

Chapter 4

Russia's Strategy for the Indo-Pacific Region and Its Implications

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I. Introduction

The world situation for Russia in 2021 has its continuity and discontinuity. After Joe Biden took office at the beginning of the year, the New START treaty was extended, and the pressure on Russia in the field of arms control was slightly relieved. However, the pattern of Russia and China uniting against the U.S. remains unchanged and is likely to intensify into an ideological confrontation as Biden frames rivalry between the U.S., China and Russia as a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism.¹

Although the U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, which was declassified before Donald Trump left office, treats Russia as a minor player relative to the United States, China, and India;² however, Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG) has identified China and Russia as the primary opponents and declared that the U.S. would work with partners in the Indo-Pacific and Europe to deter them.³ Therefore, Russia, which straddles Europe and Asia, obviously cannot stay away.

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¹ President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, *The White House*, March 2021, p. 6, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-lv2.pdf>.

² "U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific," *The White House*, January 6, 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>.

³ *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, pp. 8, 15.

Russia, which wants to play the role of a balancer, does not want to be involved in the U.S.-China confrontation under the U.S. “Indo-Pacific Strategy” but still has to respond to the changes in the process. Moreover, because the Indo-Pacific region is relevant to its return to a superpower, Russia must also lay out in the Indo-Pacific region to protect its strategic interests.

II. Russia’s Strategic Layout in the Indo-Pacific Region

Following the Ukraine crisis, Russia has accelerated its “Pivot to the East” and proposed the “Greater Eurasian Partnership” in 2016 in order to get out of the predicament. The tensions between Russia and the West have spread from Europe to the Indo-Pacific region as the pattern of Russia and China uniting against the U.S. has become increasingly obvious. The 2021 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation declares its intention to ensure economic integration and multilateral cooperation through the framework of the “Greater Eurasia Partnership”, in particular by developing a strategic partnership with China and India to ensure stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region on a non-aligned basis.⁴ This is because a stable Asia-Pacific region will facilitate the development of the lagging Asian Russia region, and China and India are indispensable strategic pillars for Russia’s return to its former great power status.

The “Greater Eurasian Partnership” aims to establish a broad community of all Eurasian countries from the Atlantic to the Pacific, including the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU).⁵ Despite Russia criticizes of the term “Indo-Pacific”, the geographic scope of the “Greater Eurasian Partnership” does encompass the Indo-Pacific region.

⁴ Paragraph 6 and 7 of Article 101 of the 2021 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. See “Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 г. № 400 ‘О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации’,” *Президент России*, 2 июля 2021, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046>.

⁵ Сергей Лавров, “Мир на перепутье и система международных отношений в будущем,” *Россия в глобальной политике*, No. 5, 30 октября 2019, <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/mir-na-perepute-i-sistema-mezhdunarodnyh-otnoshenij-v-budushhem/>.

Operationally, Russia has turned to the East with the Eurasian Economic Union as its axis, initially seeking to sign free trade agreements with these countries and eventually establishing larger a free trade area such as the (EAEU-ASEAN Free Trade Area) to further enrich the “Greater Eurasian Partnership”.

Vietnam, Singapore, Iran (provisional agreement), and Serbia have signed FTAs with the Eurasian Economic Union, Indonesia is preparing to sign, Iran is starting full-scale FTA negotiations, and China, India, Egypt, Israel, Thailand, and Mongolia are negotiating. Although the progress has been slow, it is clear that the economic tentacles of the “Greater Eurasia Partnership” have been extended to the Indo-Pacific region.

China and India are the key pillars of the “Greater Eurasia Partnership” in the Indo-Pacific region. As the confrontation between China and the United States intensifies, the best choice for China is to join Russia to fight against the United States. However, India, which is the object of the “Greater Eurasian Partnership” and the “Indo-Pacific Strategy”, is taking advantage of the opportunity to maneuver between various parties. This is not only casts a shadow on the Russo-Indian relations but impacts Russo-Indian arms sales significantly. In view of the increasingly close relationship between Russia and China as well as the contradictions between the two countries, if Russia wants to unite China and oppose the U.S. without being subject to China, it must take advantage of India to control China and balance multiple parties. Therefore, Russia's cooperation with China against the United States still needs to stabilize the Russo-Indian relations, which will help to dominate the Russo-Chinese relations, but also conducive to the promotion of the “Greater Eurasian Partnership”.

III. Russia's Practice of Safeguarding its Strategic Interests

1. Promoting Russo-Chinese Military Cooperation

(1) Manipulating strategic ambiguity

In June 2021, Russia and China issued a joint statement on the 20th anniversary

of the signing of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as "the statement"), which pointed out that the epidemic has intensified the global game and highlighted the value of the treaty, and therefore the need for its renewal. It also emphasizes that Russo-Chinese relations are not similar to the military-political alliance during the Cold War, but are new type of international relations that go beyond this model, do not seek expediency and ideology, fully consider each other's interests, do not interfere in each other's internal affairs, have independent values, and do not target at any third country.⁶

Article 9 of the treaty has often been questioned as a deliberate attempt to leave room for the military alliance between Russia and China.⁷ This is why the statement clarifies the situation, but it is still in line with the previous formula of no alliances, no confrontation, and no targeting at third countries, which is another kind of strategic ambiguity. When this treaty was signed in 2001, it was intended to express that Russia and China had no territorial claims on each other and that there was no need for a military alliance. However, in recent years, the U.S. has been rapidly becoming hostile to Russia and China, and the strategic ambiguity provided by the treaty of not explicitly having an alliance, but being able to cooperate strategically and not having to bear the corresponding pressure, has suited the needs of both countries.

There is an argument that Russo-Chinese relations are an axis of convenience and their cooperation is driven by expediency and opportunism rather than genuine

⁶ "Совместное заявление Российской Федерации и Китайской Народной Республики к двадцатилетию подписания Договора о добрососедстве, дружбе и сотрудничестве между Российской Федерацией и Китайской Народной Республикой," *Президент России*, 28 июня 2021, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/hkwONx0FSpUGgXPaRU3xUHRmkRneSXIR.pdf>.

⁷ Article 9 states that when a situation arises in which one of the contracting parties deems that peace is being threatened and undermine or its security interests are involved or when it is confronted with the threat of aggression, the contracting parties shall immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats. See "Договор о добрососедстве, дружбе и сотрудничестве между Российской Федерацией и Китайской Народной Республикой," *Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации*, 16 июля 2001, https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/cn/-/asset_publisher/WhKWb5DVbQKA/content/id/576870.

common interests.⁸ This can be seen in Russian President Vladimir Putin's erratic attitude toward the military alliance between Russia and China. In 2019, Putin mentioned that Russo-Chinese relations were only reflected in economic alliances but soon announced that Russia was building a missile warning system for China. In 2020, he stated that there was no need for a military alliance between Russia and China but added that it was theoretically conceivable. In 2021, he approved the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, which emphasized the strengthening of Russo-Chinese relations on a non-alliance basis. At the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in 2021, on the issue of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) seeing Russia and China as a common threat and whether Russia should unite China, he stated that Russia's friendship with China is not against anyone but for mutual benefit. Unlike NATO, we have no intention of creating a military coalition.⁹ Putin's manipulations have taken the strategic ambiguity of the treaty to the extreme and have put considerable pressure on the United States.¹⁰

(2) *Conveying political signals through military exercises*

Russia and China often deliberately use military exercises to send political signals due to the tensions with the United States, such as the "Joint Sea 2014" East China Sea military exercises, the "Joint Sea 2015" first stage Mediterranean military exercises, and the "Joint Sea 2017" first stage Baltic military exercises. However, this is still not as good as China's recent participation in Russia's highest-level strategic exercises: Vostok-2018, Tesntr-2019, Kavkaz-2020 and

⁸ Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (London: Chatham House, 2008), p. 3.

⁹ "Владимир Путин принял участие в XVIII Ежегодном заседании Международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай». Стенограмма пленарной сессии," *Валдай Международный дискуссионный клуб*, 21 октября, 2021, <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-xviii-ezhegodnoe-zasedanie-mezhdunarodnogo-diskussionnogo-kluba-valday-stenogramma/>.

¹⁰ Admiral Charles Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, worries about Russo-Chinese military cooperation because Washington has not faced such a rival in 30 years. Russia and China have the most modern strategic nuclear weapons and fleets. Their active cooperation is not only in the military but also in the cyber security field. Therefore, it is necessary for the United States to revise the theory of deterrence for these two countries. See also "В ВС США заявили, что обеспокоены сотрудничеством России и КНР в оборонной сфере," *TASS*, 26 августа 2021, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12231121>.

Zapad-2021, which Russia has conducted without inviting outsiders.¹¹ This implies that Russo-Chinese military cooperation has moved to a different stage since then. The change is linked to the deterioration of Russo-American relations and the signing of the Russo-Chinese Military Cooperation Roadmap for 2017-2020 in June 2017. In the following year Russo-Chinese military cooperation underwent a qualitative change. In addition to the aforementioned strategic exercises, Russia and China have conducted joint strategic air patrols in the Asia-Pacific region for two consecutive years since 2019, deliberately provoking U.S. allies.

The Zapad/Interaction-2021 exercise, conducted in August 2021, which aims to test the capabilities of Russia and China in joint operations against terrorism, is also one of such qualitative changes. If the exercise is intended to counter terrorism, it should be held within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which has a counter-terrorism purpose, in order to be most effective. The main focus of the exercise was the launch of a bilingual Russian-Chinese command information system and the testing of a direct command link to the end of the two armies' platforms. The joint exercise is also completed using the opposing side's main combat equipments since the Kavkaz-2020 exercise. Russia and China have now taken the first step toward real joint operation. However, the extent of the joint operations should be considered confidential, but Russia and China deliberately publicize it. It is clear that the real purpose is to demonstrate against the United States, where counter-terrorism is secondary. After all, the world also did not expect the Taliban to regain control of Afghanistan so quickly.

The first joint Russo-Chinese maritime strategic cruise, which ended on October 23, 2021, has created another ripple in the Western Pacific. The joint cruise was a joint formation of ten ships and six helicopters after the "Joint Sea 2021" on October 17, which first crossed the Tsugaru Strait between Hokkaido and Honshu Islands and then went south to cross the Osumi Strait between Osumi Peninsula

¹¹ "Zapad-2021" was held in Russia and Belarus in September 2021. Given that the series of "Zapad" exercises have always targeted NATO and the U.S. in order to avoid substantiating NATO's accusation that China poses a "systemic challenge" to them, this time China only sent personnel to observe, and the level of participation was not as high as before.

and Tanegashima Island, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan. It is like sailing around the Japanese archipelago. As tensions rise with the United States, similar provocative moves by Russia and China are likely to increase in the future.

The Russo-Chinese military exercises may also be extended to missile warning systems and cyberspace in the future. The former depends on the progress of system construction and situation changes, while the latter can be seen in recent developments. The aforementioned statement not only stresses the importance of retaining domestic cyber governance sovereignty but also states that Russia and China will consolidate bilateral and multilateral cooperations in the international information security field, promote the construction of a global information security system that prevents conflicts and encourages the peaceful use of technology, and develop feasible measures to counter threats in the information security field. At the end of July 2021, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov expressed his hope for the normalization of the Russia-U.S. cybersecurity dialogue after the conclusion of the Russia-U.S. Strategic Stability Dialogue. He hoped that the U.S. would not limit itself to cyber fraud, as cyber-attacks on weapons control systems such as drones or critical infrastructure are equally important issues related to security and warfare, and he looked forward to the U.S. response.¹² Since the new version of the Russian Federation National Security Strategy accuses the West of subverting Russian cultural sovereignty and social governance through cyber infiltration and does not rule out responding with symmetric or asymmetric means,¹³ it is possible that Russia and China will hold joint cyber exercises in the future to pressure the United States.

¹² “Рябков назвал приземленной и деловой встречу с США по стратегической стабильности,” *TACC*, 28 июля 2021, <https://tass.ru/politika/12009721>.

¹³ See Articles 49, 50, 51, 53, 87, 88, 99 of the 2021 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation.

2. Stabilizing Russo-Indian Relations

(1) *Resisting disassociation from Indo-Pacific Strategy*

Despite its reputation as a “special and privileged strategic partnership”, Russo-Indian relations have recently been marred because India’s relationship with the West is too close. In December 2020, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov publicly denounced the U.S.-led West considers India a pawn in the Indo-Pacific strategy to restore unipolar world order and further split the special relationship between Russia and India.¹⁴ While Nikolay Kudashev the Russian Ambassador to India, and his deputy Roman Babushkin expressed understanding of India’s vision of inclusiveness in the Indo-Pacific, they remained concerned that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) would have a negative impact on region stability and emphasized that the “Greater Eurasian Partnership” would integrate Russia, China, and India.¹⁵ However, Moscow finally canceled the previously postponed summit of Russian and Indian heads of state due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the first time in 20 years, moreover, it further causes an uproar in the Indian public opinion. India still actively participated in the first-ever “QUAD” online heads of state meeting in March 2021, indicating that India could not resist the “Indo-Pacific Strategy”. This is because the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” can prove India’s great power status. Nevertheless, Russia still declared that it would hold bilateral annual heads of state summit at the end of the year after the July 2021 meeting between the Russian and Indian foreign ministers.¹⁶ At the sixth Eastern Economic Forum in September 2021, Russia invited India to invest in its Far East development, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India would be Russia’s partner in the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), becoming a reliable

¹⁴ Сергей Лавров, “Выступление на Общем собрании Российского совета по международным делам,” *Российский совет по международным делам*, 8 декабря, 2020, <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/vystuplenie-na-obshchem-sobranii-rossiyskogo-soveta-po-mezhdunarodnym-delam/>.

¹⁵ Rezaul H. Laskar, “Russia understands India’s Vision of Indo-Pacific, Has Concerns About Quad: Russian Diplomats,” *Hindustan Times*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/russia-understands-india-s-vision-of-indo-pacific-has-concerns-about-quad-russian-diplomats/story-ngJamb9wWTfA6aP2SFM7NK.html>.

¹⁶ “Ежегодный российско-индийский саммит состоится до конца 2021 года,” *TACC*, 9 июля 2021, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/11866689>.

partner for Russia's Far East development vision.¹⁷ At first glance, this may seem like a win for Russia, but it may only be one round of the Russian-U.S. rivalry. The Russian-U.S. competition for India shows that while the U.S. "Indo-Pacific strategy" aims at China, Russia will not tolerate any possibility of shaking the layout of the "Greater Eurasian Partnership". The geopolitical competition between the "Indo-Pacific strategy" and the "Greater Eurasian Partnership" is inevitable after all.

(2) *Efforts to preserve the market share of Indian armaments*

The Russo-Indian arms sales are the central axis of Russo-Indian relations and Russia's significant interests in the Indo-Pacific, but Russia has been losing its advantage in recent years. From 2011 to 2020, Russia has been the largest supplier of Indian armaments, but the share of arms sales has dropped 53% during this period. If we compare the two phases in the previous and next five years, the share of Russian-made weapons in India's arms imports has fallen from 70% to 49%. While this is related to the overall decline in arms imports due to India's complex and lengthy acquisition process, it is also influenced by India's desire to reduce its dependence on Russian-made armaments.

While the United States is a long-standing competitor to Russia in the Indian arms market, U.S. arms sales to India from 2016 to 2020 are down 46% from the previous period (2011-2015), dropping from India's second-largest source of armaments to fourth place. Despite the positive attitude of the United States, France and Israel are Russia's biggest challengers in the Indian arms market. India's arms imports from France increased by 709% while those from Israel rose by 82%.¹⁸

Although several large Russo-Indian arms sales were completed by 2020, India

¹⁷ "Индия поможет России развивать Северный морской путь," *ТАСС*, 3 сентября 2021, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/12294941>; "Нарендра Модии: Индия будет надежным партнером России на Дальнем Востоке," *Российская газета*, 3 сентября 2021, <https://rg.ru/2021/09/03/narendra-modi-india-budet-nadezhnym-partnerom-rossii-na-dalнем-vostoke.html>.

¹⁸ Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2021), p. 9.

placed several orders with Russia in 2019-2020, so Russo-Indian arms sales are still promising in the near term.¹⁹ However, India's Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) bid, which has been delayed for years, is significantly uncertain. In the face of the U.S. strategy of linking the "Indo-Pacific strategy" to arms sales, Russia may not win the bid for its Su-35 fighter aircraft, despite its inherent advantage of having Russian weapons as the mainstream equipment of the Indian army.²⁰ The fighter aircraft bid is crucial to Russia's future influence on India, and a successful bid would influence the U.S. "Indo-Pacific strategy" and allow it to maneuver with the U.S. in Europe and balance the Russo-Chinese relations.

IV. The impact of Russia's Strategic Layout on the Indo-Pacific Region and Future Developments

1. Russia can Constrain the U.S. "Indo-Pacific Strategy"

From March to April 2021, Russia launched the largest military exercise near the Russo-Ukrainian border since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which raised concerns that the conflict would escalate into a major war and suggested that China might take the opportunity to invade Taiwan. Russia has also used this gray area tactics to prove its ability to influence the international situation. It has been concerned whether the U.S. has been prepared to fight on both sides in the face of the reality of the Russo-Chinese cooperation against the U.S., nor has it been able to divide the increasingly close Russo-Chinese military cooperation, which

¹⁹ Wezeman, Kuimova and Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers*, 2020, p. 4.

²⁰ For the competition for India's next-generation fighter bid, please refer to Shiao-Shyang Liou, "India's Next-Generation Fighter Bid Affecting the Future Indo-Pacific Layout," *National Defense and Security Real-time Assessment*, No. 135, February 23, 2021, https://indsr.org.tw/tw/News_detail/3331/ 牽動未來印太格局的印度下一代戰機標案。

is tantamount to a quasi-alliance.²¹ In August 2021, the U.S. launched the largest maritime exercise-Large Scale Exercise since the Cold War. The U.S. Army's Stars and Stripes newspaper further declared that the exercise was a signal to China and Russia that the U.S. was capable of multifaceted warfare to repel aggression.²² However, this cannot quell the doubts the rivalry between Russia and the U.S. in Europe will affect the Indo-Pacific situation. Instead, it opens up the infinite imagination of the chain effect.

The development of the Indo-Pacific region is crucial to Russia's future national destiny because the development of Asian-Russia is closely related to Russia's future economic development. In the case of Russia's inability to develop independently, the introduction of foreign investment from the Indo-Pacific region is necessary. Moreover, China and India are indispensable pillars of Russia's great power strategy and are crucial to its return to its former status as a great power alongside the United States. For the U.S., the Indo-Pacific region is its global strategic priority, but how to take care of both the European and Asian battlefields is a significant challenge.

The Russo-U.S. summit in Geneva in June 2021 aims to find strategic stability and rules of confrontation to avoid a worst-case scenario. The U.S.-China confrontation has forced the United States to seek a stable and predictable U.S.-Russian relationship to compete with China intently. However, this does not mean that the U.S. is willing to compromise, and after the Geneva summit the

²¹ Jack Detsch and Amy Mackinnon, "China and Russia Turn Deeper Ties into a Military Challenge for Biden," *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/20/china-russia-military-attention-us-policy-xi-putin-biden-taiwan-ukraine/>. For the motives and influence of Russia's launch of the grey zone tactics near the Russo-Ukrainian border, please refer to Shiau-Shyang Liou, "Russia Returns to Great Power Status with the Grey Zone Tactics against Ukraine", *Real-time Review of National Defense and Security*, No. 153, April 12, 2021, https://indsr.org.tw/tw/News_detail/3352/俄羅斯藉對烏克蘭灰色地帶衝突重返大國地位; Shiau-Shyang Liou, "An Analysis of the Chain Effect of the Grey Zone Conflict near the Russo-Ukrainian Border on Taiwan," *Real-time Review of National Defense and Security*, No. 167, May 6, 2021, https://indsr.org.tw/tw/News_detail/3370/ 近期俄烏邊境灰色地帶衝突對臺灣的連鎖效應評析.

²² Alison Bath, "Navy and Marine Exercise to Span 17 Time Zones on a Scale Last Seen During the Cold War," *Stars and Stripes*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/branches/navy/2021-08-02/largest-scale-us-naval-and-amphibious-exercise-in-40-years-starting-sixth-fleet-2413231.html>.

U.S. continued to use the “Navalny incident”²³ as a reason to sanction Russia. Although Russia wants to normalize the Russo-American relations, Russia still sticks to its bottom line and reluctant to make concessions on its internal affairs and “near abroad” issues. Nevertheless, while Russia can affect the security situation in Europe, Russia can keep the U.S. in check as long as the U.S. does not want the conflict to get out of hand. After all, if the U.S. fails to fulfill its security commitments in Europe, it could seriously undermine its global supremacy. It is inconceivable that the U.S. would trade European geopolitical interest for a coalition with Russia against China. However, if China is willing to make concessions to Russia or give its full support in critical areas, Russia may repeat its gray-zone tactics near the Russo-Ukrainian border and even conspire with China to synchronize the efforts in Europe and the Indo-Pacific to impede the U.S. so as to make the U.S. too overstretched to focus on China.

2. Russia, the U.S., China, and India have Failed to Negotiate

While Russia and China unites, Russia can affect the situation on Europe and create a chain effect in the Indo-Pacific region. It is highly unfavorable to the United States, but the Russo-Chinese relations are not impeccable. Russia has repeatedly acknowledged that the Russo-Chinese relations are at the best stage, but since the “Pivot to the East” Russia’s expectancies have been not as expected with China gaining much ground, leading to the questions about whether the “Pivot to the East” was a mistake.²⁴ The aforementioned statement also has an unusual atmosphere. It mentioned the need to strengthen the cooperation on the use of the Northern Sea Route based on mutual benefit and respect for the interests of countries along the route and promote the sustainable development of the Arctic.

²³ Alexei Navalny is a well-known Russian opposition figure. He was suspected of being poisoned by the Russian authorities in August 2020. Navalny once went abroad for medical treatment, but he was arrested and sentenced to prison after returning to the country. Western countries have imposed sanctions on Russia and demanded the release of Navalny on the grounds that Moscow is suppressing dissidents and threatening democratic values. The incident has so far continued to show no signs of stopping.

²⁴ Sergey Sukhankin, “Russia’s Pivot to Asia (China) After 2014: The Wrong Turn?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 18, Iss. 91, June 8, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-pivot-to-asia-china- after-2014-the-wrong-turn/>.

Apart from not using the Chinese term “Polar Silk Road”, it also stressed the need to respect Russia's interests. This is because Russia has always regarded its Northern Sea Route as its internal waters and does not allow others to violate its sovereignty. Therefore, even if Russia needs China's help, Russia still wants to lead the development of this route and uphold its sovereignty. Russia is also seeking other aids to avoid overreliance on China. In addition to seeking India's support at the aforementioned Eastern Economic Forum, Rosatom, which leads the operation of the route's infrastructure, signed an agreement with Dubai Ports World in July 2021 to cooperate in its development.²⁵

Russia, the United States, and China have their grand strategies in the Indo-Pacific, with Russia proposing the “Greater Eurasian Partnership”, the United States “Indo-Pacific Strategy”, and China “A Community with A Shared Future”, all of which present India as a critical role. However, given the legacy of Sino-Indian relations and the intensification of border conflicts and the threat to India's national security posed by the String of Pearls and the Belt and Road Initiative, it is difficult to imagine India supporting China. Therefore, in order to counter China, India has swung between Russia and the U.S. India's desire to unite the U.S. and contain China while keeping a distance from the U.S. to avoid damaging Indo-Russian relations has not yet met Russia's expectations and has alienated Russia. However, in order to consolidate its strategic layout of returning to great power status, Russia still needs to stabilize the Russo-Indian relations, and India also needs Russia's strength to maneuver with the West.

The Indo-Pacific is not a national security concern for Russia, but it is still relevant to its future national economic development and strategic layout. The development of the world situation, which closely links Europe and the Indo-Pacific, is both an opportunity and a challenge for Russia. Although the evolution of the situation has given Russia a sense of respect as a great power that it has not had for a long time, it may also accelerate its decline if not handled carefully, so Russia still has to deal with it step by step.

²⁵ “Росатом и DP World подписали соглашение о сотрудничестве,” *РОСАТОМ*, 23 июля 2021, <https://rosatom.ru/journalist/news/rosatom-i-dp-world-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve/>.

V. Conclusion

Russia's strategic layout and practice in the Indo-Pacific region is part of its "Greater Eurasia Partnership", which aims to return to its former great power status. After years of operation in the Indo-Pacific region, the "Greater Eurasian Partnership" achieves some economic success. Moreover, as the U.S. confrontation with China and Russia intensifies, the pattern of Russia and China uniting against the U.S. is becoming more and more solid, and the Russo-Chinese military cooperation is putting pressure on the U.S. However, the Russo-Indian relations are becoming more and more divided. If Russia wants to unite with China against the U.S. and not be subjected to China, it must utilize India to contain China, so it needs to stabilize Russo-Indian relations. Nevertheless, the Russo-Indian relations are facing strong challenges from the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" in recent years, but India still needs Russia, so Russo-Indian relations are unlikely to break up.

After the Ukraine crisis, Russia's relations with the West are unlikely to warm up, and the focus of world economic development has shifted to the Indo-Pacific, so the Indo-Pacific is becoming increasingly important in Russia's global strategic layout. This is why the 2021 Russian Federation's National Security Strategy also considers that the relations with China and India should be strengthened. In 2020, there was an argument within Russia of taking advantage of COVID-19 to act as a balancer of global affairs. Although it was not well received by outsiders at the time, and Russia's strategic layout in the Indo-Pacific was a mixed combination of acceptance and opposition, however, its ability to influence the European security situation in 2021 not only constrains the U.S. but also have a knock-on effect on the Indo-Pacific situation. The close connection between the European and the Indo-Pacific situations has made Russia a variable that cannot be ignored in the Indo-Pacific order.