

**THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND RUSSO-  
CHINESE PARTNERSHIP: POLITICAL  
AND NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

Vitaly KOZYREV

*EAI Background Brief No. 1714*

Date of Publication: 27 June 2023

## Executive Summary

1. Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted the West to consolidate its effort to support Ukraine's defence against the Russian aggression condemned by most UN member states. However, Russia's strategic partner, China, has consistently supported the Kremlin's justification of the invasion, refused to join Western economic sanctions against Russia and demonstrated 'pro-Russian neutrality'.
2. Beijing intensified its political dialogue with Moscow, deepened its economic cooperation with Russia, developed defence and security cooperation, and activated its role as a potential mediator in the conflict. President Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow in March 2023 raised Western concerns of a likely Russia-China alignment and a new bipolar confrontation between China and the US-led liberal coalition.
3. The Chinese has implemented a more sophisticated counter-hegemonic strategy to avoid a direct involvement while increasing US costs aimed at a 'strategic defeat of Russia'. Beijing and Moscow are seeking to delegitimise the 'cold war mentality' of the West by strengthening 'genuine multilateralism', freed from Western control and forming an alternative vision of the world order.
4. By siding with Russia and attempting to delegitimise US hegemony, the Chinese leadership is seeking support against US policies of 'bullying or domineering' in international affairs. China is trying to extrapolate the 'strategic autonomy' narrative to interactions between all states to delink themselves from US hegemonic policies viewed by China and Russia as conflict-prone and divisive.
5. To end the West's cultural hegemony, Beijing and Moscow have added a civilisational component to their version of global governance. This has long been a significant attribute of the Chinese foreign policy and recently a part of Russia's new foreign policy concept.

6. The Ukraine war and America's policies towards Taiwan have prompted China and Russia to stress the historical foundation of sovereignty, which justify Russia's and China's own territorial claims.
7. China and Russia also seek to revise the principle of non-interference since it does not consider the impact of 'colour revolutions' on sovereign legitimacy and domestic stability of states. According to Chinese-Russian documents, self-determination should also consider the factor of cultural diversity.
8. The broader interpretation of UN principles has also become an element of the Sino-Russian 'anti-neocolonialism' agenda. The Ukraine war has placed Moscow at the fore of a new battle with 'neoliberal neocolonialism' that enables Moscow and Beijing to secure revision of rules and norms.
9. This new Moscow-Beijing *modus operandi* will drive their practical anti-hegemonic actions which, if successful, will modify the world order. Currently, China and Russia need to act carefully to avoid a direct conflict between major Western powers, secure China-US reconciliation, rescue Russia from defeat in Ukraine and disincentivise the West from containing China and Russia.