and Chinese diplomacy is particularly keen on counting the countries that support its positions at the UN and reaching the highest number possible, even if this implies counting in different ways. For instance, the Chinese media was keen in June 2021 to underline that aside from the 65 countries that expressed opposition to interference in China's affairs at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR), 'more than 20 countries plan to deliver separate speeches to support China, making the total number to express understanding and support to China surpassing 90'<sup>(3)</sup> – a number which was hard to confirm. This 'numbers race' is likely to continue in the coming years at a time Chinese diplomats are under pressure from Beijing to deliver results.

But the success of China's coalition-building efforts needs to be qualified, as the results are uneven, and China's position sometimes clashes with the position of some developing countries. When, in June 2019, China and Russia blocked a bid at the UN Security Council to condemn the killing of civilians in Sudan and

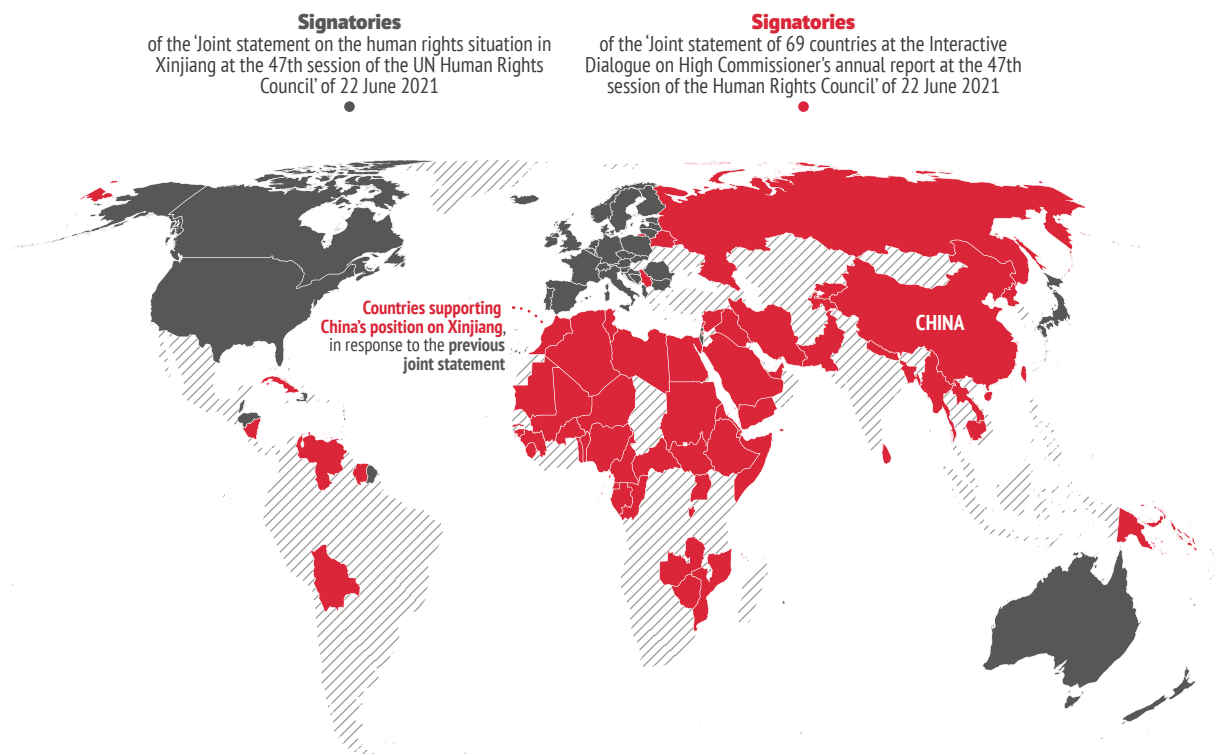
(1) 'Canada leads call on China to allow Xinjiang access – statement', Reuters, 22 June 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/canada-leads-call-china-allow-xinjiang-access-statement-2021-06-22/>).

(2) 'More than 90 countries express support to China amid rampant anti-China campaign at UN human rights body', *Global Times*, 22 June 2021 (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202106/1226834.shtml>).

(3) Ibid.

## China is not alone

Tit-for-tat statements on the human rights situation in Xinjiang



Data: Government of Canada, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021

advocate a consensual solution and a transition to democracy<sup>(4)</sup>, many African countries were negatively surprised by China's position on an issue located on their continent and about which they were strongly concerned.

Apart from issue-based divergences, China's coalition-building efforts at the UN occasionally encounter resistance for various reasons. One reason relates to the general perception among some developing countries that China itself is not a developing country anymore and, like other major powers, has become arrogant and condescending towards the 'South'. Resistance also emerges from the perception that China's diplomats exert too much pressure on their counterparts when lobbying in the corridors of the UN. Observations clearly indicate

that in some instances Chinese diplomats have been behaving in a pushy or intimidating way – and in some cases producing the opposite result than the one intended. Cases of what could be coined 'diplomatic cheating' have also been noticed: countries who had not given their formal support to China have been surprised to discover that they were listed as countries supporting China's position in documents made public by Beijing, without prior notice<sup>(5)</sup>.

But the fact that several countries are disappointed by China's behaviour does not automatically imply that they will oppose China's positions at the UN: many prefer to stay 'neutral' as much as possible. At the UN, two core groups can be identified at the moment:

(4) 'China, Russia block UN action on Sudan', AFP, 5 June 2019.

(5) Interview with Bruce Jones, Director of the Project on International Order and Strategy at Brookings, June 2021, based on his experience and observations at the UN.

a Western core group, which includes the United States, EU Member States, Canada, Australia and South Korea among other 'like-minded' countries and a China-Russia core group, which include about 20 'hardcore' supporters – most of the members of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as other, non-democratic states, such as Saudi Arabia, who are often aligned with Beijing and Moscow on issues related to human rights.

In between, many countries are trying their best to avoid being pushed into one group or another. They form a rather large and fluid group of countries, about 50 % of UN members, whose position is issue-based and not necessarily aligned with one partner or core group. India can be considered as a member of this category, in the sense that it is closely aligned with the United States on some issues – for instance, it is concerned about the potential intentions behind China's BRI and is strongly opposed to the inclusion of any references to the BRI and related vocabulary in UN resolutions and statements – but on other issues (e.g. on climate change or on human rights), its positions may appear closer to the China-Russia core group or to the position of the developing/emerging countries at large.

## COVID-19: CHINA'S STRATEGY UNCHANGED

The Covid-19 pandemic has so far not significantly eroded China's coalition-building potential. From the US and European perspective,

China's image has been tarnished and it is now perceived negatively among many other countries, partly due to Covid-19 as well as Beijing's contentious 'wolf-warrior diplomacy'. But a significant number of other countries still perceive China much less as a threat than Washington or Brussels do, and remain open to China's initiatives and offers – as demonstrated by the number of countries who have accepted China's assistance since the beginning of the pandemic. Countries as diverse as Algeria, Brazil, Ethiopia or Lebanon have accepted exports and donations of medical as well as technological equipment (videoconferencing systems powered by Huawei, or DJI drones, among other devices).

A significant group of countries is upset with the way China has managed the crisis, and has communicated around it, but at the same time an equally significant number of countries appears disappointed with the vaccine diplomacy promoted by the EU and the United States as part of COVAX, an international initiative to promote equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines<sup>(6)</sup>. In particular, many African governments are dissatisfied with their limited access to vaccines, as they were still waiting for delivery of the promised COVAX vaccines at a time when many developed countries had moved ahead with the roll-out of large-scale vaccination programmes benefiting their own population<sup>(7)</sup>. Reflecting this perception, the special envoy of the African Union for the purchase of anti-Covid-19 vaccines, Strive Masiyiwa, strongly criticised the Europeans during a July 2021 press conference on the COVAX initiative, saying that 'not one dose, not one vial, has left a European factory for Africa'<sup>(8)</sup>. As of July 2021, almost 3.3 billion vaccine doses had been distributed in the world, but only 1 % in the poorest countries. The implementation of the COVAX initiative in particular was in this

(6) According to Bruce Jones, interviewed in June 2021 for this report, who has observed comments and reactions at the UN on this specific issue, and confirmed by the statement of African Union officials mentioned in the above paragraph.

(7) 'L'Afrique face au Covid-19: les Européens vivement critiqués sur le mécanisme Covax', *Le Monde*, 2 July 2021 ([https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/02/l-afrique-face-au-covid-19-les-europeens-vivement-critiques-sur-le-mecanisme-covax\\_6086692\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/02/l-afrique-face-au-covid-19-les-europeens-vivement-critiques-sur-le-mecanisme-covax_6086692_3212.html)).

(8) Associated Press, 'Africa's Covid-19 envoy blasts EU, COVAX over vaccine crisis', 1 July 2021 (<https://apnews.com/article/africa-europe-coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-926c80134a8543efef16e2c7ca4d43c2>).

context largely called into question<sup>(9)</sup>. The situation has evolved rapidly since then, with the EU global response to the Covid-19 pandemic amounting, by September 2021, to €4.6 billion from Team Europe<sup>(10)</sup>, and the EU continued to send doses to Africa in the following months, with the aim of delivering 450 million vaccines by the summer of 2022<sup>(11)</sup>. Still, the Covid-19 pandemic, and in particular the fact that African countries have begun their vaccine campaigns much later than wealthier states which secured the initially limited doses, has led to strong anti-European/anti-Western sentiment in parts of the developing world.

In this context, China is tapping into the widespread resentment against the West to broaden its support base. In addition to pointing at the West's perceived 'bad' management of the pandemic crisis, Chinese diplomacy does not hesitate to underline to partners in the developing world that, unlike Western countries, China has never been a colonial power. It remains difficult to assess the impact of this rhetoric,<sup>(12)</sup> which is actively promoted in the framework of China's 'South-South cooperation', but some

## **Before the pandemic crisis, the general perception in Beijing was that the West was in irreversible decline.**

countries – such as Iran – are responding positively to it and integrating it in their own official discourse<sup>(13)</sup>. Resentment against NATO is also shared by some Latin American countries, who have for instance supported (in the case of Venezuela) or not condemned (in the case of Bolivia and Brazil) the Russian invasion of Ukraine, considering that in some instances NATO and the United States were responsible for the war<sup>(14)</sup>. In Latin America, China's 'anti-imperialist' discourse appears to be received positively by some governments – such as Maduro's government in Venezuela<sup>(15)</sup>. In broader terms, China considers that the West's negative image in some parts of the world can be used for the promotion of its own image and initiatives in these countries, and that there is room to enlarge its circle of friends through the use of an anti-Western discourse.

To be sure, well before the pandemic crisis, the general perception in Beijing was that the West is in irreversible decline. This notion has been underlined so frequently in Chinese official communication that it has become fully integrated into the discourse of policymakers and think-tankers in Beijing<sup>(16)</sup>.

(9) 'Accès aux vaccins anti-Covid : la grande fracture Nord-Sud', *Le Monde*, 10 July 2021 ([https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/10/acces-aux-vaccins-anti-covid-la-grande-fracture-nord-sud\\_6087833\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/10/acces-aux-vaccins-anti-covid-la-grande-fracture-nord-sud_6087833_3212.html)).

(10) European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 'EU humanitarian initiative to support Covid-19 vaccination rollout in Africa' ([https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/support-package-covid-19-vaccination-rollout-africa\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/support-package-covid-19-vaccination-rollout-africa_en)).

(11) 'EU pushes for Covid vaccinations in Africa as supply "no longer" a problem', Euractiv, 10 February 2022 (<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-pushes-for-covid-vaccinations-in-africa-as-supply-no-longer-a-problem/>).

(12) Some recent polls suggest China's overall image is generally positive in parts of Africa. See for instance Afrobarometers's studies and surveys: <https://theconversation.com/how-popular-is-china-in-africa-new-survey-sheds-light-on-what-ordinary-people-think-149552>

(13) For instance, the Iranian Ambassador to China declared in an interview to the Chinese press in April 2021, following the signing of the 25-years bilateral agreement: 'China has never had a colonial record and has never tried to occupy another country. Western countries consider China, a rising world power, as a threat to their strategic dominance. They consider the establishment of a long-term strategic and friendly relationship between China and other independent countries like Iran a threat to their core interests in the region. They try to paint a bad image of China to frighten the people of other countries. When economic cooperation brings prosperity, well-being, and improves the livelihood of the local people, this poisonous and unrealistic propaganda of the West loses its effectiveness.' Xie, W., 'China-Iran 25-year deal not aimed at any country: Iranian envoy', *Global Times*, 15 April 2021 (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221192.shtml>).

(14) Underlined by Gaspard Estrada (executive director of OPALC – l'Observatoire politique de l'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes) during the conference. 'Géopolitique mondiale de l'invasion de l'Ukraine', Paris, 1 March 2022 (<https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/evenements/geopolitique-de-linvasion-de-lukraine/>).

(15) Ibid.

(16) Informal discussions with Chinese diplomats and researchers, Beijing and Paris, 2016–2019.

The advent of the Trump presidency reinforced this perception of Western disarray, and it was then often considered that Washington was making so many mistakes on its own (from the withdrawal from the Paris Climate agreement to the Iran nuclear deal, and including the Trans-Pacific Partnership),<sup>(17)</sup> that Beijing did not have much to do to reinforce its position and influence at multilateral level and drive global governance reform. In 2016–2020, China actively tried to position itself, at the World Economic Forum in Davos and other arenas, as the supporter of ‘multilateralism, free-trade and globalisation’. Although the reform of Chinese state-owned enterprises and the opening-up of the Chinese market did not materialise, and an increasing number of foreign companies are complaining about the barriers to entry and expansion in the Chinese market, Beijing has continuously been promoting this narrative.

With the election of Joe Biden to the US presidency, this perception partly evolved, but the overall assumption that the West is in decline has remained unchanged in Beijing. The mantra that China is rising and that the West is declining is encouraged by economic statistics on the one hand, and by a Marxist-nationalist view of history on the other. According to Xi's speech at the centenary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in July 2021, it is time for the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ (referred to 24 times in his speech), and ‘the time in which the Chinese nation could be bullied and abused by other [is] gone forever’<sup>(18)</sup>. According to the Chinese president, China's rise as a socialist power is a natural trend of

history, and is destined to succeed<sup>(19)</sup>. In this context, China's diplomacy remains very proactive and is now focused less on the United States' own mistakes – which are perceived as less numerous under the presidency of Joe Biden, at least at the multilateral level – than on the West's decline in broader terms.

## INDO-PACIFIC VS. ASIA-PACIFIC

China has been openly critical of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept since it was launched, but it has criticised it in particularly strong terms since early 2022<sup>(20)</sup>.

In March 2022, Wang Yi, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister, declared:

*‘The real goal of the US Indo-Pacific strategy is to establish an Indo-Pacific version of NATO. It seeks to maintain the US-led system of hegemony, undermine the ASEAN-centered regional cooperation architecture, and compromise the overall and long-term interests of countries in the region. The perverse actions run counter to the common aspiration of the region for peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes. They are doomed to fail.’<sup>(21)</sup>*

In much the same way as they reject the concept of ‘alliance’, both China and Russia formally reject the use of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ – which they consider illegitimate and not

(17) Informal discussions with Chinese participants, 17th IISS Shangri-La dialogue, Singapore, 1–3 June 2018.

(18) ‘Full text: Xi Jinping's speech at a ceremony marking the centenary of the Communist Party of China’, Xinhua, 1 July 2021 ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c\\_1310038244.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm)).

(19) He declared: ‘By learning from history, we can understand why powers rise and fall. Through the mirror of history, we can find where we currently stand and gain foresight into the future. Looking back on the Party's 100-year history, we can see why we were successful in the past and how we can continue to succeed in the future.’ Ibid.

(20) ‘The US Indo-Pacific strategy is becoming a byword for “bloc politics”. The US professes a desire to advance regional cooperation, but in reality it is stoking geopolitical rivalry. It talks a lot about returning to multilateralism, but in reality it is forming exclusive clubs. It claims to uphold international rules, but in reality it is setting and imposing rules that suit itself and its acolytes. From strengthening the Five Eyes to peddling the Quad, from piecing together AUKUS to tightening bilateral military alliances, the US is staging a “five-four-three-two” formation in the Asia-Pacific. This is by no means some kind of blessing for the region, but a sinister move to disrupt regional peace and stability.’ State Councillor and Foreign Minister's Wang Yi's annual press conference, 7 March 2022 ([http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/202203/t20220308\\_10649559.htm](http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/202203/t20220308_10649559.htm)).

(21) Ibid.

politically neutral – and continue to use instead the term 'Asia-Pacific'.

*'The [Chinese and Russian] sides stand against the formation of closed bloc structures and opposing camps in the Asia-Pacific region and remain highly vigilant about the negative impact of the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy on peace and stability in the region. Russia and China have made consistent efforts to build an equitable, open and inclusive security system in the Asia-Pacific Region (APR) that is not directed against third countries and that promotes peace, stability and prosperity'*<sup>(22)</sup>.

China conceives its opposition with the US not as a mere bilateral rivalry, but also as part of a larger rivalry between groups of states, that is between China and its friends and the 'US and its allies'. Indeed, the 'US and its allies', an expression used four times in the February 2022 Joint Statement between China and Russia, are depicted as the main troublemakers in the world<sup>(23)</sup>. Anti-NATO rhetoric is increasingly frequent and explicit<sup>(24)</sup>. In addition, China and Russia jointly and openly criticise the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom (AUKUS)<sup>(25)</sup>. More than ever, China aims to compete with the United States and its allies by developing an alternative security

partnership in which China-Russia security cooperation constitutes a solid core. For both Beijing and Moscow, the objective is to push the military presence of the US and its allies away from their neighbourhood as far as possible, and they have publicly expressed, in early 2022, their readiness to coordinate efforts in this vein in their respective regions<sup>(26)</sup>.

The US attempt to restore ties with erstwhile allies is certainly not in the interest of China, but Beijing and Moscow seem to consider that the US-led alliance system is still weak in several respects, and that the launch of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept and strategy is not a game-changer in this regard.

Chinese and Russian official media and researchers have been quick to publicly underline divergences of definitions and approaches existing among members of the Indo-Pacific group<sup>(27)</sup>, for instance between Japan and India, between the United States and the EU, or among EU Member States. They have also been keen, since early 2022, to underline that India, a QUAD member and country that is considered a pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy, is not aligned with its partners on the issue of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (refusing to impose sanctions and abstaining from condemning Russia's action at the UN)<sup>(28)</sup>. China is also

(22) Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

(23) Ibid.

(24) See for instance: 'The sides believe that certain States, military and political alliances and coalitions seek to obtain, directly or indirectly, unilateral military advantages to the detriment of the security of others, including by employing unfair competition practices, intensify geopolitical rivalry, fuel antagonism and confrontation, and seriously undermine the international security order and global strategic stability. The sides oppose further enlargement of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon its ideologized cold war approaches, to respect the sovereignty, security and interests of other countries, the diversity of their civilizational, cultural and historical backgrounds, and to exercise a fair and objective attitude towards the peaceful development of other States.' Ibid.

(25) 'The sides are seriously concerned about the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom (AUKUS), which provides for deeper cooperation between its members in areas involving strategic stability, in particular their decision to initiate cooperation in the field of nuclear-powered submarines. Russia and China believe that such actions are contrary to the objectives of security and sustainable development of the Asia-Pacific region, increase the danger of an arms race in the region, and pose serious risks of nuclear proliferation. The sides strongly condemn such moves and call on AUKUS participants to fulfil their nuclear and missile non-proliferation commitments in good faith and to work together to safeguard peace, stability, and development in the region.' Ibid.

(26) 'The sides call on the United States to respond positively to the Russian initiative and abandon its plans to deploy intermediate-range and shorter-range ground-based missiles in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. The sides will continue to maintain contacts and strengthen coordination on this issue.' Ibid.

(27) 'China's post-Alliance architecture in Asia', op. cit.

(28) See for instance Chinese media on this: 'US ropes in Quad allies to fight "two-front wars" with China and Russia despite spent force', *Global Times*, 11 February 2022 (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1252049.shtml>); 'The US tries hard to hijack world's view on Russia, but more countries not buying it', *Global Times*, 3 March 2022 (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1253786.shtml>).

aware that historical and political divergences remain strong between Washington's two core allies in Northeast Asia, Japan and South Korea; that both countries have trouble coordinating their geostrategic and security approaches; and that Seoul had so far, under the Moon administration, not officially and fully endorsed an 'Indo-Pacific' strategy<sup>(29)</sup>. The fact that several countries in the region are reluctant to use the concept is welcomed in Beijing.

Beijing is also aware that several countries of the region, such as the Philippines or Sri Lanka, have been shifting their approach towards China depending on the government in place. This volatility is to some extent perceived as a weakness by a leadership that is planning to prolong its own power beyond 10 years at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to be held in Autumn 2022.

During the first years of Xi's mandate, China promoted the establishment of a 'new type of security partnership' in Asia. This concept has gone largely unnoticed and been adjusted since then, but it predates the 'Indo-Pacific' concept, and is still very much on China's foreign policy agenda today. Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao (2002–2012), had already started to shape the framework of a neighbourhood policy, to consolidate China's participation in various existing multilateral regional mechanisms (such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum – APEC) and position China as an active contributor to global governance reform in general terms<sup>(30)</sup>. But since the beginning of Xi's presidency in 2013, China's activism in the region has consolidated at a fast pace. The

project matured and was further amplified with the publication in 2017 of China's White Paper on security cooperation in the Asia Pacific<sup>(31)</sup>. Chinese officials have stated on various occasions that the security governance of the region needs to be restructured and that 'China supports security dialogue among the Asia-Pacific countries and efforts to explore a regional security vision and architecture that fits the reality of this region'<sup>(32)</sup>, and more recently that 'global governance has entered its Asia period'<sup>(33)</sup>.

## **C**hina is eager to propose its trade and connectivity initiatives to any country, including allies of the United States.

To be sure, China is not planning to create a formal security institution in the region, an alternative NATO or OSCE, but on the contrary to invest in informal initiatives, such as the newly launched 'Global Security Initiative'. As mentioned above, China prefers to engage in what could be described as

'institutional bridging', i.e. forging links between existing institutions, as well as between old and new institutions, rather than creating a totally new governance architecture. Over the last 8 years, China has launched a series of small-scale institutional initiatives, aiming at progressively shaping this new security architecture. It invests in existing regional institutions and mechanisms, such as the ASEAN-centered meetings (ARF, ADMM+, etc.), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) or the less influential Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). China has also tried to enhance several informal regional security forums it had created during the previous decade, such as the Xiangshan Forum, which may be perceived as an alternative to the Shangri-La Dialogue, as well as the many other regional

(29) But this is likely to change under the new administration following the election of Yoon Suk-yeol as President of the Republic of Korea in March 2022.

(30) 'China's post-Alliance architecture in Asia', op. cit.

(31) Xinhua/State Council of the PRC, 'Full text: China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation', 11 January 2017 ([http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2017/01/11/content\\_281475539078636.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2017/01/11/content_281475539078636.htm)).

(32) Xinhua, 'Full text of Yang Jiechi's keynote speech at the 55th Munich Security Conference', 17 February 2019 ([http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2019-02/17/content\\_74472585.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2019-02/17/content_74472585.htm)).

(33) State Councillor and Foreign Minister's Wang Yi's annual press conference, 7 March 2022 ([http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/202203/t20220308\\_10649559.htm](http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/202203/t20220308_10649559.htm)).

multilateral track 1.5 and track 2 forums, seminars and workshops that already exist. Many of these gatherings have been put on hold or moved online since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, but they are likely to continue in the coming years.

At the end of 2020, just before the new Biden administration took office, China – along with other countries of the region – pushed for the final signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)<sup>(34)</sup>, the free trade agreement involving 15 countries from the Asia-Pacific region, which in itself represents an important step in China's development of its network of partnerships. The fact that some RCEP members (such as Australia) are experiencing diplomatic and political tensions with China is not an issue for Beijing. On the contrary, this reinforces the strategic ambiguity of its network of partners. Indeed, as a challenger of the existing international order, China is eager to propose its trade and connectivity initiatives to any country, including allies of the United States. While Washington expects some of its allies to clarify their position *vis-à-vis* China's initiatives (BRI, 5G network development) and behaviour (human rights violations in Hong-Kong, etc.), Beijing deploys a form of ambiguity, considering that its network of partnerships can and should include US allies whenever possible, even when some of them are experiencing bilateral tensions with China.

The flexible and multilayered nature of China's coalition-building architecture (no alliance treaty, no official endorsement of a fixed concept such as the 'Indo-Pacific', no exclusion of US allies) makes it difficult for countries to establish a clear-cut and consistent position towards it.

From a purely security perspective, China's ambition to compete with the US-led alliance system in the region and promote a post-alliance regional order appears

unrealistic at this point in time given the asymmetric military capabilities (naval capabilities in particular) and the structural role that the US alliance system continues to play in Asia. But the diverse array of China's partnerships in the region, including economic and technological partnerships, tends to blur the lines of the US regional presence. Several countries with strong security relations with the United States continue to maintain strong economic ties with China, such as South Korea. And several ASEAN countries which are US partners remain relatively open to China's technological investments.

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<sup>(34)</sup> Following a long negotiation process that started in 2012, partly with the aim to counterbalance the US-led talks on a Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP).



## CHAPTER 4

# SCENARIO 2027

## Coalitions at war

China's ambition to develop a global network of partnerships is the result of a lengthy period of internal strategic reflection and has become a key pillar of China's foreign policy. In that sense, it should be the focus of particular attention, as it will most likely still be at the top of the Chinese diplomatic agenda in the coming years.

The central leadership's strong political will to promote its coalition-building strategy is guided by its resentment against the West and rejection of what it considers a legacy of Western influence on institutions, norms and standards. This is what drives its efforts to reform global governance institutions and mechanisms in a post-alliance direction. Logically, countries who are overall satisfied with the current global governance system inherited from the Bretton Woods Agreement tend to show less interest in global governance restructuring and in coalition building than China does, as the challenger of the existing system. In contrast to China, many countries do not have a clear-cut position or vision regarding regional or global governance architectures, or simply do not have the financial and/or diplomatic resources to support such a stance.

From Beijing's perspective, building a network of partnerships is a long-term process that should evolve progressively and be completed by 2050, just after the centenary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China, a key deadline set by the central leadership for the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. The leadership has also set intermediate deadlines to achieve various socio-economic

objectives, such as 2035, and is likely to seek first-stage consolidation of its network of partnerships by then.

The March 2018 amendments to the constitution have officially allowed Xi Jinping to remain president beyond his first ten years in power (2012–2022). It is in fact likely that Xi Jinping will remain in power after the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (2022), for a period of at least 5 years, until 2027, or even indefinitely. China's foreign policy orientations are shaped according to a long-term political calendar which is very different from that of the United States, the EU or other democratic powers. The objective is to progressively and systematically 'enlarge the circle of friends', by deepening cooperation in various sectors – economic, technological and military. In light of this timeframe, the year 2027 has been chosen as the horizon of the scenario presented below, which considers the evolution of China's network of partnerships.

Russia's war against Ukraine will inevitably have an impact on coalition-building dynamics. The most likely scenario is that it will accelerate pre-existing coalition trends. There is already a clear divide between two groups of countries: countries who have condemned Russia's behaviour and countries who have not. More specifically, there exists a divide between countries who have imposed sanctions against Russia and countries who have not. China is one of the countries who have not. Chinese diplomacy has repeatedly positioned itself against sanctions towards Russia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that both countries 'will continue to conduct

normal trade cooperation'<sup>(1)</sup>. The 2027 scenario below takes this position into account, with the assumption that it is unlikely to change significantly considering the consolidated Sino–Russian ties described in previous chapters. The scenario has also been elaborated with the assumption that both presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin will still be in power in 2027.

*NB: The sections below describe a fictitious scenario, outlining potential developments during the period 2022–2027. They do not describe the current situation.*

## THE 2022 RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: DEEPENING DIVISIONS OVER SANCTIONS

The battle of coalitions became more acrimonious during the years following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Two groups of countries were opposing each other more frontally: on one side, the 'Western coalition', and on the other, an alternative coalition where China and Russia played prominent roles. On the Western side, several alliances had already been strengthened during the first years of the Biden presidency<sup>(2)</sup>, formally (AUKUS) or informally (QUAD), and Russia's invasion of Ukraine had contributed to the strengthening

of NATO, which remained on constant alert and reinforced its analytical and operational capabilities to be able to better protect and defend its members, first and foremost those located close to Russia. Some NATO members – such as Greece and Turkey<sup>(3)</sup> – had worked to improve ties and put bilateral divergences aside as much as possible since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. New membership – such as that of Finland and Sweden – was also on the agenda, after a step-by-step association of these countries to NATO activities since March 2022. Discussions about EU enlargement had also been revived and membership perspectives had emerged following the applications of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in March 2022<sup>(4)</sup>.

In general terms, solidarity among EU Member States, as well as between the EU and most of its Eastern partners, had been strengthened. The EU had reinforced its security and defence capabilities, and overall had become more united and committed to enhancing its common security and defence policy (CSDP), building on the foundations laid by previous initiatives such as the 'Strategic Compass'. This process had rapidly accelerated since the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This move had been facilitated by several EU Member States significantly adjusting their military doctrine and increasing their defence budgets – such as Germany, who in March 2022 decided to dramatically beef up its defence budget and allocate an extra €100 billion to the Federal Defence Forces of the country<sup>(5)</sup>. Other EU Member States had followed suit, also significantly increasing their defence spending and the number of personnel in the armed forces.

(1) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on February 28, 2022', 28 February 2022 ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/202202/t20220228\\_10646378.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202202/t20220228_10646378.html)).

(2) 'We have to keep strengthening our alliances and resist those who would undermine our solidarity': Alliance of Democracies, 'Democracy in an age of authoritarianism', Remarks of Vice President Joe Biden, Copenhagen Democracy Summit, Copenhagen, Denmark, Friday 22 June 2018 (<https://www.allianceofdemocracies.org/speech-by-joe-biden/>).

(3) 'Turkey, Greece agree to improve ties amid Ukraine conflict', *Euractiv*, 14 March 2022 (<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkey-greece-agree-to-improve-ties-amid-ukraine-conflict/>).

(4) 'Georgia, Moldova follow Ukraine in applying to join EU', *Politico*, 3 March 2022 (<https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-and-moldova-apply-for-eu-membership/>).

(5) DW, 'Germany's army: Will €100 billion make it strong?', 3 March 2022 (<https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-army-will-100-billion-make-it-strong/a-60996891>).

In any case, the EU remained on high alert, as several of its aspiring new members (Moldova, which appeared particularly vulnerable, but also Georgia) were directly exposed to Russia's potential invasion. The EU had decided to consolidate its eastern border as much as possible, helping Member States, as well as some aspiring member states, who shared a border with Russia or territories under Russia's influence (such as Belarus) to secure it in various ways, in cooperation with NATO. Although the 'Iron Curtain' analogy had its limits given that the regional context was different from the Cold War, the emergence of a dividing line on European territory between a Western and Eastern part had profoundly altered flows of goods, services and people on the continent. People-to-people exchanges between Russia and most of its neighbours had drastically diminished, and connectivity projects that aimed to link Asia to Europe and vice versa (whether part of China's BRI or the EU's Global Gateway) had been completely frozen. An alternative route for the transregional transport of goods, the Middle Corridor, via the Caspian Sea and the railway linking the South Caucasus to Turkey and Europe, had gained importance.

In this context, EU-NATO cooperation as well as transatlantic cooperation had rapidly consolidated during the period 2022–2027<sup>(6)</sup>. Exchanges of information and strategic coordination between the EU and the United States under the Biden administration, as well as between the EU and NATO, had become more frequent and comprehensive faced with the joint threat posed by both Russia and China. EU cooperation with some of its Asian partners, such as Japan – who had strongly supported Ukraine since the beginning of the war<sup>(7)</sup> – also intensified significantly. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the war in Ukraine had also challenged some of the pre-existing coalition-building dynamics.

For instance, India – previously considered as a pillar partner of the emerging Indo-Pacific strategy – had adopted a different position towards Russia than its partners (see map on page 36) and this, in addition to a hardening of the domestic political climate in India, had led to a certain distrust between New Delhi and Washington. However, this distrust did not lead to a corresponding improvement in Sino-Indian relations, also characterised by distrust.

On the 'non-Western' side, the core group of countries supporting China's positions had remained generally aligned with Beijing, for different reasons – because they were still unhappy with the US presence and influence in their neighbourhood (such as Russia), or because they remained in China's sphere of economic and political influence. While many countries could be more easily identified as 'friends of China', systematically supporting Beijing's position on issues including the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and human rights in general terms, other countries – such as members of the 'Indo-Pacific' group – had strongly and repeatedly voiced their concerns on these issues.

In particular, among these issues, Taiwan had become the most hotly contested. Under Xi Jinping, China's overarching ambition had remained to 'reunify' Taiwan. Beijing was fully aware that under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia would not oppose China's reunification moves, especially given that China had not opposed Russia's war on Ukraine. The Chinese authorities, having closely watched how the war in Ukraine unfolded, and the numerous difficulties and casualties experienced by the Russian army, were more than ever convinced that a traditional military invasion would not be the best option. China had other tools at its disposal to promote its interests. In addition to economic warfare, China resorted

(6) The US vowed to protect 'every inch' of allies' territory. 'Remarks of President Joe Biden – State of the Union Address (As Prepared for Delivery)', The White House official website, 1 March 2022 (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/01/remarks-of-president-joe-biden-state-of-the-union-address-as-delivered/>).

(7) It is interesting to note that the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, mentioned the forming of a 'truly global anti-war coalition' in a tweet thanking Japan for its support and aid, on 1 March 2022 (<https://twitter.com/zelenskyyua>).

to lawfare, as well as cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, to destabilise the democratic functioning of Taiwan, especially during the presidential election campaign of 2024, through which Beijing hoped to see a figure not affiliated with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) emerge as the winner. The US administration had repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to Taiwan throughout the years, including through various official declarations and high-level visits to the island. For this reason as well as others (concerns on the Xinjiang issue and other human rights issues, China's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine), Sino-American tensions had become even more acute and trade and tech sanctions between the two countries not only remained in place in 2027, but had become larger in scope.

## GLOBAL DISCONNECTION

These two groups of countries had also started to oppose each other in various fields and ways, not just with regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The two coalitions engaged in high-intensity energy, trade and technological warfare. Russia had increasingly reoriented its oil and gas exports to China. At the core of the 'alternative' coalition, the China-Russia tandem had been particularly active and creative. Indeed, the 'sanction overlaps' (sanctions targeting Russia and sanctions targeting China in a context of acute Sino-American rivalry) had led to reinforced Sino-Russian cooperation in developing tools and connections enabling both countries to limit the impact of these sanctions and bypass them as much as possible – whether direct or secondary sanctions.

On trade, sanctions against Russia had been followed by retaliatory measures. The economic bifurcation that had started to emerge during the pandemic crisis had accelerated. Sino-American trade tensions had escalated and extended into a fully-fledged trade war between the two groups of countries. While many Western companies withdrew from the Russian market and vice-versa, a diverse group of countries who had not sanctioned Russia had expanded their trade ties with each other and engaged in joint efforts to bypass sanctions – especially countries who were themselves targets of sanctions (including China, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Myanmar/Burma, Venezuela and Cuba among others). Russia and China appeared ready to accept the economic consequences of sanctions – which in the case of Russia had led to a significant impoverishment of the population – as they considered that the geopolitical and political gains were worth it.

These countries had used various tools to bypass sanctions, including the pre-existing alternative to the SWIFT payment system (including China's CIPS and Russia's SPFS) and digital/crypto-currencies (including China's digital yuan, Russia's digital ruble and Iran's digital rial). Not only had Visa, Mastercard, Paypal and other financial and technological companies suspended their operations in Russia<sup>(8)</sup>, but the services they provided had also become inoperable in China and other countries who continued to trade with Russia. These countries had therefore promoted and utilised alternative financial and payment card companies and online services from their own countries (domestic national card systems and online payment systems – China's UnionPay, Alipay, WechatPay, Russia's MIR, etc.) which had become more compatible with each other.

China's economy had suffered both directly and indirectly from sanctions against Russia, due to the extraterritorial nature of the

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(8) 'Visa, Mastercard suspend operations in Russia over Ukraine invasion', Reuters, 5 March 2022 (<https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/visa-suspends-operations-russia-over-ukraine-invasion-2022-03-05/>).

sanctions. In particular, the technology restrictions against Russia had also severely impacted China's tech companies<sup>(9)</sup>. But Beijing was ready to pay the price in the short term, as the long-term aim remained to reduce dependency on the American market and 'Western' markets in broader terms. During the years 2022–2024, sanctions were not applied across the board and some degree of economic and energy interdependency remained between the two groups of countries (for instance, a significant amount of Russian gas was still used by EU Member States). But by 2027, the level of economic interdependency had decreased sharply to the point that the consequences of sanctions from one side or another have become insignificant and were no longer feared.

In the field of technology, prolonged sanctions and retaliatory measures had also led to the acceleration of digital and telecommunications network decoupling (5/6G mobile networks, undersea cables, satellite systems, etc.) Not only had China and Russia reinforced their bilateral cooperation in these areas, but they had also aggressively promoted their technology to third countries who formed part of their network of 'friendly' countries. In parallel, they had stepped up offensive capabilities and actions to attack/weaken the 'Western' networks: undersea cables were being cut by Russian or Chinese boats on a more frequent basis, satellites were being incapacitated or destroyed by anti-satellite weapons, while the number and range of cyberattacks had increased sharply. At the user end, strong incompatibility between technologies (hardware

as well as software) had led to the emergence of two types of distinct online communities (those using Huawei, WeChat, Baidu, and other compatible devices and apps vs. those using Apple, WhatsApp, Google, Twitter and other compatible devices and technology). The strict censorship existing in some countries (in particular in China but also in Russia, where censorship had been intensified since the invasion of Ukraine)<sup>(10)</sup> had reinforced the growing digital divide and the construct of two very different types of media universe and news coverage of both domestic and international issues.

In addition, people-to-people and transport connections between the two groups of countries had become more limited. Travel and visa restrictions between countries had increased. Not only had many European and American citizens left China and Russia in a context of sanctions and an increasingly hostile atmosphere, but they were no longer welcome, especially if their profession was considered politically sensitive (journalists, NGO representatives, researchers/academics, etc). Regarding air connections in particular, international flights from the United States, the EU and their partners to Russia and Belarus were now extremely limited if they existed at all (many airlines had suspended codeshare with Aeroflot and other former Russian partners)<sup>(11)</sup>. In general terms, following the Ukraine crisis and tit-for-tat sanctions and retaliatory measures between airlines, political divergences had had repercussions for international flight networks: cooperation between airlines of 'like-minded' countries had intensified on both sides, while suspension of cooperation

(9) A potential development identified by Martin Chorzempa, in 'New technology restrictions against Russia could also target China', Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), 7 March 2022 (<https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/new-technology-restrictions-against-russia-could-also-target>).

(10) 'Russia bans Facebook and restricts Twitter as it tightens grip on information', *Financial Times*, 4 March 2022 (<https://www.ft.com/content/b2bc707c-70bb-4b7a-bfca-93ae19125588>).

(11) Russia's flagship airline, Aeroflot, halted all international flights except to Belarus beginning in early March 2022. The move came after the country's aviation agency recommended that Russian airlines with foreign-leased planes suspend passenger and cargo flights abroad. (This did not apply to Russian airlines using Russian planes or foreign planes not at risk of being impounded as part of Western sanctions): 'Delta suspends codesharing with Russia's Aeroflot airline', AP News, 26 February 2022 (<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-airlines-latvia-6432021a31ee3e7ff58a7eaa5a26c7e1>); The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union announced previously that they were barring Russian-owned and -operated flights from entering their airspaces in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine: 'Russia's flagship airline Aeroflot to suspend international flights', Axios, 5 March 2022 (<https://www.axios.com/russias-aeroflot-suspend-international-flights-6589bd3-7e29-4f3b-9da8-7cbc192bac9f.html>); Delta suspended codeshare with Aeroflot: 'Delta suspends codeshare with Aeroflot', Delta News Hub, 25 February 2022 (<https://news.delta.com/delta-suspends-codeshare-aeroflot>).

between airlines of countries with geopolitical disagreements and mutual sanctions had extended far beyond Russia. China-US and China-EU tensions had also had consequences in this field, with suspension of code-sharing between Chinese airlines and their American/European partners. At the technical and industrial level, regarding the manufacture and maintenance of airplanes, Russia – and to some extent China – had faced a number of difficulties in finding and replacing aircraft parts that were traditionally provided by European and American suppliers. The impact on civil and military aviation was severe for several years, until China and Russia managed to jointly produce planes without having to rely on foreign technologies. The process had taken a long time and Sino-Russian planes were not as technologically advanced as Boeing or Airbus planes, but nevertheless both countries had now substantially reduced their previous dependence in the field.

Lack of contacts and information between the two groups of countries had reinforced and accentuated misperceptions and increased risks of escalation of tensions. Trade and technological tensions had been fuelled by strong ideological divergences between democratic and authoritarian countries. Diverging views on Ukraine clearly amounted to more than diverging views on the war itself. They revealed a deeper gulf in perceptions. On one side, a group of countries including Russia, Iran, North Korea or Venezuela, argued in the same vein as the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that the United States was responsible for the escalation of tensions, that it had 'started the fire and fanned the flames', and on the other side, a Western coalition, formed by the United States, EU Member States and NATO allies primarily, was of the view that Russia was responsible and that supporting Ukraine was also part of a broader endeavour of support to democracies against authoritarian countries. The ideological dimension of coalition building

had become more pronounced over the years, in part due to a hardening of the domestic political climate in both Russia and China (President Putin had intensified censorship of the media and a crackdown on dissent since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, and later on restored the death penalty in Russia – about 30 years after it was *de facto* abolished for most offences, after a moratorium was placed on the issue in 1996), and also in part due to the strong political will of both countries to destabilise or weaken Western democracies in a variety of ways (via disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks or arresting foreign citizens on their territory).

The two groups of countries continued to combat each other's political systems in various fields and on various fronts. China, Russia and their partners did not hesitate to proclaim that the West was in terminal decline and to portray themselves, in particular to authoritarian governments, as a successful alternative. On the other side, the protection and promotion of democracy had become more than ever a common objective of the Western alliance. Both sides were on constant alert to fight foreign influence/interference: China feared that what it called 'foreign hostile forces' might destabilise the monopoly of the CCP and had applied a strict policy of censorship towards Western media, NGOs and individuals on topics it considered sensitive (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, South China Sea, etc). On the other side, democracies in Europe and beyond were fearful of Russia/China and other countries conducting interference and disinformation operations in their domestic affairs, especially during electoral campaigns. Many EU countries had created institutions and cyber agencies dedicated to the identification and prevention of these threats to democracy<sup>(12)</sup>, and cooperation among them, as well as with dedicated EU bodies, had intensified over time.

(12) For instance, France created the technical and operational service, Viginum, in July 2021: Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale, 'Viginum, vigilance et protection contre les ingérences numériques étrangères' (<http://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/le-sgdsn/fonctionnement/le-service-de-vigilance-et-de-protection-contre-les-ingerences-numeriques-etrangeres-viginum/>).

## POLES APART AT THE UN

By 2027, voting at the UN had increasingly become a loyalty test, with more and more countries anxious to avoid offending their main partners. The ‘fluid’ group of countries in the middle – which traditionally had tried to avoid taking sides – had shrunk, due to pressures exerted by the Western core group on one side, and the China–Russia led group on the other. In any case, fully aware that numbers matter in multilateral settings, China had continued to engage in ‘diplomacy by numbers’, trying to gather as many countries as possible in support of its positions. This diplomacy was encouraged by the central leadership, and was zealously implemented by diplomats under pressure to deliver positive results to the authorities back in Beijing. This pressure remained particularly strong as political and ideological discipline continued to be very strictly implemented by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), which encouraged mutual surveillance among comrades and colleagues, generating a pervasive atmosphere of mistrust and fear among them.

By 2027, China and Russia had stepped up their coordination within the UN and its agencies<sup>(13)</sup> to promote their positions and block UN missions or investigations in most countries – which they considered illegitimate interference in the internal affairs of other states. This coordination had intensified following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The fact that 40 countries abstained or refused to demand that Russia end its military operations in Ukraine in March 2022 (see map overleaf) did not go unnoticed by Russia and China, who thereafter

invested more heavily in the consolidation of the bilateral relationship with these countries at various levels, proposing concrete cooperation opportunities (in the trade, technology and military domains), and anticipating that this loyal group of countries would continue to support their position on core interests in multilateral gatherings.

Both countries had also stepped up joint activism to change the terms of the debate<sup>(14)</sup>, presenting themselves as supporters of human rights and repeatedly condemning the United States and the EU for so-called ‘human rights violations’. The definition gap had become so wide that it had prevented any further tangible dialogue or discussion from taking place on human rights issues.

China and Russia had also cooperated further within the UN and its agencies to promote new norms in international information and cybersecurity, as well as in the field of artificial intelligence, in line with what they had methodically outlined in their February 2022 Joint Statement<sup>(15)</sup>. This type of cooperation had been deployed in a context of heightened China–US, but also China–EU, tensions over Xinjiang. Tit-for-tat sanctions imposed in 2021 by China and the EU remained in place for years, as Beijing maintained the same stance on the issue and continued to reject any external concerns or criticism, whether from individual states or groups of countries.

Beyond the UN, a host of meetings and summits of ‘like-minded’ countries had emerged, in new formats following the Covid-19 pandemic (physical but also online, with new interactive forms of remote participation). On one side, countries were gathering at NATO, QUAD, the Summit of Democracies, the D-10

(13) As they had planned in 2022: ‘The sides will strengthen cooperation within multilateral mechanisms, including the United Nations, and encourage the international community to prioritize development issues in the global macro-policy coordination.’ Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

(14) With a conception of human rights giving primacy to prosperity and economic rights.

(15) ‘The sides attach great importance to the issues of governance in the field of artificial intelligence. The sides are ready to strengthen dialogue and contacts on artificial intelligence. (...) Russia and China reaffirm the key role of the UN in responding to threats to international information security and express their support for the Organization in developing new norms of conduct of states in this area.’ Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, op.cit.

## Diverging positions

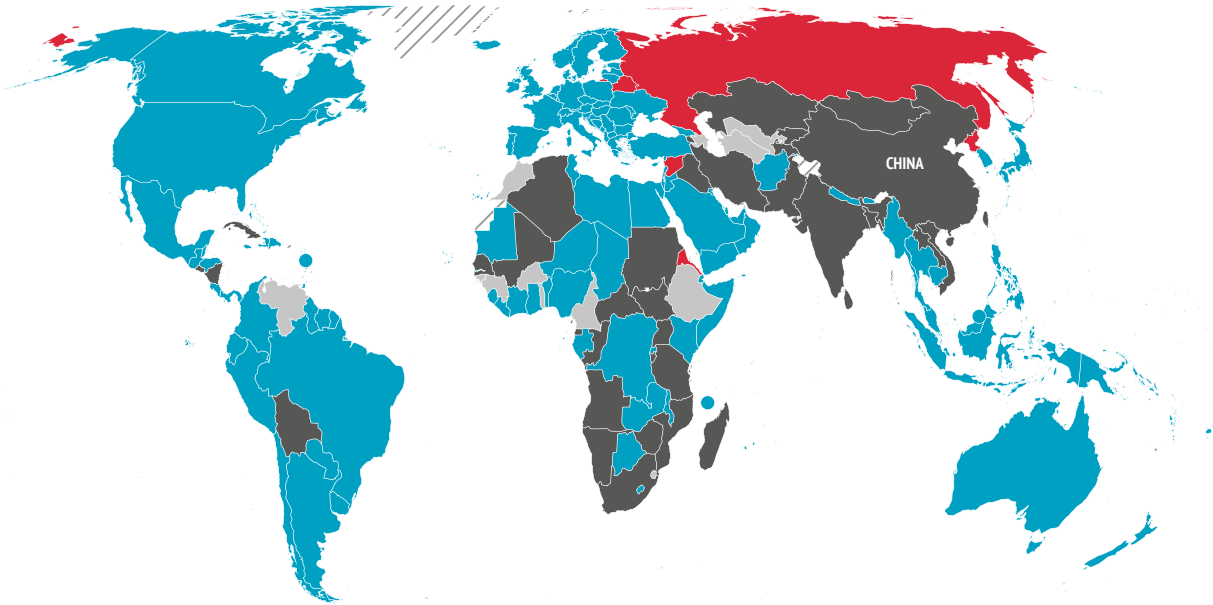
On the war in Ukraine

No Abstention Yes Non-vote

● ● ● ●

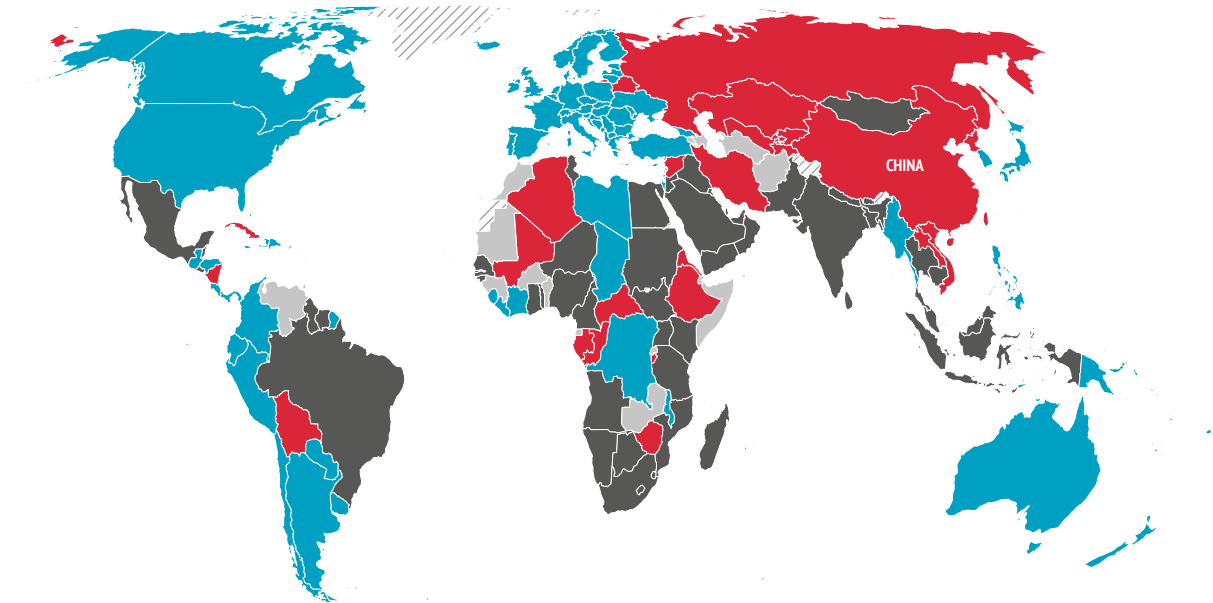
### A/RES/ES-11/1

Votes at the UN General Assembly on a resolution demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine, 2 March 2022



### A/RES/ES-11/3

Votes on the suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council, 7 April 2022





Strategy Forum, the Shangri-La Dialogue and other events, while another group of countries had gravitated towards the SCO, the Belt and Road Forum, the Xiangshan Forum, the Boao Forum, the Valdai Club and other forums. The multilateral landscape had become highly polarised, and this was reflected both in the existence of parallel multilateral gatherings which were attended by different groups of countries, and in the internal divisions evident in multilateral gatherings attended by countries from different groups (such as the G20 or the UN and its agencies, as described above).

China was still pursuing the strategy of participating actively in a broad spectrum of multilateral institutions, agencies and frameworks at the same time, hoping to reinforce its influence and to reform them from within. Chinese diplomacy also continued to consolidate links between institutions, trying to shape and align the agenda, the secretariats, the *modus operandi* and the financial/human resources to support China's priorities and positions.

## BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE VS. CONNECTIVITY STRATEGIES

By 2027, European countries had established different types of partnerships with China, and several connectivity projects linking Asia and Europe had been put on hold following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the new restrictions on people-to-people exchanges and transport of goods that had been imposed on the continent (see above). Many European countries had become disillusioned with China's domestic and foreign policy orientations, as well as with China's promise of greenfield investments. After the departure of Lithuania from the then '17+1' cooperation framework in 2021, other central and eastern European countries followed suit in the period

2022–2023, leaving this framework an empty shell relabelled '13+1'.

Chinese diplomacy still tried to rely on strategic ambiguity as much as possible, inviting allies of the United States and members of the 'Indo-Pacific' group to join its initiatives or to sign up to Chinese technological and digital projects, or avail of offers of medical supplies and equipment, but these countries were no longer receptive. On the contrary, some had decided to pull out of Chinese projects and initiatives that they had previously joined – this was for instance the case of Italy, who in 2023 terminated the BRI MoU signed in 2019.

The nature and depth of partnership with China varied within the EU, but also greatly differed between the EU and its neighbourhood. China's investments in the Western Balkans had led to a consolidation of its 'circle of friends' in the subregion, outside the EU. Serbia, which already had strong historical and political ties with Beijing, systematically supported China's positions. Montenegro, which managed to sign a deal on lifting the Chinese debt burden related to the building of a 41 km stretch of road in 2021, still remained in a difficult financial situation and in this context continued to maintain ties with China. Overall, countries throughout the subregion had reinforced their technological partnership with China – several Chinese companies having notably supported the development of their telecommunication networks. After Serbia in 2020, China had declared most of the countries of the region to be 'iron-clad friends'.

The heterogeneity of infrastructure providers across Europe, and also of technological standards, had affected the regional integration process, limiting the possible interoperability of telecommunication networks and railway systems. Two parallel systems of standards now co-existed on the European continent.

In Europe and beyond, some countries were considered 'spontaneous friends' of China, while others in contrast, such as Sri Lanka, had become partners somewhat against their will. Indeed, China's *de facto* control

over critical infrastructures (symbolised by the 99-year lease of the port of Hambantota signed in 2017) had established a long-term partnership between the two countries that subsequent Sri Lankan governments had not been able to dismantle.

The success of the BRI, 15 years after it was launched in 2013, was mixed. The abovementioned cases of countries being trapped with heavy debt had led many other countries to be wary of China's infrastructure investments and initiatives. At the same time, countries who rejected the project from the beginning, such as India, had maintained their stance in a context of strong bilateral tensions. Over the years, the Chinese government had encouraged state-owned enterprises to reduce the scale of large infrastructure construction projects and shift focus to less costly digital, medical or tourism projects. At the same time, under the banner of the BRI, China had remained very active in promoting technical norms and standards, at bilateral level but most of all at multilateral level (within the International Organisation for Standardization, among other institutions), often in coordination with Russia.

All in all, the BRI had led to the consolidation of economic and technological ties between China and a significant number of countries, mainly from the emerging world. These countries had become technologically dependent on China, as many Chinese companies had enhanced their competitiveness by providing advanced and affordable infrastructures and devices (videosurveillance cameras, 5/6G telecommunication networks, undersea cables/optical networks, satellite networks, drones, facial recognition systems) as well as services (Alipay/WeChat pay, digital yuan, various blockchain services). At the same time, by 2027, China had successfully reduced its dependency on many foreign tech components,

including semi-conductors, with the strong political and financial support of the central government. China had also managed to reinforce the 'sovereignty' of its data – whether data from the private or public sectors – after the implementation of a strict data sovereignty policy governing the private sector in 2021–2022<sup>(16)</sup>.

China had also consolidated its position as a leading arms exporter<sup>(17)</sup>. By 2027, Chinese defence companies producing missiles, space systems and unmanned aerial vehicles, but also radar and electronic warfare systems, had become particularly competitive – mainly due to China's own national R&D investments in the field, but also, to a lesser extent, to its increased cooperation with Russia for the joint development of several of these products. Through arms exports, China had progressively structured and deepened its security ties with a broad array of countries. Military and technology exports combined had led to several recipient countries becoming heavily dependent on China. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) had communicated less on the deployment of a 'new type of security partnership' in Asia, but invested more in the training of foreign military officials and the conduct of joint military exercises, in particular with countries which were prime purchasers of China's defence equipment.

In the defence field, the polarisation observed in other spheres (trade logistics, technology) was equally visible: many countries who had acquired Chinese and/or Russian defence equipment had done so as part of a diversification strategy but were no longer able to pursue this strategy, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and related direct and secondary sanctions. Washington and several EU Member States capitals were concerned about potential security breaches/espionage operations targeting their defence systems

(16) 'China orders Didi app downloads suspended over data violation', Reuters, 5 July 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-cyberspace-agency-says-didi-illegally-collects-user-data-2021-07-04/>).

(17) Tian, N. and Su, F., 'Estimating the Arms Sales of Chinese Companies', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, No 2020/2, January 2020 (<https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/estimating-arms-sales-chinese-companies>).

in allied countries who were also cooperating with Russia or China. In this context, several traditional security partners of the United States were asked to cut their ties with China, particularly where these concerned the purchase of military equipment and/or development of strategic infrastructures (ports, airports, telecommunication grids, etc). Most had complied, while a minority of countries had decided to consolidate their diversification strategy, and continued to trade with China in strategic sectors, a move that had generated profound tensions with Washington.

Although tensions with Russia had had a significant impact on coalition-building dynamics, the geopolitical rivalry between China and the United States remained the crucial defining frame in the Indo-Pacific/Asia region and in international relations at large. The rivalry had intensified over the years in various fields (trade, tech, space militarisation, data management, standards, etc) and around various points of tension (including first and foremost Taiwan, but also the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula, among other issues).

In this context of intensifying Sino-US rivalry, two different types of globalisation network had consolidated in parallel<sup>(18)</sup>: a network of transport hubs (ports, airports, railways, etc) shaped by China was used with preferential conditions by many of its 'friends', including Russia, while another network was preferred by other countries (including in Europe and Asia) seeking to reduce their dependency on the Chinese and Russian market. However, political preferences and business realities were not always aligned, and many companies were still heavily reliant on Chinese logistic hubs and firms, which provided high-tech services at a remarkably competitive cost. China had managed to maintain important economic partnerships with several allies of the United States. Countries signing up to the RCEP and other trade agreements were still benefiting

from trade with China, while at the same time they had been trying to diversify their trade partnerships – an ambiguous situation that was initially hard to handle for some countries, such as Australia.

The United States and the EU had joined forces to develop their connectivity strategies (the 'Build Back Better World' initiative and 'Global Gateway' strategy), with a large number of co-financed transport and digital infrastructure projects, developed in both America and Europe but also in third countries. In broader terms, connectivity had become a key pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy, implemented with the financial and political support of countries who had endorsed it. After the signing of a connectivity agreement with Japan and India, the EU concluded similar agreements with other partners in the region and beyond under the framework of the Global Gateway and its substantial budget. The €300 billion in investments that had been mobilised between 2021 and 2027<sup>(19)</sup> had led to the implementation of infrastructure projects of various types (digital, transport, health, energy/climate, research, etc) in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America, and first and foremost in the neighbourhood of the EU. Still, in the Western Balkans, competition with China's BRI projects was intense, and there were numerous norm and interoperability issues. The technological fragmentation of Europe had become a reality, in particular between the EU – which had ended up using primarily European, American and South Korean technologies – and its neighbourhood, utilising primarily Chinese technologies (notably smart city infrastructures and telecommunication networks).

New 'Global Gateway' agreements encompassed a broader range of fields (including space, finance or blockchain cooperation), cementing the EU's comprehensive partnerships with a significant number of countries. The EU and the United States had managed to

(18) This point of analysis was first elaborated in a preliminary scenario in: 'China's Belt & Road and the World: Competing forms of globalization', op. cit.

(19) European Commission, 'Global Gateway: up to €300 billion for the European Union's strategy to boost sustainable links around the world', Press release, 1 December 2021 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_6433](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6433)).

diversify their autonomous 5G network as well as submarine cable network. At the same time, China had also managed to extend and amplify similar global networks, often in cooperation with Russia. Both existed in parallel and had become non-compatible – using different norms and standards and serving distinct groups of countries.

In any case, China more than ever differentiated between countries which it regarded as 'friends', and others, which it considered as 'foes'. Beijing had not hesitated to impose strict and long-lasting sanctions on the latter group of countries, launch cyberattacks and lambast the perceived weaknesses and mistakes of their governments, while in contrast it had maintained cooperative relations with the 'friendly' groups. Many friendly countries were increasingly influenced by China in the shaping of their economic, political, social or security governance systems. The Chinese government had encouraged this by providing training and guidance to officials of these countries, as well as ecosystems of infrastructures and technologies (industrial parks, port-city complexes, smart cities packages, etc) that could be used for various purposes following the example of China's own implementation of these technologies on its national territory. Although it deployed an ambitious South-South cooperation policy, China had not managed to seduce all developing countries with its communication strategy. Still, the attractiveness of China's trade and tech products and services remained generally strong in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Overall, after a period of intense and open international trade flows, a new deglobalisation process had emerged, driven by efforts on both sides to reduce Sino-American economic interdependence as well as by efforts by Brussels and Washington to significantly curtail economic ties with Russia. To a lesser extent, the EU and China had also reduced their economic interdependence, after years of political tensions over Xinjiang, Hong Kong and other human rights issues, and the failure to ratify the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) – which had still not been concluded by 2027. The polarisation of the international

world order was increasingly clear by 2027, structured by divergent security and technological partnerships, and the disparate positions towards Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. Most of all, it had become structured by divergent ideologies, led by China and Russia on one side and the United States and the EU on the other, both engaged in a fierce competition between radically opposed political systems.

# CONCLUSIONS

This *Chaillot Paper* has shown that China's ability to build coalitions is significant and driven by strong political will. Xi Jinping's speech at the ceremony marking the centenary of the CPC, in July 2021, reasserted the country's ambition to develop its network of partnerships and position itself as a normative power<sup>(1)</sup>.

Greater attention needs to be paid to China's 'pulling power'. Both the United States and the EU tend to underestimate the magnitude of China's ambition to 'enlarge its circle of friends', and even when this ambition is acknowledged, it is often perceived as doomed to fail – which at this point in time is not certain. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly led to the deterioration of China's image in a significant number of countries, including in Europe, but it also led to the relative consolidation of some of its 'friendly' ties with an equally significant number of other countries.

The main factor that could potentially constrain China's coalition-building efforts in the coming years would be the emergence of new and acute divergences between Beijing and Moscow, which are not in evidence so far. Today the bilateral relationship remains the pillar of China's coalition-building endeavour. It is based on shared resentment against 'the West', joint rejection of NATO, as well as shared features characterising both countries' authoritarian domestic political systems. Chinese-Russian *rapprochement* has intensified under the leadership of both Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin who have met in person 38 times since Xi Jinping was appointed General Secretary of the CCP 10 years ago. In the event of regime or leadership change in Moscow or Beijing, the conceptual dimension of

the Sino-Russian *rapprochement* could erode, and the joint coalition effort might no longer be underpinned by a strong ideological base. But this scenario remains unlikely to date, on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (Autumn 2022) when it is likely that the extension of Xi's mandate will be announced.

More realistically, the current Chinese leadership is likely to remain in power and continue to deploy its coalition-building strategy beyond 2022. Russia's war on Ukraine and the 'sanctions divide' that it has precipitated are likely to accelerate the trends towards decoupling and deglobalisation that had emerged well before the war – in 2018 with the rise of Sino-American trade and technological tensions, and two years later with the onset of the pandemic crisis.

In concrete terms, the divisions over sanctions may lead to the consolidation of normative *rapprochement* between China, Russia and members of their 'circle of friends': norms for financial and payment systems, norms for an internet governance regime, and norms regulating blockchain and digital currency and other tools that may facilitate the circumvention of sanctions. Countries who are already the targets of sanctions could be among those who may be particularly motivated to use these alternative systems and norms, but other countries may also be interested in having access to them.

But the trend towards decoupling is not just the result of external factors. These are likely to remain independently of the evolution of the war in Ukraine, as they are driven by strong geoeconomic and geopolitical ambitions on China's side. The Chinese authorities

(1) The Chinese president notably pledged to 'use China's new achievements in development to provide the world with new opportunities' and declared that China has 'created a new model for human advancement'. Xinhua, 'Full Text: Speech by Xi Jinping at a ceremony marking the centenary of the CPC', 1 July 2021, ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c\\_1310038244.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm)).

will continue to seek more autonomy from the West regarding technological hardware and software, in line with the objectives stated in China's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan of self-reliance and promotion of domestic consumption ('dual-circulation'). China's autonomy in sectors identified by the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan is likely to have increased by the plan's deadline (2025)<sup>(2)</sup>.

Acknowledging the normative ambitions of China is also necessary. For Beijing, the promotion of its political and economic governance system in the world is key as it is a matter of political survival. The coalition-building efforts on both sides – 'Western-led' or 'China-led' – are diametrically opposed because they wish to gather countries around radically different types of political systems, development models and ideals. Following this logic, and considering that authoritarian countries have outnumbered democracies in recent years<sup>(3)</sup>, China may have more scope to enlarge its circle of friends than democratic countries.

In any case, the normative competition between democracies and authoritarian countries is likely to last. The EU would gain by further reinforcing both its defensive and offensive capabilities as a democratic power, so as to limit and deter interference of authoritarian powers in the domestic political affairs of Member States (conducted via disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, etc). At the same time, the swift implementation of the ambitious Global Gateway strategy may be conducive to the protection and promotion

of technological norms and standards that are compatible with democratic values.

But the battle of coalitions is much more than just a competition between political systems. It first and foremost involves intense economic competition. China's ability to mobilise international cooperation and support is intimately related to its economic leverage.

Currently the second-largest economy in the world, it may become the first before 2030<sup>(4)</sup>. If China's economy does indeed continue to grow, it may more easily convince countries – and first and foremost emerging ones – to join its network of partnerships through

various incentives and inducements. Chinese investment in and support for transport infrastructure projects is still appealing to many countries, even if several cases of major infrastructure projects – such as in Sri Lanka or Montenegro – have raised awareness of the risk of being indebted to China, and prospects for Eurasian connectivity have been significantly altered by the war in Ukraine. Most likely, China will continue to promote its technological products and services to a large number of countries, who may then be dependent on China for the long-term development and maintenance of some of their critical infrastructures (5G and submarine cable networks, smart city ecosystems, missile systems guided by China's satellite network, etc).

Within multilateral organisations, China's diplomatic capabilities have often been underestimated. But China now has the largest diplomatic network in the world<sup>(5)</sup>, possesses

## China now has the largest diplomatic network in the world.

(2) Although full autonomy is unlikely as many national companies are still lagging behind in terms of competitiveness with Western counterparts in some sectors (semiconductors, civilian aerospace or computer operating systems). For instance, *The Economist* forecasts a certain degree of self-reliance in six areas: mRNA vaccines, agrochemicals, civilian aerospace, semiconductors, computer operating systems and payment networks. See: 'The techno-independence movement', *The Economist*, 26 February–4 March 2022 (<https://www.economist.com/business/china-wants-to-insulate-itself-against-western-sanctions/21807805>).

(3) According to various reports, such as: V-Dem 2021, 'Democracy Report 2021 – Autocratization turns viral', 2021 ([https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr\\_2021.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr_2021.pdf)) and Freedom House, 'Freedom in the world 2021: Democracy under siege', 2021 (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>).

(4) According to various estimates, such as the one made by the UK-based Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR): BBC News, 'Chinese economy to overtake US "by 2028" due to Covid', 26 December 2020 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55454146>).

(5) According to the Lowy Institute's Global Diplomacy Index: <https://globaldiplomacyindex.loyyinstitute.org/>

a good understanding of the functioning of most international organisations, and has fine-tuned its lobbying practices. The fact that its communication style and diplomatic tone has become more confrontational over the last three years does not in itself put these capabilities into question.

In order to be able to compete with China's coalition-building efforts, the EU and other members of the Indo-Pacific grouping need to reach out to countries beyond the usual 'like-minded' partners. A larger coalition could be assembled, through renewed diplomatic activism – at both multilateral and bilateral levels – aimed at rallying countries around positions and norms that the EU and its partners consider important to defend.

The countries who have adopted an Indo-Pacific strategy could also seek to expand cooperation on 'Indo-Pacific +' initiatives, involving countries who have not formally endorsed the concept but who share similar security and geostrategic interests with those who have. In broader terms, the EU could accommodate the ambiguous stance of some countries who are wary of positioning themselves *vis-à-vis* the Sino-American rivalry.

At the UN and other multilateral frameworks, coalition-building efforts could be facilitated and reinforced by a more anticipative and more comprehensive strategy, able to reach out to a large number of countries within a short space of time. This could be made possible with the support of tailor-made and enhanced diplomatic resources (human, logistical and financial). As this *Chaillot Paper* has shown, China's diplomacy is very centralised and tends to apply the same strategic 'template' to different situations. It is therefore particularly relevant to identify the characteristic patterns of Chinese diplomatic behaviour as they play out from one international institution to another, in order to be better able to anticipate China's initiatives and moves at the multilateral level. The efficiency of the EU's coalition-building strategy could therefore be enhanced by being supported by a well-grounded and pragmatic methodology of implementation.

# ANNEX

## Joint Statement delivered by Permanent Mission of Belarus at the 44th session of Human Rights Council<sup>(1)</sup>

2020/07/01

Madam Vice President,

We reiterate that the work of the Human Rights Council should be conducted in an objective, transparent, non-selective, constructive, non-confrontational and non-politicized manner. We reaffirm our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and our firm opposition to the practice of politicization of human rights issues and double standards.

Terrorism and extremism are common enemies to the human beings, and pose severe threats to all human rights. We note with concern that terrorism, separatism and extremism have caused enormous damage to people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, China, and seriously infringed upon their human rights.

We note with appreciation that China has undertaken a series of measures in responds to threats in accordance with the law to safeguard the human rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. There was no single terrorist attack in Xinjiang in the last three years. Safety and stability have been restored in Xinjiang. Human rights of people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang have been effectively safeguarded.

We appreciate China's openness and transparency which is evident from, among other

things, inviting more than 1,000 diplomats, officials of international organizations, journalists and religious personages to visit Xinjiang, who witnessed Xinjiang's remarkable achievements. We take note that the Chinese government has extended an invitation to the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Xinjiang, and the two sides are keeping contact on the matter.

We urge refraining from making unfounded allegations against China based on disinformation. We are confident that the OHCHR will continue to conduct its work in an objective and impartial manner in accordance with its mandate.

Thank you, Madam Vice President.

The statement was supported by Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, China, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, State of Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

(1) Published by the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland (<http://www.china-un.ch/eng/hom/t1794034.htm>).



## Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Remarks on the Hong Kong-related Joint Statement by Belarus to Support China on Behalf of 70 Countries at the UN Human Rights Council<sup>(2)</sup>

2021/03/05

Q: On March 5, the Republic of Belarus delivered a joint statement on behalf of 70 countries at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council to support China's position and measures on Hong Kong-related issues and oppose Western countries' exploitation of such issues to interfere in China's internal affairs. Do you have any comment on this?

A: On March 5, on behalf of 70 countries, Belarus delivered a joint statement at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council to reiterate their support for China's practice of "one country, two systems" in the Hong Kong SAR. The statement said that Hong Kong was lifted out of chaos and stability was gradually restored after the national security legislation took effect. Stressing that non-interference is an important principle of the UN Charter and a basic norm governing international relations, and Hong Kong SAR is an inalienable part of China and its affairs are China's internal affairs, the joint statement urges the relevant parties to earnestly respect China's sovereignty and stop interfering in Hong Kong affairs and China's internal affairs. Besides, another 20-plus countries also voiced support for China's position and measures on Hong Kong-related issues in their respective remarks at the Human Rights Council.

China is committed to the principle of "one country, two systems", "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong" and a high

degree of autonomy. The Central Government's relevant measures for Hong Kong will better protect the legitimate rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong residents, promote Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability, and contribute to the steadfast and successful implementation of "one country, two systems". Hong Kong is China's Special Administrative Region and its affairs are an integral part of China's internal affairs which allow no interference by any country, organization or individual.

Once again, the UN Human Rights Council was echoed with calls for justice jointly uttered by a great number of developing countries. It is crystal-clear that facts speak so much louder and justice will never fail to prevail. China is determined in safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, in implementing "one country, two systems", and in upholding prosperity and stability in Hong Kong. We urge the relevant parties to strictly observe international law and basic norms governing international relations, and stop interfering in Hong Kong affairs and China's internal affairs in any way.

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(2) Published by the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2535\\_665405/t1858837.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2535_665405/t1858837.shtml)).

## Concept Note for the “Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations”<sup>(3)</sup>

*Permanent Missions of Algeria, Angola, Belarus, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, Cuba, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nicaragua, the State of Palestine, Russia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Syria, and Venezuela to the United Nations*

### Background

The 20th century was marked by conflicts between societies and nations for the control of areas of influence. Some of those conflicts even reached a global character, as are the cases of World War I and II. The level of destruction from those conflagrations led nations and leaders of the world from that time to work together towards the establishment of multilateral formulas that would allow to overcome the unsettled approach that had prevailed until then in international relations: large vs. small; strong vs. weak.

After the failed attempt of the League of Nations to establish an international order based on peace, cooperation and solidarity, the Organization of the United Nations emerged in 1945, from the ashes of World War II, with the firm purpose – as expressed in the Preamble of its founding Charter – of “saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, while ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security, the development of friendly relations among nations, the promotion of human rights, and the achievement of international cooperation.

The Charter of the United Nations, which contains the tenets and pillars of modern

day international law, is not only the first international legally-binding agreement, of a multilateral nature, that expressly and definitely forbade war as an instrument of foreign policy, but also the code of conduct that has ruled international relations between States for the past 75 years, on the basis of respect for the principle of sovereign equality, self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of States, as well as for the territorial integrity and political independence of any nation.

The Charter of the United Nations is, therefore, both a milestone and a true act of faith that still today fills us with hope on the best of humanity and brings us together to ensure the common wellbeing of present and future generations. Its purposes and principles are indispensable in preserving and promoting peace and security, the rule of law, economic development and social progress, and all human rights for all.

### Current Crossroads

Throughout its history, the United Nations has registered significant achievements in the fields of peace and security and international cooperation; most notably are its contributions to the causes of human rights, decolonization, sustainable economic and social development, eradication of diseases and disarmament, among others.

Yet, we must also acknowledge that its record has not been exempt of flaws and that, at many times, the Organization has not been up to the expectations that “We the Peoples of the United Nations” have on it. Nevertheless, the UN remains the best option we have to face, through peace and cooperation, the complex and emerging challenges and threats faced by humanity.

<sup>(3)</sup> Published by the UN on 6 July 2021, on the occasion of the Virtual Launch of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations (<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1w/k1w1qatav5>).

One of the key elements for ensuring the realization of the three pillars of the Organization and of the yearnings of our peoples, as well as of a peaceful and prosperous world and a just and equitable world order, is ensuring, precisely, compliance with and strict adherence to the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter, for it is the consolidation of friendly relations and cooperation among States what will ensure peace, security, stability and development to the international community as a whole.

However, multilateralism, which is at the core of the UN Charter, is currently under an unprecedented attack, which, in turn, threatens global peace and security. Nowadays, the world is seeing a growing resort to unilateralism, marked by isolationist and arbitrary actions, including the imposition of unilateral coercive measures or the withdrawal from landmark agreements and multilateral institutions, as well as by attempts to undermine critical efforts to tackle common and global challenges.

In addition, the international community is struggling with both the continued attempts to disown the diversity of our world and the very basic principles of international relations, and with the systematic violations to the norms of international law and the tenets of the UN Charter, in particular detriment of developing countries, by certain powers who seem to claim a non-existent “exceptionalism” that disregards, for instance, the principle of sovereign equality of States.

## Objectives

- > The Group of Friends, as part of our common quest for making further progress to achieving full respect for international law, shall strive to preserve, promote and defend the prevalence and validity of the UN Charter, which, in the current international juncture, has a renewed and even more important value and relevance.
- > The Group of Friends shall strive to ensure full, permanent and effective – and not

selectively or conveniently – fulfillment of obligations under the UN Charter and compliance with its letter and spirit, conscious of the fact that this is the legal instrument with the greatest scope and legitimacy of the world, which has prevented and shall continue to prevent humankind from suffering once again the horrors and untold sorrow of the scourge of war.

- > The Group of Friends shall serve as a platform for, among others, promoting the prevalence of legality over force and for discussing, articulating possible means and coordinating joint initiatives for fostering respect to the principles of sovereignty, equality of States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, peaceful settlement of disputes, and to refrain from the use or threat of use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, as enshrined in the UN Charter, as well as to the values of dialogue, tolerance and solidarity, mindful of the fact that these are all at the core of international relations and necessary for the peaceful coexistence among nations.
- > The Group of Friends shall, therefore, coordinate the drafting and presentation of joint statements and proposals on issues of common interest and relevant or related to the aims of the Group, as well as the organization of side events, within the framework of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and with the participation of experts and high-level representatives from Member States, the UN System and civil society, for the purpose of realizing the objectives of the Group and ensuring the respect, promotion and defense of the UN Charter, in both its letter and spirit.

## Format

- > The Group of Friends has an open-ended nature, and, accordingly, its composition shall be regularly updated, as Member States, Observers and UN entities indicate

their willingness and interest in joining it, subject to the approval of its membership.

- > The Group of Friends shall meet regularly, at the PR-level, at least every three (03) months. Extraordinary meetings can be convened to address/discuss specific questions, at the request of its members.
- > The Group of Friends shall convene once a year at the Foreign Minister-level, situation permitting, in New York, on the sidelines of the High-Level Week of the General Assembly of the United Nations.
- > The Group of Friends will be coordinated by one (01) of its members for a term of one (01) year and, upon completion of that term, the principle of geographical rotation will be observed for the transfer of the coordination. --/--

## **Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development**

2022/02/04

At the invitation of President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir V. Putin visited China on 4 February 2022. The Heads of State held talks in Beijing and took part in the opening ceremony of the XXIV Olympic Winter Games.

The Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, hereinafter referred to as the sides, state as follows.

Today, the world is going through momentous changes, and humanity is entering a new era of rapid development and profound

transformation. It sees the development of such processes and phenomena as multipolarity, economic globalization, the advent of information society, cultural diversity, transformation of the global governance architecture and world order; there is increasing interrelation and interdependence between the States; a trend has emerged towards redistribution of power in the world; and the international community is showing a growing demand for the leadership aiming at peaceful and gradual development. At the same time, as the pandemic of the new coronavirus infection continues, the international and regional security situation is complicating and the number of global challenges and threats is growing from day to day. Some actors representing but the minority on the international scale continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force; they interfere in the internal affairs of other states, infringing their legitimate rights and interests, and incite contradictions, differences and confrontation, thus hampering the development and progress of mankind, against the opposition from the international community.

The sides call on all States to pursue well-being for all and, with these ends, to build dialogue and mutual trust, strengthen mutual understanding, champion such universal human values as peace, development, equality, justice, democracy and freedom, respect the rights of peoples to independently determine the development paths of their countries and the sovereignty and the security and development interests of States, to protect the United Nations-driven international architecture and the international law-based world order, seek genuine multipolarity with the United Nations and its Security Council playing a central and coordinating role, promote more democratic international relations, and ensure peace, stability and sustainable development across the world.

The sides share the understanding that democracy is a universal human value, rather than a privilege of a limited number of States, and that its promotion and protection is a common responsibility of the entire world community.

The sides believe that democracy is a means of citizens' participation in the government of their country with the view to improving the well-being of population and implementing the principle of popular government. Democracy is exercised in all spheres of public life as part of a nation-wide process and reflects the interests of all the people, its will, guarantees its rights, meets its needs and protects its interests. There is no one-size-fits-all template to guide countries in establishing democracy. A nation can choose such forms and methods of implementing democracy that would best suit its particular state, based on its social and political system, its historical background, traditions and unique cultural characteristics. It is only up to the people of the country to decide whether their State is a democratic one.

The sides note that Russia and China as world powers with rich cultural and historical heritage have long-standing traditions of democracy, which rely on thousand-years of experience of development, broad popular support and consideration of the needs and interests of citizens. Russia and China guarantee their people the right to take part through various means and in various forms in the administration of the State and public life in accordance with the law. The people of both countries are certain of the way they have chosen and respect the democratic systems and traditions of other States.

The sides note that democratic principles are implemented at the global level, as well as in administration of State. Certain States' attempts to impose their own 'democratic standards' on other countries, to monopolize the right to assess the level of compliance with democratic criteria, to draw dividing lines based on the grounds of ideology, including by establishing exclusive blocs and alliances

of convenience, prove to be nothing but flouting of democracy and go against the spirit and true values of democracy. Such attempts at hegemony pose serious threats to global and regional peace and stability and undermine the stability of the world order.

The sides believe that the advocacy of democracy and human rights must not be used to put pressure on other countries. They oppose the abuse of democratic values and interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states under the pretext of protecting democracy and human rights, and any attempts to incite divisions and confrontation in the world. The sides call on the international community to respect cultural and civilizational diversity and the rights of peoples of different countries to self-determination. They stand ready to work together with all the interested partners to promote genuine democracy.

The sides note that the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set noble goals in the area of universal human rights, set forth fundamental principles, which all the States must comply with and observe in deeds. At the same time, as every nation has its own unique national features, history, culture, social system and level of social and economic development, universal nature of human rights should be seen through the prism of the real situation in every particular country, and human rights should be protected in accordance with the specific situation in each country and the needs of its population. Promotion and protection of human rights is a shared responsibility of the international community. The states should equally prioritize all categories of human rights and promote them in a systemic manner. The international human rights cooperation should be carried out as a dialogue between the equals involving all countries. All States must have equal access to the right to development. Interaction and cooperation on human rights matters should be based on the principle of equality of all countries and mutual respect for the sake of strengthening the international human rights architecture.

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The sides believe that peace, development and cooperation lie at the core of the modern international system. Development is a key driver in ensuring the prosperity of the nations. The ongoing pandemic of the new coronavirus infection poses a serious challenge to the fulfilment of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is vital to enhance partnership relations for the sake of global development and make sure that the new stage of global development is defined by balance, harmony and inclusiveness.

The sides are seeking to advance their work to link the development plans for the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative with a view to intensifying practical cooperation between the EAEU and China in various areas and promoting greater interconnectedness between the Asia Pacific and Eurasian regions. The sides reaffirm their focus on building the Greater Eurasian Partnership in parallel and in coordination with the Belt and Road construction to foster the development of regional associations as well as bilateral and multilateral integration processes for the benefit of the peoples on the Eurasian continent.

The sides agreed to continue consistently intensifying practical cooperation for the sustainable development of the Arctic.

The sides will strengthen cooperation within multilateral mechanisms, including the United Nations, and encourage the international community to prioritize development issues in the global macro-policy coordination. They call on the developed countries to implement in good faith their formal commitments on development assistance, provide more resources to developing countries, address the uneven development of States, work to offset such imbalances within States, and advance global and international development cooperation. The Russian side confirms its readiness to continue working on the China-proposed Global Development Initiative, including participation in the activities of the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative under the UN auspices. In order to accelerate

the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the sides call on the international community to take practical steps in key areas of cooperation such as poverty reduction, food security, vaccines and epidemics control, financing for development, climate change, sustainable development, including green development, industrialization, digital economy, and infrastructure connectivity.

The sides call on the international community to create open, equal, fair and non-discriminatory conditions for scientific and technological development, to step up practical implementation of scientific and technological advances in order to identify new drivers of economic growth.

The sides call upon all countries to strengthen cooperation in sustainable transport, actively build contacts and share knowledge in the construction of transport facilities, including smart transport and sustainable transport, development and use of Arctic routes, as well as to develop other areas to support global post-epidemic recovery.

The sides are taking serious action and making an important contribution to the fight against climate change. Jointly celebrating the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, they reaffirm their commitment to this Convention as well as to the goals, principles and provisions of the Paris Agreement, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The sides work together to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement, remain committed to fulfilling the obligations they have undertaken and expect that developed countries will actually ensure the annual provision of \$100 billion of climate finance to developing states. The sides oppose setting up new barriers in international trade under the pretext of fighting climate change.

The sides strongly support the development of international cooperation and exchanges in the field of biological diversity, actively participating in the relevant global governance process, and intend to jointly promote the

harmonious development of humankind and nature as well as green transformation to ensure sustainable global development.

The Heads of State positively assess the effective interaction between Russia and China in the bilateral and multilateral formats focusing on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, protection of life and health of the population of the two countries and the peoples of the world. They will further increase cooperation in the development and manufacture of vaccines against the new coronavirus infection, as well as medical drugs for its treatment, and enhance collaboration in public health and modern medicine. The sides plan to strengthen coordination on epidemiological measures to ensure strong protection of health, safety and order in contacts between citizens of the two countries. The sides have commended the work of the competent authorities and regions of the two countries on implementing quarantine measures in the border areas and ensuring the stable operation of the border crossing points, and intend to consider establishing a joint mechanism for epidemic control and prevention in the border areas to jointly plan anti-epidemic measures to be taken at the border checkpoints, share information, build infrastructure and improve the efficiency of customs clearance of goods.

The sides emphasize that ascertaining the origin of the new coronavirus infection is a matter of science. Research on this topic must be based on global knowledge, and that requires cooperation among scientists from all over the world. The sides oppose politicization of this issue. The Russian side welcomes the work carried out jointly by China and WHO to identify the source of the new coronavirus infection and supports the China – WHO joint report on the matter. The sides call on the global community to jointly promote a serious scientific approach to the study of the coronavirus origin.

The Russian side supports a successful hosting by the Chinese side of the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing in 2022.

The sides highly appreciate the level of bilateral cooperation in sports and the Olympic movement and express their readiness to contribute to its further progressive development.

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The sides are gravely concerned about serious international security challenges and believe that the fates of all nations are interconnected. No State can or should ensure its own security separately from the security of the rest of the world and at the expense of the security of other States. The international community should actively engage in global governance to ensure universal, comprehensive, indivisible and lasting security.

The sides reaffirm their strong mutual support for the protection of their core interests, state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and oppose interference by external forces in their internal affairs.

The Russian side reaffirms its support for the One-China principle, confirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and opposes any forms of independence of Taiwan.

Russia and China stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, intend to counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, oppose colour revolutions, and will increase cooperation in the aforementioned areas.

The sides condemn terrorism in all its manifestations, promote the idea of creating a single global anti-terrorism front, with the United Nations playing a central role, advocate stronger political coordination and constructive engagement in multilateral counterterrorism efforts. The sides oppose politicization of the issues of combating terrorism and their use as instruments of policy of double standards, condemn the practice of interference in the internal affairs of other States for geopolitical purposes through the use of terrorist

and extremist groups as well as under the guise of combating international terrorism and extremism.

The sides believe that certain States, military and political alliances and coalitions seek to obtain, directly or indirectly, unilateral military advantages to the detriment of the security of others, including by employing unfair competition practices, intensify geopolitical rivalry, fuel antagonism and confrontation, and seriously undermine the international security order and global strategic stability. The sides oppose further enlargement of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon its ideologized cold war approaches, to respect the sovereignty, security and interests of other countries, the diversity of their civilizational, cultural and historical backgrounds, and to exercise a fair and objective attitude towards the peaceful development of other States. The sides stand against the formation of closed bloc structures and opposing camps in the Asia-Pacific region and remain highly vigilant about the negative impact of the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy on peace and stability in the region. Russia and China have made consistent efforts to build an equitable, open and inclusive security system in the Asia-Pacific Region (APR) that is not directed against third countries and that promotes peace, stability and prosperity.

The sides welcome the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapons States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races and believe that all nuclear-weapons States should abandon the cold war mentality and zero-sum games, reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security policies, withdraw nuclear weapons deployed abroad, eliminate the unrestricted development of global anti-ballistic missile defense (ABM) system, and take effective steps to reduce the risks of nuclear wars and any armed conflicts between countries with military nuclear capabilities.

The sides reaffirm that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the cornerstone of the international disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation system, an

important part of the post-war international security system, and plays an indispensable role in world peace and development. The international community should promote the balanced implementation of the three pillars of the Treaty and work together to protect the credibility, effectiveness and the universal nature of the instrument.

The sides are seriously concerned about the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom (AUKUS), which provides for deeper cooperation between its members in areas involving strategic stability, in particular their decision to initiate cooperation in the field of nuclear-powered submarines. Russia and China believe that such actions are contrary to the objectives of security and sustainable development of the Asia-Pacific region, increase the danger of an arms race in the region, and pose serious risks of nuclear proliferation. The sides strongly condemn such moves and call on AUKUS participants to fulfil their nuclear and missile non-proliferation commitments in good faith and to work together to safeguard peace, stability, and development in the region.

Japan's plans to release nuclear contaminated water from the destroyed Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean and the potential environmental impact of such actions are of deep concern to the sides. The sides emphasize that the disposal of nuclear contaminated water should be handled with responsibility and carried out in a proper manner based on arrangements between the Japanese side and neighbouring States, other interested parties, and relevant international agencies while ensuring transparency, scientific reasoning, and in accordance with international law.

The sides believe that the U.S. withdrawal from the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles, the acceleration of research and the development of intermediate-range and shorter-range ground-based missiles and the desire to deploy them in the Asia-Pacific and European regions, as well as their transfer to the allies, entail an increase in tension and



distrust, increase risks to international and regional security, lead to the weakening of international non-proliferation and arms control system, undermining global strategic stability. The sides call on the United States to respond positively to the Russian initiative and abandon its plans to deploy intermediate-range and shorter-range ground-based missiles in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. The sides will continue to maintain contacts and strengthen coordination on this issue.

The Chinese side is sympathetic to and supports the proposals put forward by the Russian Federation to create long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe.

The sides note that the denunciation by the United States of a number of important international arms control agreements has an extremely negative impact on international and regional security and stability. The sides express concern over the advancement of U.S. plans to develop global missile defence and deploy its elements in various regions of the world, combined with capacity building of high-precision non-nuclear weapons for disarming strikes and other strategic objectives. The sides stress the importance of the peaceful uses of outer space, strongly support the central role of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in promoting international cooperation, maintaining and developing international space law and regulation in the field of space activities. Russia and China will continue to increase cooperation on such matters of mutual interest as the long-term sustainability of space activities and the development and use of space resources. The sides oppose attempts by some States to turn outer space into an arena of armed confrontation and reiterate their intention to make all necessary efforts to prevent the weaponization of space and an arms race in outer space. They will counteract activities aimed at achieving military superiority in space and using it for combat operations. The sides affirm the need for the early launch of negotiations to conclude a legally binding multilateral instrument based on the Russian-Chinese draft treaty on the prevention of placement of weapons in outer space and the use or threat of force against

space objects that would provide fundamental and reliable guarantees against an arms race and the weaponization of outer space.

Russia and China emphasize that appropriate transparency and confidence-building measures, including an international initiative/political commitment not to be the first to place weapons in space, can also contribute to the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space, but such measures should complement and not substitute the effective legally binding regime governing space activities.

The sides reaffirm their belief that the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BWC) is an essential pillar of international peace and security. Russia and China underscore their determination to preserve the credibility and effectiveness of the Convention.

The sides affirm the need to fully respect and further strengthen the BWC, including by institutionalizing it, strengthening its mechanisms, and adopting a legally binding Protocol to the Convention with an effective verification mechanism, as well as through regular consultation and cooperation in addressing any issues related to the implementation of the Convention.

The sides emphasize that domestic and foreign bioweapons activities by the United States and its allies raise serious concerns and questions for the international community regarding their compliance with the BWC. The sides share the view that such activities pose a serious threat to the national security of the Russian Federation and China and are detrimental to the security of the respective regions. The sides call on the U.S. and its allies to act in an open, transparent, and responsible manner by properly reporting on their military biological activities conducted overseas and on their national territory, and by supporting the resumption of negotiations on a legally binding BWC Protocol with an effective verification mechanism.

The sides, reaffirming their commitment to the goal of a world free of chemical weapons, call upon all parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to work together to uphold its credibility and effectiveness. Russia and China are deeply concerned about the politicization of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and call on all of its members to strengthen solidarity and cooperation and protect the tradition of consensual decision-making. Russia and China insist that the United States, as the sole State Party to the Convention that has not yet completed the process of eliminating chemical weapons, accelerate the elimination of its stockpiles of chemical weapons. The sides emphasize the importance of balancing the non-proliferation obligations of states with the interests of legitimate international cooperation in the use of advanced technology and related materials and equipment for peaceful purposes. The sides note the resolution entitled "Promoting international Cooperation on Peaceful Uses in the Context of International Security" adopted at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on the initiative of China and co-sponsored by Russia, and look forward to its consistent implementation in accordance with the goals set forth therein.

The sides attach great importance to the issues of governance in the field of artificial intelligence. The sides are ready to strengthen dialogue and contacts on artificial intelligence.

The sides reiterate their readiness to deepen cooperation in the field of international information security and to contribute to building an open, secure, sustainable and accessible ICT environment. The sides emphasize that the principles of the non-use of force, respect for national sovereignty and fundamental human rights and freedoms, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, as enshrined in the UN Charter, are applicable to the information space. Russia and China reaffirm the key role of the UN in responding to threats to international information security and express their support for the Organization in developing new norms of conduct of states in this area.

The sides welcome the implementation of the global negotiation process on international information security within a single mechanism and support in this context the work of the UN Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) 2021-2025 (OEWG) and express their willingness to speak with one voice within it. The sides consider it necessary to consolidate the efforts of the international community to develop new norms of responsible behaviour of States, including legal ones, as well as a universal international legal instrument regulating the activities of States in the field of ICT. The sides believe that the Global Initiative on Data Security, proposed by the Chinese side and supported, in principle, by the Russian side, provides a basis for the Working Group to discuss and elaborate responses to data security threats and other threats to international information security.

The sides reiterate their support of United Nations General Assembly resolutions 74/247 and 75/282, support the work of the relevant Ad Hoc Committee of Governmental Experts, facilitate the negotiations within the United Nations for the elaboration of an international convention on countering the use of ICTs for criminal purposes. The sides encourage constructive participation of all sides in the negotiations in order to agree as soon as possible on a credible, universal, and comprehensive convention and provide it to the United Nations General Assembly at its 78th session in strict compliance with resolution 75/282. For these purposes, Russia and China have presented a joint draft convention as a basis for negotiations.

The sides support the internationalization of Internet governance, advocate equal rights to its governance, believe that any attempts to limit their sovereign right to regulate national segments of the Internet and ensure their security are unacceptable, are interested in greater participation of the International Telecommunication Union in addressing these issues.

The sides intend to deepen bilateral cooperation in international information security

on the basis of the relevant 2015 intergovernmental agreement. To this end, the sides have agreed to adopt in the near future a plan for cooperation between Russia and China in this area.

#### IV

The sides underline that Russia and China, as world powers and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, intend to firmly adhere to moral principles and accept their responsibility, strongly advocate the international system with the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international affairs, defend the world order based on international law, including the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, advance multipolarity and promote the democratization of international relations, together create an even more prospering, stable, and just world, jointly build international relations of a new type.

The Russian side notes the significance of the concept of constructing a "community of common destiny for mankind" proposed by the Chinese side to ensure greater solidarity of the international community and consolidation of efforts in responding to common challenges. The Chinese side notes the significance of the efforts taken by the Russian side to establish a just multipolar system of international relations.

The sides intend to strongly uphold the outcomes of the Second World War and the existing post-war world order, defend the authority of the United Nations and justice in international relations, resist attempts to deny, distort, and falsify the history of the Second World War.

In order to prevent the recurrence of the tragedy of the world war, the sides will strongly condemn actions aimed at denying the responsibility for atrocities of Nazi aggressors, militarist invaders, and their accomplices, besmirch and tarnish the honour of the victorious countries.

The sides call for the establishment of a new kind of relationships between world powers on the basis of mutual respect, peaceful co-existence and mutually beneficial cooperation. They reaffirm that the new inter-State relations between Russia and China are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era. Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no "forbidden" areas of cooperation, strengthening of bilateral strategic cooperation is neither aimed against third countries nor affected by the changing international environment and circumstantial changes in third countries.

The sides reiterate the need for consolidation, not division of the international community, the need for cooperation, not confrontation. The sides oppose the return of international relations to the state of confrontation between major powers, when the weak fall prey to the strong. The sides intend to resist attempts to substitute universally recognized formats and mechanisms that are consistent with international law for rules elaborated in private by certain nations or blocs of nations, and are against addressing international problems indirectly and without consensus, oppose power politics, bullying, unilateral sanctions, and extraterritorial application of jurisdiction, as well as the abuse of export control policies, and support trade facilitation in line with the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The sides reaffirmed their intention to strengthen foreign policy coordination, pursue true multilateralism, strengthen cooperation on multilateral platforms, defend common interests, support the international and regional balance of power, and improve global governance.

The sides support and defend the multilateral trade system based on the central role of the World Trade Organization (WTO), take an active part in the WTO reform, opposing unilateral approaches and protectionism. The sides are ready to strengthen dialogue between partners and coordinate positions on trade and economic issues of common concern, contribute to ensuring the sustainable and stable operation of global and regional value chains,

promote a more open, inclusive, transparent, non-discriminatory system of international trade and economic rules.

The sides support the G20 format as an important forum for discussing international economic cooperation issues and anti-crisis response measures, jointly promote the invigorated spirit of solidarity and cooperation within the G20, support the leading role of the association in such areas as the international fight against epidemics, world economic recovery, inclusive sustainable development, improving the global economic governance system in a fair and rational manner to collectively address global challenges.

The sides support the deepened strategic partnership within BRICS, promote the expanded cooperation in three main areas: politics and security, economy and finance, and humanitarian exchanges. In particular, Russia and China intend to encourage interaction in the fields of public health, digital economy, science, innovation and technology, including artificial intelligence technologies, as well as the increased coordination between BRICS countries on international platforms. The sides strive to further strengthen the BRICS Plus/Outreach format as an effective mechanism of dialogue with regional integration associations and organizations of developing countries and States with emerging markets.

The Russian side will fully support the Chinese side chairing the association in 2022, and assist in the fruitful holding of the XIV BRICS summit.

Russia and China aim to comprehensively strengthen the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and further enhance its role in shaping a polycentric world order based on the universally recognized principles of international law, multilateralism, equal, joint, indivisible, comprehensive and sustainable security.

They consider it important to consistently implement the agreements on improved mechanisms to counter challenges and threats to the security of SCO member states and, in

the context of addressing this task, advocate expanded functionality of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure.

The sides will contribute to imparting a new quality and dynamics to the economic interaction between the SCO member States in the fields of trade, manufacturing, transport, energy, finance, investment, agriculture, customs, telecommunications, innovation and other areas of mutual interest, including through the use of advanced, resource-saving, energy efficient and "green" technologies.

The sides note the fruitful interaction within the SCO under the 2009 Agreement between the Governments of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member States on cooperation in the field of international information security, as well as within the specialized Group of Experts. In this context, they welcome the adoption of the SCO Joint Action Plan on Ensuring International Information Security for 2022–2023 by the Council of Heads of State of SCO Member States on September 17, 2021 in Dushanbe.

Russia and China proceed from the ever-increasing importance of cultural and humanitarian cooperation for the progressive development of the SCO. In order to strengthen mutual understanding between the people of the SCO member States, they will continue to effectively foster interaction in such areas as cultural ties, education, science and technology, healthcare, environmental protection, tourism, people-to-people contacts, sports.

Russia and China will continue to work to strengthen the role of APEC as the leading platform for multilateral dialogue on economic issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The sides intend to step up coordinated action to successfully implement the "Putrajaya guidelines for the development of APEC until 2040" with a focus on creating a free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent and predictable trade and investment environment in the region. Particular emphasis will be placed on the fight against the novel coronavirus infection pandemic and economic recovery, digitalization of a wide range of different spheres

of life, economic growth in remote territories and the establishment of interaction between APEC and other regional multilateral associations with a similar agenda.

The sides intend to develop cooperation within the "Russia-India-China" format, as well as to strengthen interaction on such venues as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum on Security, Meeting of Defense Ministers of the ASEAN Member States and Dialogue Partners. Russia and China support ASEAN's central role in developing cooperation in East Asia, continue to increase coordination on deepened cooperation with ASEAN, and jointly promote cooperation in the areas of public health, sustainable development, combating terrorism and countering transnational crime. The sides intend to continue to work in the interest of a strengthened role of ASEAN as a key element of the regional architecture.

(<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>)

# ABBREVIATIONS

## ADMM+

ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus

## AIIB

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

## APEC

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

## ARF

ASEAN Regional Forum

## ASEAN

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

## AUKUS

Security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States

## BRI

Belt and Road Initiative

## BRICS

Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

## CCDI

Central Commission for Discipline Inspection

## CIPS

Cross-Border Interbank Payments System

## CPC

Communist Party of China

## CPPCC

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

## CSDP

Common Security and Defence Policy

## FAO

Food and Agriculture Organization

## ITU

International Telecommunication Union

## LMG

Like-Minded Group

## MoU

Memorandum of Understanding

## NATO

North Atlantic Security Organization

## NGO

Non-governmental organisation

## NPC

National People's Congress

## OSCE

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

## PLA

People's Liberation Army

## PRC

People's Republic of China

## QUAD

Quadilateral Security Dialogue

## R&D

Research and Development

## RCEP

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

## SCO

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

## SPFS

System for Transfer of Financial Messages

## UN

United Nations

## UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## UNHCR

United Nations Human Rights Council

## UNIDO

UN Industrial Development Organisation

## USSR

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## WHO

World Health Organization

While the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy has garnered a lot of attention, much less analysis has been devoted to China's coalition-building efforts. However, since the ascent of Xi Jinping to the presidency, the enlargement of China's 'circle of friends' has become a top priority for Beijing. For Chinese diplomacy, the goal is to convince a maximum number of countries to support China's positions, both individually and collectively at the multilateral level, on various issues of core interest – including Xinjiang, Hong Kong and other human rights-related matters. While China is actively seeking to build coalitions, it has set about doing so pursuing an approach that is quite different from that of the United States.

This *Chaillot Paper* identifies the tactics and strategy used by China to expand its circle of friends. It also assesses the prospects for Beijing's coalition-building endeavour, based on an analysis of its achievements to date, as well as the setbacks it has encountered along the way. The paper also explores the potential impact of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine – and related sanctions – on coalition-building dynamics in the years ahead.