

**Analysis of the Russian Elite Discourse on
China in the Context of the Ongoing Ukraine
War**

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the discourse of the Russian elite regarding China during the ongoing Ukraine war. It focuses on how prominent political figures, including President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, formulate narratives concerning Russia-China relations. The study used the Discourse Historical approach, a Critical Discourse Analysis subfield, to investigate how the Russian elite uses discourse to portray China.

Russia's shifting narrative shapes the broader geopolitical scene, particularly in reaction to the dissolution of the USSR, NATO's enlargement, and Western sanctions imposed after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 war in Ukraine. This study examines the evolution of Russia's discourse by conducting a comparative discourse analysis of official speeches, interviews, and policy statements from 2014 to 2025.

The results of the discourse historical analysis reveal that Russian elite discourse characterizes China as a historical and economic partner and a geopolitical counterweight to the West. Argumentation techniques encompass claims to historical legitimacy, economic and monetary autonomy, and collective resistance to Western-imposed rules. Early, the post-2014 language primarily focused on economic cooperation and pragmatic relations, but recent rhetoric depicts China as an integral partner in Russia's vision of a multipolar world.

This study enhances comprehension of Russian foreign policy via discourse and its influence on global power dynamics. It integrates discourse analysis with international relations theories, precisely realism and constructivism, to illustrate how language functions as a mechanism for geopolitical positioning.

Keywords: *Russia-China relations, Ukraine war, discourse analysis, NATO enlargement, Russian elite, Western sanctions, strategic partnership.*

Introduction

Historical Background

The end of the Second World War in 1945 led to the formation of the Yalta-Potsdam world order when the leaders of the three great powers—the USSR, the UK, and the US—reached a consensus regarding the world map and peace¹. However, the world immediately transformed into a bipolar one when the two great powers, the United States and the USSR, adopted the strategy of deterrence, which was mainly related to nuclear weapons and mutual-assured destruction (MAD)².

The end of the Cold War did not mark the end of history as the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama predicted in his famous work titled *The End of the History and the Last Man* (1992)³. On the contrary, the emergence of new states such as Russia and Ukraine and the rise of China have continually added new chapters to the history of international relations and global politics. The ideological defeat of the USSR led to a unipolar moment for the United States and its allies, the European Union in particular. An essential factor of the following geopolitical tensions remained the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which did not dissolve after the Cold War, unlike the Warsaw Pact⁴. The United States used its unipolar moment and the weakness of a newly independent Russia, the successor of the USSR, and expanded its influence to the east,

¹ Anatoly V. Torkunov, William C. Wohlforth, and Boris F. Martynov, eds., *History of International Relations and Russian Foreign Policy in the 20th Century*, vol. 2 (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 2.

² Robert Jervis, "Mutual Assured Destruction," *Foreign Policy*, no. 133 (2002): 40–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3183553>.

³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 25.

⁴ Mary Elise Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 78.

which caused Russia to have national security concerns⁵. The two significant NATO enlargements in 1999 and 2004, the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003) and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004), which brought pro-western politicians to lead in the mentioned countries, led to the famous speech by Vladimir Putin in the annual Munich Security Conference in 2007⁶. This speech had a significant impact on global politics and security because it was one of the earliest instances that Vladimir Putin publicly contradicted the US hegemony and its unilateral actions, for example, the invasion of Iraq (2003), the enlargement of NATO, and the disregard for the United Nations Charter. This speech also announced the importance of the multipolar world order formation. Notably, in this famous speech, Vladimir Putin mentioned the economic success of China and India and emphasized that the GDP of the BRIC countries exceeded that of the European Union.

The above-mentioned historical context is the cornerstone to understanding the formation of Russia's current foreign policy stance and its relationship with China, in particular. The non-involvement of Russia in the collective Western bloc and the NATO enlargement towards the perceived post-Soviet Russian sphere of influence led to a defensive response from Moscow, particularly the Kremlin, which sought new strategic partnerships and cooperation to reinforce its national interests. Among the most vital partnerships is the growing cooperation between Russia and China. For more than two decades, their friendly neighborly bilateral relationship has evolved into a comprehensive strategic and then no-limits partnership marked by political, economic, and military collaboration⁷.

⁵ Jungwon Park, "NATO's Transformation in the 21st Century: The Expansion of NATO to the East," in *European Union at the Crossroads: The European Perspectives After the Global Crisis*, ed. József Bayer (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó Zt., 2011), 153–170, accessed March 31, 2025, <https://www.cceol.com/search/chapter-detail?id=548725>.

⁶ Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," February 10, 2007, Kremlin Official Website, <https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

⁷ "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China," February 4, 2022, Kremlin Official Website, <https://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.

The military tensions between Russia and Ukraine, particularly the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the officially titled Russian Special Military Operation in 2022, and the collective Western sanctions on Russia, played a significant role in isolating Russia from the West. This, in turn, pushed Moscow to intensify its ties with China to alleviate the burden of the sanctions.⁸ Considering this context, at the political discourse level, the Russian elite framed China as a vital partner and as a shaping, stabilizing force in the evolving multipolar world order fixed in the Concepts of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation⁹.

This thesis analyzes how the Russian elites, through their public political discourse, presented and justified the deepening of Russia-China cooperation. It emphasizes their common stance on key issues and shared goals, such as developing the multipolar world order in the ongoing war in Ukraine.

This analysis will be conducted through the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)¹⁰. The subfield analysis material consists of primary sources such as speeches and interviews by prominent Russian figures such as President Vladimir Putin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, and the Russian Federation's Foreign Affairs spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova. This study will mainly examine how Russia's discourse on China reflects the broader geopolitical strategies and ideological dimensions of its foreign policy. The period for the chosen texts estimates the post-Crimea period following the 2014 annexation and the post-2022 period after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

⁸ European Commission, "EU Sanctions Against Russia," *European Commission Press Corner*, updated January 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_123.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, March 31, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/.

¹⁰ Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001).

This evolving geopolitical landscape has prompted significant scholarly interest, yet not many studies have analyzed how Russia’s elite constructs China discursively in the context of conflicts: the 2014 conflict and the war in Ukraine in 2022. This thesis aims to fill the gap by offering a longitudinal¹¹ discourse-historical analysis of elite narratives. Focusing on how China is framed across crises, this study adds new empirical and theoretical insights into the interplay between identity, discourse, and foreign policy.

¹¹ Elisabetta Ruspini, “Longitudinal Research: A World to Explore,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research*, ed. Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 357–77.

1. Research Question

This study aims to analyze how Russian elites (Vladimir, Putin, Sergey Lavrov, and Maria Zakharova) constructed their discourse on China in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine by examining their speeches using the CDA methodology, particularly the discourse-historical approach (DHA). Considering Russia's advanced cooperation with China following the Western sanctions and NATO enlargement, elite discourse played a crucial role in shaping diplomatic narratives about the evolving Russian relations. A comparative analysis will also be conducted with the Russian elite discourse in the post-2014 period to gain an integral overview of the development of current relations. This will show the change in Russian discourse on China during the two crises. This research will primarily focus on discourse strategies, which serve as tools for framing China's role. This study seeks to elucidate how Russian political elites rationalize their foreign policy and formulate an ideological narrative regarding China's position in the evolving global order by examining the frequently identified discursive patterns. This research enhances comprehension of Russia's strategic rhetoric and the interplay of language, power, and international relations.

1.1 Methodology

This research employs the discourse-historical approach (DHA) that Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl proposed. This approach offers a methodical framework for analyzing political discourse by interpreting ideologies, concealed settings, and implicit messages¹². The DHA technique is appropriate for this research since it facilitates historical and contemporary analysis, illustrating the evolution of Russia's elite discourse on China from 2014 to 2025. Seventeen texts comprise speeches, interviews, and official declarations by Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov, and Maria Zakharova.

The selection of these political figures is not accidental. For example, in 2015, when Russia's relations with the West were deteriorating and relations with China were becoming more intense after the annexation of Crimea, Maria Zakharova was appointed Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹³. As her father served as a diplomat in Beijing and she spent a large portion of her childhood there, Zakharova's upbringing was strongly tied to China, and she speaks Chinese fluently. Hence, she has a deep understanding of Chinese diplomacy and culture, which helps her to shape her discourse about China with remarkable cultural sensitivity and accuracy. Similarly, Sergey Lavrov's extensive diplomatic experience influenced his knowledge of Asian settings. He gained firsthand knowledge of Eastern political culture, customs, and diplomatic techniques while working as a diplomat in Sri Lanka prior to being appointed foreign minister of Russia. His early exposure to Asian cultures deepened his knowledge of the continent and may have increased his awareness of China's strategic

¹² Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2009), 87-93, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251636976_The_Discourse-Historical_Approach_DHA.

¹³ "Press release on the appointment of Maria Zakharova as Director of the Information and Press Department," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, August 10, 2015, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1512749/

and cultural uniqueness, which later played a major role in his foreign ministerial speeches.

The analysis comprises five texts from the post-2014 era and 12 from the 2022-2024 timeframe. The selection of texts involves identifying those that expressly reference China and reflect the research question. The timing of speeches has been considered as they reflect significant political events: meetings, summits, diplomatic agreements, or reactions to Western policy. This study includes a comparative analysis of writings from two distinct periods to examine the evolution of Russian discourse on China. Five discursive strategies will be employed for text analysis.

1. Nomination

The nomination strategy analyzes Russian political officials' terminology to refer to China, including terms such as partners, friends, and neighbors.

2. Predication

The second technique is predication, which examines adjectives and other evaluative terms that characterize China.

3. Argumentation

The third strategy is argumentative discourse. It illustrates how Russia rationalizes its relationship with China.

4. Perspectivization

The fourth method is perspectivization, illustrating how Russian political elites align themselves with China.

5. Intensification/Mitigation

In certain instances, intensification and mitigation tactics will be employed to discern speech acts that amplify Russia's allegiance to China.

Conclusion

The selected texts were chosen based on their political salience, speaker status, and explicit reference to China. Speeches were collected from prominent political personalities to analyze elite-level discourse. Each text was analyzed utilizing five discursive procedures in Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA). This method guarantees consistency; nevertheless, the study is confined to public statements, which may not represent internal or confidential discussions. Moreover, judgments of discourse depend on contextual indicators and are therefore inherently subjective, albeit corroborated by consistent themes among speakers and timeframes.

1.2 Limitations

This study focuses solely on the discourse of three key officials in the Russian government: President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova. This selection reflects the official and strategic narrative of the Russian state, omitting viewpoints from opposition figures, legislative representatives, and other influential actors, including military personnel and policy advisors. The findings represent the prevailing discourse rather than the complete spectrum of elite thinking.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis in IR Studies

In International Relations, discourse as a concept and methodology is intricately linked to critical theory, post-structuralist, and constructivist approaches. Inspired by, among other things, Habermas's theory of communicative action, various critical international relations perspectives commenced recontextualizing reason and social action within linguistics. They focused on critical discourse analysis to investigate **how social power is reproduced and contested through text and dialogue in social and political contexts**¹⁴. Since CDA may detect dominant, marginal, oppositional, or alternative discourses within policy texts, such as policy documents and speeches, scholars Anna-Katharina Hornidge (2011) and Langan, Fairclough¹⁵ have frequently used it for policy analysis.

The primary theoretical approach to analyzing the discourse of the *Russian elite on China* is the *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)* theory developed by sociolinguist Norman Fairclough¹⁶, particularly the *Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)* developed by Austrian linguists Ruth Wodak, Michael Meyer¹⁷, and Martin Reisigl¹⁸.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) offer a thorough framework for comprehending the connection between ideology, power, and language. Nowadays, the term CDA is used more precisely to describe the

¹⁴ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7–8.

¹⁵ S. J. R. Cummings, L. J. A. de Haan, and A. A. Seferiadis, "How to Use Critical Discourse Analysis for Policy Analysis: A Guideline for Policymakers and Other Professionals," *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* 15, no. 1 (2020): 99–108, <http://www.km4djournal.org/>.

¹⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989).

¹⁷ Ruth Wodak, *The Discourse-Historical Approach*, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: SAGE, 2009).

¹⁸ Martin Reisigl, *The Discourse-Historical Approach in CDA*, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: SAGE, 2009).

critical linguistic approach of academics who believe that the broader discursive unit of text is the fundamental communication unit¹⁹. Nowadays, the word "critical" is commonly employed more expansively, signifying, as Krings contends, the practical integration of social and political participation with a sociologically informed understanding of society. Therefore, an entirely "critical" account of discourse would necessitate a theorization and description of the social processes through which individuals or groups, as social-historical subjects, create meanings in their interaction with texts. This is because CDA focuses on more than just spoken or written texts as objects of inquiry. Thus, three concepts—power, history, and ideology—are essential to all CDA²⁰.

2.2 Class and Power in CDA

Fairclough particularly emphasized the role of class and power in shaping discourse, mentioning that power relations within social institutions and society influence discourse orders. Looking at language as a social practice, he concludes that social structures shape discourse and, in turn, contribute to social change. Hence, he encourages analyzing texts and considering the circumstances of how they are created and understood. Individuals interpret texts using social norms because they are already at their cognitive level²¹.

¹⁹ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2001), 2.

²⁰ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2001), 3.

²¹ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1997), 19.

2.3 Text in CDA

The idea that a text is rarely the creation of a single individual is crucial in CDA. Discursive disparities are negotiated in texts, governed by power differentials partially encoded and dictated by genre and discourse. As a result, texts frequently contain conflict because they include evidence of competing discourses and ideologies vying for control. One characteristic that sets CDA apart is its focus on power as a fundamental aspect of social existence and its endeavors to formulate a theory of language that makes this a primary tenet. Close attention is paid to the intertextuality and recontextualization of conflicting discourses and power and control struggles²².

²² Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2001), 11.

2.4 Discourse-Historical Approach

DHA, which Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak developed, is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates theories, techniques, and empirical data from several domains to evaluate discourse in its social and historical context. DHA looks at intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and linguistic aspects to reveal speech's ideological foundations and power structures. This method concentrates on critiquing discursive processes, considering both the larger socio-political institutions that impact language use and the context in which it occurs. DHA uses this methodology to investigate how social, political, and historical circumstances both influence and are influenced by discourses. DHA examines complex issues present in society. This suggests that the study of language use—oral, written, and visual—remains but one facet of the entire endeavor. Hence, this study is interdisciplinary.

DHA, developed by Reisigl and Wodak, incorporates linguistic, historical, and sociopolitical aspects. This thesis operationalizes DHA by identifying five discursive strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation. Each technique was employed on distinguished works to analyze the portrayal of China across several periods. For example, nomination illustrates the labels assigned to China (e.g., “partner,” “civilizational power”), whereas argumentation elucidates the justification for collaboration (e.g., through historical solidarity or anti-Western alignment).

2.5 Critique, Ideology, and Power in DHA

To understand why this approach is the most suitable for this thesis, we should analyze DHA's three central tenets: critique, ideology, and power.

Even though critique is primarily "situated critique," adopting a "critical" stance should be interpreted as drawing closer to the data, placing the data in a social context, elucidating the discourse participants' positioning, and conducting ongoing self-reflection while conducting research. According to the conception of critique, the DHA should disclose the study's subject and the analyst's stance before providing a theoretical justification for why particular readings and interpretations of discursive events appear more legitimate than others²³.

In his book *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (1990), Thompson discusses ideology and its relationship to other ideas, particularly those related to mass communication. According to Thompson, ideology encompasses the social structures and mechanisms that allow hegemonic symbolic forms to circulate in the social world. We are excited by how language and other semiotic processes influence and replicate ideas in various social organizations. One of the DHA's objectives is to deconstruct the hegemony of particular discourses by identifying the ideologies that support, uphold, or challenge supremacy²⁴.

The three dimensions of the DHA are as follows: (1) after identifying the particular topic or substance of a given discourse, (2) discursive methods are examined. Then (3), context-dependent linguistic realizations (as tokens) and linguistic means (as

²³ Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 24-25.

²⁴ John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 28–67.

kinds) are investigated. Within the parameters of our technique, the focus should be on five questions when addressing these tactics in the analysis.

1. What are the language names and references for people, things, events, processes, and actions?
2. What traits, attributes, and features are ascribed to objects, processes, occurrences, events, and social actors?
3. Which arguments are used in the particular discourse?
4. From what point of view are these arguments, attributions, and nominations made?
5. Are the corresponding statements explicitly, vigorously, or subtly²⁵?

The combination of CDA and DHA provides a robust theoretical framework for analyzing the Russian elite's discourse in China. CDA highlights how discourse structures power, while DHA reveals how historical narratives legitimize geopolitical decisions. Other sections will discuss the more detailed methodology to uncover the discursive and ideological mechanisms behind Russia's strategic discourse on China, which shapes global power dynamics.

²⁵ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)," in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, ed. John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 93–94.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Russia's National Identity: Its Role in Foreign Policy

Understanding the discourse change of the Russian elite initially requires understanding the evolution of Russian identity, which is the core component of the foreign policy construction process. The Russian identity has been a central question for various Russian and international academics. However, to avoid diverting the core of this study, some particular scholars' ideas will be discussed below, particularly Andrei Tsygankov²⁶, political scientist Igor Zevelev, and Dmitry Trenin, to avoid going deep into the historical reasons. **The common argument is that Russia's geopolitical shifts after the dissolution of the USSR did not have only a strategic nature but were rooted in its national identity. Hence, one frequently met theme of Russia's foreign policy discourse is national identity. Thus, the Russian elite discourse on China is not haphazard but is directly linked to the national identity construction process.**

According to Andrei Tsygankov (2012), having evolved from a vulnerable and introspective nation in the 1990s, Russia has reemerged as a mighty power, increasingly proficient at preserving its international stature by deploying its economic and military assets.

In the 2000s, it utilized its energy influence to bolster Russian economic links globally, especially in Europe and Asia, strengthening its position as a global actor. In a progressively post-American and post-Western world, Russia is positioned to sustain its prominence as a crucial power in the strategically important Eurasian region. Russia, holding a position on the United Nations Security Council and membership in

²⁶ Andrei P. Tsygankov, profile, *ResearchGate*, accessed September 15, 2025, <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrei-Tsygankov>

international organizations like BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, will retain considerable influence in global affairs²⁷.

According to Dmitri Trenin²⁸, who was also the first Russian director of the Carnegie Center in Moscow, between 1991 and 1992, a newly independent Russia began constructing its identity from the ground up; first, it seemed that only marginal elements of its history could be pertinent to the evolving context. Historical events led to Russians exiting the Soviet Union as an incomplete, poorly delineated nation marked by a notably low degree of national consciousness, a lack of a mass-based national movement, and an unclear comprehension of its political limits. Between 1992 and 2011, issues about national identity were perceived as necessary. Vladimir Putin commenced addressing these issues earnestly only after returning to the Kremlin to initiate his third term in 2012. He executed this operation as part of the effort to restore Russian supremacy on the international stage. Putin asserts that strength and influence depend on the degree to which a nation's populace perceives itself as a unified entity, its alignment with its historical narrative, values, and traditions, and its solidarity in achieving shared goals and responsibilities. The endeavor to build and strengthen national identity is crucial for Russia. In this notable speech at the Valdai International Discussion Club in 2013, the president addressed the pursuit of national identity for the country he served as a third-term president. The speech prompted public statements, addresses, and private talks centered on preserving Russian identity in a changing global context. Between 2013 and 2016, they revealed substantial apprehensions about the Kremlin's anxiety about the unity of the Russian country and the grave threats it faces internationally. They have

²⁷ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West: From Alexander to Putin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–8.

²⁸ “Experts,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, accessed September 15, 2025, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/experts/287>.

demonstrated that Russian national identity has become a concrete matter of security and foreign policy rather than an abstract academic subject.

President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who constructed the official narrative, formulated a discourse that distinctly reflects a specific worldview influenced by the Kremlin's interpretation of Russia's history and national identity. This viewpoint is profoundly rooted in Russian intellectual history²⁹.

Zevelev's ideas also align with those of Trenin. According to Zevelev, the period from 2012 to 2016 catalyzed substantial changes in the construction of Russian national identity and foreign policy development. The principal feature of Russia's current foreign policy is the securitization of identity. The first suggests that Russia should be a robust and autonomous great power, serving as a bastion for all "conservative" elements that resist revolutions, disorder, and liberal ideologies propagated by the United States and Europe.

The second notion asserts the presence of a broader Russian World (Russkiy mir) that surpasses Russia's national boundaries and posits a Russian civilization distinct from Western culture. These concepts do not readily cohabit with prevailing Western discourses and have been regarded in the West as cognitively obsolete and primitive.

Nevertheless, the difference did not present any imminent threat to the world system or the European security framework until March 2014. This elucidates why Moscow's maneuvers concerning Ukraine were entirely unforeseen by numerous Western politicians and analysts: they had not examined Russian domestic identity narratives, which had become progressively detached from global trends. The enlargement of NATO and the EU, together with their growing influence and connections in the region, was

²⁹ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia Leaves the West," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2006): 87–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20032043>.

viewed in Moscow as a breach of Russia's geopolitical interests and a threat to its "civilizational identity" and historical narrative.³⁰

In conclusion, as Tsygankov, Trenin, and Zevelev suggest, Russia's national identity has influenced strategic decisions and the political elite's discourse and rhetoric. Thus, this study will investigate how Russia's changing discourse on China reflects this identity-based framework, especially in reaction to Western expansion and geopolitical changes.

3.2 The Nature of Russia-China Relations

After 2014, Russia's national identity evolved, so its foreign policy discourse was also altered, particularly the discourse covering China. This resulted in debates among scholars who remain divided on the true nature of Russia-China relations. Considering China's economic power and Russia's much weaker position, some scholars think these relations are based on necessity. In contrast, others provide middle-ground perspectives: Russia-China relations are based on strategic partnership and shared values and vision of the world. This section will discuss all the opinions mentioned above.

In his article "The Sino-Russian Partnership and Global Order" (2020), *Bobo Lo*, a well-known scholar, presented a skeptical view of Russia-China relations. He argued that Russia and China have no shared values, their agendas differ, and their relations are solely based on national interests³¹.

³⁰ Igor Zevelev, *Russian National Identity and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2016), 1–19, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161208_Zevelev_RussianNationalIdentity_Web.pdf.

³¹ Bobo Lo, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and Global Order," *China International Strategy Review* 2, no. 2 (December 2020): 297–313, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-020-00063-7>.

In contrast, Alexander Gabuev, another well-known scholar specializing in Russia-China relations, in his 2016 article titled “Friends with Benefits? Russian-Chinese Relations after the Ukraine Crisis,” argues that Russia’s economic engagement with China began before it annexed Crimea and the subsequent imposition of Western sanctions. Still, it has escalated in the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict. According to him, the rapprochement has expedited projects under consideration for decades, culminating in agreements on a natural gas pipeline and cross-border infrastructure, among other arrangements³².

Alexander Lukin, who specializes in Chinese studies, has a different approach from Bobo Lo regarding Russia-China relations. In his article written in 2018 titled “China and Russia: The New Rapprochement,” Lukin goes through two conceptions of Sino-Russian relations prevalent in Western scholarly and public discourse: one that reduces the existing cooperation between Moscow and Beijing as insignificant and another that expresses caution. He contends that the connection is neither a blank partnership nor a mere alliance. It is a ‘close strategic partnership’ influenced mainly by Western supremacy in international affairs. Russia and China are united by their mutual reluctance to acknowledge U.S. dominance and commitment to a multipolar global order. Lukin observes alterations in trading patterns and the increasing significance of China for Russian commerce. However, according to Lukin, Russia does not perceive it as a substantial threat. The starting premise is the conviction in the irreversibility of the schism between Russia and the West following 2014. Lukin discusses a psychological epiphany among the Russian elite, who have recognized the absence of chances for substantial

³² Alexander Gabuev, “*Friends with Benefits? Russian-Chinese Relations after the Ukraine Crisis*,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 29, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/29/friends-with-benefits-russian-chinese-relations-after-ukraine-crisis-pub-63953>.

change in Russian-Western relations and the West's refusal to acknowledge Russia as an equal partner. One cause for this is the West's pursuit of dominance, while another is the widening disparity in moral principles as conservative and traditional Russia confronts the morally compromised West. In this context, Russia's collaboration with China acquires further rationale³³.

In conclusion, scholars remain divided on Russia-China relations. The more skeptical scholar Bobo Lo sees their relations as pragmatic, hence no shared values and pure national interests. In contrast, Lukin views the Russia-China partnership as an *alignment* against Western dominance. Gabuev, discussing Russia-China relations, highlights Russia's economic dependence on China, particularly the post-Crimean crisis.

However, it should be mentioned that all these perspectives have limitations. For instance, Lo fully underestimates the common worldview framework, Lukin does not consider internal contrasts, and Gabuev focuses on economic factors and disregards discourse as an instrument of influence. Therefore, this study will fill these gaps by analyzing how Russian elites create narratives about China, exposing the discursive techniques influencing their changing relationship.

³³ Alexander Lukin, *China and Russia: The New Rapprochement* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/700355>.

3.3. Constructivism in Russian Discourse: Cooperation with China

While the realism theory explains Russia's power or security-driven motivations, constructivism sheds light on ideological and identity-based factors shaping Russian discourse on China as a strategic partner through shared identity, historical narratives, and ideological alignment. One of the prominent works of constructivist thought is Alexander Wendt's famous 1999 argument that "*Anarchy is what states make of it.*"³⁴ This article is particularly relevant because it displays how Russia frames China within its foreign policy discourse.

As we saw in the previous paragraph, realist scholars argue that anarchy is the natural state of the international system, which leads to conflict, as the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes author mentions in *Leviathan*³⁵. Russia's discursive framing of China as a "*no limits*" strategic partner or "*ideological friend*" exemplifies this constructivist logic³⁶. Despite previous historical tensions regarding borders between Russia and China, both parties have framed their relationship as a strategic partnership³⁷. Instead of referencing the schools of realism and viewing China as a rival in an anarchic system, Russia's discourse constructs China as a partner against Western hegemony³⁸. This proves Wendt's argument that anarchy does not unconditionally create adversaries,

³⁴ Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>.

³⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; repr., McMaster University Archive of the History of Economic Thought), <https://historyofeconomicthought.mcmaster.ca/hobbes/Leviathan.pdf>.

³⁶ Reuters, "Xi, Putin Hold Phone Call on Ukraine War Anniversary, State Media Says," *Reuters*, February 24, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/xi-putin-hold-phone-call-ukraine-war-anniversary-state-media-says-2025-02-24/>.

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Sino-Russian Partnership of Strategic Coordination Enters a New Era," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, May 31, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/wjls/3604_665547/202405/t20240531_11367562.html.

³⁸ Le Monde, "Russia and China Are United in an Ideological Battle Against the West – and Therefore Against Europe," *Le Monde*, April 13, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/04/13/russia-and-china-are-united-in-an-ideological-battle-against-the-west-and-therefore-against-europe_6022835_23.html.

whereas states define and build their roles and others based on shared narratives and ideologies.

It would be a mistake to ignore Russia-China cooperation in the BRICS, SCO, EAEU, One Belt and Road Initiative, and G20 in the context of constructivism. Constructivism argues that the foundation of international or regional organizations is enhancing material interests and reflecting shared identities and norms³⁹. It also provides an analysis of identity politics. It suggests a framework for comprehending the roles of nationalism, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, sexuality, and other intersubjectively recognized communities in global politics⁴⁰. Understanding how identities are constructed, what norms and practices accompany their reproduction, and how they build each other is a significant part of the constructivist research program's active participation in the BRICS, SCO, EAEU, and many others, demonstrating how it is constructing a new multipolar order with China outside Western influence.

In conclusion, while realist perspectives explain Russian attitudes toward Ukraine, following realist logic does not present the reality of Russia-China relations. Here comes Constructivism. Constructivism theory highlights the role of identity in shaping Russia-China relations, particularly how the Russian elite perceives China as a strategic partner rather than a threat; this also follows Wendt's assertion that international relations are socially constructed and not mere power calculation.

³⁹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/social-theory-of-international-politics/0346E6FDC74FECEF6D2CDD7EFB003CF2>.

⁴⁰ Hopf, Ted. "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory." *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 171–200. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539267>.

4. Critical Analysis of Russian Elite Discourse on China After 2014

4.1 Sergey Lavrov, April 15, 2014

The Foreign Affairs Minister of the RF, Sergey Lavrov, gave an interview on April 15, 2014, which was published in *China Daily*⁴¹. It is essential to consider that the interview happened one month after the annexation of Crimea. Hence, it was a pivotal moment in Russia's foreign policy. At this stage, the first sanctions were imposed on Russia, such as freezing assets and travel bans. Moreover, the EU-Russia summit in the European Council was canceled⁴². The central theme of the interview was Russia-China relations. Applying the Discourse-Historical Approach, this analysis will examine how Lavrov constructed and justified Russia-China relations.

Nomination

Lavrov used official terminology to nominate China, referencing the official joint document between Russia and China. Hence, 'the comprehensive strategic partnership' and 'unprecedented level' *are* mentioned in sentence⁴³. The choice of this terminology signaled formal cooperation in the scope of the joint document.

Organizations such as the SCO, BRICS, and the UN were characterized as platforms for promoting sustainable development.

Interestingly, the West is not mentioned or nominated in Lavrov's speech. This reinforced the idea that in 2014, Russia still kept its foreign policy and discourse flexible, not blocking further cooperation with the West.

⁴¹ Sergey Lavrov, "Interview of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to *China Daily* Published on April 15, 2014," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, April 15, 2014, <https://mid.ru/en/maps/cn/1725684/>.

⁴² European Council, *European Council Meeting (20-21 March 2014) – Conclusions*, March 21, 2014, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2014/03/20-21/>.

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Bilateral Relations," accessed March 18, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/3265_665445/3220_664352/.

Predication

Lavrov was minimalistic in characterizing Russia-China relations and only mentioned respecting *each other's interests*. 'In this interview, Lavrov did not frame China as a like-minded partner; this is the exact contrast to post-2022 Lavrov's discourse, which will be analyzed in the following chapters.

Argumentation strategy

Lavrov justified Russia's good relations with China by appealing to history, particularly WWII. He mentions, 'Friendship forged in the war laid a firm basis for today's relations.' This argument legitimized current cooperation based on the natural flow of history, strengthening the emotional aspect of Russia-China relations.

Lavrov appealed to joint military exercises to justify their relations, highlighting that their relations have an 'a special nature.' This implies that Lavrov anticipates future enhanced military cooperation yet does not frame China as a security partner against the West.

He also appealed to justice, mentioning that 'Russia and China advocate a just and democratic polycentric world order.' Interestingly, the word 'polycentric' is mentioned, which is a neutral word that does not suppose a direct opposition. Meanwhile, 'multipolar' suggests more competing blocs. This word choice highlights that in 2014, Russia's political discourse has not shifted toward an anti-Western stance. Also, till 2014, Russia did not create a new Foreign Policy Concept document and followed the 2013 document, where no direct sections mentioned the 'multipolar world.'⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Embassy of Russia in China, "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," accessed March 18, 2025, https://beijing.mid.ru/en/countries/rossiya/kontseptsiya_vneshney_politiki_rossii/.

Perspectivization Strategy

Regarding the Ukraine crisis, Lavrov qualifies China's stance as impartial. China abstained from voting on resolutions condemning Russia⁴⁵. Here, Lavrov hinted that Russia is not entirely isolated. Furthermore, he supported China's neutrality, not convincing China to endorse Russian actions.

Lavrov mentioned that multilateral platforms such as SCO, BRICS, and RIC create a basis for addressing the problems and shaping Russia-China cooperation. Lavrov avoids deterministic language similar to post-2022 discourse regarding creating a multipolar world. This also highlighted that both sides had an open window for collaboration with the West, so their ideological alignment was still not finalized in 2014.

Conclusion

Sergey Lavrov's 2014 discourse on China was non-confrontational and cautious. The key narrative was that China is Russia's partner within a polycentric world. The primary justification for their relations is the historical ties since WWII.

⁴⁵ United Nations, "UN Security Council Action on Crimea Referendum Blocked," *UN News*, March 15, 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464002-un-security-council-action-crimea-referendum-blocked>.

4.2 Sergey Lavrov, May 26, 2017

Foreign Affairs Minister Lavrov, on May 26, 2017, had a joint news conference in Moscow after the talks with Wang Yi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China⁴⁶. Compared to Lavrov's 2014 and 2017, the Russian discourse is more consolidated. In 2017, Lavrov fully prioritized economic ties with China. Russia tried to integrate its Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) with the Belt and Road Initiative, as the BRI had become the central pillar of China's strategy. Donald Trump was in the American administration. Thus, he adopted a firm restrictive policy on China and Russia, which enhanced Russia-China relations. This analysis will examine how Lavrov justified Russia-China relations in 2017. How Lavrov framed the West, and whether the discourse in 2017 differed from the 2014 discourse.

Nomination

Lavrov highlighted strong bilateral relations. The second was the *Belt and Road Initiative*, depicted as a 'successful organization.' The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was framed as complementary to the Belt and Road Initiative. Lastly, the BRICS, SCO, and UN were presented as multilateral platforms for cooperation. Compared to the 2014 discourse, the BRI and EAEU connection was new. Unlike in 2014, the West was referenced indirectly.

Predication

Lavrov used careful and diplomatic language to describe Russian-China relations. For instance, the 'high level of cooperation' highlights the gradual evolution of their

⁴⁶ Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Statement and Answers to Media Questions at a Joint News Conference Following Talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yi, Moscow, May 26, 2017," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, accessed March 19, 2025, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1547434/.

relations throughout history. The other qualification is that Russia-China relations are an 'important stabilizing factor in international affairs' with a 'balancing role.' Lavrov described their relations as a force for global stability and implicitly hinted at the counterbalance to the West. Lavrov also emphasized the 'progressive development' of the economy.

The key difference between the 2014 and 2017 discourses is that in 2014, Lavrov avoided making any references to the West, whereas, in 2017, he subtly hinted at counterbalancing the West.

Argumentation

Lavrov highlights, 'China and Russia cooperation ensures Eurasian stability.' Hence, he justified the Russian-Chinese good relations, appealing to the economy and security. He also stated that harmonizing EAEU and BRI will benefit all parties. To justify Russia-China's attempts to counterbalance the US, he highlighted that the US was using Pyongyang's actions to justify its military buildup in the region. Hence, he appealed to a common threat. He meant the 'balance of power' concept in the Realism school, and in this case, the US presence in East Asia disrupted the distribution of power.

Perspectivization

Lavrov emphasized the two countries' unity by saying, 'we were unanimous' or 'we support,' highlighting their endorsement of China's BRI initiative. He also portrayed Russia and China as rational and diplomatic actors who seek diplomatic solutions. He referred to the North Korea issue.

Conclusion

In this speech, Lavrov showed that Russia and China's partnership has a stabilizing effect, particularly in the context of multilateral organizations. By supporting the Chinese initiative, Lavrov harmonized the Chinese initiative with the EAEU for

Eurasian integration. The contrast with the West is only highlighted once regarding Pyongyang, which the US uses for extra military buildup in the region.

4.3 Sergey Lavrov, January 17, 2020

On January 17, 2020, Minister Lavrov answered media questions regarding Russia's diplomatic performance in 2019⁴⁷, related to Russia-China relations and the country's outlook on the world.

Nomination

According to Lavrov, Russian and Chinese relations are a comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation, also a reference to the official document. Lavrov also highlighted 'Moscow and Beijing foreign policy coordination.' This is an evolution; in the previous speeches in the post-2014 period, the coordination was not mentioned. Lavrov also emphasized that Russia and China have similar views on all the key international issues and highlighted that the two presidents signed a 'Joint Statement on Developing Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Interaction Entering a New Era.'

Predication

Lavrov presented China in a positive light, contrasting with the negative characteristics of the Western actors. Regarding the Syrian war, Lavrov mentioned, 'We coordinate the way we vote and invariably support justice, trying to prevent the adoption of decisions our Western colleagues often try to impose on us to further their unilateral agenda disregarding the need for reaching consensus.' Lavrov meant the veto by Russia and China about imposing sanctions against those parties in Syria who used chemical

⁴⁷ Sergey Lavrov, "Acting Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers to Media Questions at a News Conference on Russia's Diplomatic Performance in 2019," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, January 17, 2020, https://mid.ru/en/press_service/photos/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/1425037/.

weapons⁴⁸. Lavrov used 'we' in contrast to the Western colleague to show the alignment of Russia and China. However, it should be noted that in 2022, when applying to the West, Lavrov called them 'our Western colleagues.' Consequently, till January 2020, there were opportunities for both sides to cooperate.

Argumentation

Lavrov's argumentation during this speech appeals to stability regarding Moscow-Beijing relations, appealing to legalism mainly referring to the principles of the UN Charter and appealing to threat; this refers to the aggressive policy of the Western countries, particularly Lavrov mentions, 'The main destabilizing factor is the aggressive policy of several Western countries, primarily our American colleagues.' Further, Lavrov called the EU an aggressive minority that adopts unilateral resolutions.

Conclusion

Lavrov strategically positions China and Russia as constructive global actors, while the West is aggressive and destructive. China's cooperative image is presented as appealing to legalism, stability, and a common threat. Hence, Russia and China have a standard view of issues requiring multilateral action.

⁴⁸ United Nations, *"Russia, China Block Security Council Action on Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria," UN News*, February 28, 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/02/552362>.

4.4 Vladimir Putin June 6, 2018

On June 6, 2018, President Putin was interviewed by the China Media Group Shen Haixiong⁴⁹. The interview took place before Putin visited the People's Republic of China.

Nomination

Putin depicted China as a neighbor with a long history: '*Russia and China are neighbors. We have interacted for centuries, and our historical ties and roots go very deep.*' By highlighting 'centuries,' Putin meant that China is a time-tested partner with who they got through many things. In this speech, China was presented as an economic powerhouse. Putin mentioned, 'Today, China is Russia's number one trade partner.' Putin inferred that China's economy is vast and has long been Russia's most significant partner, contrasting with the West.

Predication

Putin qualified China as a development-oriented country similar to Russia. Putin asked, 'What lies at the foundation of everything President Xi Jinping said? The aspiration to improve people's lives.' Putin also characterized China as a country focused on innovation and cooperation. He highlighted, 'We know that China already has had significant achievements, for example, in the field of the Internet of Things and digital commerce. However, this will not be enough for both China and Russia's successful development in the short term. We need to develop digital technologies in industry, infrastructure, and energy, including in the electric power industry and alternative types of energy.' Putin meant that Russia and China should expand their cooperation.

⁴⁹ Vladimir Putin, *Interview with China Media Group, June 6, 2018*, Kremlin, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/57684>.

Argumentation

Putin appealed to many factors to justify the relations with China. For instance, he appealed to economic growth: ‘Last year, trade reached \$87 billion, and this year, the growth in the first four months was the same as last year.’ Or, Putin used an appeal to geopolitical justification, making sure that their cooperation was not conducted against anyone: ‘All of this, together with our military capabilities, constitutes a huge force that we, of course, will not use for confrontation but for establishing the necessary conditions for multifaceted cooperation.’

Perspectivization

Putin presented the BRI as an opportunity from the Russian point of view, mainly when he mentioned, ‘We believe that it is a useful, important, and promising initiative. It meets our effort to build the Eurasian Economic Union.’ He aligned the BRI initiative with the EAEU, which is frequently done by the Russian elite throughout many speeches. Putin also emphasized that Russia and China are cooperative forces in global security, and their visions match. He stated, ‘Our approaches, as diplomats say, are the same or similar.’

Conclusion

Putin’s statements on China were meant to frame the narrative that China, as an economic and technological powerhouse, is a global stabilizing force. Its initiatives benefit China and Russia, as the two countries have similar views on development.

4.5 Vladimir Putin April 27, 2019

On April 27, 2019, in Beijing, the Belt and Road Initiative Forum for International Cooperation took place, where the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, participated⁵⁰. After the roundtable, Putin answered the questions of journalists.

Nomination

Putin described China as a vast country; its plans are immense and ambitious. In other words, in the eyes of Putin, China was an economic powerhouse. The next nomination given by Putin is a rule-abiding actor who accepts and initiates programs based on institutional principles; ‘what it is doing is attempting to reaffirm the principles set out by the WTO and IMF.’ Putin meant that the BRI resulted in skeptical discussions among Western leaders, and Putin assured that Russia’s initiative was in the frame of the International Organization principles that China had membership.

Predication

In his answers, Putin praised China’s positive characteristics and highlighted its role in international relations. For instance, he emphasized economic pragmatism, ‘When China implements anything, it uses a highly pragmatic approach to achieve its tasks.’ In this context, Putin meant the long-term plans of the BRI and China.

China was also embraced due to its strategic caution: ‘China acts in a highly civilized manner... ensuring proposals for common development meet the interests of the vast majority of international participants.’ This means that China’s initiatives are not based on self-interest, and other countries can benefit from them.

⁵⁰ Vladimir Putin, *"News Conference Following Working Visit to China,"* April 27, 2019, Kremlin, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60396/videos>.

Argumentation

Putin used various rhetorical tools to justify Russia's alignment with China. One of his main arguments was an appeal to global economic balance: 'Today, China is interested in pushing its products to foreign markets, which is a natural aspiration for any country.' He implied that exports would increase as the Chinese economy grew, which was expected and shared knowledge.

Perspectivization

Putin depicted China as a country with geopolitical and economic implications that benefit Russia rather than threaten it. To embrace the benefits of the BRI, Putin mentioned, 'We have earmarked trillions of rubles for infrastructure development to make effective use of our country's transit potential.'

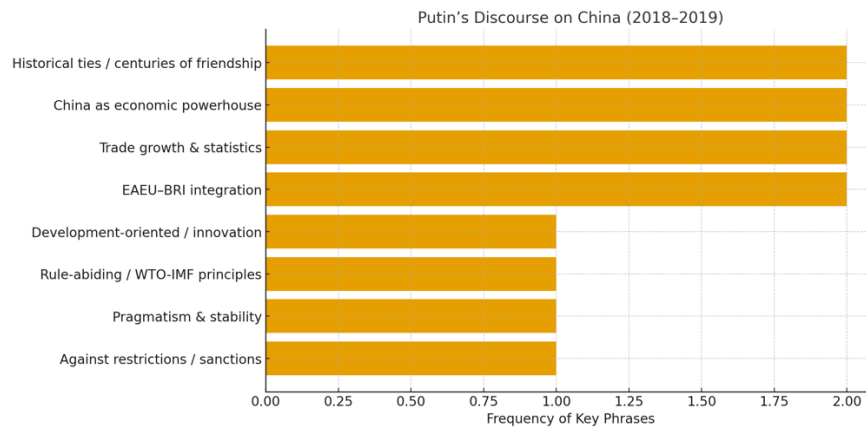
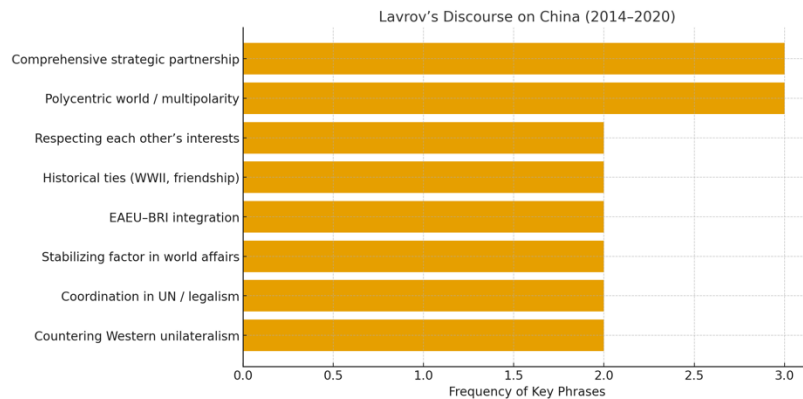
Putin also appealed to Western trade barriers. He said, '*China and Russia are interested in free trade, not restrictions.*' He meant the Western-imposed sanctions on Russia and tariffs/quotas on imports from China to the US⁵¹.

Conclusion

By answering the journalists' questions, Putin reaffirmed China's economic power and highlighted that its initiatives are a natural response to its vast economy. At the same time, they reflect the principles of the international organizations in which Russia, China, and most states are members. He also assured Russia would benefit from the Chinese initiatives, whereas some Western countries would try to contain China by imposing barriers.

⁵¹ Chad P. Bown and Melina Kolb, "Trump's Trade War Timeline: An Up-to-Date Guide," *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, January 20, 2025, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/2018/trumps-trade-war-timeline-date-guide>.

4.6 Conclusion: Russia's Post-2014 Discourse on China



Russian discourse on China remained purposefully cautious in the years after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In his early speeches, Lavrov avoided direct conflict with the West by framing China as a comprehensive strategic partner in a "polycentric world." China was commended for its historical contributions, particularly during World War II, and for promoting stability through multilateral organizations like the UN, SCO, and BRICS. However, the rhetoric was devoid of overt hostility. For example, Lavrov in 2014 avoided labeling the West as an enemy, instead portraying China and Russia as stabilizing powers.

By 2017, however, the focus had shifted to more economic integration, with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aligned with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Hints of counterbalancing the US emerged here, particularly in relation to security crises such as North Korea. By 2020, Lavrov had publicly compared cooperation between Russia and China to "Western unilateralism," portraying Beijing and Moscow as beneficial legalist actors in opposition to destabilizing Western powers.

Another layer was introduced by Putin's rhetoric in 2018 and 2019, in which he continuously highlighted China's position as an economic superpower and a practical, forward-thinking ally. He emphasized the growth of trade, centuries of shared history, and the complementary nature of BRI and EAEU projects. Although Putin acknowledged Western limitations, he refrained from presenting the collaboration as essentially anti-Western. China was presented as a stabilizing force in world development instead.

To put it briefly, the post-2014 discourse portrayed China as an essential partner, but it did so in terms of stability, pragmatism, and careful balance. It did not explicitly define the partnership in terms of ideology or civilization.

5. Critical Analysis of Russian Elite Discourse on China After 2022

5.1 Maria Zakharova, March 9, 2023

On March 9, 2023, the spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry briefed on various geopolitical events and reflected on questions regarding China⁵². Zakharova's speech analysis will also help make the overall picture of Russia's discourse on China vivid. The same DHA strategies will be used for the study.

Nomination

Zakharova called Chinese colleagues 'Chinese friends,' which signifies their close relationship. During economic and geopolitical cooperation discussions, she used the term 'Chinese partners.' In contrast, Zakharova mentioned the past grievances involving Japan, contrasting with China, highlighting the solidarity and historical alignment between Russia and China.

Predication

Zakharova described China as modernized and prosperous, highlighting, 'The results of the modernization efforts in China are obvious.' She stated that the Russian side is happy about the achievements of Chinese partners and sees several opportunities to develop 'mutually beneficial cooperation.' Notably, she contrasted Russia's positive perception of China with the West's antagonistic posture about perceiving China as a threat. Here, the qualification of strategic partnership can also be attributed.

Argumentation

One of Maria Zakharova's arguments was structured to appeal to historical solidarity. The date of this briefing was also the anniversary of the American bombing of

⁵² Maria Zakharova, "Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova," Moscow, March 9, 2023, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://mid.ru/en/press_service/video/briefingi/1857501/.

Tokyo, and Zakharova made a very diplomatic turn to the atrocities committed by the Japanese towards the Chinese. This maneuver was strategic because Japan had issues with China, and by mentioning the atrocities towards Chinese people by Japan, Zakharova showed historical solidarity.

The journalist asked a provoking question about China's modernization, as modernization has always been associated with Westernization. The question was how the Russians assess that, as China also promotes protectionism. Zakharova emphasized that it is China's domestic matter, and her response appealed to geopolitical pragmatism and sovereignty.

Perspectivization

Zakharova positioned Russia as a supporter of China's success, expressing interest in China's modernization. Russia's second position in Chinese matters is that of a defender of sovereignty, mainly on domestic issues that should not be discussed internationally. According to Zakharova, Russia is an equal strategic partner of China, framing the Russian-Chinese relationship as mutually beneficial. The last position articulated in this briefing is that Russia and China are historical partners who should overcome Western-imposed rules.

Conclusion

Zakharova's briefing shows Russia's discourse frames China as a modernized and sovereign global power. Repeated narratives about shared historical experiences reinforced the particular discourse to challenge Western narratives. Zakharova's briefing also portrayed Russia's relations with China based on a shared worldview about multipolarity and historical justice by refusing the view that Russia and China's efforts to cooperate strongly are reactive responses. This speech analysis highlights that Russia's

discourse legitimizes the new world order where Russia and China are not mere partners but also architects of the multipolar system.

5.2 Maria Zakharova Dec. 27, 2023

On December 27, 2023, Maria Zakharova conducted her regular briefing session, commenting on the recent geopolitical news and answering the questions of media representatives⁵³. In this briefing, journalists asked queries regarding China, and Zakharova responded according to the adopted discourse on China.

Nomination

This briefing was constructed around three actors: China, Russia, and the collective West. Zakharova depicted Russia as a historical partner of China and Africa, which stands against Western imperialism. China is presented as a responsible power that engages in equally beneficial partnerships. This referred to China-Africa relations. Zakharova presented China's role in Africa as 'voluntary, equal, and based on mutual respect and mutual benefit.' Here, the adjective 'voluntary' was used to contrast Africa - West relationships, where the West was *deceptive* and *neo-colonial*. Particularly, Zakharova mentioned, 'Africa was the zone of responsibility of Western PMCs, which failed to bring about the desired effect.' Zakharova emphasized the Iraq war, Operation Desert Fox, where the United States, with the support of the United Kingdom, invaded Iraq without the mandate of the UNCS, hence without the consent of Russia and China as permanent UN Security Council members⁵⁴.

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Excerpts from the Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova," press release, December 27, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1923432/.

⁵⁴ Shlomo Brom, "Operation Desert Fox: Results and Ramifications," *Strategic Assessment*, June 1999, Institute for National Security Studies, https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/operation-desert-fox-results-and-ramifications/.

Predication

China is presented as a sovereign country in the context of African engagement. Zakharova mentions, 'China has a sovereign right to develop relations with any states, including African countries.' In contrast to China, the West has neocolonial practices. Zakharova mentions the quantity of armaments that the US and the UK used to invade Iraq to intensify the moral contrast. Through such comparisons, Zakharova positioned Russia and China as the 'protector of African nations.'

Argumentation

In the context of Africa, Zakharova justified her claims about Russia's partnership with China in Africa, appealing to historical resistance to Western unilateral actions. Hence, the other claims are coming, as always, multipolarity and anti-imperialism. Regarding multipolarity, everything is clear; to support her anti-imperialism arguments, Zakharova says, 'China, like Russia, is one of the largest international donors providing effective and selfless assistance to Africa's poorest and developing countries.'

Another justification is made by appealing to the Western unilateral and illegitimate intervention. Notably, she mentions, 'On December 17, 1998, Operation Fox was an attack by the US and UK against Iraq without a UN mandate.'

Conclusion

In conclusion, Zakharova's briefing reinforced the narrative that the emergence of the multipolar world order is a directive to correct the historical injustices caused by Western hegemony. Her discourse positioned Russia and China as moral powers, stabilizing the geopolitical situation by discrediting the Western-led order. The arguments of this briefing reaffirm Russia's ideological cooperation with China, rejecting the narrative of geopolitical necessity.

5.3 Maria Zakharova May 3, 2024

On May 3, 2024, Maria Zakharova had a briefing that covered various geopolitical issues and international relations. Among the different sections, the journalists raised a specific question about ‘Washington’s interference in Russia-China relations.’

Nomination

As in all speeches by the representatives of the Russian elite, the first categorization is China as a strategic partner. This sentence by Zakharova proves that: ‘Russia-China cooperation hinges on the principles of respectful, equitable, and trust-based partnership.’ Zakharova made this sentence in response to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s warnings to China: The United States would initiate action if China did not stop supporting Russia⁵⁵. The spokesperson for the Foreign Affairs Ministry of China, Lin Jian, responded that China is not a profit party from the crisis, and the US is militarizing Ukraine while blaming China’s trade with Russia. Zakharova mentioned that she agreed with his colleague and emphasized, ‘This highlights the value of Russia-China strategic interaction.’

Zakharova also discussed the Chinese stance on the Ukraine crisis, mentioning ‘China’s well-thought-out and consistent position on the Ukraine crisis’ and ‘Beijing has invariably emphasized readiness to play a constructive role in resolving it by political and diplomatic means.’ Hence, from Zakharova’s perspective, China is an independent actor that does not follow the standard flow.

⁵⁵ “US Warns China to Stop Supporting Russia’s War on Ukraine During Beijing Meeting,” *ABC News*, April 26, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-04-27/antony-blinken-warns-china-over-its-support-for-russia-war/103775260>.

According to Zakharova, the US disrupts Russia-China relations: ‘Washington has been trying unsuccessfully to drive a wedge into Russia-China relations for a long time... This is part of the US policy to contain our two countries.’

Predication

In her briefing, Zakharova defines China as a constructive diplomatic actor, notably mentioning that ‘President of China XI Jinping recently discussed the idea of convening an international peace conference.’ She also mentions that China is the counterbalance of the West. Particularly, Zakharova mentions that ‘China’s economy frustrates Washington.... The US is extremely exasperated by China’s economy.’

Perspectivization

Zakharova justifies Russia’s strong partnership with China by appealing to natural development and worldview alignment. The repetition will be noted; however, Zakharova's idea will be highlighted again to emphasize the appeal to natural development: ‘Russia-China cooperation hinges on the principles of respectful, equitable, and trust-based partnership.’

Appealing to worldview alignment, Zakharova’s ideas suggest that US policy is to contain the two countries. Hence, Russia and China have similar views that contradict Western ideals.

Conclusion

In this briefing, China was depicted as a diplomatic and constructive actor who advocated peace in Ukraine and is committed to global stability. Russia and China were portrayed as victims of the U.S. containment, highlighting the underlying purpose of the containment: maintaining Western hegemony. Zakharova positioned these two countries as cornerstones of the new world order to reinforce the arguments about the shared worldviews of Russia and China. The discourse in the briefing not only countered the

Western narratives but also legitimized the need for new centers of power, which would reshape the new order based on respect and non-interference.

5.4 Maria Zakharova, February 14, 2025

On 14 February 2025, the spokeswoman of the MFA of the Russian Federation had her regular briefing and question/answer with the media representatives, where the reflection on China was apparent⁵⁶. At this time, the multipolar world order was the primary focus. During this briefing, only one question was raised about Russia and China; however, the question and the response are worth analyzing, especially considering the Russian Chinese efforts to construct the multipolar world order.

Nomination

During the briefing, Zakharova enunciated a unique categorization regarding Russia and China: ‘Russia and China, as two sovereign civilization states with millennial history.’

Secondly, by placing China alongside Russia, Zakharova legitimizes Russia’s claim of being a civilization-state. It is not a secret that China claims its title as a civilizational state, and it is not a new idea.

Predication Strategy

Zakharova described China positively in her briefing response, attributing a constructive global role. In response to the journalist’s remark about the Munich Security Report 2025, where the ‘inevitability of multipolarity’ is mentioned, Zakharova stated⁵⁷: ‘Russia and China stated back in 1997 that the world was on track to become multipolar.’ Her response implies that Russia, together with China, was the first state to initiate

⁵⁶ Maria Zakharova, "Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova," Moscow, February 14, 2025, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1997514/.

⁵⁷ Munich Security Conference, *Munich Security Report 2025: Multipolarization* (Munich: Munich Security Conference, February 2025), <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2025/>.

measures of counterweight to Western domination. Hence, multipolarity is the shared historical vision of China and Russia⁵⁸.

Argumentation

Zakharova claims that one more time, the strong relations between Russia and China are due to historical inevitability and geopolitical realities, referring to the joint document that Russia and China signed in 1997 about multipolarity. This also implies that back in 1997, when the Cold War had just ended, Russia and China already felt the unnatural situation of a unipolar moment.

Conclusion

The briefing responses of Zakharova reinforced the narrative of the shared worldview of Russia and China. Her discourse emphasized that these two countries not only cooperate based on strategic pragmatism but also due to their shared civilizational identity. Zakharova positioned Russia and China as historical partners by appealing to historical continuity, civilizational identity, and the critique of Western dominance. Her responses highlight that elite discourse is capable of integrating history and ideology into one narrative that validates the need to contract a multipolar world order.

⁵⁸ United Nations General Assembly, "Letter Dated 15 May 1997 from the Permanent Representatives of China and the Russian Federation to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General," A/52/153 (May 15, 1997), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/234074>.

5.5 Sergey Lavrov, January 18, 2023

On January 18, 2023, the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, answered the media's questions regarding Russian diplomacy in 2022 at a news conference⁵⁹. Most questions were also related to Russia-China relations and the tensions between the West and Russia. The context was the Ukraine crisis, as the Special Military Operation had been conducted for one year.

Nomination

Firstly, China is nominated as Russia's strategic partner and a target of Western long-term containment. In answer to the question regarding Russia-China relations, Lavrov cited President Putin and President Xi, mentioning that they are at an 'all-time high.' Lavrov stated that Russia and China share 'trust-based, mutually respectful relations rooted in the balance of interest.'

Secondly, Lavrov referred to the EU-NATO Joint Declaration signed on January 10, 2023, mentioning that China is the target of the West⁶⁰. To solidify his argument, he noted that 'the West has already started imposing sanctions on China.' He meant China's ability to make microprocessors and semiconductors⁶¹. Interestingly, Lavrov stated that China understands that the current target for the West is Russia, that the next one will be China, and that it is not a 'joke.'

⁵⁹ Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers to Media Questions at the News Conference on the Performance of Russian Diplomacy in 2022," Moscow, January 18, 2023, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://mid.ru/fr/foreign_policy/news/1848395/?lang=en.

⁶⁰ "Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation," Council of the European Union, January 10, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration-10-january-2023/>.

⁶¹ Stefan H. Reisinger, "New Export Controls on Semiconductor and Advanced Computing Related Items to China," Norton Rose Fulbright, October 2022, <https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/it-it/knowledge/publications/f3f0dd98/new-export-controls-on-semiconductor-and-advanced-computing-related-items-to-china>.

Predication

Lavrov attributed positive characteristics to China, such as being a strong, reliable partner. However, he stated that there is a strong interdependence between the West and China. He hinted that during the upcoming tensions (supposedly), China's dependence on the West will be an obstacle. However, this can be implied in the West as well.

Argumentation

Lavrov legitimized Russia and China's cooperation using three lines of argumentation.

Firstly, it appeals to economic growth and sovereignty. This implies that Russia and China should cooperate economically if they strive to escape Western financial control. The second precondition of economic growth and sovereignty is that Russia and China strengthen their trade in national currencies.

Lavrov's speech also appealed to security and global stability. He mentioned they work 'closely' internationally, particularly in the United Nations. He highlighted that both countries are UNSC members, and the UN should remain on the global stage to solve problems according to the UN Charter.

The third argument is based on the threat from the West. This implies that the West is attempting to contain Russia and China. He mentions, 'Both Russia and China can see that the West, while sticking to its dual containment strategy against Moscow and Beijing, is trying to sow discord in our relations.' Lavrov referred to many American analysts who thought that by defeating Russia, they could convince Russia to become a partner of the West; hence, Russia would not stand in the way of the West in containing China. Also, various research centers or think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations or the Royal Institute for Defense and Security Studies (RUSI) publish numerous articles mentioning that Russia-China relations are unequal, Russia is the junior partner of China,

and other different narratives⁶². However, Lavrov noted that Russia and China are '*clear-eyed about these games.*'

Perspectivization

The perspectivization strategy explains how Lavrov aligns Russia with China: 'There was a time when our Chinese friends said that our relations were more than an alliance but something stronger.' In his March 19, 2023, speech, it is interesting that Putin also mentioned that fact.

Lavrov also used an intensification strategy to present the Western threat. He said, 'In the so-called 'Indo-Pacific region,' the West is out to create bloc architecture against Russia and China.' Lavrov explained that the region is Asia-Pacific; however, during the NATO Madrid Summit 2022, the West announced that they should contain the 'Indo-Pacific' region globally⁶³. This implies that the Collective West, in the frame of NATO, will provoke tensions through Japan or the Republic of Korea.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the key narrative of Lavrov's answers to media questions was that the Russia-China partnership is essential for economic sovereignty. The most crucial factor is the de-dollarization of their mutual trade. The second narrative is that the West also threatens China; he emphasized the Western containment strategies. While Lavrov embraced China's state of the economy, however also warned about the dangers of deep integration into Western markets. In other words, Lavrov's discourse reinforced the idea

⁶² Callum Fraser, "Russia and China: The True Nature of Their Cooperation," *Royal United Services Institute*, June 7, 2024, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/russia-and-china-true-nature-their-cooperation>.

⁶³ NATO, "Relations with Partners in the Indo-Pacific Region," *NATO*, last modified October 24, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_183254.htm.

that Russia and China should strengthen their partnership in the economic and geopolitical sphere because the West's strategy is to contain Russia and China.

5.6 Sergey Lavrov, May, 17, 2023

Russian Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov interviewed Tsargrad TV on May 17, 2023, and commented on the president of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, regarding Russia-China relations⁶⁴.

Nomination

Lavrov presented Russia as a Permanent Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power by stating that ‘The two heads of our eagle face both the East and the West,’ here he used the metaphor of Russia’s national emblem and highlighted that Russia is a balanced actor and made a contradiction to the well-known narrative that Russia turned to East.

China was framed as a long-term strategic partner. Lavrov framed their relations as ‘multifaceted and multidisciplinary strategic cooperation,’ which surpasses any classical military union. At the same time, the West was presented as unstable, weak, and controlled by the US, which betrayed its interests. Here, he was mainly talking about Europe, particularly France.

Predication

The predication strategy attributes positive characteristics to China and negative ones to Western actors. Lavrov highlighted that the Russian political elite is aware of the scale of China’s economy, which is ten times larger than Russia’s, and reassured that they remain Russia’s leading trading partner. Lavrov also characterized China as a country with strategic foresight that defines its development horizon and does not hold elections every other year. Here, he highlighted the stable nature of the Chinese form of governance

⁶⁴ Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Interview with Tsargrad TV, Moscow, May 17, 2023," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, May 17, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1870675/.

and the unstable nature of European states, describing them as shortsighted. Lavrov also dismissed the Western narrative that China poses a risk to the West. He mentioned, ‘We see no threats coming from China.’

Argumentation

Lavrov used the appeal to historical continuity and economic sovereignty to argue about Russia-China relations. The historical continuity refers to Russia’s ties and rejects the well-known opinion about ‘Russia’s pivot to Asia.’ Lavrov said, ‘We don’t need to turn anywhere. Russia is a Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power, which has always been since Tsarist times, and ‘The West has turned away from us, betraying its own interests.’ Here, Lavrov tried to emphasize the identity of Russia, which was debated among Russian scholars after the collapse of the USSR.

‘The absolute volume of our relations with China has risen to a historic high.’ This is appealing to economic growth and sovereignty.

Perspectivization

Russia was an independent, sovereign power, and China was depicted as a mighty, trusted, and long-term historic economic partner. Lavrov mentions, ‘China has surged way ahead of all others.’ Meanwhile, the Western political system is described as ineffective and self-destructive, not understanding what benefits it and what does not.

Conclusion

Lavrov’s interview emphasizes that the partnership between Russia and China is not a reactive response to the West but a logical continuation of history. He reaffirmed that Russia has always been a Eurasian power and has never pivoted to Asia out of necessity. The following narrative is that Russian and Chinese relations are based on trust, not dependency, rejecting French President Macron’s idea that Russia is the vassal of

China⁶⁵. The broader implication is that Lavrov acknowledges that China's rise is natural, and Russia accepts that fact, which leads to a shift in global power relations that will challenge Western influence.

⁶⁵ "Kremlin Slams Macron Comments Over Russia's 'Subservience' to China," *Le Monde*, May 15, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/15/kremlin-slams-macron-comments-over-russia-s-subservience-to-china_6026730_4.html.

5.7 Sergey Lavrov February 14, 2024

Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov made a speech during the Government Hour at the State Duma of the Federal Assembly in Moscow and answered the media question⁶⁶. Three Discourse-Historical Approach strategies will be used to analyze this text: nomination, predication, and argumentation.

Nomination

The key nomination pattern frequently met in Lavrov's discourse on China is creating a multipolar world order. In all his speeches, China is characterized as a 'comprehensive, strategic partner' and 'stabilizing force in international affairs.' This highlights the geopolitical weight of China in this chaotic and politically tense world. In his last speeches, Lavrov hinted that China is a civilization, and here, Lavrov mentions 'Ancient civilizations that predate Western dominance.' Saying this, he meant that there is a clear civilizational contrast with the West, and the representatives of those civilizations are Russia and China, which is also emphasized in their foreign affairs concepts⁶⁷.

Another nomination by Lavrov is that Russia and China are historic nations. He said, 'Multipolar world led by historic nations.' This implies that China is not only a trade partner but also a civilizational pole, which, together with Russia, will create a multipolar world where the West will not have a hegemonic power. In its turn, this implies that

⁶⁶ Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers to Questions during Government Hour at the State Duma of the Federal Assembly, Moscow, February 14, 2024," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, February 14, 2024, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_organizations/mezdunarodnyj-valutnyj-fond-mvf/1932076/.

⁶⁷ "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 31, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/.

Lavrov avoids seeing Russia or China as junior, as many scholars think, considering the economies.

Predication

Lavrov contrasted ancient civilizations with newly established states by mentioning, ‘Some civilizations are tens or even hundreds of times older than those where states have called the shots for the past 500 years.’ Here, he meant the United States, which was founded in 1776. When Lavrov links the geopolitical vision to concepts like history and civilization, he implies that ancient civilizations establish a new order organically.

Lavrov also embraced President Xi Jinping’s global vision of a ‘Community of Common Destiny’ but carefully distanced Russia from it. Lavrov said, ‘We agree that we will benefit from the concepts based on respect for all countries. We will continue to promote them.’ However, he highlighted that they are working on a document presenting their understanding of multipolarity. Hence, Russia is ideologically aligned with China. However, the road maps may be different. For example, China is more inclined toward a global governance system based on mutual interdependence, whereas Russia mainly prefers the principles of the UN Charter.

Argumentation

It is essential to mention that in argumentation strategies for justifying Russia’s position in the newly forming multipolar world order, Lavrov refers to the concept of “Common Destiny.”⁶⁸ To synthesize the argumentations, it will be apparent that Russia and China resist Western unipolarity and neo-colonialism. Eurasian integration in the

⁶⁸ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions*, September 2023, <http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n101/2023/1010/c127-916.html>.

forms of EAEU and the Belt and Road Initiative is the future, and regional cooperations such as BRICS and SCO are pillars of the new world order.

Conclusion

Lavrov's speech in the State Duma displayed Russia's vision of the newly emerging global order. He positioned Russia and China as civilizational powers, basing the arguments on historical and cultural continuity. Lavrov framed the transition to a multipolar world as historically inevitable.

Lavrov emphasized Russia's distinct foreign policy identity by reaffirming its commitment to the principles of the UN Charter and the UN type of global governance while embracing the concept of a 'Community of Common Destiny.' This balanced discourse between sharing the vision of world order, but a distinct strategy, reflects the complexity of Russia-China relations at the elite discourse level.

5.8 Sergey Lavrov, December 26, 2024

Sergey Lavrov gave an interview to the Russian and international media on December 16, 2024⁶⁹. Most questions were about the Ukrainian conflict, Syria, Donald Trump's new administration, and just one direct question about China. However, it is worth mentioning that Minister Lavrov talked about Russia-China relations in almost every answer.

Nomination

Like in other speeches, Lavrov presented China as a stabilizing force. For instance, 'It is our understanding, and there is a broad recognition that Russia and China have a real stabilizing effect on international relations.'

Secondly, in this speech, China was not directly presented as a civilizational power. However, Lavrov mentions, 'Countries representing various continents, civilizations, religions, and cultures work together within BRICS.' Here, we suppose that by saying civilization, Lavrov also means China because, in previously analyzed speeches, Lavrov mentioned several times that China is an ancient civilization. Russia and China are also consolidating powers, highlighting how they treat the Global South. Lavrov does not explicitly mention that the West is disruptive, but his direct categorization of Russia and China discusses it.

Predication

Lavrov depicted China as a responsible and cooperative power. In order not to be repeated, the first paragraph's sentence explains China's responsible nature. Understandably, China is an economically significant country when Lavrov responded to

⁶⁹ Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Interview with Russian and International News Media, Moscow, December 26, 2024," *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, December 26, 2024, https://mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/1989213/.

the Former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joseph Borrell's idea that 'China has replaced Europe and the G7 as Russia's trade and economic partner.' In response, Lavrov mentioned, 'Everyone has known all along that Western sanctions were harming the populations of the countries that apply them.'

China once again presented as a future target of the West, mentioning that 'The Americans prefer to get rid of competitors; it is their policy. Now they are 'taking out' Russia and beginning to do the same about China.' Also, to contrast China and the West, Lavrov positioned China as a part of a fair and multilateral order compared to the 'colonial' West. However, what is very important during this speech by Lavrov is that he refers to President Xi Jinping's document text written during the global security initiative in February 2023⁷⁰. The text mentions that to resolve any conflict, it is essential to identify and address the root causes. This is a very special contrast between Western and Chinese leaders regarding the Ukraine crisis. Lavrov refers to this idea of President Xi because the Russian side viewed the root cause of the conflict as the provocations of the West.

Argumentation

Considering the argumentation strategies to justify his claims, Lavrov used historical argumentation and encouraged the West to adapt to the future shift. Particularly, Lavrov mentioned, 'Hopefully, there will be room in this multipolar world order for our Western colleagues. They will not disappear from our planet.'

Conclusion

Lavrov's interview again displayed the key discourse narratives about the Russia-China partnership. He portrayed Russia and China as fair civilizational powers with legitimacy to create a multipolar world order. Lavrov depicted China as a trustworthy and

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*, February 21, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367484.html.

forward-looking partner whose views about the future world overlap. Referring to President Xi Jinping's strategic views, Lavrov gave more intellectual depth to the Russia-China partnership. Meanwhile, Lavrov presented the decline of Western influence as a consequence of its own deeds. On the other hand, Russia and China were seen as providing a fair and inclusive world order.

The discourse following 2022 indicates an intensification of ideological alignment between Russia and China. Through the vocabulary of sovereignty, civilization, and collective destiny, elites reconceptualize China not only as a strategic partner but also as a co-architect of a novel world order. These narratives validate Russia's foreign policy trajectory and express opposition to Western hegemony through discourse.

6. Vladimir Putin, September 15, 2022

The first speech of Vladimir Putin that was chosen for the Discourse-Historical analysis took place in September 2022, five months after the beginning of the special military operation, after Putin and the President of the PRC, Xi Jinping, had negotiated in Samarkand in the frame of the Shanghai Cooperation Summit⁷¹. Five strategies were used to analyze Putin's speech: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, mitigation, and intensification.

Nomination

Putin portrays Russia as a responsible global actor, a stabilizer of international affairs, and a defender of a multipolar world. This kind of categorization or naming is not new because it has been mentioned by Putin and other Russian officials several times.

Secondly, Putin uses the pronoun 'we' to align Russia with China, presenting Russia as an equal partner with a shared worldview. He mentions, 'We support building a just, democratic, and multipolar world order.' Here, saying their attempts to build a 'just' world, he highlights the fair motives of Russia and China. Meanwhile, Putin implies that the Western hegemonic world is unjust and unfair. Various factors, such as economic sanctions on Russia, China, and other unfriendly states of the West, can explain this. It can also imply the Western, mainly American, interference in domestic issues of foreign countries, and many other factors.

President Xi Jinping is presented as Putin's 'dear friend.' Here, Putin highlights that their relationships are beyond the official setting. Besides that, he calls President Xi 'comrade' or in Russian *товарищ*, which is the standard way to name communist

⁷¹ Vladimir Putin, "Meeting with PRC President Xi Jinping," *President of Russia*, September 15, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69356>.

leaders⁷². Calling the President of the PRC *comrade*, he shows his respect and acceptance for the Communist Party. Putin depicts Sino-Russian relations as a strategic and comprehensive partnership, which is not only a word choice but also an official document signed between Russia and China in 1996 between President Jiang Zemin and Boris Yeltsin. The document was called the China-Russia Strategic Partnership of Cooperation⁷³. In 2001, the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation was signed⁷⁴. In 2019, the partnership was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era⁷⁵, and before launching a Special Military Operation in Ukraine on February 4, 2022, Putin and Xi Jinping issued a joint statement about a ‘no-limit partnership’⁷⁶.

Putin did not mention the West explicitly but referred to the West as forces imposing rules and seeking unipolarity. He made derogatory characterizations, calling the Western attempts an ugly configuration. Putin stated that the West invented rules and is trying to impose them on others. In the same sentence, Putin ensures that Russia and China support international rules fixed in the United Nations Charter.

⁷² Danko Sipka, “Comrade, Sir,” in *The Geography of Words: Vocabulary and Meaning in the World’s Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 175–

79, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108894548>.

⁷³ “President Jiang Zemin and President Yeltsin Issue Joint Press Communiqué at the Conclusion of Their Second Informal Summit,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, last updated November 15, 2000, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/.

⁷⁴ “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, last updated July 24, 2001, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367098.html.

⁷⁵ “Xi Jinping Meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, June 6, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/jj/2019zt/xjpcfelsgjjlt/202406/t20240606_11380070.html.

⁷⁶ *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, “Wang Yi Talks About Three Major Judgments on COVID-19 at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations in 2021,” December 3,

2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zy/jj/2020zt/kjgzbdffyq/202112/t20211203_10462034.html.

Predication

Vladimir Putin's second strategy is predication, which shows whether the actors are described positively or negatively. For instance, Putin depicts Russia-China relations as exemplary (positive attribute): 'Russian-Chinese interstate interaction can be regarded as a model.'

The second feature of their relationship is stabilizing, which 'plays a key role in ensuring global and regional stability.' The third positive attribution is the economic success despite the Western sanctions: 'Trade grew by 35% to over \$140 billion' or 'In the near term, we will bring trade to \$200 billion.' On the contrary, the West is negatively attributed, which was previously mentioned: creating a unipolar world, ugly configurations, imposing rules, etc.

Regarding the Ukraine crisis, Putin used mitigation, which explains and softens China's neutrality about this issue, presents China's view of this crisis as balanced, and mentions, 'We understand your questions and concerns.'

Perspectivization

Putin used the appeal to legitimacy: 'We support a just, democratic, and multipolar world order.' He meant that Russia-China cooperation is legitimate, while Western interference is illegitimate. This implies that Russia and China follow the international law of the UN, whereas the West imposes its rules.

Putin aligns himself with China by using "we." Regarding the Ukraine crisis, he avoids discussing it, instead shifting his focus to China's economic partnership.

Conclusion

In his speech, Putin shows that Russia and China are civilizational powers who act united to construct a new multipolar world order based on respect for sovereignty and equality. To legitimize their partnership, Putin invoked his personal relations with President Xi Jinping multiple times, referencing the bilateral treaties and agreements. While Russia and China are presented as rational and stabilizing powers, the West is antagonized and presented as a disruptive power. Overall, Putin's discourse presents the Russia-China partnership as strategic, ideologically, and historically legitimate.

6.1 Vladimir Putin March 19, 2023

On March 19, 2023, Vladimir Putin wrote an article for the People's Daily Newspaper titled *Russia and China: A Future-Bound Partnership*⁷⁷. The same categories and strategies Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl developed will be used for Discourse-Historical analysis.

Nomination

Like the 2022 speech analyzed above, Russia also self-nominates itself as a *stabilizing power*. Russia and China are framed as cornerstones of regional and global stability. This idea of Putin means that Russia and China are great powers. Instead of being adversaries, which is inherent to great power politics, they maintain stability by cooperating. This contradicts the Offensive neo-realist John Mearsheimer's book titled *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics 2001*, which mentions that great powers do not cooperate because they fear the other state will gain relative advantages⁷⁸.

Another nomination that Putin mentions in his speech is that Russia is the victim of Western aggression and is a ready actor to find a political and diplomatic resolution to the Ukraine crisis. In naming Russia as a victim, Putin stated that the West provoked and fueled the crisis in Ukraine. The US policy of deterring Russia and China is becoming more aggressive.

In this speech, President Xi Jinping was also called a good friend and an old friend whom he met in March 2010. Regarding Russia-China relations, Putin states they are at the highest level throughout history.

⁷⁷ Vladimir Putin, "Russia and China: A Future-Bound Partnership," *People's Daily*, March 19, 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70743>.

⁷⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

The West is explicitly portrayed as an adversary in this speech. At the same time, it is depicted as an aggressive force that imposes its dominance and disturbs global harmony. The word harmony is chosen strategically because harmony is one of the themes of Chinese political thought, which is more intensively emphasized in President Xi Jinping's vision of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind⁷⁹. Putin's article was written for the Chi audience, with the Chinese people's positive awareness of the word 'harmony,' as it is an integral part of Chinese culture⁸⁰.

Putin also highlighted the difference between the West and China. He mentioned that the 'Collective West is gambling on the fates of entire states and peoples.' This also highlights the difference between Western and Chinese political thought and actions.

Another adversary actor Putin has nominated is NATO, which 'seeks to penetrate Asia-Pacific.' Here, Putin aims to highlight that NATO, a Western organization, is provoking and interfering in disputes in the Asia-Pacific region, whose problems should be solved without including third parties.

Predication

Putin presents Russia- and China relations as deep, stating that they are above 'Cold War-time military-political alliances in their quality.' This attribution shows that their relationships surpassed the alliances during the Cold War because when states make official alliances, they make the geopolitical situation tenser⁸¹. They are required to take

⁷⁹ Wang Yi, "The Historic Step from Peaceful Coexistence to a Shared Future for Humanity," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, July 17, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202407/t20240717_11455444.html.

⁸⁰ Sundararajan, Louise. "A History of the Concepts of Harmony in Chinese Culture." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. 28 Feb. 2020; Accessed 19 Mar. 2025. <https://oxfordre.com/psychology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-679>.

⁸¹ Snyder, Glenn H. "ALLIANCE THEORY: A NEOREALIST FIRST CUT." *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1990): 103–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24357226>.

measures when their ally is involved in the conflict, and in the case of two nuclear powers, Russia and China, if they ally, it will provoke more tensions with the West. Still, creating a strategic partnership, they remain open to regulating their relations with the West. Besides that, Putin used various poetic metaphors in his speech, such as ‘river of friendship,’ ‘waves and winds,’ and ‘rock amid a fast-flowing stream,’ which are inherent to Chinese diplomatic discourse. For instance, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi often responds to his Western colleagues by using phrases from the Book of Changes. Hence, mirroring this style, Putin resonates with Chinese leaders and the audience⁸².

Argumentation

President Putin appealed to economic growth while justifying Russia-China relations; for instance, he mentioned that Russia-China trade reached \$185 billion⁸³.

Putin also legitimized Russia-China cooperation by delegitimizing the West for imposing its rules for the ‘golden billion.’ Here, the ‘phrase of golden billion’ is mentioned intentionally; Putin means that people living in Western-aligned countries are just a billion people, whereas, for example, BRICS member countries collectively have 3.3 billion people⁸⁴. The adjective ‘golden’ means the West's colonial past, whereas Russia and China bring the global political arena to the countries representing the Global South⁸⁵.

⁸² Harald Brüning, "Chinese Top Diplomat Gives West Pragmatic, Erudite Advice," *China Daily*, February 19, 2025, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202502/19/WS67b51910a310c240449d5f81.html>.

⁸³ The Russian Government, "Deputy Prime Minister: Cooperation Between Russia and China Reaching New Level," news release, December 20, 2023, <http://government.ru/en/news/49327/>.

⁸⁴ Spencer Feingold, "BRICS: Here's What to Know About the International Bloc," World Economic Forum, November 20, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/brics-summit-geopolitics-bloc-international/>.

⁸⁵ Marino De Luca and Luigi Giungato, "Conspiratorial Narratives and Ideological Constructs in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: From the New World Order to the Golden Billion Theories," *Genealogy* 8, no. 4 (2024): 131, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8040131>.

Perspectivization

Putin framed himself as a profoundly engaged leader in China relations, mentioning that they met with Comrade Xi Jinping almost 40 times⁸⁶. Putin also intensifies his presentation of the Russia-China Partnership. He says their ‘partnership is standing on the brink of a new era’ and softens China’s stance on Ukraine, mentioning that ‘we appreciate the well-balanced stance on Ukraine adopted by China.’ This means that Russia understands that China has concerns regarding this issue but remains a reliable partner.

Conclusion

The Discourse-Historical aspect of Vladimir Putin’s article revealed the multi-layered strategic cooperation between Russia and China. In an evolving world order, Putin positioned these two countries as pillars of global stability and elevated their cooperation above the former Cold War-era alliances.

Putin customized his message to a Chinese audience by referencing Chinese culture and common civilizational identities. In contrast, the West was portrayed as unstable and disconnected from the current reality. Putin’s dismissal of the ‘golden billion’ concept reinforced Russia and China’s position as supporters of an inclusive and fair world order centered on the Global South.

⁸⁶ Steven Lee Myers, "Putin and Xi Meet in China, Pledging to Deepen Ties Amid Global Tensions," *New York Times*, May 15, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/15/world/asia/putin-xi-china-summit.html>.

6.2 Vladimir Putin May 15, 2024

Vladimir Putin was interviewed by the well-known Chinese news agency Xinhua on May 15, 2024,⁸⁷. In this interview, Putin's discourse on China reflects narratives that aim to reinforce Russia-China ties by highlighting their common global view and showing the difference between China's role and the West's hegemony.

Nomination

Putin constructs their partnership on the foundation of past solidarity, which refers to historical legitimacy. Putin uses the nomination strategy to create Russia's and China's role in the evolving multipolar world. For instance, "Russia and China are building a multipolar world order."

President Xi Jinping was nominated by Putin as a 'time-tested friend' because he highlights that they first met in 2010 and have communicated regularly ever since. Besides that, he highlights that their conversation in 2023 lasted almost 5 hours. Here, Putin wants to say that Xi Jinping is a trustworthy and reliable partner, and during these long years, they reinforced Russian and Chinese relations. Another nomination given to China by Putin is a '*historic partner*' during war and peace. Here he meant the importance of defeating the Japanese for the Soviet Union to have time to defeat Nazism in Europe.

Predication

Similar to other speeches or interviews by Vladimir Putin, he also presented a positive attitude toward Russia-China relations, contrasting with the West. He described China-Russia relations as equal and natural: 'Russia and China ties are free from the influence of either ideology or political trends.' Here, Putin highlights that Russia-China

⁸⁷ Vladimir Putin, "Interview to Xinhua News Agency," interview by Xinhua News Agency, May 15, 2024, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/74027>.

relations are not conditioned by their temporary geopolitical needs; on the contrary, they are long-term based on mutual trust. Here, as in the article published in the People's Daily, Putin brings up the 'golden billion' concept while talking about the West. He states, 'Western elites refuse to respect civilizational and cultural diversity.' Here, by saying civilizational diversity, he meant Russia, China, and India.

In his speeches, like a red line, the West is depicted as neo-colonial, which makes the contrast with Russia and China, who are 'champions of equality.' BRICS and SCO are categorized as pillars of a new multipolar world order, and BRICS is a platform where people from the Global South and the East have a voice. Here, the contrast is vivid: the Global South did not have a voice in the Western hegemonic world, whereas Russia and China created platforms for them.

Argumentation

Regarding the argumentation strategies, Putin appealed to economic growth, sovereignty, and multipolarity. The Russian-China turnover and the use of national currencies in 90% of settlements explain the appeal to economic growth. Putin mentions that Russia and China are working to strengthen their sovereignty and protect territorial integrity and security. When Putin argues about defending the sovereignty or territorial integrity, he implies that the West threatens them. The appeal to multipolarity is used to delegitimize the rules imposed by the West.

Perspectivization

Putin described him and Xi Jinping as the central architects of Russia-China relations, mentioning their first meeting, the volume of their conversations, and their long history.

The last discourse strategy in Putin's text is softening. He again mentions, 'We appreciate China's well-balanced stance on Ukraine' and 'Beijing proposes practicable

and constructive steps to achieve peace.’ Here, Putin shows diplomatic sensitivity to avoid persuading China to fully share Russia’s position on Ukraine.

Conclusion

The Discourse-Historical Analysis of Putin’s Xinhua Interview emphasized that the fundamental narrative justifying Russia-China cooperation is the need to construct a multipolar world order. Putin presents Russia and China as trusty, sovereign partners whose cooperation is based on mutual trust, shared civilizational identity, and an aligned worldview. Platforms like BRICS and the SCO are positioned as alternative institutions that empower developing economies of the Global South, which balance the rule-based Western neocolonial governance system. Putin adopted a gentle, diplomatic approach toward China regarding Ukraine, showing his understanding of the Chinese view.

Overall, the key narrative was constructed around the concept of the new world order, in which the relationship between Russia and China is necessary.

6.3 Vladimir Putin May 17, 2024

After Vladimir Putin's reelection for the fifth time, Putin had his first official foreign trip to China on May 16-17, 2024⁸⁸. It is a tradition for Putin and President Xi to make the first official foreign visit to China or Russia annually. After the negotiations in Harbin, President Putin answered the media questions; hence, Putin's answers will be analyzed in this text.

Nomination

In his answers, Putin nominated both Russia and China as major civilizations. It is no secret that Russia mentions Russia, China, and India as civilizations in its foreign affairs concepts. Putin also portrays Russia and China as responsible global actors whose shared development should be peaceful.

President Xi Jinping is presented as Putin's friend in his other speeches. He highlights that they spend the entire day with President Xi and his colleagues. Putin highlights not only personal relations but also his diplomatic relations. China is also characterized as an economic partner and a diplomatic actor who 'sincerely' wants to settle the crisis in Ukraine. Putin here highlights 'sincerely' to emphasize that others, such as the Western actors, do not wish to resolve the situation. In contrast to the positive lights on China, he mentions that the previous negotiations went to dustbin by the West. Here, Putin refers to the failed talks in the OSCE framework⁸⁹.

⁸⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Answers to Media Questions Following the Visit to China," *President of Russia*, May 17, 2024, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74065>.

⁸⁹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), "Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (Closed)," accessed March 19, 2025, <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine-closed>.

Predication

Putin shed a positive light on Russia-China relations and a negative light on the West. To present Russia-China relations as stable and cooperative, Putin highlighted, ‘Our cooperation is not directed against anyone.’

To highlight more cooperation and independence from the West and the Western sanctions, Putin mentions that they ‘will buy and sell everything in national currencies.’

Argumentation

In order not to do repetition in case of argumentation, it will be mentioned that Putin uses the same argumentations as in the previous speeches: appeal to multipolarity, economic sovereignty, security, and diplomacy.

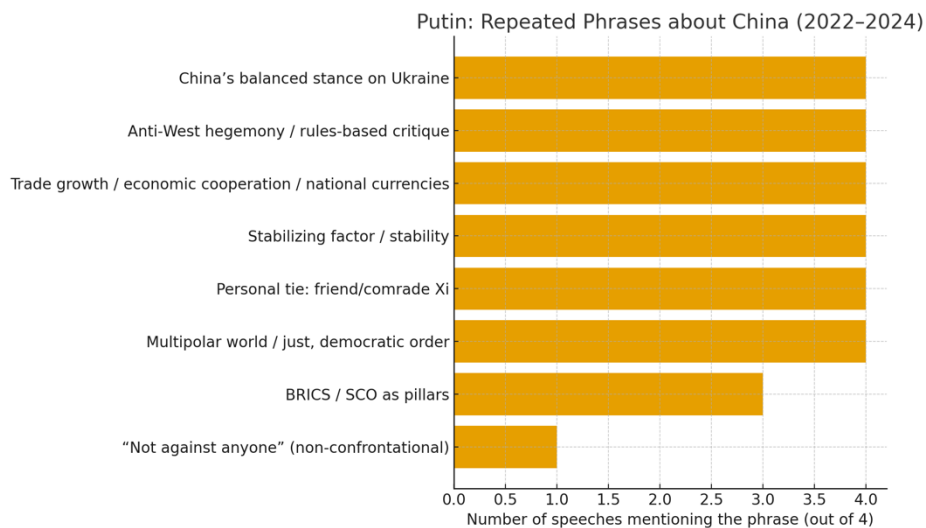
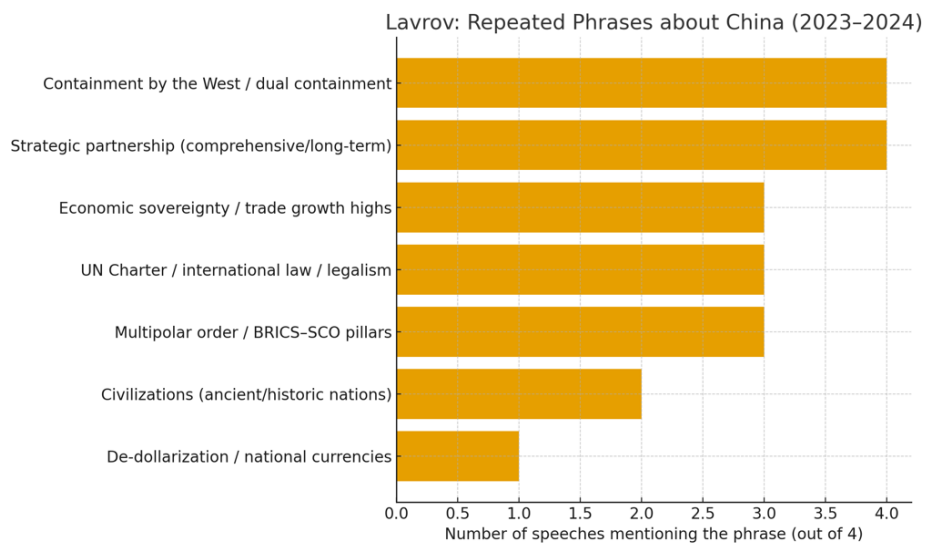
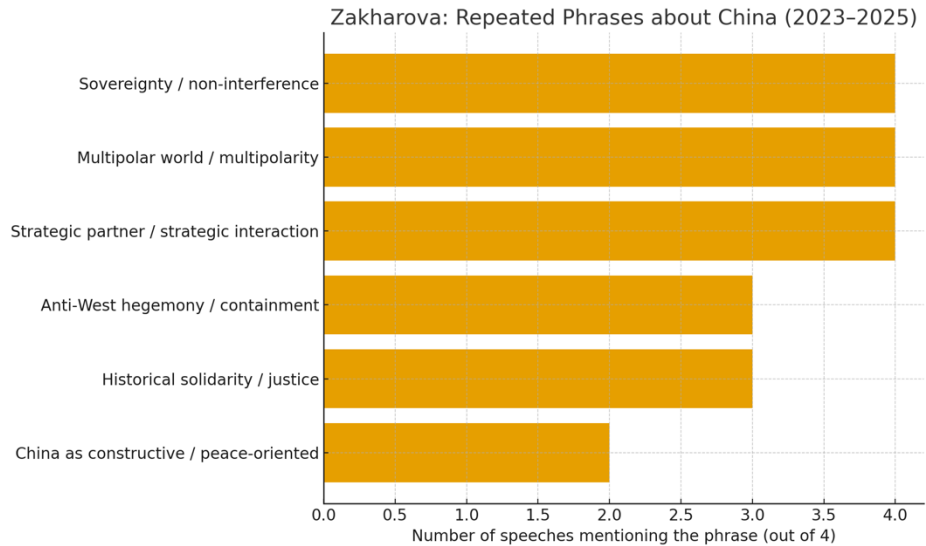
Conclusion

Several important conclusions can be drawn by conducting a discourse-historical analysis of Vladimir Putin’s four speeches during the Ukraine crisis of 2022. Putin’s discourse on China is carefully constructed. It serves Russia’s economic, security, and political interests. Besides that, Putin’s discourse binds strategic pragmatism and ideology. One of the most repetitive themes is the Russia-China founders of a multipolar world. This narrative is aligned with the anti-Western hegemony discourse. Putin highlights the importance of respecting sovereignty, just international relations with the involvement of developing states and regions, and non-interference.

The second narrative was economic sovereignty, which implies de-dollarization in the Russia-China trade. The next theme about China is that China, particularly Xi Jinping, has the role of an actor who solves crises peacefully and diplomatically. Putin portrays President Xi as a well-balanced (neutral or unbiased) actor, whereas the Western elites are portrayed as escalators of the conflict and unreliable actors. Unlike the often-

met economic and political themes, security and military cooperation are not mentioned or carefully framed.

6.4 Analytic Conclusion on Post-2022 Discourse on China by the Russian Elite



The outbreak of the 2022 war in Ukraine and the ensuing Western sanctions marked a turning point. The discourse of the Russian elite changed from one of practical cooperation to one of portraying China as a civilizational ally in a worldwide conflict against Western dominance.

By drawing a comparison between "ancient civilizations" and the emerging Western powers, Lavrov's rhetoric highlighted both the "comprehensive strategic partnership" and the civilizational aspect of Russia-China relations. Russia and China were at the forefront of multipolarity, which was now characterized as a historical inevitability rather than using neutral terms like "polycentric." The tone hardened: the West was openly branded as an aggressor seeking "dual containment" rather than as a possible ally.

Putin's post-2022 discourse demonstrated a strong strategic and personal bond with Xi Jinping. In addition to being an economic partner, he presented China as a normative force that would help Russia create a new order. In contrast to Western sanctions, limitations, and containment efforts, he consistently emphasized shared visions for multipolarity, sovereignty, and non-interference.

Sharper ideological coloring was added by Zakharova's speech. In opposition to Western imperialism and neo-colonialism, she continuously portrayed China and Russia as agents of historical justice. Sovereignty, civilizational continuity, and moral legitimacy were all highlighted in her speeches. The West was portrayed as unstable, hypocritical, and morally tainted, while China was commended for its modernization, anti-colonial solidarity, and diplomatic restraint.

6.5 Asymmetry and Distrust: From Sino-Soviet Split to Sino-Russian Partnership

Recalling the previous chapters, the current discourse of the Russian elite on China is predominantly positive; however, the historical and structural perspectives suggest that the partnership still remains fragile. It is essential to revisit the experience of the Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War. Historians and political scientists Chen Jian⁹⁰ and Lorenz Lüthi⁹¹ demonstrate that the alliance between the Soviets and Beijing in the 1950s was initially portrayed as indispensable, yet it continued for only little more than a decade due to ideological divergences, asymmetries of power, and mutual distrust. Just as the Sino-Soviet alliance ultimately collapsed despite its early importance, so too the present alignment between Moscow and Beijing carries the seeds of fragility. This chapter illustrates how the discourse of friendship conceals fundamental asymmetries and possible fault lines in the partnership by applying comparisons between the Cold War divide and current dynamics.

Chen Jian contends in *Mao's China and the Cold War* that the division was based on Mao Zedong's revolutionary philosophy and China's fight for autonomy within the socialist camp, and that it cannot be fully explained by power politics⁹².

Mao insisted that China should take the lead in the Cold War, which he saw as a worldwide conflict between imperialism and revolution. Mao saw Khrushchev's acceptance of "peaceful coexistence" with the West as revisionism and treachery. From

⁹⁰ Jian Chen, "Jian Chen," *NYU Shanghai*, accessed September 15, 2025, <https://shanghai.nyu.edu/academics/faculty/directory/jian-chen>.

⁹¹ Lorenz Lüthi, "Lorenz Lüthi," *Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill University*, accessed September 15, 2025, <https://www.mcgill.ca/history/lorenz-lüthi>.

⁹² JIAN, CHEN. *Mao's China and the Cold War*. University of North Carolina Press, 2001. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807898901_chen.

the beginning, the cooperation was weakened by this ideological difference. Chen emphasizes the domestic and personal aspects even more. Khrushchev's pragmatism and Mao's combative leadership style clashed, and Mao's domestic power was strengthened by the contentious conflicts with Moscow. Ideological and strategic differences had solidified into overt animosity by the 1960s, leading to border conflicts.

Chen Jian believed that Mao's revolutionary aspirations and China's refusal to accept Soviet domination were more responsible for the Sino-Soviet divide than it was an inevitable geopolitical result. From the start, ideology, nationalism, and divergent ideas about the socialist future threatened to destroy the coalition. If we draw the parallels with the current situation, in the 1950s-60s, China was the junior partner resenting the Soviet dominance, whereas nowadays the roles are reversed- Russia is the junior partner, particularly after the Western sanctions. A hypothesis can be drawn just as Mao resisted Soviet superiority; some Russian elite may quietly resent growing dependence on Beijing.

Secondly, Mao claimed ideological purity in contrast with the Soviets' revisionism.' Although nowadays there is no common communist ideology, and Sino-Russian relations are based on pragmatic opposition to Western dominance, their partnership is based on convenience rather than trust.

Thirdly, after Stalin's death, the Soviets prioritized détente with the US, while China was encouraging Third World Revolutions. Now, the roles are also reversed; China's priority is economic development, whereas Russia has a confrontational posture, which may drag China into conflicts, and China escapes from them. Hence, China is very cautious about commenting the war in Ukraine.

Lorenz Lüthi in his *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World book*, written in 2008 is also agrees with Chen Jian, stating that ideology was critical, however he highlights that Mao also used that dispute to reinforce his domestic position. Lüthi

frames things in a more networked global influence, not only bilateral conflict, although both recognize Soviet pragmatism versus Chinese radicalism, as well as the asymmetry of expectations and the need for leadership on China's side⁹³.

⁹³ Lüthi, Lorenz M. *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton University Press, 2008. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7pfr5>.

Final Conclusion

This thesis has shown that while the Russian elite's current discourse about China is overwhelmingly positive, historical and structural viewpoints indicate that the partnership is still fundamentally vulnerable. It is clear from a review of the Sino-Soviet relationship in the 1950s and 1960s that Moscow-Beijing alliances have always been susceptible to mistrust, power imbalances, and ideological differences. Chen Jian highlights that Mao Zedong's revolutionary vision, China's refusal to accept Soviet dominance, and Khrushchev's pragmatism were more responsible for the alliance's dissolution than unavoidable geopolitics.

This viewpoint is supported by Lorenz Lüthi, who emphasizes the importance of ideology and Mao's use of the conflict to strengthen his domestic power while also demonstrating how the division affected the larger communist world. These observations demonstrate how the current "no-limits" partnership also harbors the seeds of fragility: while China resisted Soviet dominance in the 1960s, Russia now holds the junior role and is becoming more reliant on Beijing as a result of Western sanctions and global isolation.

Drawing on Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov, and Maria Zakharova, the discourse analysis of Russian leaders' speeches and statements shows how Moscow's perception of China has changed over the past ten years, moving from pragmatic cooperation to a more strategic partnership and ultimately to an ideologically framed convergence within a multipolar world order. According to the Discourse-Historical Approach, language both reflects and creates this change. For example, after 2014, China was portrayed as a vital but mainly neutral economic partner; by 2020, the focus of discourse changed to

geopolitical alignment against the West; and by 2025, Russia openly portrayed China as a civilizational ally in the fight to create a more equitable global order.

This discursive evolution highlights how Russia's quest for identity as a unique civilizational power, along with external pressures like NATO enlargement, sanctions, and the Ukraine crisis, have influenced how elites portray China to audiences at home and abroad.

Thus, a paradox is revealed when the past and present are compared. On the one hand, discourse has allowed Russia to justify its shift toward China by portraying the alliance as the foundation of a multipolar global community. Conversely, Cold War vulnerabilities are echoed by the structural realities: power imbalances, conflicting priorities, and lingering mistrust. The use of certain discourse by the Russian elite to conceal these weaknesses shows that although the partnership may grow in discourse, it is still dependent on reality.

In the end, this thesis emphasizes how important language is as a foreign policy analysis tool. We can observe how Russia creates its identity in opposition to the West and justifies its strategic alignment with China by examining elite discourse. However, past experiences remind us that these kinds of alliances are not as stable as official discourse suggests. A complex combination of practical cooperation, mutual resistance to Western domination, and the ongoing discursive development of a shared civilizational mission will probably determine the future of Sino-Russian relations. However, beneath the surface of amicable rhetoric, there is always the chance of conflict—just as there was in the past, when strategic and ideological disagreements shattered an alliance that was once deemed "indispensable."

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