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RUSSIA'S ROLE IN THE POST-WAR WORLD ORDER

How will Russia's position in the Global South
and within international institutions evolve?

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Executive summary

1 Russia maintains a broad network of economic and political ties that has allowed it to withstand sanctions, but **these relationships are fragile and embed long-term costs**. Dependence on discounted commodity exports, shadow finance, and alternative trade corridors ensures short-term stability while deepening structural vulnerabilities.

2 China is Russia's critical partner, but the relationship is **highly asymmetric**. Russia relies heavily on Chinese technology, dual-use goods, and financial infrastructure, while trade in yuan exposes it to Beijing's policy decisions. This imbalance increases China's leverage and limits Moscow's ability to act independently.

3 India, Turkey, and the Gulf states benefit from energy trade with Russia but avoid strategic alignment. Their **hedging** between Moscow and Western partners **keeps cooperation shallow and sensitive to sanctions enforcement** and reputational risks.

4 In the Middle East, Russia's reliance on OPEC+ and transit hubs in the UAE and Iran sustains its trade flows but **narrows its maneuverability**. The Syrian conflict shows how stretched resources erode Moscow's ability to maintain influence and credibility as a security guarantor.

5 **Partnership** with Iran expands in defense, energy, and logistics but **remains transactional**. Competing interests in oil markets, the Caucasus, and Gulf politics limit trust and highlight contradictions in the relationship.

6 North Korea supplies Russia with weapons and manpower, but this cooperation heightens tensions in Northeast Asia and risks **technology transfers that could destabilize the region**. Tactical benefits are outweighed by strategic liabilities.

7 In Africa, Russian support for authoritarian regimes through military assistance and private contractors secures access to resources but generates instability, human rights abuses, and reputational costs. Russia's limited trade and investment underline its **weak economic role on the continent**.

8 **Sanctions evasion** through commodities, crypto, and precious metals sustain revenue but remains vulnerable. Corporate setbacks and partner caution show that these **channels are temporary and easily disrupted**.

9 **Nuclear diplomacy** through Rosatom expands Russia's presence in developing countries but ties its influence to **sanction-sensitive**, long-term projects that can be stalled or scaled back by host governments or non-proliferation concerns.

10 Overall, Russia has succeeded in redirecting its economy and building alternative alliances, but **at the price of dependence, asymmetry, and fragile partnerships**. The contradictions embedded in these ties limit Russia's strategic autonomy and leave its coalition brittle under sustained pressure.

PART I. RUSSIA AND NON-WESTERN PARTNERS

Russia is actively adapting to Western sanctions while maintaining its economic influence through raw material trade, oil discount policies, and the export of fertilizers and grain. It is redirecting its trade flows from Europe to Asia, using new transport corridors. Demand for Russian oil and raw materials remains high in developing countries such as China, India, Turkey, and the UAE.

Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey, and the UAE are just some of the regional leaders that remain opposed to or neutral towards unilateral sanctions. In July 2024, India overtook China to become **the largest buyer of Russian oil**.¹ Trade with these countries has allowed Russia to continue earning billions of dollars despite Western sanctions on its energy and oil price caps. In addition, Russian oil has reached European markets through **secondary exports** via countries such as India.² The transit of goods through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) connecting Russia with India and the Asian market via Iran is growing significantly. This growth is driven not only by economic benefits but also by strategic importance, as the INSTC provides Russia with **control over major transportation routes** in Eurasia and, thus, an alternative to Western-controlled routes.

Russia also evades sanctions by **relying on cryptocurrencies, diamonds, and gold**. The Kremlin has legalized cryptocurrency mining, allowing it to be used for international payments. The success of this initiative depends on Russia's ability to overcome international regulatory barriers, effectively manage sanctioned entities, and create partnerships with foreign entities to support such transactions.³ Alrosa, Russia's largest diamond mining company, retains its position in Zimbabwe, but in Angola, the company was suspended from participating in diamond mining due to complications in the sale of raw materials caused by sanctions. The Angolan authorities have publicly stated that sanctions against the Russian diamond industry have created problems not only for Russia itself but also for the Angolan diamond sector and its reputation in the international market.⁴ The UK and the US continue to impose sanctions aimed at the illegal gold trade, which, according to the United Kingdom, funds Russia's military operations and fuels corruption.⁵

With Russia's reorientation to the East, a **new semi-bloc of sanctioned countries** is gradually forming, spanning from Venezuela to North Korea. Changes in the international system are being driven by new supply chains and new geography of financial flows, as well as the expansion of the BRICS, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These shifts are potentially sustainable and will gradually institutionalize Russia's new position in the global political economy.

¹ Nidhi Verma. India surpasses China to become Russia's top oil buyer in July». Reuters. August 22, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/india-surpasses-china-become-russias-top-oil-buyer-july-2024-08-22/>

² Mohi Narayan and Nidhi Verma. Fuels from Russian oil gets backdoor entry into Europe via India. Reuters. April 6, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/fuels-russian-oil-gets-backdoor-entry-into-europe-via-india-2023-04-05/>

³ Russia's Cryptocurrency Pivot: Legislated Sanctions Evasion. Chainalysis. September 5, 2024. <https://www.chainalysis.com/blog/russias-cryptocurrency-legislated-sanctions-evasion/>

⁴ Leah Meirovich. Angola Replaces Alrosa with Oman in Diamond-Mining Operations. Rapaport. December 1, 2024. <https://rapaport.com/news/angola-replaces-alrosa-with-oman-in-diamond-mining-operations/>

⁵ US, UK take aim at illicit gold trade in sanctions actio. Reuters. December 9, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-sanctions-illicit-gold-trade-players-bid-cut-russias-war-funding-2024-12-09/>

Russia seeks to consolidate its position in the new alliances by using ideological antagonism toward the West. To this end, it actively employs a historical anti-colonial narrative.

Russia is exploiting non-Western countries' **skepticism toward the West**, especially the United States, because of its aggressive actions in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. It fuels a propaganda narrative among these countries about the threat of NATO expansion and Western interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. As a result, they perceive the war against Ukraine as a conflict between Russia and the West, with the West as the provocateur. In addition, Russia is also stirring feelings of alienation and resentment that the war and rivalry between the West and China are diverting attention and resources from their own pressing challenges.

Many countries with a **colonial past** perceive the United States and European countries as neo-colonial powers that still treat them with arrogance. Anti-Western sentiments prevent them from recognizing that Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty is a form of colonialism. In order to present itself as a leading anti-colonial force, Russia appeals to its Soviet past, when the USSR supported anti-colonial liberation movements. Although in some countries, there is a point of view that emphasizes human rights violations by Russian military forces and the Russian state, it is usually represented by opposition parties or non-governmental organizations. It is likely that a number of countries recognize the colonial dimension of the war but continue to act in accordance with their national interests.



Demonstrators gather in support of the putschist soldiers in the capital Niamey, Niger on July 30. Signs read 'long live Niger, long live Russia' and 'France must leave.' STRINGER/Reuters

Regional powers, such as India, Turkey, Brazil, and the BRICS members, are choosing a non-aligned stance, balancing relations with Russia and the West.

This decision stems not only from deepening ideological differences but also from **pragmatic economic interests**. India continues to maintain partnerships with both the United States and Russia, which allows it to counter China's growing influence in Asia. It is a member of the Western QUAD grouping in the Indo-Pacific but also participates in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Turkey is a member of NATO and participates in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and a SCO dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It enters into contracts with Rosatom, a Russian state nuclear energy corporation, to build its own nuclear power plant but also sends its Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine. Egypt is the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid⁶, but imports most of its grain from Russia⁷.



Demonstrators hold placards during a protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine in Caracas on March 4. FEDERICO PARRA/AFP via Getty Images

Russia develops partnerships with countries based on their dependence and strategic value. Relations with autocracies emphasize Russia's superiority as an alternative provider of security solutions, while strategically important countries remain cautious due to geopolitical risks. This demonstrates Russia's asymmetric approach to partnerships, which depends on local conditions.

Countries such as Nicaragua and Venezuela rely on Russia in some critical areas, especially **regime security**. Russia's advantage as a patron lies in its ability to provide comprehensive security support outside of international norms. This support typically includes a combination of information operations, deployment of private military companies, and intelligence services. Accordingly, the most openly pro-Russian stance on the international stage is demonstrated mainly by autocratic regimes and military juntas. These include the Maduro and Ortega regimes, the juntas in Mali and Myanmar, and the former authoritarian regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Larger countries, such as the BRICS group, Algeria, and Egypt, are more strategically important to Russia but also more independent due to less asymmetry in relations. These countries have

⁶ Simon Lewis. US grants Egypt \$1.3 billion in military aid, overriding rights conditions. Reuters. September 12, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-administration-grants-egypt-13-billion-military-aid-despite-rights-2024-09-11/>

⁷ Egypt's wheat imports and flour exports reach new heights in 2024. Miller Magazine. 11 February 2025. <https://millermagazine.com/corporate>

had to balance their long-term partnership with Russia and ties to the West, which has correspondingly limited their relations with Russia.

Russia is trying to position itself as the global leader of the anti-Western coalition, but this strategy causes ambiguity among its partners, as they are not interested in direct confrontation with the West.

At the end of 2023, an official report was presented, coordinated with the Presidential Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. It focused on the latest prospects for Russia's relations with the so-called "World Majority." The task of the Russian Federation was proclaimed to be a **complete political and economic dissociation** from the West since normalization of relations would be not only impossible for the Kremlin but also unprofitable even in the medium term. It was also asserted that Moscow should prepare the ruling circles and societies of the "World Majority" for the **possibility of further escalation** of the conflict with the West, including the use of the "nuclear factor." The document also noted that Russia intends to force the West **to simultaneously confront both Russia and China**. At the same time, it was recognized that many countries of the "World Majority," including China, are not interested in direct conflict with the West, preferring an evolutionary method of transforming Western hegemony. With this report, Russia aimed to send a signal of its readiness to use a general **strategy of horizontal escalation in the process of geographical expansion of proxy conflicts**, which carries clear risks for non-Western countries and stability in their regions.⁸

Russia has traditionally used the **arms trade as a lever of geopolitical influence**, but the war in Ukraine has significantly undermined its position in this area. The share of Russian arms exports on the global market fell to 4% in 2023, compared to 30% in 2012.⁹ Sanctions, particularly under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (**CAATSA**), limited access to international payment mechanisms, and reputational damage have significantly reduced the attractiveness of Russian arms to international customers. India, China, and Egypt remain the main importers of its weapons.¹⁰

Despite the current difficulties, Russian defense capabilities are likely to be expanded to meet the needs of the war. This could allow Russia to resume arms exports in the postwar period, attracting countries that need cheaper or proven alternatives, such as Iran, Myanmar, or some African states. India and Vietnam may also remain customers in terms of servicing existing equipment, although they will gradually develop a diversification of suppliers.

Russia is actively using its nuclear technology capabilities to strengthen ties with countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

In recent years, Russia has become a partner in **providing nuclear technology** to many non-Western countries, gradually expanding its presence in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa,

⁸ Vadim Grishin. Russia and the Global South, or the Mystery of Political Semantics. The George Washington University. March 14, 2024. [Russia and the Global South, or the Mystery of Political Semantics](#)

⁹ Brian Hart, Bonny Lin, Matthew P. Funairole, Samantha Lu, Hannah Price, Nicholas Kaufman, Gavril Torrijos. How Deep Are China-Russia Military Ties. China Power. August 4, 2022. Updated August 7, 2024. Accessed March 11, 2025. <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-russia-military-cooperation-arms-sales-exercises/>

¹⁰ Pieter D. Wezeman, Katarina Djokic, Dr Mathew George, Siemon T. Wezeman. Stockholm TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. 2023. March 2024. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs_2403_at_2023.pdf

and Asia. This strategy relies on Moscow's ability to establish diplomatic and trade relations without imposing strict non-proliferation conditions. In addition, Rosatom controls approximately **44% of the global market** for conversion and enrichment-related materials¹¹, making it an important partner for scientific groups in the United States and European countries, regardless of the Russia-Ukraine war. Since 2023, Rosatom has been the exclusive supplier of enriched uranium products for Brazilian nuclear facilities.¹²

The State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom is a unique supplier capable of providing all stages of nuclear program development. The company **controls 70% of the global nuclear power plant export market**.¹³ The Russian Federation has traditionally dominated the global market for nuclear reactors. In April 2023, Turkey, with Russian support, opened its first nuclear power plant, Akkuyu, which is expected to be responsible for about 10% of total national electricity production.¹⁴ The conclusion of such agreements, despite Western sanctions, adds tension to relations with Turkey.

Rosatom has signed an agreement with Egypt to build the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant, which is also expected to produce more than 10% of Egypt's total electricity.¹⁵ The plant is to be the first in Egypt and the second on the African continent. Various African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Congo, South Africa, and Kenya, continue to sign diplomatic and commercial agreements on nuclear energy with Russia. Moscow is seeking preferential access to uranium mines on the continent, as evidenced by its agreement with Namibia.¹⁶



¹¹ Uranium Enrichment. World Nuclear Association. June 2025. <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/conversion-enrichment-and-fabrication/uranium-enrichment>

¹² João Paulo Nicolini Gabriel. Russian Nuclear Diplomacy in the Global South, and How to Respond to It. Istituto Affari Internazionali. March 22, 2024. [Russian Nuclear Diplomacy in the Global South, and How to Respond to It | IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali](https://www.iai.it/en/publications/russian-nuclear-diplomacy-in-the-global-south-and-how-to-respond-to-it)

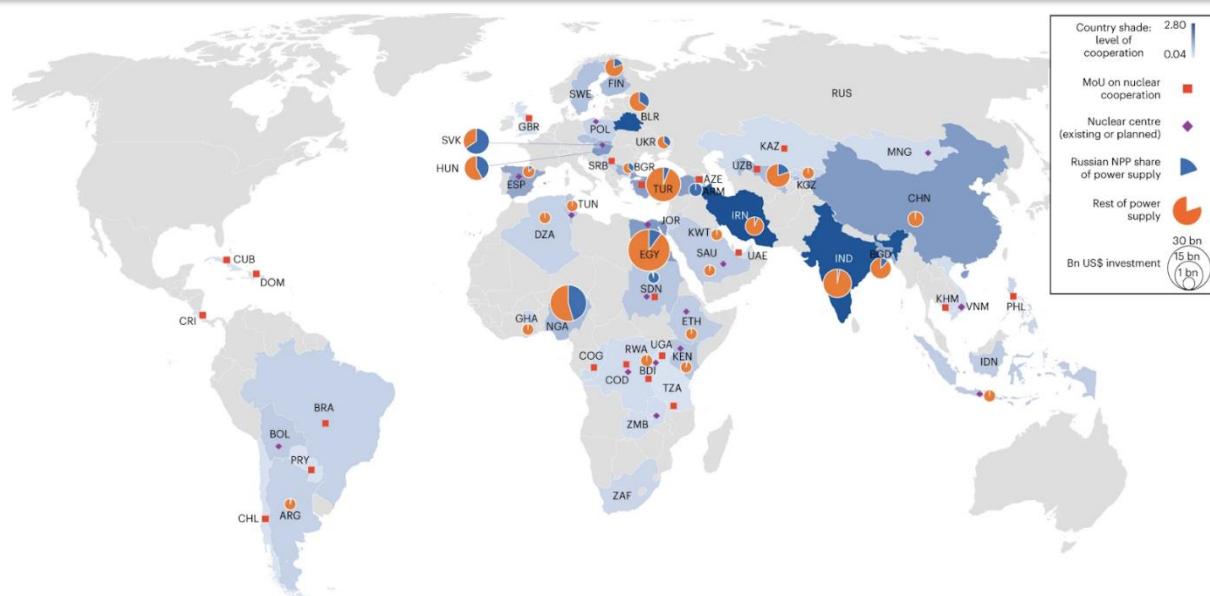
¹³ Alexandra Prokopenko. Russia Energy Series – Rosatom: A Difficult Target. Energy Innovation Reform Project. May 8, 2023. <https://innovationreform.org/eirp-russia-energy-series-rosatom-a-difficult-target/>

¹⁴ Una experta en guerra pide a la OTAN que detenga cuanto antes el plan nuclear de Rusia. Redacción HuffPost. August 22, 2024. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/global/una-experta-guerra-pide-otan-detenga-cuanto-plan-nuclear-rusia.html>

¹⁵ Marina Lorenzini. Why Egypt's new nuclear plant is a long-term win for Russia. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. December 20, 2023. <https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/why-egypts-new-nuclear-plant-is-a-long-term-win-for-russia/>

¹⁶ African Energy Chamber | Oct 14, 2024

African Energy Chamber. Rosatom Accelerates African Nuclear Development, Joins African Energy Week (AEW) 2024 as Gold Sponsor. APO Group. October 14, 2024. <https://www.africa-newsroom.com/press/rosatom-accelerates-african-nuclear-development-joins-african-energy-week-aew-2024-as-gold-sponsor?lang=en>



Szulecki, K., Overland, I. Russian nuclear energy diplomacy and its implications for energy security in the context of the war in Ukraine. *Nat Energy* 8, 413–421 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-023-01228-5>

Russia's nuclear diplomacy has also expanded to the Asian continent, particularly South Asia, with nuclear energy cooperation established with such countries as India (construction of units at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant), Bangladesh (the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant), Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Philippines. By financing the growth of these countries through the supply of nuclear technology, Russia receives diplomatic support in return, particularly at the United Nations General Assembly. Rosatom is also extending its influence to the BRICS countries by organizing international events to foster cooperation and seek funding for its own projects.¹⁷

Through partnerships in the nuclear sector, Russia has not only strengthened its presence in the international energy system but also increased its geopolitical influence, especially among developing economies seeking new technologies and energy solutions. The strategic use of nuclear partnerships increases the **risk of economic and technological dependence** of these countries on Russia.

Conclusions

The dependence of many countries on Russian energy and raw materials remains a key source of Russia's economic stability despite sanctions and international pressure. This dependence enables Moscow to maintain significant financial flows, which are partly used to fund the war and maintain geopolitical influence. This is especially true for countries that have not joined the sanctions regime, such as India, China, Turkey, and the Gulf states. In this context, it is crucial **to develop mechanisms for monitoring secondary exports of Russian energy** and **to strengthen the global coalition for the effective implementation of sanctions**, including the **regulation of cryptocurrency circulation and control of precious metals trade**.

Although growing reputational losses and market diversification are gradually narrowing Russia's economic role, it will likely continue to intensify trade activities through countries that take a "neutral" position. The West can play a crucial role in **reducing dependence on Russian goods**

¹⁷ BRICS members set to increase nuclear energy cooperation. World Nuclear News. October 18, 2024. <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/articles/brics-members-set-to-increase-nuclear-energy-cooperation>

and services by **encouraging the diversification of energy sources** for developing countries through **investments in renewable energy**, the **development of alternative transport corridors**, and **support for local energy production**. In the post-war context, it will also be a key tool in curbing Russia's geopolitical ambitions by limiting its economic ability to finance conflicts and exert influence on regions through energy leverage.

Simultaneously, Russia continues to use proxy conflicts and information campaigns to put pressure on the international system. Thus, it is critical to **support independent media** and **invest in media literacy** in regions with a high level of exposure to Russian disinformation. Information campaigns aimed at **debunking the myth of Russia's "anti-colonialism"**, as well as regular dialogue with Russia's partner countries explaining the consequences of proxy conflicts and risks of destabilization, can help reduce its propaganda influence.

In addition, Russia is likely to focus on nuclear diplomacy as a tool to restore international influence, particularly among countries seeking technological modernization. Therefore, it is necessary to establish **international control over nuclear projects** and **ensure compliance with non-proliferation norms**.

Overall, measures to support the diversification of energy and trade markets, strengthen sanctions and their enforcement, and counteract Russia's informational and nuclear influence are key to limiting its ability to finance wars, destabilize regions, and form an anti-Western bloc.

China

Russia has integrated into a Chinese-oriented economic, technological, military, and political system, making its departure from it increasingly challenging, even as Moscow seeks to achieve strategic autonomy. Trade between Russia and China is showing steady growth, particularly in energy and technology exports. While China is Russia's main economic partner, the trade imbalance creates long-term risks of dependence for Russia.

China is the **leading supplier of manufacturing equipment, goods, and technologies** to Russia. In return, Russia is a significant supplier of energy, resources, food, and fertilizers to China. For the latter, Moscow plays a **crucial role in its energy security strategy**, allowing Beijing to avoid overdependence on energy from the Middle East, which is transported via the Indian and Pacific Oceans—routes vulnerable to disruption in the event of conflict with the United States. For Russia, China is the main buyer of its resources and the only serious alternative to the West in the supply of goods, equipment, and technology.¹⁸ In 2023, trade between China and Russia reached \$240 billion, which is 26.3% more than in the previous year. This growth was largely driven by **Chinese exports - 67%, compared to 25% of Russia's exports**.¹⁹ Russia overtook Saudi Arabia to become **the largest oil supplier** to China.²⁰

Trade relations between the two countries are **marked by asymmetry**: Russia accounts for **4% of China's trade**, while China accounts for almost **22% of Russia's trade**;²¹ China is Russia's **the largest export market**, whereas Russia is **eighth** in China.²² While the latter has a vested interest in Russian energy, the dependence in this sector is mutual, as Russia is increasingly dependent on the Chinese oil market.

Technological dependence is growing, particularly in the most sensitive and strategic areas such as artificial intelligence development, the information and communications sector, cyberspace, aerospace, and advanced military-technical cooperation. A significant portfolio of infrastructure projects planned to be implemented in joint ownership with China, including in the Arctic, is set to further enhance the importance of the **Siberia-Far East-China transport corridor** and, at the same time, increase Russia's dependence on the Chinese market.²³ Russia also relies on Chinese companies and banks for crucial investments in its **energy and telecommunications**

¹⁸ Together and Apart: The Conundrum of the China-Russia Partnership. Asia Society. October 11, 2023. <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/together-and-apart-conundrum-china-russia-partnership>

¹⁹ Hugo von Essen. Russia-China Economic Relations Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine. Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies. July, 2023. Russia-China Economic Relations Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine - SCEEUS

²⁰ Andrew Hayley. China defies sanctions to make Russia its biggest oil supplier in 2023. Reuters. January 22, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/china-defies-sanctions-make-russia-its-biggest-oil-supplier-2023-2024-01-20/>

²¹ Christopher S. Chivvis and Jack Keating. Cooperation Between China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia: Current and Potential Future Threats to America. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. October 8, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/cooperation-between-china-iran-north-korea-and-russia-current-and-potential-future-threats-to-america?lang=en>

²² The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC). China CN / Russia RU. 2023. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/rus>

²³ Vadim Grishin. Russia and the Global South, or the Mystery of Political Semantics. The George Washington University. March 14, 2024. https://therussiaprogram.org/gs_mystery

infrastructure.²⁴ Thus, China's strategic significance for Russia in its isolation from the West is becoming increasingly defining. Russia's economic and technological dependence on China compels it to focus on maintaining and deepening their partnership characterized by growing asymmetry, where China holds a dominant position.

Despite this, Chinese **investments in Russia remain low.** The flow of Chinese capital into Russia has always been small, but no major investment projects have been launched since the start of the full-scale invasion. The risks of a long-term commitment to the Russian market outweigh the economic opportunities.²⁵ To mitigate political risks in economic relations, it is beneficial for Beijing to see Putin and his inner circle in power while providing investments and loans to elites close to him.²⁶

China's support has become a significant factor in bolstering Russia's military capabilities, primarily by providing tools and technology to help the Russian defense industry increase the production of critical weapons.

China supplies machine tools, semiconductors, and other dual-use items. About **70% of the machine tools, 90% of the microelectronics, and 80% of the microchips** (mostly Western-made) imported by Russia come from China.²⁷ Beijing exports over \$300 million worth of dual-use goods to Russia monthly. They are deemed "high-priority" and are essential for manufacturing weapons such as missiles, drones, and tanks.²⁸ In addition to them, Beijing has begun to provide Moscow with significant support in strengthening its military capabilities. In return, Russia has started supplying China with submarines, missiles, and other sensitive technologies.²⁹

²⁴ Clara Fong and Lindsay Maizland. China and Russia: Exploring Ties Between Two Authoritarian Powers. Council on Foreign Relations. March 20, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/china-russia-relationship-xi-putin-taiwan-ukraine>

²⁵ Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2024RP06_Russia-ChinaEconomicRelations.pdf

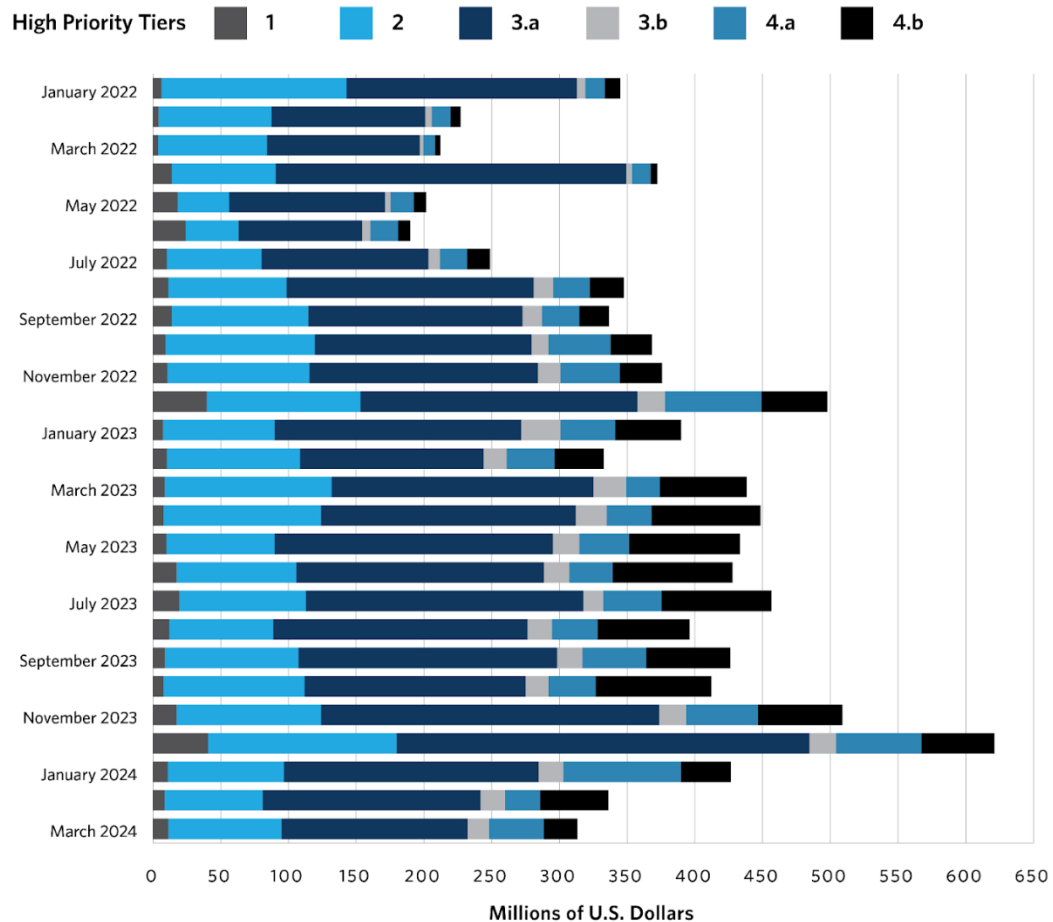
²⁶ Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024RP06/>

²⁷ Natalie Sabanadze, Abigaël Vasselier, Gunnar Wiegand. China-Russia alignment: a threat to Europe's security. MERICS, Chatham House and GMF. June 26, 2024. [China-Russia alignment: a threat to Europe's security | Merics](https://www.merics.org/en/insights/china-russia-alignment-a-threat-to-europes-security)

²⁸ Nathaniel Sher. Behind the Scenes: China's Increasing Role in Russia's Defense Industry. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. May 6, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia- Eurasia/politika/2024/05/behind-the-scenes-chinas-increasing-role-in-russias-defense-industry?lang=en>

²⁹ Stuart Lau. US accuses China of giving 'very substantial' help to Russia's war machine. POLITICO. September 10, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/united-states-accuse-china-help-russia-war-kurt-campbell/>

Figure 1. Chinese Exports of “High Priority” Products to Russia by Tier, 2022-2024



Source: Author calculations of China Customs.

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To curb Chinese aid, more attention should be paid to developing strategies for secondary sanctions, as they are its key deterrent.

Although China has been secretly **helping Russia circumvent Western financial sanctions**, Chinese banks remain cautious about doing business with sanctioned Russian companies, as this **could expose them to secondary sanctions from the West**. For example, the Zhejiang Chouzhou Commercial Bank, which was important for Russian importers, has stopped its cooperation with Russian companies because of such concerns.³⁰

While Russia seems determined to sever relations with the United States and the European Union, China is likely to continue maintaining economic and diplomatic ties with the West. **The level of economic interdependence between the US and China**, along with the scale and intensity of

³⁰ Huileng Tan. Chinese banks are getting cold feet dealing with Russia. Business Insider. February 8, 2024. <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-economy-chinese-banks-halt-payment-settlements-sanctions-chaozhou-commercial-2024-2>

trade and investment, far exceeds the trade relations between China and Russia.^{31 32} Beijing is unwilling to jeopardize its access to Western capital, technology, and markets to meet Moscow's expectations.

Alternative currencies are becoming a tool for both countries to achieve financial independence from the West. The internationalization of the yuan strengthens China's position in the global economy.

Using an alternative currency instead of dollar-denominated transactions allows Russia to **bypass the SWIFT** banking system. In December 2023, **37.5%** of total Russian **imports** and **40.8%** of its **exports were settled in yuan**. The sanctions forced Moscow to change the distribution of its reserves, which will now consist almost entirely of gold and yuan.³³ According to the Moscow Exchange, trading volumes in Chinese yuan exceeded those in U.S. dollars in 2023.³⁴

Russia's dependence on the yuan exposes it to numerous economic and political risks. The yuan exchange rate is largely controlled by China. If the latter decided to artificially devalue the yuan to boost exports, Russian deposits and reserves would also lose value.³⁵ However, scenarios of a deterioration in Sino-Russian relations, where reliance on the Chinese currency would prove disadvantageous, currently seem unlikely. The central banks of both countries have extensive currency swaps to exchange each other's currencies. Nonetheless, the current dynamics in the countries' currency policies demonstrate that China is gradually gaining **political control over Russia's reserves, trade, and payments**.³⁶

China shares Russia's foreign policy goal of promoting a multipolar world order.

Given China's ongoing competition with the United States and its allies, Russia is a valuable partner that can provide modern weapons, cheap oil and gas, support in the UN Security Council, and the ability to distract the US by causing problems in many parts of the world. Both countries are using tensions surrounding Russia's war in Ukraine **to promote an alternative vision of an international order without Western dominance**. Instead of focusing on China as an "emerging threat," the United States should allocate resources to monitoring contingencies in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the fear of being directly involved in the war in Ukraine has revealed a significant **isolationist strain in US foreign policy attitudes**. It has prompted arguments that the United States should stay out of conflicts in both regions and therefore should

³¹ Kenneth Gatten. U.S.-China Relations: Short and Long-Term Implications for the Global Economy. The Pennsylvania State University. <https://publicpolicy.psu.edu/faculty-and-research/policy-perspectives/u-s-china-relations-short-and-long-term-implications-for-the-global-economy/>

³² Daniel Workman. China's Top Trading Partners. World's Top Exports. <https://www.worldstopexports.com/chinas-top-import-partners/>

³³ Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024RP06/#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20the%20Chinese,exports%20were%20settled%20in%20yuan.>

³⁴ Elena Fabrichnaya and Alexander Marrow. China's yuan ousts dollar to become most traded currency in Moscow in 2023. Reuters. January 16, 2024. [China's yuan ousts dollar to become most traded currency in Moscow in 2023 | Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/chinas-yuan-ousts-dollar-to-become-most-traded-currency-in-moscow-in-2023-2024-01-16/)

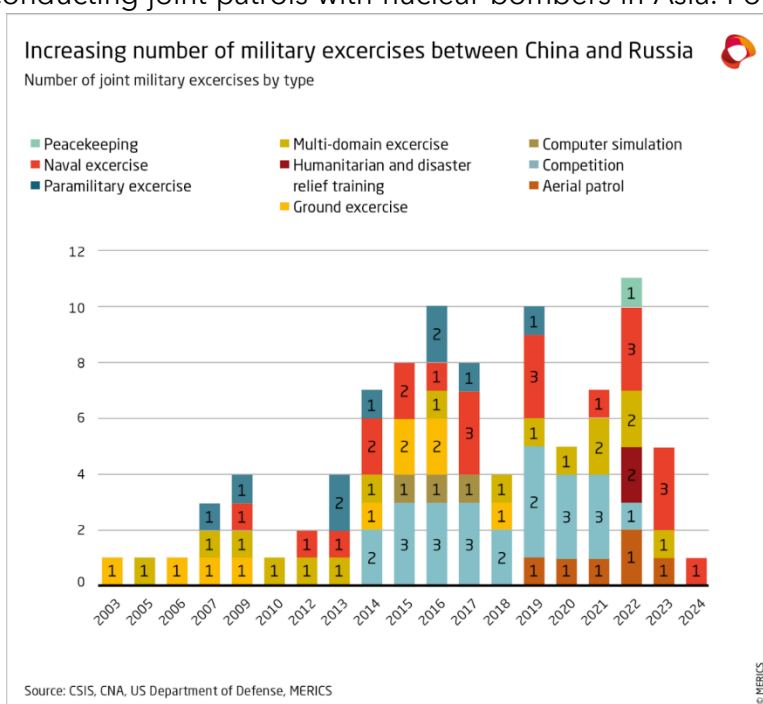
³⁵ Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. Janis Kluge. Russia-China Economic Relations. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. May 2024. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024RP06/#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20the%20Chinese,exports%20were%20settled%20in%20yuan.>

³⁶ Hugo von Essen. Russia-China Economic Relations Since the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine. Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies. July, 2023. <https://sceeus.se/en/publications/russia-china-economic-relations-since-the-full-scale-invasion-of-ukraine/>

not risk being drawn into a conflict with China over Taiwan. Trump's rise to power without a proper countermeasure plan could reinforce this trend.

China and Russia's pursuit of strategic autonomy is likely to prevent them from becoming formal military allies.

Nevertheless, the two countries continue to forge close ties in the field of defense. The military cooperation between them covers three main areas: **joint exercises and defense consultations, arms sales, and military-technical cooperation**. After 2022, joint exercises continued, including naval maneuvers (such as those in the East China Sea in December 2022 and the Gulf of Oman in March 2024, when Iran and Russia participated in the “Maritime Security Belt – 2024” drills) and land military exercises (“Vostok” in September 2022 in the Russian Far East, which involved 2,000 Chinese troops). The countries also actively cooperate in the development of early warning systems for missile strikes, as well as conducting joint patrols with nuclear bombers in Asia. For example, in November 2023, they conducted a joint air patrol over the Sea of Japan using H-6N bombers and other military aircraft.³⁷ However, it is worth noting that even in this sector, one country can gain at the expense of another. Amid the decline in Russia's share of global arms exports, **China has gained a relative market share**. In 2023, China recorded a historic 8.4% share of global arms sales, surpassing Russia in this indicator for the first time.³⁸ At the same time, Russia remains the world's third-largest arms exporter and continues to surpass China in overall export volumes.³⁹



Conclusions

The Russian-Chinese partnership strengthens the countries' positions against the West but increases Moscow's dependence on Beijing. Russia will try to compensate for the weakening of its position in the West by enhancing economic and military cooperation with China. However, its role in international relations will increasingly be limited to supporting Chinese strategies in regions where Moscow is losing influence.

³⁷ Tai-yuan Yang. Analysis of the Purpose of the 9th China-Russia Joint Air Strategic Patrol between. Institute of Chinese Communist Studies. December 12, 2024. <https://iccs.org.tw/en/NewsContent/240>

³⁸ Brian Hart, Bonny Lin, Matthew P. Funaiolo, Samantha Lu, Hannah Price, Nicholas Kaufman, Gavril Torrijos. How Deep Are China-Russia Military Ties. China Power. August 4, 2022. Updated August 7, 2024. Accessed March 11, 2025. <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-russia-military-cooperation-arms-sales-exercises/>

³⁹ Christoph Hasselbach. Ukraine war is changing the global arms trade. Deutsche Welle. March 11, 2024. <https://www.dw.com/en/how-the-ukraine-war-is-changing-the-global-arms-trade/a-68481124?>

In this context, Russia's dependence on China should be leveraged to limit its ability to act independently. This includes strengthening sanctions against critical industries where Russia relies on Chinese technology. Additionally, **economic barriers** can be created for Chinese companies that cooperate with Moscow by **expanding sanctions lists or restricting access to Western markets**. It is also important **to control the export of dual-use goods and technologies that can be re-exported to Russia** and to collect evidence of their use in Russian military operations.

It is unlikely that relations between Beijing and Moscow will turn into a full-fledged alliance. These countries have **different priorities regarding the international order**: China is much more interested in preserving the rules and institutions that govern global trade and finance. The further development of their relations will depend on how China assesses its interests. Beijing will avoid dependence on the Russian economy and has already diversified its energy suppliers to protect itself from possible disruptions in supplies from Russia.⁴⁰

The **accelerated reorientation of the Russian economy to China** demonstrates the unlikelihood of a return to the previous status of relations with the West, even in the event of a regime change in Russia. The decline of the Russian economy will force it to rely even more on the yuan, while access to international financial markets will be limited. This will make Russia **vulnerable to any changes in China's financial policy**.

Incentives should be developed for China that minimize its support for the Russian economy, particularly in the energy sector, while strengthening mechanisms to control international transactions and currency operations. It is necessary **to emphasize the risks of investing in the Russian economy** due to its instability, stemming from sanctions, isolation, and the lingering effects of the war. Additionally, it is important to develop new export routes to Asia, expand its presence in the region's energy markets to reduce Russia's influence, and support financial systems that limit the use of the yuan in international transactions.

In order to influence Beijing's expectations about its support for Russia, it is necessary to shape a narrative **emphasizing the risks of cooperation with Moscow due to possible secondary sanctions** for Chinese companies. Furthermore, **Russia's internal weaknesses** should also be highlighted, which make it an unreliable partner, and show that prolonged cooperation with this country could entangle China into conflicts that contradict its economic and geopolitical interests.

North Korea

Russia has become dependent on North Korean weapons to wage war in Ukraine. In return, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) uses this alliance to obtain technologies that can enhance its military capabilities and reduce its dependence on China.

The DPRK provides Russia with a significant amount of artillery shells, ballistic missiles, ammunition, military equipment, and other weapons. The two countries intensified cooperation after signing a **joint comprehensive partnership agreement** in June 2024, which, in particular,

⁴⁰ Carole Nakhle. A rising China is reshaping global energy markets. Geopolitical Intelligence Services. November 10, 2023. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/china-energy-markets/>

contains a clause covering mutual assistance in case of aggression against one of the parties. In addition to military cooperation, the agreement encompasses cooperation in the space and nuclear energy sectors.⁴¹



North Korea is likely expecting Russia to transfer technologies related to tactical nuclear weapons, the development of its intercontinental ballistic missiles, reconnaissance satellites, and nuclear submarines⁴² in exchange for deploying troops and supplying arms to Russia in the war against Ukraine. Russia helped North Korea launch a reconnaissance satellite that may have captured images of US military bases in Guam.⁴³

Expanding economic ties between the two countries strengthens the resilience of Pyongyang's regime.

Official trade between Russia and the DPRK is growing rapidly. In the first half of 2024 alone, the **trade volume rose to \$52.9 million** compared to the whole of 2023 and amounted to \$34.4 million.⁴⁴ Direct currency transfers for North Korea's arms supplies to Russia have significantly improved the latter's economic situation. This arms trade further allows the Kim regime to expand its relations with existing trade partners, seek new customers that it can support through expanding production lines, and gain access to limited technology.⁴⁵ Russia has already helped North Korea **evade sanctions**, for example, by transporting oil from ship to ship⁴⁶, and creating a network of financial institutions to secretly facilitate illegal payments.⁴⁷ Russia **has transferred**

⁴¹ Kelsey Davenport. North Korea, Russia Strengthen Military Ties. The Arms Control Association. July/August 2024. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-07/news/north-korea-russia-strengthen-military-ties>

⁴² Natasha Bertrand. North Korea likely to ask for nuclear technology from Russia in exchange for troops, South Korea says. CNN. October 30, 2024. <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/10/30/politics/north-korea-russia-nuclear-technology-troops/index.html>

⁴³ Hyonhee Shin. North Korea received Russian aid for satellite launch -South Korea lawmakers. Reuters. November 23, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-received-russian-aid-satellite-launch-south-korea-lawmakers-2023-11-23/>

⁴⁴ Frederic Spohr. New ties between North Korea and Russia. Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom. October 28, 2024. <https://www.freiheit.org/new-ties-between-north-korea-and-russia>

⁴⁵ Robert Peters. The Potential for Russia to Supercharge North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Program. The Heritage Foundation. October 22, 2024. <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-potential-russia-supercharge-north-koreas-nuclear-and-missile-program>

⁴⁶ James Byrne, Joseph Byrne, Ino Terzi and Denys Karlovskyi. Blood and Oil: Russian Oil Deliveries Follow North Korean Weapons Transfers. RUSI. 26 March 2024. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/report-blood-and-oil-russian-oil-deliveries-follow-north-korean-weapons-transfers>

⁴⁷ Treasury Targets Key Actors in Sanctions Evasion Scheme to Support Russia and North Korea. U.S. Department of the Treasury. September 19, 2024. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2590>

frozen North Korean assets worth \$9 million and may be helping North Korea access international banking networks.⁴⁸

The partnership between **Russia and the DPRK** has serious geopolitical consequences, including increased tensions in Northeast Asia, an escalation of the nuclear threat on the Korean Peninsula, and growing confrontation between world powers. North Korea's participation in the war against Ukraine could increase the DPRK's readiness for future offensive operations.

Neither Russia nor China is interested in increasing North Korea's nuclear capabilities. Although China unequivocally affirms its commitment to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,⁴⁹ Moscow, seeking to benefit from the tensions surrounding the nuclear situation, has emphasized that North Korea's **denuclearization** is a **"closed" issue**.⁵⁰ Russia's critical dependence on arms supplies is likely to make Moscow much more willing to share sensitive technologies. Russia vetoed the annual UN Security Council resolution renewing the mandate of the UN Panel of Experts (PoE), which monitors North Korea's sanctions violations. China, on the other hand, abstained from voting.⁵¹

A **decrease in China's influence** on North Korea could lead to a **decrease in stability on the Korean Peninsula** and pose a threat to **the Northeast Asian subregion**. Unlike China, Russia is much less concerned about the stability of the peninsula, so it can use the DPRK to threaten and distract the West. Russia's support could give Pyongyang more confidence in confronting China's displeasure, prompting it to intensify missile tests and aggressive actions against South Korea.

By **participating in the war in Ukraine**, North Korea likely hopes to improve its offensive doctrine, test its weapons systems, gain command and control experience, and learn how to operate drones and electronic warfare systems on a modern battlefield. The skills gained by the troops during the war in Ukraine are expected to give them **an offensive advantage in future conflicts**, particularly on the Korean Peninsula. However, the actual ability of North Korean forces to absorb, disseminate, and institutionalize lessons learned on the battlefield depends on how the Russian command leverages North Korean manpower. Heavy casualties would undermine the lessons Pyongyang hopes to learn from the battlefield.⁵²

⁴⁸ Rich, Motoko. A Russian Bank Account May Offer Clues to a North Korean Arms Deal. The New York Times. February 6, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/06/world/asia/north-korea-russia-missiles-bank.html>

⁴⁹ Tomoyuki Tachikawa. Japan, South Korea, China to pursue North Korea denuclearization: Kishida. Kyodo News. May 27, 2024. https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2024/05/844fe5afa077-japan-s-korea-china-leaders-likely-to-agree-on-broad-cooperation.html#google_vignette

⁵⁰ Russia's Lavrov says North Korea's nuclear status is a 'closed issue'. Reuters. September 26, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-lavrov-says-north-koreas-nuclear-status-is-closed-issue-2024-09-26/>

⁵¹ Security Council Fails to Extend Mandate for Expert Panel Assisting Sanctions Committee on Democratic People's Republic of Korea. United Nations. 28 March 2024. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15648.doc.htm>

⁵² Karolina Hird, Daniel Shats, and Alison O'Neil. North Korea Joins Russia's War Against Ukraine: Operational and Strategic Implications in Ukraine and Northeast Asia. Institute for the Study of War. October 25, 2024. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/north-korea-joins-russias-war-against-ukraine-operational-and-strategic-implications>

Although some analysts argue that the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war will reduce the relevance of cooperation between Russia and North Korea, it is likely that the partnership will continue to develop and extend beyond the war against Ukraine. In the post-war period, ties with Pyongyang would provide Moscow with a **foothold in Northeast Asia**, offering **leverage over future nuclear negotiations** on the Korean Peninsula and an opportunity for its underutilized eastern region to integrate into the Northeast Asian economy. The partnership will remain aligned with the long-term strategies of both countries to eliminate the dominance of the US and China.⁵³



Conclusions

North Korea is interested in developing trade and defense cooperation with Russia, which allows it to reduce its dependence on China and weaken Beijing's influence on the North Korean regime. This shift in partnership poses risks to stability in Northeast Asia. To prevent regional tensions, it is important **to engage China in a dialogue on limiting Russia's influence** on the DPRK, support multilateral diplomatic efforts for the **region's denuclearization**, and strengthen **strategic partnerships with allies in Asia**, including South Korea and Japan.

Russia is likely to deepen its technological and military cooperation with North Korea to support the Kim regime and avoid international isolation. This cooperation allows the DPRK to obtain resources to enhance its autonomy and military capabilities, which threatens to increase international destabilization. To counteract this, **sanctions should be tightened against companies that facilitate the transfer of military technology** between Russia and North Korea, and **technology transfers** that could be used in North Korea's military programs **should be monitored**.

Economic cooperation between Russia and the DPRK serves as a mechanism to support isolated regimes and reduce the impact of sanctions. To limit this, it is necessary **to create an international coalition to monitor illegal economic transactions and initiate sanctions** against Russian-Korean economic ties. As supporting arguments, intelligence about the DPRK's activities in the war and international investigations into Russia's cooperation with North Korea can be utilized, emphasizing violations of international norms.

Russia will seek to leverage its partnership with North Korea to strengthen its role in Northeast Asia, put pressure on the United States and its allies, and negotiate over the international order, including nuclear policy. Dependence on partners like the DPRK makes Russia less interested in stability and denuclearization of the region. The DPRK's strengthening will exacerbate disagreements between the United States, China, and Russia, deepening the geopolitical divide.

⁵³ Sangsoo Lee. Russia and North Korea: A Long-Term Strategic Partnership. Center for the National Interest. October 1, 2024. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/russia-and-north-korea-long-term-strategic-partnership-213037>

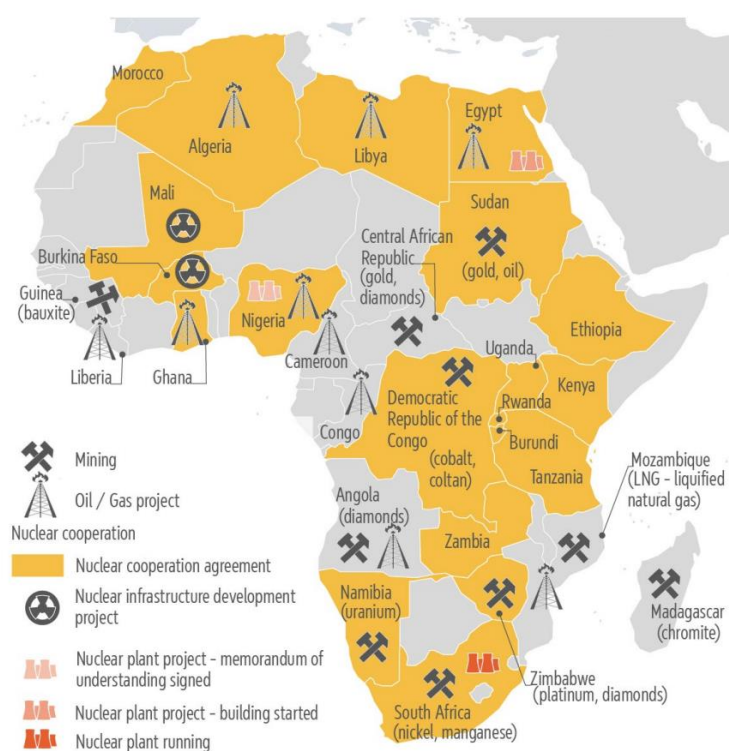
To counter such intentions, it is important **to reinforce joint military exercises with allies in the region**, demonstrating strength and deterring aggression. Equally critical is **to weaken Russia's partnership with its key regional allies**. To this end, **strategic differences and distrust** should be taken into account, particularly by highlighting Beijing's ambitions to dominate the region and the challenges posed by North Korea's cooperation with Russia.

Russian-African Relations

Russia is actively establishing political ties with African countries that are under sanctions or have suffered military coups. Particular attention is paid to regions with unstable political situations, which allows the Kremlin to promote bilateral military agreements and thus increase its influence. Russia's approach provides it with strategic access to resources and creates new dependencies in weak countries. However, this partnership is limited and focused on regimes that require military support rather than long-term economic cooperation.

Amid chronic instability and military coups, **regime survival** outweighs any potential benefits from cooperation with Western partners, which is based on building institutional capacity instead of securing power itself.

Russia's main projects in Africa revolve around **access to strategic resources** such as gold, diamonds, uranium, and oil. Some of Russia's largest companies, including state-owned or closely related to the state like Gazprom, Lukoil, Alrosa, Renova, Rusal, Rosatom, and Norilsk Nickel, have projects in Africa. Large projects are focused on diamond mining in Angola, gas pipeline construction in Nigeria, nickel production in Botswana, oil production in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, precious minerals mining in South Africa, and oil production in Equatorial Guinea.⁵⁴ Russia has also secured access to gold and diamonds in the Central African Republic, cobalt in Congo, gold and oil in Sudan, chromite in Madagascar, platinum and diamonds in Zimbabwe, and uranium in Namibia.⁵⁵



Main data sources: [S&P Global](#), 27 July 2023; [EIU](#), 2022; Rosatom (on [Mali](#) and [Burkina Faso](#)), 13 October 2023.

In addition to profits from oil fields, Russia's geopolitical goals in Libya and Mali are related to **access to naval ports** to ensure its position as a leading regional power. Russia also intends to limit Western influence and access to Libyan oil and gas. In the case of the Sahel, this is of particular concern, as Russian influence in these countries could **limit Western access to critical resources such as lithium or uranium**.

⁵⁴ Kathryn Stoner. *Is Russia Losing in Ukraine but Winning in the Global South*. Cambridge University Press. September 19, 2024. *Is Russia Losing in Ukraine but Winning in the Global South? | Slavic Review | Cambridge Core*

⁵⁵ Anna Caprile and Eric Pichon. *Russia in Africa: An atlas*. European Parliamentary Research Service. February 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757654/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)757654_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757654/EPRS_BRI(2024)757654_EN.pdf)

Russian private military companies (**PMCs**) are committing massive **human rights violations** and **misappropriating natural resources** in many African countries, exacerbating the already dire environmental situation on the continent. According to the Global Terrorism Index, sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by terrorism in 2023, with Burkina Faso—where Russian PMCs are active—becoming the country with the highest number of terrorist attacks. The number of deaths from terrorism there increased by 68%.⁵⁶ Actions by the Burkina Faso government, which, with the support of Russian mercenaries, is attacking the civilian population of Peul, are contributing to increased recruitment of jihadists. This wave of violence, accompanied by numerous abuses by armed forces, is forcing the population to seek refuge in areas where there is at least minimal stability.

In Mali and Burkina Faso, **migration flows** are already increasing pressure on neighboring countries. The cascading effects of conflict, terrorism, and migration pressures in the Sahel are affecting Senegal and Tunisia, as well as NATO partners like Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania.⁵⁷ ⁵⁸ In addition to the rise in **indiscriminate violence**, the outsourcing of security to Russian PMCs could cause **intra-military friction** that could exacerbate fragile civil-military relations.

Thus, the rise of terrorism, combined with Russia's aggressive activities in the region, including military operations, disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and the weaponization of migration, could deepen instability and vulnerability on the continent.

Despite Russia's ongoing efforts to build stronger business and trade ties with Africa, it lags far behind key competitors like China, the US, and the EU in trading volume and investment. Russia positions itself as a supplier of cheap services and technology but fails to invest in the region's sustainable development and thus is unable to offer mutually beneficial long-term cooperation.

While **trade** revenues between Russia and African countries amount to about **\$17.7 billion**, the value of African trade with the European Union, China, and the United States is currently **\$295 billion**, \$254 billion, and \$65 billion, respectively. Russia's investments in Africa are also minimal, accounting for **less than 1%** of total foreign direct investment (**FDI**) flows to the continent.⁵⁹

Thus, Moscow's main competitive advantage in the struggle for influence on the continent is its ability to provide relatively cheap security and military support services. This includes arms supplies, as well as anti-insurgency training and consultancy services.

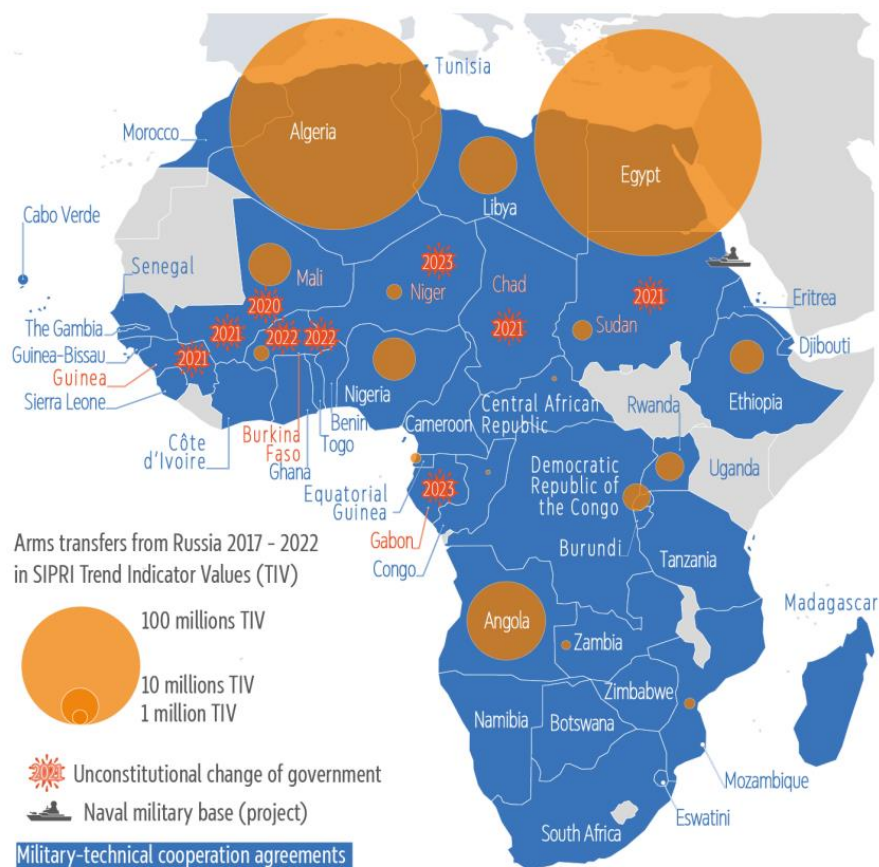
⁵⁶ Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism. Institute for Economics & Peace. February 2024. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>

⁵⁷ Beatriz Mesa. Migratory Movements Arising from Conflicts in the Sahel Countries. European Institute of the Mediterranean. 2024. <https://www.iemed.org/publication/migratory-movements-arising-from-conflicts-in-the-sahel-countries/>

⁵⁸ Tasnim Abderrahim. Maghreb migrations: How North Africa and Europe can work together on sub-Saharan migration. European Council on Foreign Relations. September 5, 2024. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/maghreb-migrations-how-north-africa-and-europe-can-work-together-on-sub-saharan-migration/>

⁵⁹ Joseph Siegle. Decoding Russia's Economic Engagements in Africa. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. January 6, 2023. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/decoding-russia-economic-engagements-africa/>

The **dependence** of many African countries **on Russian weapons** is explained by several factors. First, modern Russian weapons are usually cheaper than Western alternatives and are compatible with stockpiles of Soviet equipment that are still in use in many African states. Secondly, unlike the United States and its allies, Russia imposes no conditions regarding democratic norms or human rights in exchange for arms supplies. It sends armor, combat aircraft, and missile systems to countries at war, such as Libya⁶⁰, where Russia supports the fight of Eastern Libyan leader Khalifa Haftar against the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).



Data sources: [SIPRI](#), March 2023; [BBC](#), 22 June 2022; [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation](#), accessed 4 December 2023; [VOA](#), 3 October 2023.

To support loyal regimes, Russia uses private military companies (PMCs), in particular Africa Corps (the Wagner Group's successor). They exchange military assistance for access to resources and political concessions.

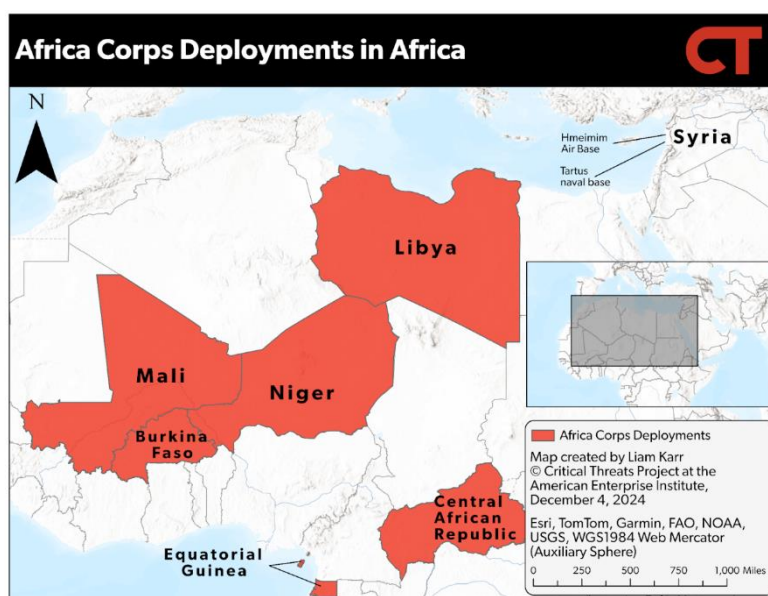
Russian PMCs are increasing their influence in unstable regions, leading to the **growth of terrorism and internal conflicts**. This policy increases risks to regional security and contributes to further destabilization of Africa. Currently, Africa Corps is deployed in the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Libya, and Sudan.⁶¹ The use of **hybrid methods**, including disinformation, increases overall instability. Russia has long used PMCs **to minimize official responsibility** and **avoid international scrutiny**, allowing it to participate in proxy conflicts at minimal cost. However, the replacement of Wagner with Africa Corps established a **direct link**

⁶⁰ Tom Kington. Russia funneling weapons through Libyan port, eyeing gateway to Africa. Defense News. April 19, 2024. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2024/04/19/russia-funneling-weapons-through-libyan-port-eyeing-gateway-to-africa/>

⁶¹ Marcel Plichta, Christopher Faulkner, Raphael Parens. The Wagner Group Lives on in Africa. Lawfare Institute. July 21, 2024. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/the-wagner-group-lives-on-in-africa>

between the PMC and the Russian Ministry of Defense. Thus, it will now be much harder for Russia to deny its involvement in military operations on the African continent. Direct state control creates risks, including legal consequences for human rights violations.

Africa Corps attempts to move into the **economic activities of its predecessor** by establishing new companies and empowering new individuals to help circumvent international pressure. In May 2024, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed new sanctions on Wagner-linked companies operating in the Central African Republic (CAR), but these came more than a year after the media and nongovernmental organizations exposed these companies' connections to Wagner.⁶²



Source: Liam Karr

Conclusions

Russia's presence in Africa is mainly aimed at gaining political and economic benefits through military cooperation, which undermines the continent's stable development. Russia has neither the interest nor the capacity to promote Africa's sustainable growth, as it focuses on supporting authoritarian regimes and using private military companies (PMCs), which exacerbates security, humanitarian, and environmental challenges in the region. To reduce Russia's influence, it is necessary **to intensify cooperation with international organizations, such as ECOWAS**, aimed at **curbing Russia's expansion, particularly in the Sahel region**. Supporting democratic processes is an important step in reducing the influence of military regimes that are Russia's main partners.

Monitoring and blocking illegal military activities, including arms supplies and violations of international law, play a key role in countering Russian influence. Active diplomatic and informational work is aimed at **highlighting Russia's negative impact** on regional security, ecology, and human rights. At the same time, it is necessary to offer African states **alternative economic programs focused on sustainable development** in education, technology, and infrastructure. Enhanced **control over natural resource extraction** is also required to prevent environmental violations by Russian companies.

Russian PMCs pose a specific threat that demands the extension of international sanctions against them and the exposure of their activities. **Documenting human rights violations** and presenting these facts to the international community will help hold accountable the governments

⁶² Marcel Plichta, Christopher Faulkner, Raphael Parens. The Wagner Group Lives on in Africa. Lawfare Institute. July 21, 2024. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/the-wagner-group-lives-on-in-africa>

collaborating with such entities. **Imposing sanctions on these governments** will reduce support for Russian PMCs while also intensifying Russia's overall isolation on the African continent.

Formerly the Wagner Group, Africa Corps is involved in numerous criminal activities, such as gold, mineral, diamond, oil, and timber extraction, with profits illegally funneled through shell companies and back into the Kremlin's network. A crucial step **in limiting the operational capacity of Russian PMCs** is to increase attention to the use of shell companies and tracking their financial transactions. **Seizure of assets** such as currency, property, and companies functioning as shell ones would significantly limit the ability of PMCs to profit from resource extraction and make it more difficult to find new sources of support.

Russia and the Middle East

Russia has several key priorities in the Middle East region:⁶³

- Political (opposing the formation of anti-Russian coalitions; maintaining the status of an influential international player; preserving Moscow's influence in the region; forcing the West to talk to the Kremlin on the Middle East issues);
- Security (minimization of the terrorist threat coming from the region; prevention of conflicts that could pose a threat to Russia's security or distract it from confrontation with the West; minimizing support for radical movements in Russia and the post-Soviet space);
- Economic (strengthening Russia's influence in the oil and gas markets; searching for sources of investment; securing markets for a number of Russian industries; using the region's transport and transit potential to gain access to Asian markets; easing the burden of sanctions).

The Middle East has become an essential market for Russian goods and a transport hub for access to Asia and Africa.

The Middle East region has become an **important end user** for a number of Russian products that have been expelled from the Western markets. In 2022-2023, there was a significant increase in the exports of Russian precious stones and metals to the UAE, petrochemical products and fuel oil to Saudi Arabia, oil to Turkey, and agricultural products to Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Egypt, and Morocco. Furthermore, as part of Russia's global reorientation to non-European markets, the Middle East has gained additional importance **as a transit hub**, facilitating Russia's access to the Indian Ocean, East Asia, and Africa.⁶⁴

To maintain high oil prices, Russia has intensified cooperation with OPEC/OPEC+ and its informal leaders, represented by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait. In addition to maintaining high oil prices, the Middle East region played a significant role in reducing the negative impact of the war in Ukraine on the Russian economy. The UAE and Iran have become important channels for so-called "**parallel imports**" to Russia, while countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, and Tunisia are involved in the **re-export of Russian oil and petrochemicals to Europe** and beyond.⁶⁵

The Kremlin seeks to maintain its status as an influential player in international arena through active political participation in the Middle East. However, it currently lacks the ability to act as a stabilizing force. Russia uses diplomacy as a relatively cheap way to solve urgent problems and demonstrate its own importance. It has spent a lot of time and effort to bring the Syrian regime

⁶³ Russian Relations With the Middle East After Putin's Invasion of Ukraine. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. September 11, 2023. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/russian-relations-with-the-middle-east-after-putins-invasion-of-ukraine-143131>

⁶⁴ Russian Relations With the Middle East After Putin's Invasion of Ukraine. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. September 11, 2023. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/russian-relations-with-the-middle-east-after-putins-invasion-of-ukraine-143131>

⁶⁵ Russian Relations With the Middle East After Putin's Invasion of Ukraine. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. September 11, 2023. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/russian-relations-with-the-middle-east-after-putins-invasion-of-ukraine-143131>

out of isolation, but the victory of the Syrian opposition confirms Moscow's inability to play a stabilizing role in the region.

Dependence on regional partners limits Russia's maneuverability in crisis management, forcing it to take into account the interests of regional elites, thereby limiting its ability to act independently and significantly influence the region. Russia has always tried to take a cautious stance and deal with all parties to conflicts and rivalries in the region. However, Iran's hostile relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are currently posing challenges to this strategy, even though the resumption of Iranian-Saudi diplomatic relations in March 2023 provided some additional flexibility. Given the risks to regional leaders posed by Iran's nuclear program, countries are likely to continue pressuring Moscow in order to limit assistance to Iran.

Conclusions

Russia is expected to keep using the Middle East as a platform to maintain its role as a global player, relying on **energy cooperation, sanctions evasion, and the expansion of its markets**. Cooperation with OPEC+ countries will remain a key aspect of Russia's economic strategy in the region. However, growing dependence on the Middle Eastern states and forging closer bilateral ties in this conflict-prone region are likely to weaken its political position. Russia will be forced to look for **new approaches to the balance between regional players**, but this does not guarantee long-term success.

The war against Ukraine significantly undermines Russia's ability to effectively influence Middle Eastern politics. Its geopolitical influence in the region is becoming increasingly limited as it loses resources and international trust.

Highlighting Russia's role in regional instability could weaken support from Middle Eastern partners. It is crucial to conduct information campaigns in partner countries and maintain a dialogue with regional leaders, **emphasizing Russia's inability to be a reliable ally**, and to **use its economic dependence** to limit its influence through diplomatic and economic pressure. The energy factor remains an important lever of Russia's influence, but stricter enforcement of sanctions, particularly through **monitoring "parallel imports" and re-exports** of Russian goods, could restrict its economic maneuverability.

Iran

The modern relationship between the two countries is built on mutual assistance in ensuring the regimes' viability.

This approach explains why, despite conflicting interests in the energy sector, Russian-Iranian cooperation continues to grow. For Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and the Revolutionary Guard, the survival of the Islamic Republic, with Russia's diplomatic and military support, takes priority over the economic benefits of Russia's exit from European oil and gas markets.

Iran and Russia are expanding their "unprecedented" defense partnership. Russia's dependence on arms trade with Iran is increasing. Iran has provided Russia with drones, ballistic

missiles, artillery shells, and other munitions for its war against Ukraine. Iran has also facilitated the construction of a drone production plant in Russia. In return, Tehran seeks to acquire advanced weapons from Russia, including air defense systems and fighter jets.^{66 67} Additionally, Russia shares intelligence with Iran, cooperates in cyber warfare, and assists in launching spy satellites.^{68 69}

Beyond defense cooperation, the strategic partnership between Iran and Russia is gradually extending into other spheres, from trade and intelligence sharing to nuclear energy, as evidenced by the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement** signed on January 17, 2025. The bilateral agreement may also pave the way for Russia to establish aircraft refueling centers and a naval presence in Iran, as the fall of Russian ally Bashar al-Assad's regime and the overall weakening of Russian influence in the Middle East threaten the presence of key Russian bases and assets in Syria.⁷⁰



Iran's possession of nuclear weapons could shift the balance of power, creating risks for global security. Russia is likely interested in keeping Iran at a "threshold" nuclear status to maintain regional uncertainty.

The leadership in Tehran expects Russia to extend its **security umbrella** over Iran. Indeed, Russia blocks Western initiatives on Iran at the UN. In March 2022, when the West was close to reviving the nuclear deal with Iran, Russia **derailed negotiations** by demanding a written guarantee that new Western sanctions related to Ukraine would not impede its trade with Iran.⁷¹ Some analysts argue that an economically and politically isolated nuclear Iran would allow Russia to exert greater control over the country, particularly over its economic resources such as oil and gas.

⁶⁶ Leonid Martynyuk. Russia increases arms trade with UN-embargoed nations to feed Ukraine war. Voice of America. November 18, 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-increases-arms-trade-with-un-embargoed-nations-to-feed-ukraine-war/7868778.html>

⁶⁷ Dion Nissenbaum and Benoit Faucon. Iran Ships Ammunition to Russia by Caspian Sea to Aid Invasion of Ukraine. The Wall Street Journal. April 24, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-ships-ammunition-to-russia-by-caspian-sea-to-aid-invasion-of-ukraine-e74e8585>

⁶⁸ Dov Lieber, Benoit Faucon and Michael Amon. Russia Supplies Iran With Cyber Weapons as Military Cooperation Grows. The Wall Street Journal. March 27, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-supplies-iran-with-cyber-weapons-as-military-cooperation-grows-b14b94cd>

⁶⁹ Iran sends satellites to Russia for rocket launch, Tasnim reports. Reuters. October 12, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/iran-sends-satellites-russia-rocket-launch-tasnim-reports-2024-10-12/>

⁷⁰ Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. Institute for the Study of War. January 17, 2025. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-17-2025>

⁷¹ Patrick Wintour. Iran nuclear talks rocked by Russian demand for sanctions exemption. The Guardian. Mar 6, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/iran-nuclear-talks-rocked-by-russian-demand-for-sanctions-exemption>

However, there are several reasons to doubt that Russia would directly support Iran in developing nuclear weapons. Firstly, Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would strengthen Tehran's bargaining position vis-à-vis Russia. Secondly, Moscow is unwilling to risk its relations with other regional leaders, such as Israel and the Gulf states, which oppose Iran's nuclear program. Iran achieving **threshold nuclear status** would suffice for the Kremlin's interests in its confrontation with the West, as it creates regional uncertainty and limits the United States' ability to focus on China and Russia.

Economic cooperation fosters the integration of both countries into parallel financial and logistical systems outside Western influence. The countries actively collaborate in numerous areas, promoting bilateral trade and business, implementing joint projects on the North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)⁷², and integrating their banking systems.⁷³ These measures aim to bypass sanctions and strengthen institutional capabilities beyond the West. Meanwhile, Russian investments in Iran are growing, with Russia becoming **the largest source of foreign direct investment** (FDI) in 2023, contributing \$2.76 billion of the total \$4.2 billion.⁷⁴ Although Iran, with its trade and investment potential, cannot fully compensate for Russia's decline in trade with Western countries, its **strategic geographic position** as a bridge for Russia to India, the Persian Gulf, the southern Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa remains critical.



Both Russia and Iran would prefer a multipolar world where the United States does not dominate the international system, and the West's ability to pressure authoritarian regimes is diminished.

The current Iranian leadership has chosen to abandon the previous administration's attempts to improve relations with the West, instead prioritizing relations in the Middle East and strengthening ties with global powers such as Russia and China. In Tehran, the Russia-Ukraine war

⁷² Nigar Bayramli. Iran, Russia Discuss Key Railway Connection Project. Caspian News. December 24, 2024. <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-russia-discuss-key-railway-connection-project-2024-12-24-0/>

⁷³ Iran, Russia Link Banking Systems in Effort to Bypass Western Sanctions. Foundation for Defense of Democracies. November 13, 2024. <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/11/13/iran-russia-link-banking-systems-in-effort-to-bypass-western-sanctions/>

⁷⁴ Andrey Zlobin. Russia became the largest foreign investor in Iran. Forbes. March 23, 2023. <https://www.forbes.ru/finansy/486578-rossia-stala-krupnejsim-inostrannym-investorom-v-irane>

and the international reaction to it are seen as evidence of the **weakening of U.S. dominance** and a corresponding shift in the global balance of power from the West to the East. This has prompted Iranian leaders to move away from their previous policy of balancing between East and West, focusing instead on **deepening ties with Russia and China**. While so-called moderate and reformist factions in Iran are skeptical of a partnership with Moscow, dominant political forces counterbalance this skepticism.⁷⁵

Russia seeks to limit alternative energy supplies from Iran to Europe as part of its energy blackmail strategy. For Moscow, it is beneficial to invest in Iran's oil and gas projects only to gain control over them, which would enable Russia to delay Iran's emergence as an alternative exporter of oil and gas to European markets.

Competition between the countries is intensifying due to international sanctions, which push them into illegal markets. Despite this, the strategic value of their cooperation outweighs economic differences.

Shortly after the war in Ukraine began, despite rising energy prices, Iran lost market share in China as it increased its imports of Russian oil.⁷⁶ International sanctions have pushed Russia and Iran into direct **competition in the shadow oil trade**. Additionally, Russia's dominance in Armenia's gas market through Gazprom hinders Iran's efforts to expand its exports and reduce Armenia's dependence on Russian energy.⁷⁷

This issue is exacerbated by the fact that both countries export and import similar goods, making them dependent on many of the same suppliers and markets. Nonetheless, some energy experts note that this initial competition is now being **moderated through the integrated global market**.⁷⁸ According to SVB International data, Iran's oil production in August 2023 rose to 3.15 million barrels per day, the highest level since 2018, with exports just under 2 million bpd.⁷⁹ Thus, contrary to the common perception that competition stemming from conflicting interests could limit the Russia-Iran rapprochement, both sides believe the long-term strategic value of their cooperation justifies economic concessions.

The Russian-Iranian partnership remains transactional due to geopolitical disagreements (e.g., in the Caucasus and the Persian Gulf). Tensions could escalate if Moscow reconsiders its strategic priorities or Iran loses confidence in Russian support. Therefore, the partnership is based on pragmatic interests but does not rule out conflicts in the long term.

Russia's reliability as an ally in the event of escalated tensions between Iran, Israel, and the United States or direct confrontation remains an open question. Russia has **limited capacity to provide**

⁷⁵ By Hamidreza Azizi. The Ukraine War: The View from Iran. The Cairo Review of Global Affairs. Fall 2022/Winter 2023. <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/the-ukraine-war-the-view-from-iran/>

⁷⁶ Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, Florence Tan and Chen Aizhu. More Russian oil going east squeezes Iranian crude sales to China. Reuters. May 20, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/more-russian-oil-going-east-squeezes-iranian-crude-sales-china-2022-05-19/>

⁷⁷ Vali Kaleji. Iran's Gas Export to Armenia: From Energy Imbalance in Iran to Russia's Monopoly in the Armenian Gas Market. The Jamestown Foundation. November 20, 2024. <https://jamestown.org/program/expanding-iran-armenia-energy-ties-combat-yerevans-reliance-on-russian-oil/>

⁷⁸ Ellie Geranmayeh, Nicole Grajewski. Alone together: How the war in Ukraine shapes the Russian-Iranian relationship. European Council on Foreign Relations. 6 September 2023. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/alone-together-how-the-war-in-ukraine-shapes-the-russian-iranian-relationship/#iranian-military-assistance-to-russia>

⁷⁹ Alex Lawler and Timothy Gardner. Iran's oil output, exports rise as Washington, Tehran talk. Reuters. August 31, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/irans-oil-output-exports-rise-washington-tehran-talk-2023-08-31/>

military support due to its focus on the war in Ukraine, as evidenced by its passivity in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in Syria. Instead, Russia views the escalation of indirect tensions between Iran and the United States as a useful lever to encourage Iran to pressure Washington's interests in the Middle East.

Long-standing geopolitical differences between the two countries cannot be overlooked. Recently, Russian-Iranian tensions in the Caucasus have increased due to the **Zangezur Corridor** project—a Turkish initiative aimed at connecting mainland Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. This corridor would block Iran's land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia at a time when Iran hopes to expand trade with Armenia and Europe.⁸⁰ Additionally, seeking trade and investment from the UAE and other Gulf countries, Russia has supported the UAE in its dispute with Iran over three islands in the Persian Gulf.⁸¹

Despite these differences, Russia and Iran will likely strive to prevent them from undermining their shared political goals and mutual benefits.



Conclusions

Russia, having lost some of its influence due to the war, seeks to maintain its position by cooperating with regional partners like Iran. However, geopolitical disputes and competition for limited markets could complicate this strategy. Monitoring and **highlighting geopolitical differences** between Russia and Iran could help exploit these tensions to disrupt their partnership.

With loosening constraints and increasing institutionalization, it is unlikely that Russian-Iranian defense relations will return to the previous "patron-client" model even after the Russia-Ukraine war ends. Given their strategic cultures and current dynamics, both countries are likely to continue **developing their military capabilities**, probably with mutual assistance.

To weaken the Russian-Iranian influence, it is necessary **to strengthen sanctions** enforcement, particularly **concerning military supplies and financial transactions**, and to expand restrictions against companies cooperating in strategic industries. Investments in enhancing **energy**

⁸⁰ Katherine Wells, Annika Ganzeveld, Andie Parry, Johanna Moore, Carolyn Moorman, Ben Rezaei, Alexandra Braverman and Brian Carter. Iran Update. Institute for the Study of War. November 12, 2024. <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/iran-update-november-12-2024>

⁸¹ Mark N. Katz. Is Russia really siding with the UAE against Iran. Atlantic Council. July 18, 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/russia-gcc-uae-iran-islands/>

independence in the Caucasus and partnerships with allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia could help limit the influence of both states. Accelerating sanctions on oil and gas exports from Russia and Iran, combined with alternative energy offerings to allies, will reduce their dependence on these suppliers.

Russia is likely to use Iran's nuclear program as leverage against the West, although direct assistance in developing nuclear weapons remains unlikely. To counter the nuclear threat, diplomatic efforts with Gulf countries and China should be intensified to **jointly monitor Iran's nuclear program**, while increasing pressure on Russia within international organizations like the UN to hinder its support for Iran's nuclear program. Expanding sanctions against individuals and companies involved in the program, as well as strengthening compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, remain essential tools in deterring Tehran's nuclear ambitions and Russia's nuclear blackmail.

Syria

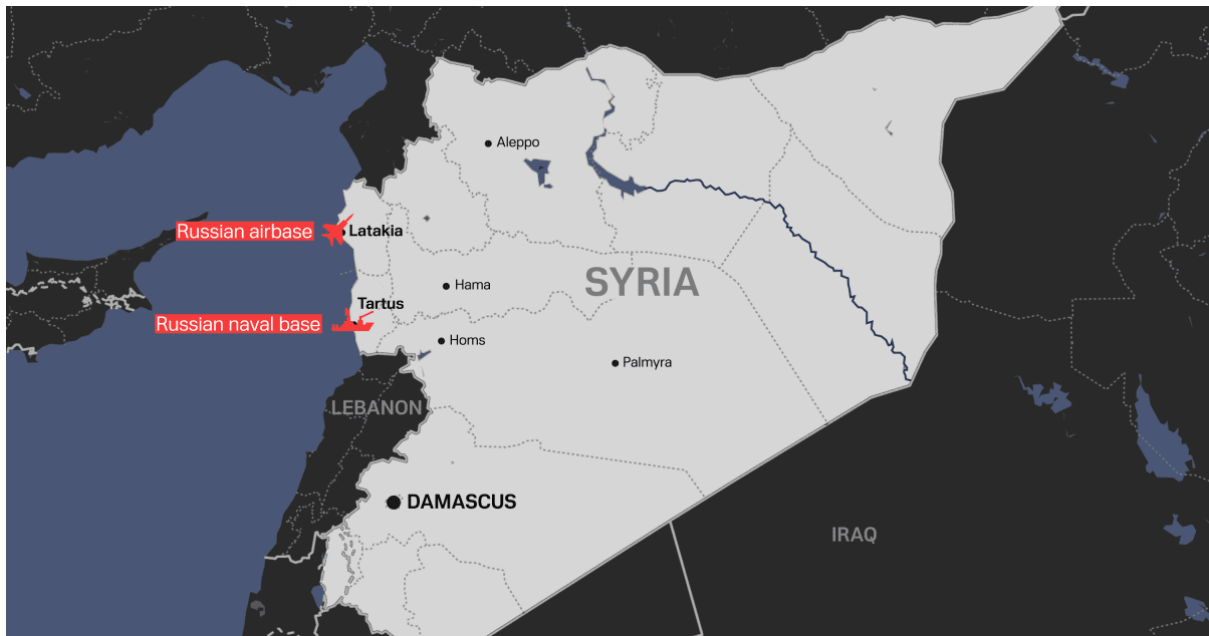
Since 2015, Russia has been the primary guarantor of the Assad regime, intervening in the Syrian conflict to preserve its ally. Its military campaign has included airstrikes, arms supplies, and the establishment of military bases that not only bolstered Assad's regime but also solidified Russia's presence in the eastern Mediterranean, ensuring strategic access to the region.

The Kremlin has also used its military presence in Syria to strengthen economic ties with the Middle East, in particular Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf states. This allowed it to increase its share of energy investments and coordinate actions with leading oil and gas producers on production and pricing.

The situation changed dramatically after the recent events in Syria, which marked the end of the Assad regime. Despite its extensive network of military bases and positions, Russia was unable to intervene decisively in response to the offensive by opposition forces. This is due to the significant diversion of Russian resources to the war in Ukraine, which limited its ability to actively defend its Syrian ally.

Now, Russia is facing serious challenges in maintaining its **strategic presence** in Syria. Negotiations with the opposition have yielded only partial security guarantees for the **bases in Tartus and Hmeymim**, while the fate of other facilities, such as the Qamishli base, remains uncertain. A gradual withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria has already begun, indicating a weakening of Moscow's regional foothold.⁸²

⁸² Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, and George Barros. Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. Institute for the Study of War. December 8, 2024. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-8-2024>



Russia continues to balance between preserving its geopolitical interests in Syria and inevitable losses brought about by changing political dynamics. Losing the naval base in Tartus and the airbase in Hmeimim would significantly limit Moscow's **ability to influence NATO's southern flank** and coordinate its **operations in the Black and Mediterranean Seas**. The loss of these bases would disrupt logistics and hinder operations, including those of Russia's Africa Corps.

The fall of the Assad regime has dealt a serious **blow to Russia's image as a reliable ally**, which could weaken its position among authoritarian regimes in Africa and the Middle East. However, the potential power struggle among the victors in Syria could create an opportunity for Russia to cooperate with certain factions, such as supporting the Alawites along the Mediterranean coast. Strategically, Russia may try to compensate for its losses in Syria by expanding its influence in other countries, such as Libya or Sudan. However, the lack of formal agreements and infrastructure in these regions limits such prospects.

Although the fall of the Assad regime in Syria is a serious blow to Russian influence in the Middle East, it **does not mean a permanent loss** of Moscow's position in the region. First, the overthrow is unlikely to result in the establishment of a pro-Western regime, as happened during the colour revolutions. Secondly, the Kremlin's relations with other Arab governments, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Egypt, are likely to remain strong due to shared economic interests.

Conclusions

The current events in Syria confirm the **limitations of Russia as a global player** capable of acting simultaneously on several fronts, primarily due to the redirection of most of its resources to the war against Ukraine. The loss of Syria as a strategic asset will complicate Moscow's ability to maintain proxy operations in Africa and the Middle East.

The change of political regime in Syria creates a **window of opportunity for anti-Russian forces** to gain a foothold in the region. In this context, it is worth considering expanding cooperation with Syrian opposition factions. Supporting humanitarian initiatives and reconstruction programs

in Syria will help strengthen pro-Western sentiments among the new government and emphasize the benefits of cooperation with democratic countries. This approach will contribute to the formation of sustainable political and social structures capable of resisting Russia's attempts to regain influence.

Although the fall of Assad's regime has significantly undermined Russia's influence in Syria, it has not entirely eliminated its presence in the region. Maintaining economic ties with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Egypt allows Moscow **to remain an active player in the Middle East's political and energy agendas**. However, the situation can be used as a precedent to demonstrate the **instability and unreliability of Russia's partnership**, which will help reduce its influence not only in Syria but also among other countries in the region.

PART II. RUSSIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

International institutions play a crucial role in shaping global governance, economic cooperation, and security frameworks. These organizations provide stability, facilitate dialogue among nations, and set the rules that guide international relations. However, their ability to adapt to geopolitical shifts is often slow due to their structural complexity, long-standing diplomatic commitments, and the need for consensus among diverse member states. Russia, as a major global power, has long sought to maintain and expand its influence within these institutions.

International Isolation of Russia

After the launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the international community started to isolate Russia, and the efforts peaked in the first half of 2022. The day after the outbreak of a full-scale war, the **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** severed relations with Russia. In March 2022, Russia's participation in the **Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)**, the **World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Group of Developed Countries Coordinating Council**, the **International Union of Railways (UIC)**, the **International Council on Archives (ICA)**, and the **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)** was suspended.

The most significant was the expulsion of Russia from the **Council of Europe (CoE)** after 26 years of membership. The **International Labor Organization (ILO)** suspended technical cooperation with Russia, and the **European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)** revoked Russia's observer status. The European Commission (EC) suspended Russia's participation in several grant research programs - **Horizon 2020**, **Horizon Europe**, and **Erasmus+**. Russia's participation in the **Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA)** and the **UN World Tourism Organization** was suspended, and cooperation with the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** was terminated.

Another significant event took place on April 7, when the UN General Assembly supported a resolution to terminate Russia's membership in the **UN Human Rights Council**. Russia was also expelled from the **International Gas Union** and the **Founding Board of the Geneva Center for Security Policy**. The **International Transport Forum**, the **Nordic Council of Ministers**, and the **International Organization for Standardization** also suspended or limited their cooperation. The **European Space Agency** decided to abandon cooperation with Russia on the Luna-25, Luna-26, and Luna-27 lunar programs. It also stopped cooperating with Roscosmos on Mars exploration projects.

In 2023 alone, Russia was suspended from 29 international organizations and other multilateral cooperation formats. Russia or its candidates were not allowed to be elected to almost 60 bodies of international organizations / other multilateral cooperation formats or their leadership positions (chairman, vice-chairman). Also, for the first time, Russia was not elected to the **International Court of Justice**, the executive boards of **UNESCO** and the **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**, and the **Council of the International Maritime Organization**.

On December 14, 2023, the **Danube Commission** decided that Russia's membership was incompatible with its missile and drone strikes on the Lower Danube. In March 2024, Russia was excluded from the organization.



Employees of the Council of Europe remove the Russian flag from the CoE building, Wednesday, March 16, 2022 in Strasbourg, France. Source: [ICJ](#)

Despite facing diplomatic isolation from a number of organizations, Russia is still a permanent member of the UN Security Council, giving it the opportunity to veto all the resolutions condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine. It is also involved in geoeconomic alliances such as the Group of Twenty (G20) and BRICS+, though being excluded from G8 after its occupation of the Crimea peninsula. In its regional sphere, Russia leads the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)** and the **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)**.

We should take a closer look at some of the most prominent organizations of Russia's presence, namely **BRICS+, Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation SCO** and **G20**, to better understand the current political dynamics, Russia's influence within them as well as its ability to leverage these platforms to advance its objectives.

BRICS+

Founded: 2009

Members: 10 (2025)⁸³

Prospects

At first, as **a coalition of major emerging economies** – Brazil, Russia, India, China – **BRICS+** has long served as a forum for promoting an alternative to Western economic hegemony. For Russia, BRICS+ is essential in positioning itself within a new multi-layer system of international relations, helping balance the influence of Western powers and partially counteract economic sanctions.



16th BRICS summit, October, 2024 in Kazan, Russia. Source: [BRICS 2024 Russia](https://www.brics2024.ru/)

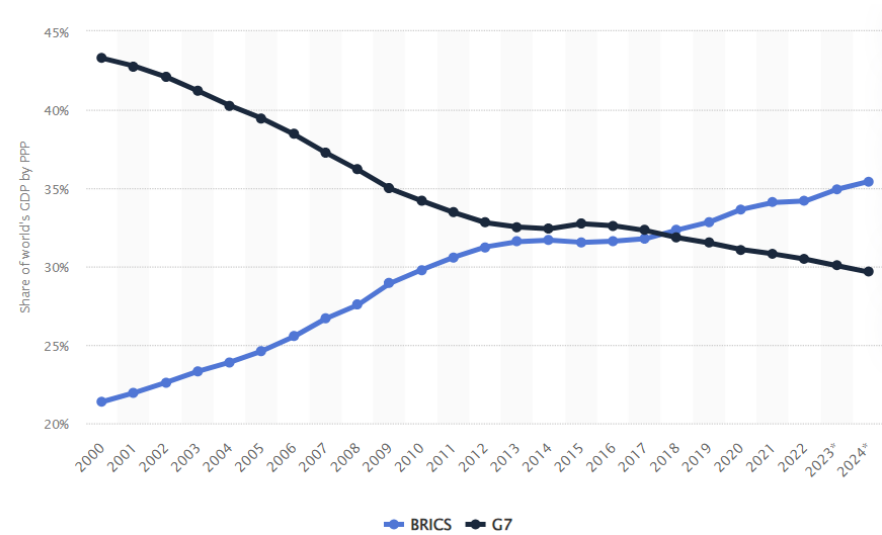
BRICS+ is distinguished by **state-driven economic policies**, a **robust public sector**, and integration into global markets primarily through **the trade of raw and processed natural resources**. The bloc contributes **25% of global exports**, with the G7 nations remaining its key trading partners. In 2023, BRICS accounted for 30% of the global GDP and 46% of the world's population, whereas the G7 represented 45% of the global GDP but only 10% of the population.

Notably, when measured by **purchasing power parity (PPP)**, the original BRICS countries have overtaken the G7, holding **a 31%** share compared to the G7's 29%, reflecting their economic momentum and the relative decline of G7 economies.⁸⁴ By 2024, the difference had increased

⁸³ Indonesia officially becomes full member of BRICS bloc. DW. <https://www.dw.com/en/indonesia-officially-becomes-full-member-of-brics-bloc/a-71233628>

⁸⁴ Hache, Emmanuel. 2025. "The Brics+: Towards Unlimited Domination of Commodity Markets? - IRIS." IRIS. January 27, 2025. <https://www.iris-france.org/en/186697-les-brics-vers-une-domination-sans-limités-sur-les-marchés-des-matières-premières-2/>.

even further, with the **BRICS now holding a total of 35% of the world's GDP** compared to 30% held by the G7 countries.⁸⁵



However, it is in the **domains of energy and metal commodities** that the bloc has the potential to establish itself as a dominant force. With the addition of some of the world’s largest exporters and holders of **hydrocarbon reserves**, including oil and gas, BRICS+ emerges as a formidable competitor to OPEC. In the **metals industry**, Brazil, China, Russia, and South Africa were already key players, but the inclusion of Saudi Arabia – aiming to position itself as a major mining hub – further consolidates their influence.

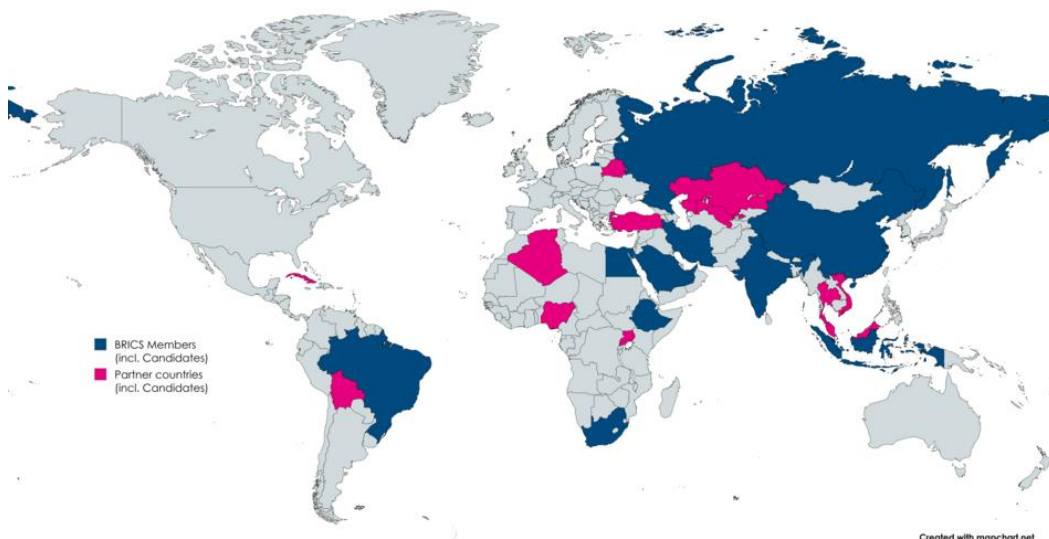
La production minière des BRICS+ (2023)								
Pays	Bauxite	Cuivre (raffiné)	Étain	Platini-um	Palladium	Plomb	Zinc	Terres rares
Brésil	8	-	6	-	-	-	-	-
Russie	2	4	1	13	44	4	3	1
Inde	6	-	-	-	-	5	7	-
Chine	23	42	23	-	-	42	33	69
Afrique du Sud	-	-	-	67	34	-	2	-
Arabie saoudite	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EAU	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iran	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total BRICS+	40	48	30	80	78	53	45	70

Les réserves de métaux des BRICS+ (2023)								
Pays	Bauxite	Cuivre	Étain	Paladi-um / Platini-um	Plomb	Zinc	Terres rares	
Brésil	12	-	8	-	-	-	-	19
Russie	2	7	9	8	-	9	5	9
Inde	3	-	-	-	2	9	6	-
Chine	3	3	22	-	21	9	40	-
Afrique du Sud	-	-	-	89	-	1	-	-
Arabie saoudite	1	7	-	-	1	1	-	-
Iran	-	-	-	-	2	47	-	-
Total BRICS+	21	17	39	97	35	72	74	-

Now the bloc consists of 10 members, with Saudi Arabia’s membership in the BRICS still being assessed more than a year after the kingdom was invited to join the alliance (though most of the BRICS maps already feature Saudi Arabia as an official full member). The entry of the United Arab Emirates and probable entry of Saudi Arabia would significantly bolster the group’s **energy leverage**, with BRICS+ being responsible for **43.1% of global oil production** and **44% of known reserves**, alongside **35.5% of global gas output** and **53% of reserves**.

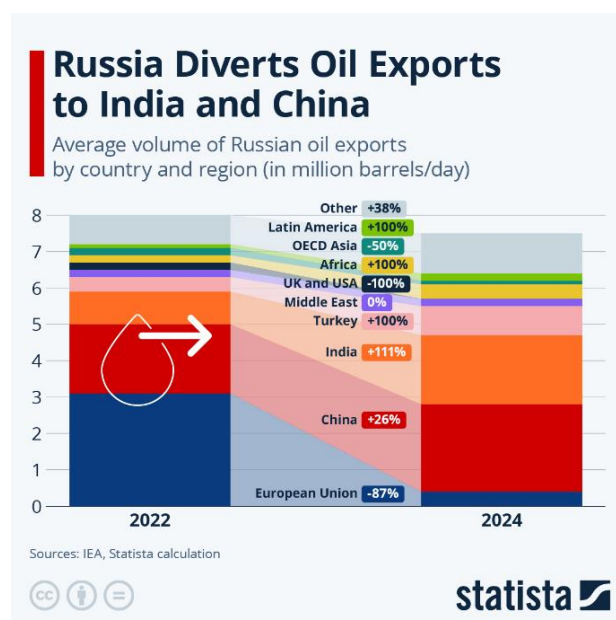
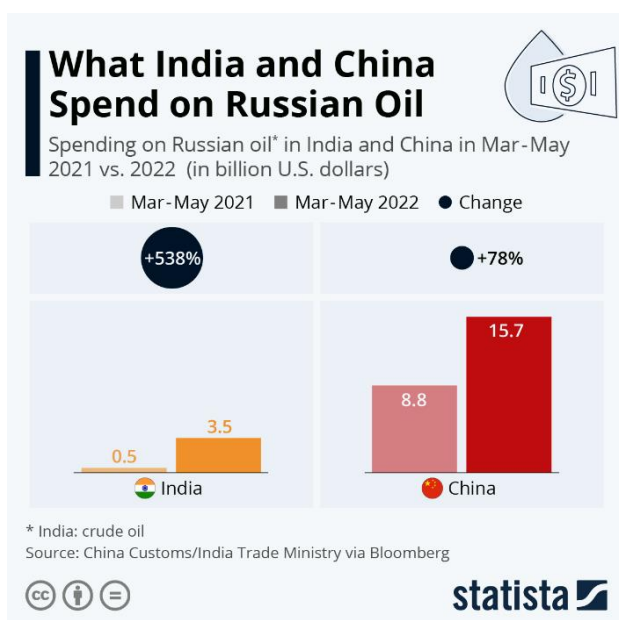
China’s endorsement of potential new members such as Nigeria and Kazakhstan suggests an ambition within the bloc to further strengthen its standing in the global energy sector.

⁸⁵ Statista. 2025. “BRICS and G7 Countries’ Share of the World’s GDP in PPP 2000-2024.” February 13, 2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1412425/gdp-ppp-share-world-gdp-g7-brics/>.



In the realm of **food commodities**, BRICS+ produces **42% of the world's wheat**, **52% of its rice**, and **46% of its soybeans**, underscoring its crucial role in ensuring global food security. This positioning grants the group a dominant and strategic role across multiple essential commodity markets, including food, energy, and an increasingly influential presence in metals.⁸⁶

Russia will probably push for **increased trade and investment within BRICS**, utilizing bilateral trade agreements that avoid the U.S. dollar and enable it to bypass Western financial systems. Even before the invasion, in 2021, the New Development Bank approved a \$1 billion loan for Russian infrastructure projects in 2023.⁸⁷



Russia-India trade volumes have reached historic highs. Bilateral trade between the two countries has reached a record \$66 billion in 2024, marking a fivefold increase over the past five

⁸⁶ Hache, Emmanuel, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Reuters, "New Development Bank Approves up to \$1 Bln Loan for Water Projects in South Africa," Reuters, August 31, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/new-development-bank-approves-up-1-bln-loan-water-projects-south-africa-2024-08-31/>

years.⁸⁸ **China-Russia imports and exports also reached a record high** of \$237 billion in 2024, according to Chinese customs data. In energy, China and India replaced the European Union market for Russia. In 2023, half of Russia's oil exports went to China, while India's share has risen to 40% in two years.⁸⁹

There are also efforts to promote **alternative currencies** and explore mechanisms like a shared **BRICS digital currency** for intra-group trade.⁹⁰

For example, Russia already uses the **yuan for energy exports to China**,⁹¹ while India purchases discounted Russian oil using **rupees and other non-dollar methods**.⁹² However, lukewarm interest in proposals for a BRICS currency – evidenced by key finance ministers skipping related meetings – highlights internal challenges.⁹³

Amid unprecedented Western sanctions, Russia aims to transform BRICS into a **parallel economic ecosystem**.

Russia is pushing for **greater use of the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS)** – China's alternative to SWIFT – within BRICS.⁹⁴ Russia's ultimate goal is to institutionalize BRICS as a geopolitical and economic counterweight to Western-led structures like the G7 and IMF. The **New Development Bank**, along with efforts to establish alternative payment systems, provides tools for Russia to bypass Western restrictions. The potential inclusion of strategically significant economies, such as Türkiye, could further strengthen this economic shield.⁹⁵

Russia may leverage BRICS summits and joint statements to amplify **anti-Western sentiment**, emphasizing themes of sovereignty and resistance to Western-imposed norms. At the 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia emphasized the need for a multipolar world order and advocated for reforms in global governance structures to reduce Western dominance.⁹⁶

Challenges for Russia

⁸⁸ "India-Russia Trade Hits USD 66bn in 2024; Target of USD 100bn by 2030 on Track: Russian Envoy." *The Economic Times*, November 27, 2024. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-russia-trade-hits-usd-66bn-in-2024-target-of-usd-100bn-by-2030-on-track-russian-envoy/articleshow/115734758.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

⁸⁹ Reuters. 2023. "Half of Russia's 2023 Oil and Petroleum Exports Went to China - Russia's Novak." *Voice of America*, December 27, 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/half-of-russia-s-2023-oil-and-petroleum-exports-went-to-china---russia-s-novak/7414124.html>.

⁹⁰ Ferragamo, Mariel. "What Is the BRICS Group and Why Is It Expanding?" Council on Foreign Relations, October 18, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-brics-group-and-why-it-expanding>.

⁹¹ "With 'Energy Cooperation', Russia/China Trade Booming Using Yuan/Rouble Currencies." MercoPress, April 17, 2023. <https://en.mercopress.com/2023/04/17/with-energy-cooperation-russia-china-trade-booming-using-yuan-rouble-currencies?utm>.

⁹² Kulakhmetov, Timur. 2024. "RUSSIA'S TURN TO THE EAST: ENERGY EXPORTS TO CHINA AND INDIA." Edited by Paul J. Saunders. <https://innovationreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-02-Russia-energy-china-and-india.pdf>.

⁹³ Seddon, Max, Charles Clover, Daria Mosolova, Martin Arnold, and Joe Leahy. "Vladimir Putin's Alternative to 'weaponised' Dollar Fails to Excite BRICS Partners." October 24, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/77ddacad-2de7-4bdc-bac7-d5ec3af32781>.

⁹⁴ Lee, Christy. 2024. "China Backs Russia-proposed BRICS Payment System." *Voice of America*, October 24, 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-backs-russia-proposed-brics-payment-system-/7836865.html>.

⁹⁵ Özdemir, Hüseyin. "BRICS as instrument for Russia's quest for influence." TRT World Research Centre. November 1, 2024. <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/featured/analysis/brics-as-instrument-for-russias-quest-for-influence/>.

⁹⁶ Marc Jütten. "Outcome of the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia." Epthinktank, November 8, 2024. https://epthinktank.eu/2024/11/08/outcome-of-the-16th-brics-summit-in-kazan-russia/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Diverging political interests and economic fundamentals among BRICS members – particularly between China, Russia, and India – make it challenging to form a unified strategy. The bloc's consensus-driven model often undermines its coherence, especially as new members with differing geopolitical priorities are integrated.⁹⁷ The recent expansion of BRICS+ to include new members (such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, and Ethiopia) **could strengthen Russia's efforts** to shift global economic influence away from Western dominance. However, this expansion also **increases internal fragmentation**, as new members bring differing economic models, geopolitical priorities, and relationships with the West. The inclusion of countries like Türkiye and Iran could exacerbate the tensions between them,⁹⁸ as Türkiye is a member of NATO. The diverse and sometimes competing economic interests and fundamentals of member states make it difficult to establish unified financial mechanisms or coordinated policies. For example, the proposal for a BRICS currency faces significant technical and political challenges, including the need to align monetary policies across vastly different economies.⁹⁹

Many BRICS members remain deeply integrated with Western financial systems, making full-scale **de-dollarization impractical** without causing major economic disruptions.¹⁰⁰

The U.S. and EU actively engage with key BRICS members like India and Brazil, offering incentives to maintain their neutrality or align with Western priorities.¹⁰¹ Both India and China have complex relationships with the West that they are unlikely to jeopardize.¹⁰²

Additionally, **BRICS also suffers from a lack of a strong institutional framework**, which limits its ability to implement decisions and coordinate actions effectively.¹⁰³

While Russia's close alignment with China within BRICS enhances its influence, **this partnership also diminishes Russia's leverage**.

Increasing dependence on China risks reducing Russia's ability to shape the organization's policies independently. While trade between China and Russia has reached all-time highs, its growth has decelerated considerably compared to 2023. Furthermore, China is diversifying its coal imports and seeking alternative oil suppliers in response to new U.S. sanctions targeting Russian oil producers and tankers.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Russia's weaker economic position – resulting from sanctions and reduced trade with the West – compounds these challenges. Compared to stronger economies like China and India, Russia lacks the economic capacity to take a leading role in major BRICS initiatives, further limiting its influence within the bloc.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

BRICS+ has evolved into a significant geopolitical and economic bloc, offering an alternative to Western-led structures and amplifying the voices of emerging economies. Its growing share of

⁹⁷ "BRICS in Transition: Aspirations and Challenges from the Kazan Summit." Beyond the Horizon ISSG. October 25, 2024. <https://behorizon.org/brics-in-transition-aspirations-and-challenges-from-the-kazan-summit/>

⁹⁸ Özdemir, Hüseyin, op.cit.

⁹⁹ ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ferragamo, Mariel, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ ibid.

¹⁰² Özdemir, Hüseyin, op.cit.

¹⁰³ Siphamandla Zondi, "The political economy of intra-BRICS cooperation: challenges and prospects". Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Konstantinovsky, Anya. 2025. "China-Russia Relations: January 2025." *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 28, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/article/china-russia-relations-january-2025>.

¹⁰⁵ "The Greater BRICS ' and 'the Global South': Cooperation, Governance, and Change". International Cooperation Center, August 9, 2024.

global GDP, dominance in key commodity markets, and increasing financial cooperation indicate its potential to reshape global economic governance. For Russia, BRICS+ provides a crucial platform to counteract Western sanctions, promote alternative trade and financial mechanisms, and advance its vision of a multipolar world order.

At this stage, **Russia is using BRICS+ as a geopolitical tool to mitigate the impact of sanctions, deepen economic cooperation with non-Western partners, and push for an alternative financial system that reduces reliance on the U.S. dollar.**

Moscow **has expanded trade with India and China**, rerouting energy exports and increasing the use of local currencies for transactions, particularly the Chinese yuan. Russia is also pushing for greater integration of China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) within BRICS+ to replace SWIFT, while advocating for a stronger role for the New Development Bank in financing infrastructure projects as an alternative to Western financial institutions.

Beyond economic cooperation, **Russia seeks to use BRICS+ as a diplomatic and propaganda tool to amplify anti-Western narratives and bolster its global legitimacy.** Moscow has actively positioned BRICS+ summits as platforms to call for a multipolar world order. This was evident at the 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, where Russia pushed for stronger coordination among members against what it describes as Western economic coercion.

However, despite these efforts, Russia's ability to fully leverage BRICS+ **remains constrained by internal divisions within the bloc.** Diverging geopolitical interests – particularly between Russia, China, and India – limit the effectiveness of collective action. Additionally, while Moscow seeks to lead a financial decoupling from the West, many BRICS+ members, including Brazil and India, remain deeply integrated into Western financial markets and are reluctant to jeopardize those ties. Moreover, **Russia's growing economic dependence on China within BRICS+ weakens its negotiating power, turning Moscow into a junior partner rather than an equal player.** While trade between China and Russia has reached record levels, Beijing has strategically balanced its economic engagement, securing discounted Russian oil while simultaneously diversifying its supply chains to mitigate risks associated with Western sanctions.

Ultimately, BRICS+ will continue to expand its influence, particularly in commodity markets and regional trade, and Russia will be using **BRICS+ as a shield against Western economic pressure and as a vehicle to reshape global economic governance in its favor.**

However, internal fragmentation, and competing national interests may prevent it from fully transforming into a unified geopolitical force capable of challenging Western dominance in global economic governance.

Prospects

The The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) consists of Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Belarus. Despite its mandate for mutual defense, the CSTO has remained relatively weak, symbolic, and highly dependent on Russia to function.

Russia may try to expand its military presence via CSTO. With heightened security concerns, Russia positions the CSTO as the leading defense network for its member states, allowing Moscow to expand its military presence (by stationing troops and deploying assets) in these countries under the framework of **"mutual security."** Russia uses CSTO as a means to intervene in internal crises, maintaining control over political dynamics in allied states (e.g., Kazakhstan in 2022). Russia will likely use CSTO to create a 'security buffer' around its borders, presenting itself as a protector of these countries from perceived Western threats.

Previously, Russia aimed to attract new members. Although there are no such real negotiations for now. Earlier, Russia was targeting states like Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia, and China. Azerbaijan would then serve as a critical juncture for energy pipelines and trade routes connecting the Caspian region to global markets. Its inclusion would extend the CSTO's reach to the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus, providing strategic access to the Middle East and enhancing control over vital energy corridors.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's subsoil is rich in oil, gas, coal, and uranium. For natural gas, it ranks 11th in the world for mining and 14th for reserves (2020), so Uzbekistan's inclusion would diversify the CSTO's economic base.¹⁰⁷

Challenges for Russia

CSTO members remain heavily reliant on Russia and its weaponry, yet Moscow can offer them far less than before.

From 2021 to 2024, **Russia's arms exports plummeted by 92%** as resources were redirected to the war in Ukraine, while sanctions, inflation, and financial constraints further crippled the sector.¹⁰⁸ In March 2023, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that, for the first time, Russia fell to third place among the world's largest military equipment exporters, trailing behind the U.S. and France. Meanwhile, China and Germany ranked fourth and

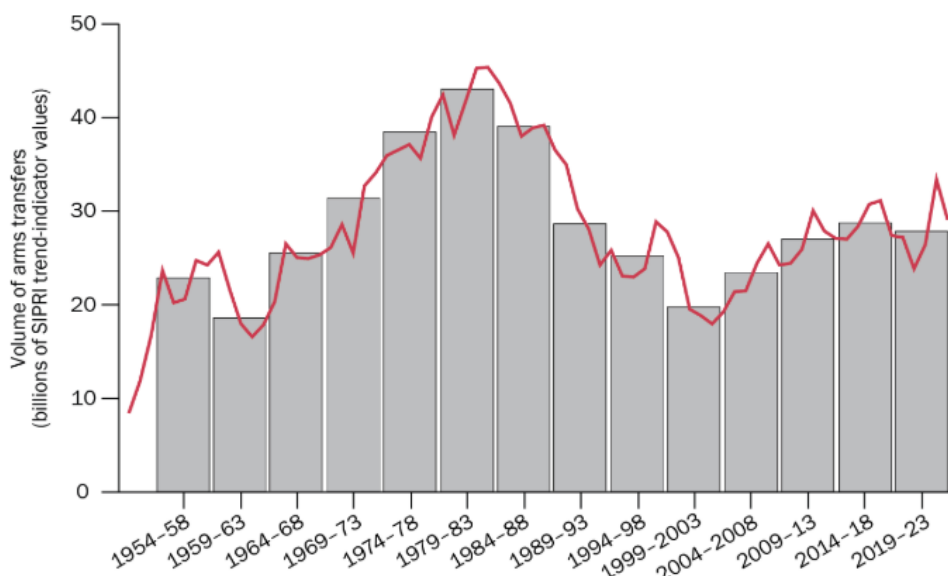
¹⁰⁶ Shahbazov, Fuad. "What Would Membership in the CSTO Mean for Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus?" CACI, October 18, 2018. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13541-what-would-membership-in-the-csto-mean-for-azerbaijan-and-the-south-caucasus>.

¹⁰⁷ IEA (2020), *Uzbekistan energy profile*, IEA, Paris <https://www.iea.org/reports/uzbekistan-energy-profile>

¹⁰⁸ "Россия Теряет Оружейный Рынок: Экспорт Рухнул В 14 Раз." *Arbat Media*, November 30, 2024. <https://arbatmedia.kz/exo-moskvyy/rossiya-teryaet-oruzeinyi-rynok-eksport-ruxnul-v-14-raz-8981?ysclid=m5bev7dbm465682812>.

fifth, respectively. According to SIPRI, Russian arms exports declined by 53% between 2019–2023 compared to the 2014–2018 period.¹⁰⁹

The trend in transfers of major arms, 1954–2023



Note: The bar graph shows the average annual volume of arms transfers for 5-year periods and the line graph shows the annual totals.

The **number of countries** purchasing Russian weaponry has also dwindled sharply. In 2019, Russia supplied arms to thirty-one nations; **by 2024, that number had dropped to just twelve.** Despite maintaining key customers such as China, Myanmar, and India, Russia's defense industry faces mounting challenges. High interest rates further strain the sector, threatening the future of its defense manufacturers.¹¹⁰

Misunderstandings, conflicts, and even armed clashes—both among CSTO members and with external countries is another feature of CSTO. This pattern has only intensified as Russia, traditionally the primary security provider for the bloc, has shifted its focus, becoming increasingly "absent" in its regional commitments.¹¹¹ There is little indication that this trend will reverse, fostering an environment of growing instability across the region.

Economist **Azamat Akeneyev**, based in Bishkek, remarked, ***"The CSTO is living its final days. Of its five members, four are at war, two between each other"***.¹¹²

- The **first** major point of contention is the divergence in perspectives on Russia's war against Ukraine. At a CSTO summit hosted by Russia on May 16, 2022, President Putin and his ally, Belarus, sought broader political and military support for the war effort against

¹⁰⁹ "6. International Arms Transfers." n.d. SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2024/06>.

¹¹⁰ Daly, John. "Russian Arms Exports Collapse by 92 Percent as Military-Industrial Complex Fails." Jamestown. January 15, 2025. <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-arms-exports-collapse-by-92-percent-as-military-industrial-complex-fails/>.

¹¹¹ Ambrosio, Thomas. "The CSTO: A Lifeless, Shambling 'Alliance' | GJIA." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, March 14, 2024. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/03/04/the-collective-security-treaty-organization-a-lifeless-shambling-alliance/>.

¹¹² Chaput, Vincent. "The Future of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) after February 24th: Implications for Russia's Hegemony in Post-Soviet Asia." European Army Interoperability Centre Finabel. Edited by James Edward Colombo, 2023. <https://finabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Future-of-the-Collective-Security-Treaty-Organization-CSTO-after-February-24th-Implications-for-Russias-Hegemony-in-Post-Soviet-Asia-Vincent-Chaput.pdf>.

Ukraine.¹¹³ Yet, Central Asian leaders neither acknowledged the war as a priority for the organization nor showed any willingness to participate in Russia's "special military operation." As a result, the CSTO provided no assurance as a collective defense body that it would support Russia.

- **Secondly**, Russia's refusal to assist Armenia in its conflict with Azerbaijan when Armenia requested CSTO intervention has underscored a lack of reliable support within the alliance. In response to this inaction, Armenia boycotted the November 2023 CSTO summit in Minsk, suspended its participation in joint military drills, refused to pay its 2024 financial contribution, and declined attendance at CSTO events.¹¹⁴ ¹¹⁵ On June 12, 2024, the Armenian leader stated in parliament, *"We have suspended our membership in the CSTO. The next logical step would be our withdrawal from the organization."* He added, *"We will decide when it happens. It could be a month, a year, or three years from now."*¹¹⁶ According to a retired Russian diplomat, *"Along with the Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia serves as an outpost against NATO member Turkey, which has a strong army standing across the border."*¹¹⁷ Should Armenia withdraw from the CSTO, Russia would lose this strategic buffer, weakening its security posture along NATO's southern edge.
- **Lastly**, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain in a state of armed conflict with one another,¹¹⁸ further straining the organization and underscoring its inability to resolve disputes even among its own members. Only in September 2022, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan engaged in four-day clashes that resulted in the deaths of approximately 50 civilians and left at least 121 others injured. The violence also forced over 130,000 people to flee their homes.¹¹⁹

CSTO was designed for **Cold War-style invasions** but fails to address **modern hybrid warfare** (cyberattacks, border skirmishes, insurgencies). **The CSTO charter is rooted in the concept of large-scale military invasions akin to those of World War II.**¹²⁰ This misalignment between the CSTO's framework and the nature of contemporary warfare renders it ineffective in addressing the real security concerns of its members. That is why if Russia pressures CSTO members to activate Article 4—which stipulates that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all, necessitating a collective response—the organization is likely headed for collapse.¹²¹

Post-war world could also create an opening for outside powers to increase their influence in the region either through bilateral ties with the post-Soviet states or by filling the vacuum left by Moscow.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Ambrosio, Thomas, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁵ Kozlov, Petr. "Russia Reckons with Loss of Regional Influence as Armenia Eyes Exit from Moscow-Led Military Bloc," *www.euractiv.com*, June 15, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/armenia/news/russia-reckons-with-loss-of-regional-influence-as-armenia-eyes-exit-from-moscow-led-military-bloc/>.

¹¹⁶ Chapple, Amos. "What Is the CSTO Military Alliance?" *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, June 14, 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/csto-military-alliance-background-photos/32991770.html>.

¹¹⁷ Kozlov, Petr, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁸ Gallopin, Jean-Baptiste. "The True Toll of the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Border Conflict." *Human Rights Watch*, May 30, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/30/true-toll-kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-border-conflict>.

¹¹⁹ *Human Rights Watch*. 2023. "Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan: Apparent War Crimes in Border Conflict," August 28, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/02/kyrgyzstan/tajikistan-apparent-war-crimes-border-conflict>.

¹²⁰ Krivosheev, Kirill. "Does the Collective Security Treaty Organization Have a Future?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 8, 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2021/06/does-the-collective-security-treaty-organization-have-a-future?lang=en>.

¹²¹ Пархит'ко, Олег. "Організація Договору Про Колективну Безпеку: Примара Чи Додаткова Загроза Для України." *Інтент: Суспільно-політичне видання*, September 10, 2023. <https://intent.press/publications/world/2023/organizaciya-dogovoru-pro-kolektivnu-bezpeku-primara-chi-dodatкова-zagroza-dlya-ukrayini/>.

Several CSTO states may already be preparing for the aftermath of the war in Ukraine by not excluding more stable and fruitful military alliances with other regional competitors like **China**. For instance, at an important meeting with Chinese Minister of National Defence Wei Fenghe held in April 2022 in Nur-Sultan,¹²² Kazakh President Tokayev insisted on the point that both countries have established a solid and comprehensive strategic partnership in the essential domains of peacekeeping operations, joint exercises, personal training, and military technologies. One could even imagine China, which has positive relations with the Central Asian states, being invited to mediate between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.^{123 124}

We also see evidence of the **West's reciprocal inroads** with Kazakhstan and Armenia. Kazakhstan has pursued closer economic ties with Western countries to attract investment. The EU is one of Kazakhstan's largest trading partners, and the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement 2016 between the EU and Kazakhstan has elevated bilateral relations to a new level, facilitating closer ties in 29 main cooperation areas.¹²⁵ In September 2023, Armenia and the United States conducted a joint military exercise, the "Eagle Partner 2023", with 85 U.S. soldiers being trained alongside 175 Armenian soldiers.¹²⁶



American and Armenian military during the EAGLE PARTNER 2023 exercise. Armenia. 2023.

Photo credits: dvdshub.net. Source: [Militaryny](#)

Conclusions

Russia is formally using the CSTO to maintain military and political control over its post-Soviet sphere, but the organization is facing deepening fractures that limit its effectiveness.

The CSTO provides Moscow with a framework to expand its military presence under the guise of

¹²² "President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Receives Minister of Defense of China." Official website of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, April 25, 2022. <https://www.akorda.kz/en/president-kassym-jomart-tokayev-receives-minister-of-defense-of-china-25340>.

¹²³ Freeman, Carla, Gavin Helf, and Alison McFarland. "China Looks to Fill a Void in Central Asia." United States Institute of Peace, May 25, 2023. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/05/china-looks-fill-void-central-asia>.

¹²⁴ Ambrosio, Thomas, op. cit.

¹²⁵ ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION AGREEMENT between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Kazakhstan, of the other part. OJ, 2016, L 29/3.

¹²⁶ "US Completes Joint Military Exercise in Armenia." Al Jazeera, September 20, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/20/us-completes-joint-military-exercise-in-armenia>.

mutual defense, as seen in **Kazakhstan in 2022**, where Russian-led CSTO troops were deployed to stabilize the government.

However, the CSTO's weaknesses have become increasingly evident. **Russia's war against Ukraine has stretched its military resources thin, leaving it unable to fulfill its security commitments to CSTO allies.** Arms exports have plummeted, reducing Russia's ability to maintain its influence through military aid and weapons sales. The organization has also failed to respond to multiple security crises among its members, such as **Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan** and the **ongoing clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**. The CSTO's inaction in Armenia's time of need has pushed Yerevan to suspend its membership and move closer to the West, marking a serious blow to Russia's credibility as a security provider.

Russia has sought to use the CSTO as a diplomatic tool to strengthen its influence, but **internal divisions and shifting geopolitical priorities among its members** are undermining this strategy. Central Asian states, particularly **Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**, are deepening ties with **China and Western partners**, seeking economic diversification and alternative security arrangements. China, with its growing military and economic influence in the region, could eventually **replace Russia as the primary security partner for some CSTO members**.

In the long term, **Russia's ability to use the CSTO as a geopolitical shield will depend on its capacity to maintain military dominance and political leverage over its allies.** If Moscow continues to weaken under the strain of war and economic sanctions, the CSTO risks becoming an increasingly hollow alliance, with member states seeking new security arrangements outside Russia's orbit. Post-war realignments could further weaken Russian influence in the region, allowing external powers like China, the U.S., and the EU to fill the strategic vacuum. The CSTO may remain nominally intact, but without major reforms or renewed Russian dominance, **it is at risk of fading into irrelevance as a functional security alliance.**

Prospects

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was established to enhance economic integration among post-Soviet states, aiming to reduce trade barriers, integrate financial systems, and coordinate industrial policies across Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

Post-war, Russia may push for closer economic integration (and reliance on Russia) within the EAEU.

Following the invasion of Ukraine, trade between Russia and other EAEU members **surged** as part of Moscow's import substitution policies. With European and U.S. companies withdrawing from Russia and Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia capitalized on the situation by re-exporting sanctioned goods.¹²⁷

In December 2024, during the meeting of the **Russian-Armenian** intergovernmental commission in Moscow, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk reported that the total trade volume between the two states more than doubled to \$10.2 billion in the first ten months of the year. Meanwhile, Armenia's Statistical Committee recorded an even higher figure, reporting nearly \$10.9 billion in trade – **an increase of 91%** compared to the same period in 2023.¹²⁸



Russia - Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk (right) meets his Armenian counterpart Mher Grigorian, Moscow, December 20, 2024. Source: [Ռադիոկայան](#)

¹²⁷ Rodeheffer, Luke. "The Future of the Eurasian Economic Union - Jamestown." 2024. Jamestown. April 3, 2024. <https://jamestown.org/program/the-future-of-the-eurasian-economic-union/>.

¹²⁸ Դեկտեմբեր. "Russia, Armenia Tout Record Bilateral Trade Amid Tensions." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, December 20, 2024. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33247573.html>.

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, **Belarus** has become more dependent on Russia than before. Following the invasion, the gap between Gazprom’s average export prices in Europe and those in Belarus reached record levels, allowing Belarus to save over \$10 billion (14.7% of GDP) in 2022 and nearly \$8 billion (11.2% of GDP) in 2023.¹²⁹ Additionally, Belarus secured a 30% discount on Russian oil compared to global market prices, leading to savings of up to \$2.4 billion (3.4% of GDP) in 2022 and \$1.5 billion (2.1% of GDP) in 2023.¹³⁰ By 2023, Belarusian exports to Russia surged to over 60%, while reliance on Russian transit infrastructure doubled. Belarus utilized 20 Russian ports that year, with exports through these ports growing by 130% annually. Moreover, Russia accounted for over 60% of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Belarus in 2023, further entrenching its economic dependence.¹³¹

Russia could further expand such a strategy to **other EAEU members**. It can possibly be through subsidized energy exports, low-interest loans, and infrastructure investments that bind member economies to Russia. For instance, **Kazakhstan** exports 80% of its oil via Russian ports (Novorossiysk) via the Kazakhstan-Russia Caspian Pipeline Consortium.¹³² Such measures would ensure that these countries’ economies remain intertwined with Russia, reducing Western influence. Russia might focus on controlling resource flows within the EAEU, especially with critical exports like energy and raw materials. This would strengthen Russia’s economic clout, as member states would depend on Moscow for essential goods and services, thus diminishing their reliance on Western markets.

Moscow could attempt to bring new states under EAEU influence, particularly countries affected by global instability. Efforts to broaden the EAEU's influence already include establishing a permanent free-trade zone with Iran, engaging in free-trade negotiations with India, and encouraging Uzbekistan to join.¹³³ Further similar moves would allow Russia to extend its economic network further, potentially positioning the EAEU as a competitive bloc in the Eurasian region.

Challenges for Russia

EAEU could not be such a good solution for circumventing sanctions because **the bloc is highly dependent on Russia**, the state that itself will be weakened by the war.

The EAEU’s main problem is Russia’s immense economic weight. According to the World Bank (2024), 2023 GDP data:¹³⁴

Russia	\$2 trillion (84% of EAEU total GDP)
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¹²⁹ “Belarus’ Increasing Economic Dependence on Russia.” German Economic Team. August, 2024. <https://www.german-economic-team.com/en/newsletter/belarus-increasing-economic-dependence-on-russia/>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Reuters. “Kazakhstan Eyes Significant Boost in Oil Exports Bypassing Russia | Reuters.” Reuters, November 25, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/kazakhstan-produce-884-mln-tons-oil-this-year-2024-11-25/>.

¹³³ Rodeheffer, Luke, op. cit.

¹³⁴ “Gross Domestic Product 2023.” 2024. *World Development Indicators Database*. <https://datacatalogfiles.worldbank.org/ddh-published/0038130/DR0046441/GDP.pdf?versionId=2024-07-01T12:42:23.8710032Z>.

Kazakhstan	\$261 billion (11% of EAEU total GDP)
Belarus	\$71 billion
Armenia	\$24 billion
Kyrgyzstan	\$14 billion
Total EAEU GDP	\$2.37 trillion

In contrast, the EU's GDP in 2023 was **\$18.5 trillion (over 9 times bigger than EAEU)**, proving that the EAEU is a far smaller and more fragile economic bloc.

Armenia, as a member with a substantial trade agreement with the West (Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement – **CEPA**), may offer an **appealing backdoor for Russia**. However, it is the only member without a shared border with others in the EAEU, which means any goods entering Russia through Armenia would still need to transit to a third country, making it a challenging option.¹³⁵ Kazakhstan's location and connections to China might offer a pathway for Russian imports. Yet Beijing, already positioned to engage directly with Moscow, has little need for Kazakhstan as a middleman.

In terms of resources, **Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are important gold producers**. However, the appeal of relying on gold as an economic anchor is limited by the realities of the modern financial system, where liquidity is far more valuable than gold in turbulent times. Additionally, the combined gold production of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is less than half of Russia's output,¹³⁶ making them unlikely to significantly bolster Russia's economy.

Though Kazakhstan's banking sector could theoretically handle some Russian export activity complicated by sanctions, its capacity is modest compared to Russia's, and the sector has been under scrutiny, especially following political unrest in January 2022.

Although in the short term, trade volumes within the EAEU have risen as the war has created new export opportunities to Russia, **the EAEU has made no progress** in addressing the member states' most pressing long-term economic challenges, such as **reducing their reliance on commodity exports, attracting investment into value-added industries, and reversing the ongoing brain drain**.¹³⁷

What is more, **there are no truly trans-Eurasian corporations or common Eurasian projects**. Currently, Russia mainly allocates its resources to bilateral projects and political support – neither of which leads to policy harmonization or EAEU interconnectedness. National industrial and agricultural policies remain uncoordinated. There is no general regulatory framework for taxes. Industrial cooperation is low, while protectionism is high. A lack of significant resources at the

¹³⁵ Hess, Maximilian. "Explainer: What about the Eaeu? Why Russia's Trade Bloc Is Not a Sanctions Backdoor." Eurasianet, March 4, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/explainer-what-about-the-eaeu-why-russias-trade-bloc-is-not-a-sanctions-backdoor>.

¹³⁶ World Gold Council. 2024. "Global Mine Production." *World Gold Council*. <https://www.gold.org/goldhub/data/gold-production-by-country>.

¹³⁷ Rodeheffer, Luke, op. cit.

EAEU level results in the dearth of mutual investments and the dominance of American and Chinese money coming in.¹³⁸

In late 2022, EAEU officials expressed their intention to establish a unified payment system. However, no tangible results have been achieved so far.¹³⁹

EAEU member states maintain trade relationships with Western countries and may be cautious about jeopardizing these ties by aiding Russia in evading sanctions.

Kazakhstan has recently emerged as a prominent critic of the EAEU, a stance influenced by its reliance on Russian pipelines and ports for energy exports. Aidan Karibzhanov, a leading Kazakh businessman, has even proposed that Kazakhstan consider withdrawing from the EAEU or suspending its membership in response to the Western sanctions on Russia and Belarus. Meanwhile, the Kazakh government has signaled its intent to adhere to these sanctions by implementing a ban on exporting 106 types of goods to Russia.¹⁴⁰

Armenia's CEPA with the EU allows trade integration with Europe, limiting dependence on the EAEU. **Belarus remains the only fully committed EAEU member**, given its deep political and economic dependence on Russia.

If Russia continues its strong efforts to reassert influence within the post-Soviet space, EAEU member states **may increasingly resist further integration (especially political one)** under the union's framework. Already, countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia are actively pursuing bilateral economic relationships with other global partners, independently of the EAEU structure.¹⁴¹

Conclusions

Russia is using the EAEU as an economic buffer against Western sanctions, leveraging it to maintain trade flows, secure access to resources, and reinforce economic dependency among its members.

With European and U.S. companies pulling out of Russia, **EAEU states have become critical intermediaries for re-exporting sanctioned goods**, helping Moscow mitigate some of the economic restrictions imposed by the West. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia have all seen trade surges with Russia, with Belarus in particular becoming deeply integrated into the Russian economy through subsidized energy and increased reliance on Russian ports for exports.

Russia also uses the EAEU as a tool to maintain economic leverage over post-Soviet states, particularly by offering discounted energy supplies, low-interest loans, and infrastructure

¹³⁸ Gontmakher, Evgeny. "The Uncertain Future of the Eurasian Economic Union ." *GIS Reports*, May 16, 2022. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/eurasian-economic-union/>.

¹³⁹ Tafuro Ambrosetti, Eleonora and Massoletti Mattia. "A Contested Past, an Uncertain Future: The Eurasian Economic Union 10 Years on | ISPI." 2025. ISPI. February 3, 2025. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/a-contested-past-an-uncertain-future-the-eurasian-economic-union-10-years-on-198661>.

¹⁴⁰ Жұлмухаметова, Жадра. 2023. "Қазақстан перестал поставлять в Россию сотню товаров." *Zakon.Kz*, October 19, 2023. <https://www.zakon.kz/sobytiia/6410894-kazakhstan-perestal-postavlyat-v-rossiyu-sotnyu-tovarov.html>.

¹⁴¹ Rodeheffer, Evgeny, op.cit.

investments. By **controlling key resource flows**—such as Kazakhstan’s oil exports via Russian ports—Moscow ensures that these countries remain economically tied to Russia, limiting their ability to fully pivot toward Western markets. Russia’s push for a common EAEU financial system and alternative payment mechanisms, such as a unified payment system to reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar, is also an attempt to insulate itself and its allies from Western financial pressure.

However, the EAEU’s long-term viability as a tool for Russian economic dominance is **uncertain**. The bloc remains heavily **imbalanced, with Russia alone accounting for 84% of its total GDP**, making true economic integration difficult. Member states, particularly Kazakhstan and Armenia, have resisted deeper political integration and have sought to expand their trade relations with China, the EU, and the U.S.. Kazakhstan has even publicly criticized the EAEU and has imposed restrictions on re-exporting sanctioned goods to Russia, signaling a desire to maintain a degree of strategic autonomy.

While Russia aims to use the EAEU to tighten its grip on the post-Soviet economic space, it faces growing resistance from within. Many EAEU members are actively diversifying their economic partnerships. If Moscow pushes too hard for further integration, it risks driving key members away or encouraging them to limit their participation in the union, as seen with Armenia’s growing disengagement from Russia-led institutions.

Ultimately, Russia is using the EAEU as an economic tool to bypass sanctions, maintain regional influence, and prevent its neighbors from fully aligning with the West. **However**, the bloc’s structural weaknesses, internal divisions, and the growing geopolitical ambitions of member states suggest that the **EAEU may struggle to evolve into a cohesive economic alliance**.

Prospects

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental organization established in Shanghai, evolving from the Shanghai Five group. Today, with nine members—China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—it stands as one of the largest regional organizations globally.¹⁴²

Top-3 SCO members in terms of GDP:¹⁴³

- China: \$17.7 trillion
- India: \$3.5 trillion
- Russia: \$2 trillion

Total SCO GDP is over **\$24.3 trillion** - more than the EU's GDP of **\$18.5 trillion** - but less than the U.S. GDP of **\$27.3 trillion**.

SCO member states collectively hold around **25% of global oil reserves, more than 50% of the world's gas reserves, 35% of global coal reserves, and approximately 50% of the world's known uranium reserves.**¹⁴⁴



Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in September, 2022 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Source: Eurasian Research Institute.

¹⁴² Gill, Bates, and Carla Freeman. "What Does Further Expansion Mean for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization? | United States Institute of Peace." United States Institute of Peace, May 30, 2024. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/05/what-does-further-expansion-mean-shanghai-cooperation-organization>.

¹⁴³ "Gross Domestic Product 2023." 2024. *World Development Indicators Database*. <https://datacatalogfiles.worldbank.org/ddh-published/0038130/DR0046441/GDP.pdf?versionId=2024-07-01T12:42:23.8710032Z>.

¹⁴⁴ Suresh, Anisree. 2023. "The SCO Energy Club as the New Energy Agenda Setters of Central Asia - Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)." Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR). August 25, 2023. <https://www.cppr.in/articles/the-sco-energy-club-as-the-new-energy-agenda-setters-of-central-asia>.

For Russia, the SCO has served as a crucial platform for Sino-Russian-Central Asian cooperation and as a potential vehicle for advancing its vision of a **Greater Eurasian Partnership**.¹⁴⁵

Through the SCO, Russia can negotiate long-term energy deals with members like China and India, fostering economic interdependencies that support its economy. The organization also provides a framework for collaboration on large-scale projects in infrastructure, technology, and energy, particularly in partnership with China—an essential avenue for Russia as Western markets remain inaccessible. According to Russian News Agency TASS, In 2023, Russia's trade turnover with SCO member states **rose by nearly 25%** compared to the previous year, reaching \$333 billion.¹⁴⁶

China's dominant role in the SCO adds to its global appeal, even drawing the interest of some Western partners.¹⁴⁷ It was more relevant before Russia's strained relations with the EU, exacerbated by the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which made formal ties between the EU and the SCO unlikely. But in the realm of security, the SCO seems an attractive alternative for countries seeking collaboration outside NATO frameworks. For example, Turkey, a NATO member, and Azerbaijan, a former strong contender for NATO membership, have become SCO dialogue partners. **Unlike the CSTO, the SCO balances Russia's geopolitical influence with China's presence, creating a more equitable environment for member states.**

Challenges for Russia

SCO continues to grow in influence, but largely due to China's active engagement rather than Russia's contributions. Member states increasingly view cooperation with China as more beneficial and promising. For instance, China is **Tajikistan's** largest foreign investor, accounting for an overwhelming 99.8% of foreign direct investment in Tajikistan in 2022.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, Tajikistan's reliance on remittances from citizens working in Russia has been undermined by Western sanctions and Russia's reaction towards Tajiks after the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack, where those arrested were of Tajikistani origin. This incident further made economic engagement with China and other partners even more critical for Tajikistan's economy.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised concerns in **Kazakhstan** about potential Russian irredentist ambitions over its northern regions, which are home to a significant Russian and Cossack population. In 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized Beijing's commitment to Kazakhstan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reinforced this stance, stating that China opposes any external interference in Kazakhstan's internal affairs.¹⁵⁰ Back then Tokayev and Wei Fenghe discussed bilateral and multilateral

¹⁴⁵ Maduz, Linda. "Flexibility by Design: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Future of Eurasian Cooperation." *CSS STUDY*. Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich. <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Maduz-080618-ShanghaiCooperation.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ Tass. 2024. "Russia's Trade Turnover With SCO Countries up Almost 25% in 2023 to \$333 Bln." TASS, July 9, 2024. <https://tass.com/economy/1814311>.

¹⁴⁷ Maduz, Linda, op.cit.

¹⁴⁸ "2023 Investment Climate Statements: Tajikistan". United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/tajikistan/>

¹⁴⁹ Gill, Bates and Carla Freeman, op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*.

cooperation in peacekeeping and military-technical spheres.¹⁵¹ In April 2024, the plan for bilateral military cooperation between Kazakhstan and China for 2024 was signed.¹⁵²

The SCO acts as a political and security framework that complements and supports the **China's Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) economic objectives**, often called the **New Silk Road**. It is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in history. In 2023, analysts identified the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (**CPEC**) as the largest BRI project to date, with an estimated cost of \$62 billion. This network of projects connects China to **Pakistan's** Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea. Overall, China has already invested an estimated \$1 trillion in BRI-related initiatives.¹⁵³



Sources: [Asian Green Real Estate](#) & [ChinaUS Focus](#)

Through SCO, China expands its overall economic influence in the region. Key initiatives include the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway, the establishment of the SCO Interbank Consortium, and the SCO International Road Transportation Agreement. While Russia has traditionally been cautious about these efforts, its influence in Central Asia has waned since the start of the full-scale aggression of Russia against Ukraine. This has resulted in tacit Russian acceptance of China's more assertive role in the region.¹⁵⁴

The organization itself faces several challenges that could hinder its development and effectiveness.

1. **One significant issue** lies in the differing visions held by **China and Russia** regarding the SCO's geographic scope and agenda. Beijing advocates for an expansive, internationally focused organization with deep economic integration, while Moscow prefers a more regionally constrained body with limited economic collaboration.
2. **Another issue** is that the accession of India and Pakistan has brought entrenched rivalries and tensions into the SCO, reducing its ability to achieve consensus on critical matters. **India and Pakistan have blocked each other's initiatives** within the SCO due to their longstanding geopolitical tensions, particularly over in **Jammu and Kashmir**. After a terror attack in Pulwama (Jammu and Kashmir, 2019), New Delhi pushed for stronger

¹⁵¹ "Kazakhstan, China Commend Bilateral Cooperation, Mark 30 Years of Diplomatic Relations - the Astana Times." The Astana Times. April 27, 2022. <https://astanatimes.com/2022/04/kazakhstan-china-commend-bilateral-cooperation-mark-30-years-of-diplomatic-relations/>.

¹⁵² "Kazakhstan, China Sign Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan." Kazinform, April 25, 2024. <https://en.inform.kz/news/kazakhstan-china-sign-bilateral-military-cooperation-plan-1eed26/>.

¹⁵³ McBride, James and Noah Berman. 2023. "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative." *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 3, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

¹⁵⁴ "The Global Evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation." *Lowy Institute*. July 12, 2024. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/global-evolution-shanghai-cooperation-organisation>.

counterterrorism measures within the SCO. However, Pakistan resisted Indian attempts to frame counterterrorism efforts in a way that would target Pakistan-based militant groups. In 2023, during SCO Foreign Ministers' Meeting, there were heated exchanges between India and Pakistan over cross-border terrorism, with Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar openly calling Pakistan the **"epicenter of terrorism."**¹⁵⁵ If the SCO fails to address its member states' diverse and evolving interests effectively, it risks losing its utility as a legitimate and effective instrument for regional policy-making.¹⁵⁶

Conclusions

Russia is using the SCO as a diplomatic and economic platform to maintain its relevance in Central Asia, deepen its economic ties with China and India, and counter Western influence.

Through the SCO, Russia has secured long-term energy deals, expanded trade with key members, and sought to advance its Greater Eurasian Partnership vision.

However, **China's growing dominance** within the SCO is gradually overshadowing Russia's role. Beijing's economic leadership, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, has made it the primary driver of development and infrastructure projects in Central Asia. China's investments in several SCO countries, such as Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, weakening Moscow's ability to dictate regional policies. The rise of Chinese influence, coupled with concerns over Russia's long-term economic stability due to sanctions and war-related expenditures, limits Russia's ability to use the SCO as a vehicle for its strategic ambitions.

Russia also relies on the SCO to demonstrate that it is not isolated on the world stage. The **expansion of trade within the organization**—particularly a 25% increase in Russia's trade turnover with SCO states in 2023—provides Moscow with a crucial economic lifeline as Western markets remain inaccessible.

However, **internal divisions** within the SCO limit Russia's ability to use the organization as an effective geopolitical tool. The inclusion of India and Pakistan has introduced deep-seated rivalries that prevent the organization from achieving meaningful consensus on key issues.

In the long term, **Russia may continue to leverage the SCO to promote multipolar narratives, secure economic deals, and maintain political influence**, but its declining regional dominance suggests that the **SCO will increasingly serve China's strategic goals rather than Russia's**. The extent to which Moscow can continue to shape the organization's policies will depend on its economic resilience and its ability to maintain its influence in Central Asia amid growing competition from Beijing.

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.etvbharat.com/english/international/top-news/you-are-asking-the-wrong-minister-s-jaishankar-tells-pak-journalist-on-terrorism/na20221216163304122122552>

¹⁵⁶ Maduz, Linda, op.cit.

G20

Founded: 1999

Members: 20

Earlier, the Group of Twenty (G20) has struggled to balance the need for global economic stability with the geopolitical realities of Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

The G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration (2022) stated that "most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stressed it is causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy – constraining growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity, and elevating financial stability risks," but noted that "there were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions."¹⁵⁷



The G20 summit in Bali on November 16 WILLY KURNIAWAN / AFP. Source: [Le Monde](#).

Then, in September 2023, **the G20 convened in New Delhi**, culminating in a communiqué which was criticized over the absence of any direct reference to Russia's role as the aggressor in the war on Ukraine. According to G20 Chair's Summary and Outcome Document, "G20 is not the forum to resolve security issues, we acknowledge that security issues can have significant consequences for the global economy". Ultimately, Western leaders opted for consensus, choosing to forgo a more direct condemnation of Russia in order to preserve unity within the G20.¹⁵⁸ Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, celebrated the outcome, calling the Delhi summit a success for Moscow.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Hajnal, Peter. "Russia's War against Ukraine: G7 and G20 Responses." January 25, 2023. <https://g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/230125-hajnal-senior-college.html>

¹⁵⁸ Lynch, Suzanne, and Alex Ward. 2023. "West Goes Easy on Russia to Save the G20." *POLITICO*, September 10, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/west-russia-ukraine-war-save-g20-summit/>.

¹⁵⁹ Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. 2023. "Russian Minister Says G20 Summit a Success After Criticism Over War Blocked." *The Guardian*, September 10, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/10/russian-minister-says-g20-summit-a-success-after-criticism-over-war-blocked>.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during the first session of the G20 Leaders' Summit at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on 9 September 2023. Source: [Force](#)

Despite sanctions, Russia's role within the G20 will likely remain significant, driven by the group's emphasis on **global economic stability**.

And Russia, as a major exporter of energy and resources, **retains strategic importance in global supply chains**. Given Russia's role in energy and agricultural markets that significantly impact Europe and Asia, G20 discussions may continue to include Russia, particularly in areas tied to resource security. Russia's federal budget revenue from oil and gas sales surged by over 26% in 2024, reaching 11.13 trillion roubles (\$108.22 billion). For the past decade, these revenues have been the Kremlin's primary financial source, contributing between one-third and half of total federal budget proceeds.¹⁶⁰

Key G20 members like China, India, and Brazil—who maintain **neutral or supportive positions**—may advocate for Russia's ongoing involvement, countering Western efforts to marginalize it. However, there may also be a stronger push from Western countries to prioritize trade diversification and create alternative supply chains to reduce dependence on Russian exports.

While some G20 members might favor Russia's exclusion or marginalization, the G20's diversity of perspectives makes a unanimous decision on Russia's exclusion improbable.

Furthermore, removing Russia would primarily cause **reputational rather than economic damage** to the aggressor, given its already limited access to global markets. Though reputational sanctions can deter potential offenders, they have limited effect on persistent violators—evident from Russia's continued economic growth and political activity even following its G8 expulsion after the Crimea annexation.¹⁶¹ The expulsion would not also deter G8 members from preserving bilateral economic and trade relations with Russia.

Conclusions

¹⁶⁰ Reuters. "Russian Oil and Gas Revenues Jump 26% in 2024 to \$108 Billion | Reuters." Reuters, January 13, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russian-oil-gas-revenues-jump-26-2024-108-bln-2025-01-13/>.

¹⁶¹ "G20 Bali 2022: Why Excluding Russia Is Not the Best Course of Action." The Conversation. April 1, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/g20-bali-2022-why-excluding-russia-is-not-the-best-course-of-action-180255>.

Russia is using the G20 as a geopolitical buffer against complete international isolation, leveraging its status as a major energy and commodity supplier to ensure its continued relevance. Despite Western sanctions and efforts to marginalize Moscow, the G20 remains a rare global platform where Russia can engage with both adversarial and neutral states, presenting itself as an indispensable player in global economic stability.

Russia benefits from the **G20's emphasis on economic cooperation over political conflict**, allowing it to avoid outright condemnation while maintaining dialogue with major economies like China, India, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia, which resist Western pressure to isolate Moscow. The **compromise language** in G20 statements—particularly the 2023 New Delhi communiqué, which omitted direct blame on Russia for the war in Ukraine—illustrates Moscow's success in exploiting divisions within the group to avoid stronger punitive measures. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov even framed the summit as a diplomatic victory, reinforcing the Kremlin's narrative that the West is unable to dictate global decision-making unilaterally.

Economically, **Russia continues to use the G20 as a forum to protect its interests in global trade, energy, and agricultural markets.** As a top **oil, gas, and wheat exporter**, Moscow positions itself as an unavoidable player in discussions on global food and energy security. Russia's oil and gas revenues surged by over 26% in 2024, reinforcing its ability to sustain its economy despite Western sanctions. With China, India, and other key energy consumers maintaining strong trade ties, efforts to exclude Russia from critical G20 economic discussions remain unlikely.

Although the G20 is **unlikely to serve as a platform** for Russia to expand its global influence significantly, it remains a crucial space for Moscow **to counter Western isolation efforts, maintain economic relevance, and project an image of continued engagement in global governance.**

Conclusions

Despite growing international isolation and sanctions, Russia continues to maintain significant economic and geopolitical influence, largely by exploiting the global dependence on its energy, raw materials, and military technologies. Its pivot toward “neutral” states – such as China, India, Turkey, the Gulf countries, Iran, and North Korea – has enabled it to circumvent Western restrictions, sustain its war effort against Ukraine, and promote a multipolar global order. However, this multi-vector strategy is increasingly undermined by structural vulnerabilities, including deepening dependence on China and alignment with isolated regimes, which limits Russia’s autonomy and strategic flexibility.

To counter these efforts, the international community must pursue a multifaceted strategy: reducing dependence on Russian exports by investing in alternative energy and trade routes, strengthening and enforcing targeted sanctions, supporting independent media, and promoting fact-based counter-narratives to Russian disinformation. Equally important is the need to challenge Russia’s growing influence in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia by bolstering regional alliances and offering viable economic and security alternatives.

Concurrently, Russia has turned to multilateral platforms – BRICS+, the CSTO, the EAEU, and the SCO – as instruments of resistance against Western dominance and as mechanisms to maintain global visibility. However, internal divisions, geopolitical rivalries, and Russia’s subordinate position – particularly to China – greatly limit Russia’s actions. Although BRICS+ offers financial and political opportunities, it is mainly dominated by China, the same happens with the SCO. Meanwhile, the CSTO and EAEU are increasingly challenged by member states’ divergent interests, their seeking of autonomy and alternative partnerships. At the same time, multipolar G20 still offers Moscow a space for engagement even if it reflects its declining ability to influence global decision-making.

In sum, while Russia remains an active actor on the world stage through both bilateral and multilateral channels, its influence is increasingly constrained by internal weaknesses, external pressures, and its reliance on stronger partners. Sustaining a rules-based international order and constraining Russian ambitions will require coordinated efforts to exploit these vulnerabilities, reinforce global resilience, and reduce systemic dependencies that empower authoritarian revisionism.



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