

## **It Would be Great to Overcome the Challenge of the Century Without War**

Numerous experts and politicians warn about the ongoing formation of a quasi-alliance between China and Russia, one that could pose great danger to democratic countries, and democracy in general. They also assume that the main culprit here is the United States, as its confrontative stance regarding certain issues – even if indirectly and unintentionally-, leads to China and Russia eventually joining forces.

If we base our perception on recent phenomena, the above-described approach does have a decent amount of truth to it. However, a more thorough analyzes reveals a good number of differences pointing out that this “alliance” is not at all as strong as it is presented to be, and that the strategic goals of China and Russia do not correspond, even if there are some tactical overlaps.

What really forms a bond between the two countries is constantly challenging the U.S. to avoid being strategically dominated, since America appears to be a direct manifestation of the threat posed on China and Russia by democracy in general. While in addition there are economic interests as well, there are no more truly shared interests connecting the two Eastern powers. Although these factors should not be perceived as unimportant at all, they are not enough to serve as a foundation of any long-term alliance. Even more so, as there already is a clash of views regarding several subjects among the parties.

China and Russia are fundamentally different players in the global political-economic arena. The latter one is clearly in decline, struggling to maintain its international positions and regain as much of the influence possessed throughout Soviet times, as possible. The biggest obstacle in the way – just like it has been for the Soviet Union -, is a lack of sufficient resources.

Possibly the biggest flaw of these Russian ambitions in the short-run is the country's almost mono-cultural economy: besides fossil fuels, there is not much Russia could offer in large enough quantities for the global markets. Certainly, the sales of arms contribute to the Russian trade capacity significantly, it simply is just not enough to change the big picture, especially as the sales of such commodities can be highly problematic at times. Regarding fossil fuels – with the global economy turning more and more green -, there is a constant decrease in demand. Also, these commodities are usually subjects to strategic and political games, even more so in the case of Russia, where it is further amplified by the very high level of consciousness in the ways of manipulating crude oil and natural gas exports for the country's own good. This attitude often results in making possible trading partners unsure about their decision, leading to many of them seeking alternative ways to replace a dependency on Russian fossil fuels.

Moreover, this lack of resources can also be seen by taking a look at the continuously failing attempts of transferring military innovations to the civil sphere of economy, while the country's volume of GDP keeps lagging behind the same indicator of leading world powers.

The Russian society itself is fragile as well. It is true although, that the support behind Putin is still strong, especially in Western measurements. A majority of Russian society still falls for the ideas once leading to the downfall of the Soviet Union: believing that

Western countries – NATO and the European Union in particular -, threaten their safety. A certain type of will to take revenge on parties responsible for the fall of the Soviet Union, which in Russian perception was connected to external factors and players, is still alive. Many are convinced to this day that Russia needs a strong leader (tsar, General Secretary, President), and this idea keeps being, unfortunately, supported by a high number of individuals in the Western world as well. Therefore, while the Russian society seems to support the current administration, this support is fragile and ever weakening.

Understanding the context, it only seems more displeasing and less rational, that Putin's Russia behaves as if it had what it takes to secure a place among the world's leading powers, while reality shows, that it lacks both economic capabilities and crucial societal factors. Also, in this case, we are not talking about Russia seeking to regain its once existent position as one of the world's leading powers, simply because it never truly has been perceived as such. An ambition like this would be way out of line even if Russia decided to put an end to wasting its scarce resources on chasing mirages, such as becoming a global superpower.

Of course, one cannot expect sudden changes in this regard in the near future, but it is likely that sooner or later – due to Putin leaving office for any reason, for example -, a process of change will begin, altering even such fundamental factors. However, not only the beginning date of this process is unknown at the moment, but also its possible direction and outcome.

These observations lead to two conclusions.

First, that the current Russian political attitude – and therefore, Russia itself -, is destined to fail. Second, that the methods once used to overthrow the Soviet Union may more or less be relevant to be incorporated in the Western approach of dealing with Russia today. Contrary to Putin's recent words, it is not the United States following the footsteps of the former Soviet Union on the way to an inevitable downfall, but the other way around: Russia might be the one going down in the relatively near future. This scenario is not a promising one. At the end of the day, Europe and the U.S. benefit the most from a Russia that prefers co-operation over confrontation. This ideal state will be very difficult to achieve. An ever-changing mix of co-operation and confrontative elements could serve this goal best. Right now, this is not the case, and it should be changed soon.

China on the other hand is a very different challenge.

China is an emerging power. There is nothing it finds less desirable than rebuilding the global security system of the Soviet era (what Russia urges). While it is true that both parties are willing to end the international dominance of democratic states, the U.S. in particular, but regarding the system following this hypothetical shift, their concepts and goals differ significantly. Throughout the course of history, there have been countless occasions where a new superpower has risen. Unfortunately, this has always been directly connected to wars, and war is clearly not a realistic option under today's circumstances. Consequently, the first challenge the world is facing right now: how can the Chinese superpower be integrated into the international order without armed conflict?

The situation has only been made even more complex due to the crises of the Westphalian state system in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and with the new, post-Westphalian

system being in the early stages of development even today, the integration of China into it has to be done while the system itself is not yet fully formed.

Additionally, it happens for the first time, that a superpower is not rooted in the North-Atlantic cultural area. This results in extra difficulties, which also have to be addressed and tackled properly.

Although this is not directly linked to China, it is important to mention that India is another nation showing clear signs of being able to turn into a superpower soon. While not being rooted in the North-Atlantic cultural area holds true in the case of India as well, it is important to note, that this is a country with a fundamentally different culture and socio-economic setting than that of China's. Even more concerning, India and China are already in a rivalry so fierce it carries the threat of armed escalation.

Another important point to make is, that China has the resources needed to maintain its powerful position, since the Chinese economy is almost the same size as the American. The topic of innovation shows a very different picture if compared to Russia, too. For China, it is no difficult task to transfer the newest technological inventions into the civil economy, let it be inventions originally created for military purposes, other domestic inventions, or technologies gained from inventions of other nations, this latter sometimes raising questions of legal nature. This is all due to the fact that the Chinese economy today is among the world's most prosperous ones, with certain sectors – the ones generating low added value -, being set up abroad, just like the way advanced Western countries transfer some part of their production to China.

It is worth noticing that China's ambitions in becoming a superpower might often be unproportional to the reality of geopolitics, as the country is bordered by less advanced countries, resulting in a certain type of unintentional Chinese isolation.

While economic indicators present a clearly promising picture, there are still massive challenges China needs to address, these being a large part of the population living below the desired level of financial stability – although the progress already made in this regard is beyond dispute -, a secondary role in global financial institutions, or the demographic challenges caused by an ageing population combined with an uneven ration of male and female individuals in the population.

Observing the military of China, a number of deficiencies can be recognized regarding specific capacities. Early warning systems, military logistics and the navy in general are still to be further advanced in order to establish a globally powerful, modernized Chinese army. Also, while the quantity of Chinese warships exceeds the number of American warships for instance, there is still a major gap in quality, clearly favoring the latter power.

To briefly summarize the difference between the foreign policy approaches of China and Russia: although Russia really does intentionally work on the destruction of the current world order with its limited tools, China on the other hand seeks ways to become partly integrated in this system, while at the same time change it for its own benefit. For that, in contrary with Russia, China truly does have the sufficient capacities and tools. Therefore, the Russians can be described as trolls and intentionally destructive based on the observation, that they know very well they cannot play a truly important role globally, yet

they decide to act the way they do. In contrary with this attitude, the Chinese are not working on destroying the system, since they are well aware they have a realistic chance to achieve the level of global prosperity and influence of the United States. After a proper interpretation of the situation, the relation between China and Russia could be best described by one particular word: frenemies.

In addition to the previously mentioned aspects, I would argue that China should be perceived as a “communist” power. While this statement clearly does not lack a strong basis, it also is too unsophisticated. China is not a communist power in the traditional sense used to describe the former Soviet Union under Stalin, as China fosters no ambitions in exporting the ideology, or other forms of Communism.

The Chinese form of Communism is rather a highly unique expression of the Pan-Asian society, that uses the word “communist” for certain historical and political reasons but lacks the most typical traits of the traditional form of Communism. Although the State party is referred to as the Chinese Communist Party, it does not try and force its ideology and social order on other countries. It is difficult to briefly describe the social-, and economic system of China, but it is very close to a state capitalist autocracy. Therefore, the main motives behind Chinese efforts to expand are strategic and economic ones, not ideological.

Inevitably, the Western world - dedicated to support human rights and democratic social structures -, has to face all the differences between its own general approach, and the Chinese way of dealing with certain issues. Without any doubt, this is a serious obstacle, but is not equivalent to the ideology driven practice commonly demonstrated by Communist powers in the past.

When establishing the politics of the West towards China, it may be beneficial to examine the values this soon-to-be superpower can offer to the world, and the Western democracies. Keeping this in mind, it still cannot be stressed enough that China will not change radically anytime soon, but it should not be expected the other way around either: expecting Europe and the United States to change beyond what is reasonable...

I am well aware the above-described statements may be somewhat controversial. It is only logical, since providing adequate answers to never before experienced issues is not at all easy.

First and foremost, one thing has to be understood: at this point it is inevitable that China will become in many regards as advanced, as the United States. China will soon be turning into a superpower. Possibly, it already is one. This demonstrates clearly why the foreign policies of the European Union and the U.S. should not be focused on trying to reverse or simply eliminate this process already set in motion. The exact reason behind this is the fact, that it would be absolutely impossible to succeed in doing so. Working on a smoother integration of China or finding proper solutions to solve difficult issues should be the goal instead. This, of course, is not to be understood as giving up on our Western values, but to rather try and conciliate these different values – and yes -, interests as well.

Also, a concrete solution has to be found to ease tensions created by the differences between Western and Chinese values. It would be naïve to assume, that the values of the Chinese society will change soon, becoming similar to Western ones. This scenario to ever

happen cannot be taken as granted at all, but the West will surely need to learn to cope with this difficult balance in the long run. This does not mean however, that attacks against human rights in China should not be followed by Western criticism and other relevant reactions. If these reactions can be implemented properly, without a provoking manner, they might even succeed.

The main aim of this article has been a search for much needed answers to the greatest questions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of course, finding all the answers in a single article is virtually impossible. But we may be hopeful about this article being able to reveal the real problems, and to point out why the current American – and generally speaking -, Western political approach on the matter cannot be effective enough while also getting a little closer to the actual solutions.

This complex issue will remain with us for a long time. We only can hope that the proper answers will be found without war.