

**GREATER EURASIA PARTNERSHIP: DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL  
ELEMENTS OF FOREIGN POLICY CONVERGENCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

China-Russia strategic partnership has evolved into a new stage where the two great powers share increasing overlapping and complementary interests. The Greater Eurasia Partnership (GEP) framework offers an integrated approach to conducting their relations by deepening collaborative partnerships through regional development and security cooperation. This article aims to analyze evolving nature of the GEP by focusing on domestic and regional elements of foreign policy convergence. Although connecting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the GEP illustrates the domestic level of convergence in their foreign policies, the regional context reflects a partial convergence that entails further policy coordination in managing potential risks and challenges, particularly in Central Asia and more broadly in Eurasia. In examining the evolving nature of GEP, the international political economy perspective is applied to foreign policy analysis with a particular focus on the development-security nexus. The article concludes with a discussion of the main drivers and future trajectory of the GEP with regard to regional and global stability.

**Keywords:** China, Russia, Greater Eurasia Partnership, Belt and Road Initiative, Foreign policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Economic and political repercussions of the post-COVID-19 global environment, including deteriorating relations of China with the West, China-India border crisis and the Russia-Ukraine War with its broader implications, indicate much uncertainty about the ongoing transformation of the international system. The security aspect of relations among great powers has been heightened and natural geopolitical limitations on their multiple interactions have become more evident. Preserving global stability and peace has attracted the world's attention at most and emerged as an urgent necessity for the international community. And most recently, Xi Jinping has announced China's new "Global Security Initiative" which is devoted to being as a response to the challenges in the global security environment.

Additionally, the vital need to change the functioning of the international economic order has increased with the current post-pandemic recession. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, the liberal international economic order has been under significant scrutiny as well as criticism due to the fact that it lacked far behind to respond existing problems with regard to global developmental issues and the issues related to unbalanced and unequal development in the world. The global economic crisis, which was coupled with the trade war and protectionism during the Trump era, often described as a "lost decade", continues to be a major challenge and the globalization process is slowing down. The failure to manage existing economic difficulties has coincided with increasing dissatisfaction from the developing world by demanding a more fair and equitable trade system and playing a more active role in developing a new global economic order has also been strengthened. Within this broader global economic context, global reshuffling has begun to be taken place after the post-pandemic recession and the world's largest trade agreement of RCEP has settled in 2022. Its significant impact on South-South trade is currently leading to some considerations on new financial initiatives for depolarization efforts especially in the areas of new currency use, the use of digital currency, and the internalization of the renminbi.

In the last two decades, the economic and political interests of China and Russia have been gradually aligned in significant ways and levels. This strategic alignment has come to a new stage where the two great powers have begun to redefine the rules and norms of a much more comprehensive framework for Eurasian integration. The ongoing structural transition from unipolarity to multipolarity has taken place not only in economic terms but also in security terms. From a regional order formation perspective, some scholars address the emergence of non-Western regionalism differently than the Western type of regional integration and institution-building models (Kaczmarek, 2017). In this regard, while China and Russia have separate visions and initiatives on regional order formation, their attempts overlap in altering the existing Eurasian order. Another different view emphasizes the "adaptation" process in Eurasian regional order formation through carefully managed interactions between China and Russia and the promotion of their attempts to increase strategic interdependence for creating a "regional system" (Christoffersen, 2018). On the other hand, some others suggest that Beijing and Moscow, sharing common geopolitical purposes and concerns, have already begun to establish a new platform for security and economic cooperation in the making of the Greater Eurasia community

(Lukin and Novikov, 2021). In order to provide geoeconomic and geopolitical consolidation as the foundation of the Community of Greater Eurasia, a number of theoretical constructs have been built upon new concepts such as “Central Eurasia” and some other new models of trans-regionalism encompassing East and Southeast Asia and Europe (Karaganov, 2018; Bordachev, 2018). On the other hand, instead of political and strategic considerations, some other views concentrate on common economic interests resulting from the formation of Greater Eurasia (Li, 2018). Eventually, it is also necessary to reconsider expected economic benefits with potential security risks for further Eurasian integration. From a broader security perspective, the question of European security within the framework of Greater Eurasia is raised as an essential component of a feasible regional integration process in the long term. According to this view, the Greater Eurasia project without Europe presents both geopolitical and geoeconomic risks (Wang and Duan, 2022).

In order to understand the future trajectory of regional development and security cooperation in Eurasia, this article aims to analyze evolving nature of the Greater Eurasia Partnership (GEP) by concentrating on the domestic and regional level of foreign policy convergence. Although both great powers principally agree upon moving towards deepening their relations within the new framework of GEP, in practice, they have different views on how to manage the dynamic interplay between economic and security dimensions of extended integration in Eurasia. Given the fact that Russia’s GEP and China’s BRI have been linked to each other, a much more effective policy coordination between the two becomes more essential. What is missing in the existing literature is to investigate the interactions between the economic and security dimensions of Greater Eurasia more closely in general and the role of domestic politics in the foreign policies of China and Russia in particular. For filling this gap, China-Russia’s strategic partnership is analyzed through their respective foreign policies with a particular focus on their attempts to facilitate regional development and security cooperation in Eurasia. In addition to the assessment of their efforts to increase mutual developmental benefits through infrastructure and trade connectivity, the major concerns for reducing potential security risks are also evaluated by paying attention to their national and foreign security policies.

The first part of the article introduces the theoretical framework that helps to explain the development-security connection by applying the international political economy perspective to foreign policy analysis. The second part focuses on the main underlying motivations of Russia’s new approach to foreign policy in formulating the GEP. The third part explicates multiple dimensions of the BRI as China’s grand policy initiative. The fourth part examines the mutual developmental benefits of linking BRI to GEP by illustrating the domestic context of their foreign policy convergence. The last part explores the partial convergence in regional bilateral and multilateral settings which indicates both advantages and potential risks for further Greater Eurasia integration.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In employing the international political economy perspective in foreign policy analysis, the domestic context of foreign policy and the relationship between domestic and foreign policies are mainly examined through the concept of developmental state (Tonami, 2016). In this regard, it helps to develop a better

theoretical approach to the development-security nexus in explaining the evolving nature of the China-Russia strategic partnership and its implications for practical regional diplomacy. It also helps to explain how developmental states engage in their bilateral and multilateral relations in responding to changing international environment.

The domestic level of convergence relies on state-led developmentalism that leads states to pursue similar foreign policies for achieving mutual developmental benefits according to their domestic needs. Development-security connection is based on the basic presumption of the inseparable nature of national development and security policies of states. They are considered mutually dependent and reinforcing each other. National development needs a secure external environment, which means that a secure external environment provides suitable conditions for economic development. On the other hand, national and external security requires stability, which is provided and supported by economic resources. National development supports a stable internal and external security environment and brings sustainable stability in the long term. Besides, national development provides potential means and opportunities to alter domestic and external security.

Foreign policy convergence in a regional bilateral or multilateral context, however, is constituted by strategic alignment practices which are affected by domestic and external factors. In economic alignment, economic interdependence plays a role in accommodating interactions toward common economic interests. In political alignment, strategic partnerships, as an alternative to formal security alliances, serve to coordinate competing interests into common goals and actions as a response to uncertainty in the international security environment (Wilkins, 2008). Developmentalist states tend to involve building collaborative partnerships through the means and tools of economic alignment and attempt to establish political alignment towards regional development and security cooperation. Strategic partnerships play a key role in establishing complementarity between economics and politics as such international trade tends to complement a state's strategic partnership, "trade follows the flag" (Watson, 2001: 1488).

## **RUSSIA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY: GREATER EURASIA PARTNERSHIP**

Russia's foreign policy shift to "pivot to Asia" in 2013 has been reformulated as "Greater Eurasia Partnership" (GEP) since 2016. The main underlying motivations behind this significant foreign policy shift can be understood from the two major challenges: the need to establish relations with the region that is gradually becoming a new center of the world economy; and the need to achieve Russia's strategic goal of developing its Siberian and Far Eastern regions (Lukin, 2018: 174). But, from a broader historical point of view, it is understood that Russia's expectations from its relations with the West were not met in the last several decades. In addition to fundamental geopolitical challenges resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was unable to create its own national development strategy to integrate the world economy successfully. As a result, Russia was excluded from the process of developing the rules of the global economy as well.

With the practical impact of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russia's decision to shift its foreign policy toward the East was encouraged by gradual diplomatic steps in different platforms. Initially, President Vladimir Putin addressed Russia's intention to form a new economic partnership between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the SCO, and ASEAN at the Federal Assembly in December 2015 (Putin, 2015). After that Putin gave a speech at the Russian-ASEAN summit by noticing that Russia was willing to create "a common free trade zone between the EAEU and ASEAN" in May 2016 (Putin, 2016). The so-called "Sochi Declaration" in the same year reflected a much clear diplomatic move towards a Greater Eurasia Partnership by proposing to establish a comprehensive free trade area between ASEAN and the EAEU and building greater cooperation among ASEAN, the EAEU, and the SCO. As Russia's strategic reorientation towards Greater Eurasia had been decisively reformulated, a more extensive Eurasian partnership has been involved in improving relations between the EAEU and the countries with which Russia already has close partnerships including China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the SCO countries. Putin especially emphasized that the GEP promotes comprehensive economic relations and trade, based on the rules of WTO. For this purpose, he added, it is essential to build a network of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements between all the members and organizations.

On the other hand, Valdai Discussion Club suggests that the GEP is "a conceptual framework for Russia's geostrategic and geoeconomic self-identification as the center and north of the rising continent". It also defines it as a new security framework that would replace a "failed European security project" (Valdai Discussion Club, 2017: 25). Although Russia views China as the central and most significant partner within the framework of GEP, Russian foreign policy aims to diversify its economic ties with the wider region rather than fostering dependence on China. For example, after the Russian Far East (RFE) was included in the Silk Road Economic Belt's (SREB) action plan, the China-Russia strategic partnership has become dependent upon Chinese Northeast-RFE economic integration. This local-level regional development project turned into a national security issue, mainly because of the increasing significance of the Northern Sea Route to the Arctic Ocean (Shi, 2017). Moreover, the different priorities of the two sides for the Chinese Northeast-RFE integration project, political purposes and administrative concerns of Russia and local market-oriented priorities of Chinese provinces, had to be converged carefully (Cheng 2015). Heilongjiang province, for instance, was incorporated into the SREB linking with Central Asia and assumed that the Chinese Northeast-RFE integration project would provide access to the Northern Sea Route through transport corridors in southern Primorye. But more importantly, the construction of the GEP reflects Russia's diversification attempts in foreign policy through expanding connectivity by linking the RFE and the EAEU to the RCEP (Suslov, 2016). Even though RCEP agreement was reached without Russia's participation in 2022, RCEP's strategic value is still important for Russia in order to place the RFE and the EAEU within the Asia Pacific context and achieve increased connections with Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia.

From national development and security perspective, Russia's fundamental domestic weakness lies in its insufficient economic development. Russia's

weakening economic position creates more vulnerabilities and insecurities. The Russian policymaking circles have come to realize that Russia will not achieve strategic modernization goals without increasing cooperation with Asia's rising economies. In this sense, one of the key strategic objectives is considered to be developing the economic conditions of the Siberian and Far Eastern territories (Lukin, 2018). In considering Russia's national security priorities, the sources of potential strength and weakness will largely affect its future foreign policy behaviour. While energy strategy has a central place in its national security posture, institutional underdevelopment, sub-regional weakness and political vulnerability play a constraining role in its foreign economic and security policy (Sussex, 2022: 158-159). In this regard, Russia's pivot to Asia is primarily based on its aspiration to create strategic leverage as a premier energy supplier to the East. However, its domestic weaknesses and vulnerabilities entail Russia pursuing other economic and political means and instruments, particularly building trade connectivity, to ensure its national economic and security interests.

### **CHINA'S GRAND POLICY INITIATIVE: BRI**

BRI as China's grand policy initiative includes two major policy initiatives, namely Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). These two initiatives are interlinked and designed as mutually reinforcing to each other. In the grand policy design of the BRI, while the former is mainly driven by economic and commercial interests, the maritime security dimension is considered to be the integral component of foreign economic policy in the latter. The potential security risks in the South China Sea, including naval blockade by the US and China's vulnerability to maritime transport routes, are aimed to be reduced by diversifying its import and export routes through the SREB (Gabuev, 2015). Additionally, some of the projects within these initiatives are closely related to each other and some others largely overlap in policy terms. For example, the Arctic Polar Silk Road project is officially situated within the MSR, but it can also be considered a part of SREB in terms of geographic imperative and policy implementation. Moreover, China's overall strategic attempts to integrate Southeast Asia into Central Asia have become more visible through recent developments, especially in its increasing trade relations with ASEAN and the SCO countries. Thus, it is strategically important to recognize interconnection or interoperability between these two main aspects of BRI in considering their long-term implications. And specifically, the broader strategic linkage between land and maritime Silk Road ensures the feasibility of the Greater Eurasia plan in a way that both China and Russia will continue to facilitate their joint efforts towards deeper strategic cooperation. Some scholars have started to discuss the need for developing the maritime dimension of the China-Russia strategic partnership (Zhao, 2021a; Trenin, 2020).

BRI's economic rationale reflects a new design of shaping the global energy and trading system, which allows China to rebalance its international investment by providing itself with a global presence. With the help of China's proactive policy approach, the security rationale of BRI seeks to achieve much more comprehensive security cooperation by shifting its focus from East Asia to Central and West Asia in the medium term. As a combination of both continental

and maritime strategy, the BRI is designed to support continental transportation roads with significant maritime ports. Furthermore, the crisis management element of BRI aims to create suitable conditions and mechanisms for a stable regional environment by helping to reduce destabilizing effects of economic, financial, and security crises and promising to ease the tensions in its regional neighbourhood. From a broader perspective, in terms of BRI's political rationale, it is reasonable to assume that China's need for gaining political support from developing countries and regional neighbours in enhancing its legitimate actions is the foundational rationale for explaining the BRI as a grand policy initiative. Stabilizing the surrounding environment is the essential strategic objective of China's BRI.

BRI as an initiative for international cooperation primarily focuses on stimulating regional economic development. Strengthening cooperation on infrastructure development is also enhanced by improving connections in the fields of energy, trade, and finance. In this regard, developing BRI for regional and international cooperation requires increased connectivity and coordinated attempts of participant countries in their national development strategies (Chen, 2017). The domestic context of BRI is linked to China's national development strategies in promoting economic reforms as well as solving the problems of regional economic inequalities between underdeveloped continental and more developed maritime regions (Leverett and Wu, 2017). BRI serves to stimulate social and economic development by coordinating different competing policies in multiple domains of national development (Jones and Zeng, 2019). As it helps to resolve socio-economic issues which are increasingly becoming connected to the world economy, it also contributes to the development of China's other regions, especially the Northeast and Northwest regions.

The problem of overcapacity and the increasing need to build collaborative partnerships in the third market, particularly in Central Asia, is also another significant domestic political factor that influences China's external BRI policy. The economic rationale is strongly associated with China's domestic needs. Stimulating demand for Chinese exports in third markets requires reducing the cost of trade and increasing connectivity through infrastructure building. And most recently supply chain management and cooperation, which is an essential component of trade and finance, has become critical after COVID-19 for China's domestic economic transition from an old growth model to a "dual circulation" strategy. Furthermore, building a large-scale infrastructure industry has produced excess labor force capacity and overproduction. The BRI, on the other hand, makes it possible to explore new opportunities in emerging markets such as Central Asia, Russia, Iran, and others.

In terms of the national security priorities of China, separatist and terrorist movements are perceived as major threats to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Development-security connection is much visible in some underdeveloped Western regions, particularly in China's Xinjiang autonomous region. The attempts in solving major security problems are supported by the idea of encouraging Xinjiang's economic development through the BRI projects. Furthermore, Xi Jinping's leadership created a new concept of "Comprehensive National Security" for national prosperity that involves extensive policymaking and implementation systems in various issue areas,

such as energy security, foreign trade and finance, migration, demography, and so on. It helps systematically calculate new risks and challenges to overall Chinese interests. While it regards national development as a core national interest, China's "Comprehensive National Security" contains "the combination of internal security and national stability with external security", leading to "the combination of traditional and non-traditional fields of security policy" (Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022). Development-security connection reflects a circular understanding of mutually dependent aspects and organizing principle of overall strategy development in Chinese strategic thinking.

### **DOMESTIC CONVERGENCE: CONNECTING BRI TO THE GEP**

Both China and Russia, as developmental states, pursue similar approaches to building new collaborative partnerships for achieving mutual developmental benefits. The domestic convergence in their foreign policies relies on certain commonalities such as giving higher priority to domestic economic transition, determination in responding to developmental needs, choosing its own developmental path, and increasing institutional efforts for strengthening state capacity and national security. Thus, the domestic and foreign policy decision-making in China and Russia are similar and getting gradually converging even though they are not likely to be identical. In this context, it is possible to suggest that China and Russia increasingly share "parallel interests" rather than identical interests (Rozman, 2014).

In terms of the driving pattern of their bilateral relations, economic interdependence with various dimensions including energy, trade, and finance has been enhanced. After the energy-driven regional connectivity cooperation was established with a big energy deal in 2014, their bilateral relations were economically realigned and politically improved. However, mutual developmental benefits need to be enlarged by forging trade interdependence through increasing connectivities for creating new growth poles. In order to improve Eurasian regional development, established energy connectivity should be supported by trade connectivity. In international trade, the largest trade partner of China has shifted from the EU to ASEAN, and both China and the EU have surpassed Russia in their economic exchanges with Central Asia. China and Russia are willing to improve trade diversification by utilizing the GEP framework. As a result of this significant change, the GEP framework is offered as an opportunity to identify new sources of growth and drivers of development for all interested countries and regions. For this purpose, in 2018, a joint agreement on linking the BRI and the EAEU was signed between China and Russia, which systematically formulated the common interests of both countries such as customs cooperation, reducing trade barriers, and strengthening trade facilitation (CGTN, 2019).

### **Chinese Northeast-Russian Far East Integration**

One of the necessary component of connecting the BRI to the GEP is to integrate China's Northeast with Russia's Far East (Shen, 2016: 28-29). The Chinese Northeast-RFE integration has been driven by strong domestic factors, such as local-center institutional development and state transformation, in both countries. The Russian government approved its Far East development strategy for 2015-2025 after Eastern Economic Forum was held in 2015. Russia's state-led developmentalism involves promoting state capacity with a wider strategic



vision of Far East development and integration with the Asia Pacific. Practically, it is essential to understand how the BRI affects the RFE development particularly. As of 2018, China became the largest trading partner of the RFE region, accounting for 83.5% of the total foreign trade of the Amur, 52.7% in Primorsky Krai, and 59.6% in Khabarovsk Kai (Kapoor, 2020). The critical juncture is the two transport corridors, called Primorye-1 and Primorye-2. The expected benefits from foreign trade after Primorskiy Krai is connected with Northeast China has been one of the key driving force. These two corridors will create a logistical chain that links the hinterland Chinese coastal provinces with Russian ports.

In terms of the border planning process in Chinese North-east-RFE integration, the state-building efforts of China and Russia appear to be in parallel development despite some problems regarding center-local relations exist in both countries (Christoffersen, 2021). Their joint integration programs focus on certain issues such as border-free trade zones, infrastructure building, developing resource industries, and investment cooperation. The close coordination between the two sides on border planning and development influences each other's domestic processes in local-center coordination of state-building efforts. The local-level actors in both countries have been significantly transformed to become more active players in domestic and foreign policymaking (Sergunin, 2020). While Heilongjiang provincial government has been successfully elevating local border trade to the national level in BRI's implementation, Russia created the Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East as a federal body that provides coordination between the central government and local authorities (Troyakova, 2018). This ministry was reconstructed later as the Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic as a response to the need of improving the efficiency of developing the Arctic zone. This institutional reform was put forward with the new Arctic strategy in 2020 labeled as "Strategy for Developing the Russian Arctic Zone and Ensuring National Security through 2035".

### **Chinese Northwest-Central Asia Connection**

Even before the BRI has launched, China's "Going West" strategy was adopted for developing Northwest China. Xinjiang province was regarded as a new center for the oil and gas industry and it attempted to build new infrastructure to connect the province to the coastal areas within China (Wishnick, 2012: 84). Within the BRI framework, however, Xinjiang's geographical advantages as key transportation and trade hub have become much a matter of utilization by creating connections with the neighboring states in Central Asia and South Asia (Zimmerman, 2015: 6). For the development of Northwest of China, the three different corridors are designed within the SREB: the New Eurasian Land Bridge and Silk Road Railway from Xinjiang to Western Russia through Kazakhstan; China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor from Xinjiang to Türkiye and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor from Xinjiang to Pakistan.

In order to improve the Chinese Northwest-Central Asia connection, the main effort has been devoted to creating a free trade zone among the SCO countries. While the SCO mainly focuses on security matters, economic and trade cooperation among its members and other partners has increasingly become an important aspect. Because of its geographic location and its potential to grow,

the Xinjiang region is regarded as a “core development” area to deepen the SCO ties (Chu, 2022). A new plan for establishing an “SCO-themed pilot free trade zone” in Xinjiang has been announced for bolstering trade activities, including e-commerce, and expanding cooperative areas in Eurasia. In addition to that China established the China-SCO Local Economic and Trade Cooperation Demonstration Area in Qingdao, East China’s Shandong province, in 2018. This area allows the SCO business groups to develop new areas of collaboration in trade and finance. It also serves as a link to the sea for landlocked Central Asian countries with 17 international freight train services, running to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as well as Hamburg and Germany.

As of 2022, Xinjiang’s regional and global connectivity has reached 118 international transport roads, 26 international optical cables, and 6,242 direct trains to Europe and Central Asia. The Xinjiang autonomous region’s foreign trade volume has significantly developed up to 21 billion dollars. Two of its major rail ports, Alataw Pass and Horgos Port, achieved a high record in handling 8,701 China-Europe freight train journeys last year (Li, 2022). Another important aspect of Xinjiang’s development is related to the region’s fast-growing wind power and photovoltaic product manufacturing industrial sector. This is especially crucial for other Central Asian countries to ensure sufficient power supplies in the coming years. Xinjiang is expected to be a production center for wind and solar equipment, which increasingly becomes essential for the global transition toward clean energy. According to the estimation, the building of clean energy generation hardware and grid networks will require an investment of some 99.8 billion dollars by 2030, when 70 percent of electricity is expected to come from wind and solar (Chu, 2022).

The different policy initiatives of relevant countries within the BRI framework include the Bright Road of Kazakhstan, the Middle Corridor of Türkiye, the Development Road of Mongolia, and the Two Corridors, One Economic Circle of Vietnam. Besides, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity represents another important cooperative mechanism that has already been taken seriously by both China and Russia. With regard to the corridors in Central Asia, one of the main concerns of Russia was about the use of the Caspian Sea as an alternative route to bypass Russia and Belarus. In practice, a Finnish company has started a route from China via Kazakhstan by using the Caspian Sea, connecting to Azerbaijan then by rail to Georgia and across the Black Sea to Romania (Briginshaw, 2022). Essentially, Russia diplomatically intends to develop the “Trans-Eurasian Development Belt”, including the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur railway and the Northern Sea route, in order to contribute to the development of the Russian Far East and Siberia (Lukin and Yakunin, 2018). However, the negative impacts of the Russia-Ukraine War practically have increased the significance of alternative routes in Central Asia. More generally, for improving the linkage between the BRI and the GEP the existing mechanisms need to be coordinated successfully.

## **REGIONAL PARTIAL CONVERGENCE: TOWARD GREATER EURASIA**

The fundamental difference between Chinese and Russian foreign policies rest on primary motivations to expand their strategic partnership at the regional level. While China prioritizes economic development and attempts to translate

economic power into political gains, Russia uses geopolitical means and tools to achieve economic benefits. Their diverging approaches become evident in promoting the role of SCO and its future development trajectory as either more security-driven or economic-driven multilateral cooperation. However, both countries seek to put economic relations at the center of their strategic partnership. Besides, they have gradually come to recognize that security can often be achieved only in cooperation. So, it means they are well aware that extended regional security cooperation requires long-term coordination of their foreign economic and security policies. In 2019, Moscow and Beijing needed to reformulate their bilateral orientations by emphasizing the term “coordination” and accepting to use of new terminology of “comprehensive strategic partnership coordination in the new era” (Xinhua, 2019). As the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) indicates, the Greater Eurasian Partnership is based on a political compromise for linking the SREB with the EAEU. According to this view, Beijing recognized the EAEU as its “equal negotiating partner” and Russia accepted China’s presence in Central Asia (Kuznetsova, 2017). Although asymmetric economic relationship remains to be managed, the alignment of political interests towards regional development and security cooperation stimulates their efforts for further Eurasian integration.

### **Advantages and Potential Risks in Central Asia**

The GEP framework would positively help to contribute to redefining the evolving nature of China-Russia interaction in Central Asia (Guo and Liu, 2016). On the other hand, the policy discussions on the GEP do not sufficiently address common interests but rather point out security challenges with regard to Central Asia under current circumstances. In this sense, Russia’s new foreign policy still tends to regard Central Asia as a security buffer zone against external security threats as it did in the post-soviet era before. The conception of “Central Eurasia”, which is often used by Russian analysts, implies the increasing significance of the Central Asia region within the GEP (Karaganov, 2018). This conception also refers to the need to build a common political understanding of the Eurasian condominium between Beijing and Moscow in a broader sense. It is based on a new type of great power relations in which Russia accepts China’s economic presence in Central Asia, and in return, China would support maintaining Russia’s role as a security provider in the region. Although it is less likely to expect two-power condominiums in Eurasia under current circumstances, it is important to pay attention to this proposal in order to understand some potential political risks and security challenges that Central Asian countries face in the region. The regional security dimension of the GEP involves dealing with certain major threats such as the radicalization of Central Asian states; the possible spillover effect of instability from Afghanistan; the domestic instability in Iran and the uncertainty in Iran’s foreign policy and more recently the impacts of Russia-Ukraine War. Yet, more specifically, both China and Russia have always been primarily concerned with stability and security in their domestic environments, China’s Xinjiang region and Russia’s Tatarstan and Volga districts, and their connections to the near external environment in Central Asia.

The GEP framework involves strengthening political and security coordination among China, Russia, and other member states within the SCO in order to solve

security issues and reduce potential risks in the region. Regarding the inclusion of new members to the SCO, the effectiveness of the multilateral organization needs to be reconsidered. Even though with new memberships it became an international regional organization, which brings it more legitimacy and prestige at the international level, there raise some other questions about what impact this will have on internal unity and how it creates an impact on the effectiveness of mechanisms for diverse cooperation within the SCO (Kortunov, 2018).

In addition to infrastructure-driven trade connectivity, the institutional connection needs to be strengthened in order to develop the GEP (Xing, 2017). The SCO presents a larger potential to achieve this purpose. If the SCO is recognized as a central mechanism for policy coordination, it would be relatively easier to overcome the existing difficulties. For example, the institutional structure and operation of the EAEU do not match consistently with the general implementation of the BRI. The EAEU Commission tends to define BRI as a minor element of the GEP and continues to emphasize a “network of trade agreements” rather than only transport and infrastructural projects (Shakhanova and Garlick, 2020: 35). The mechanisms of the Commission through which BRI-EAEU coordination is implemented at the supranational level reveal that it operates two-sided approach to the BRI as the EAEU’s collective rival. One of the most important reasons behind the Russia-Kazakhstan contestation over the BRI-EAEU coordination can be understood from the Commission’s two-sided approach.

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the SCO has been expected to undertake a new role as a central mechanism for regional economic development and security cooperation. This brings up the question of whether Afghanistan’s membership would follow Pakistan, India, and Iran in the near future. This critical decision will depend on how much China and Russia would really be willing to extend Eurasian integration. Given the increasing expectation for support from regional countries in order to solve development-security problems in Afghanistan with new regime change after the US withdrawal, how much risks China and Russia would take according to their risk assessments will be critically important. Risk sharing dimension is one of the salient factors affecting the development of strategic partnerships. What is known until now is that Xi Jinping’s leadership has been especially concerned with the changed situation in Afghanistan and his security team has already been involved in adapting China’s policy over the Afghanistan-Pakistan protracted conflict area (Zhao, 2016, 2021b). Another highlighting tendency of China’s approach to terrorism defines “economic terrorism” differently than separatism (Lantaigne, 2008). Economic terrorism is worth to be mentioned, not just for maritime security, due to the increasing significance of regional trade and energy connectivity in Greater Eurasia.

### **The Problem of Third Party: European Security**

Even if Russia’s new foreign policy intends to shift to the Asia-Pacific region, the geographical imperative entails the GEP to put European security and stability into consideration. Not only because Russia has big energy cooperation projects, such as Nord Stream 2, with Europe but also because China’s BRI’s future development largely depends on its connections with the West. With regard to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, the deteriorating relations between

Russia and European countries pose potential risks and obstacles to the future development of BRI-GEP coordination.

Regarding the Russia-Ukraine War, Russia has repositioned itself strongly in Greater Eurasia by using military force. For the Russian side, the Ukraine conflict is perceived as a result of NATO's eastward expansion and natural response to the geopolitical consolidation of post-Soviet space. The Russian leadership takes political risks in expecting to obtain long-term strategic benefits. The creation of the EAEU was an important attempt for restoring economic integration in the former Soviet space, but the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine in 2014 as the biggest setback to the EAEU integration made the possibility of Ukraine joining the EAEU unrealistic. Russia's decision to wage a war in Ukraine reflects broader domestic consensus as well as long-term historical reflection on the role of Ukraine in Russia's foreign policy calculations. The most likely strategic outcome of the Russia-Ukraine War will be Russia's accelerated and deepened reorientation towards the Asia-Pacific.

Any post-war settlement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict cannot be achieved without a broader perspective on Eurasian, including Europe, long-term security by reconsidering the concept of "indivisible security". In Xi Jinping's new "Global Security Initiative", "indivisible security" is defined as building a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture without one's national security on the basis of other's insecurity (Xinhua, 2022). The notion of "indivisible security" has its historical roots in the Helsinki Final Act (1975), which provided a framework of action to both sides in the detente period of the Cold War. It was exclusively mentioned in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and the 1999 Charter for European Security. It has become again a significant proposal in seeking a solution to the current situation of the Russia-Ukraine War. What makes it currently remarkable would be its practical value in the GEP framework. The "indivisible security" practically refers to the significance of the development-security connection in which the development of any Eurasian country requires regional security and stability. In this context, the long-term vision which provides interconnection between the GEP and the EU needs a much more comprehensive security framework (Wang and Duang, 2022). Any type of proposal has practical value for considering a new Helsinki Act for Greater Eurasia which provides a common understanding for solving problems related to Eurasian integration, managing differences and promoting policy coordination among different countries, and redefining fundamental principles and rules of interactions among them. Neither China nor Russia enjoy the expectation to be part of NATO or the EU. Therefore they have no option but to rely on indivisible security. Especially for Russia, Greater Eurasia means that "several collective security frameworks can merge into a common space of indivisible security" (Kvartalnov, 2021: 21). The necessary balancing act between collective security and indivisible security, as the two different approaches on international security order, can possibly be attained through establishing well-functioning regional security mechanisms based on indivisible security in Eurasia. Even though China and Russia perform a strong reaction to NATO's expansionism, they would not be completely satisfied with the absence of NATO as a collective security organization. In the end, both great powers support the UN-centered international order, which is also based on the collective security concept.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence and possible impacts of the GEP can be understood from multiple dimensions: the decline of Europe and the rise of Asia, the structural change towards a multipolar world, the changing nature of China-Russia bilateral relations, and the need to link the BRI to the GEP. The GEP is mainly driven by the common economic and political interests of China and Russia, which are based on their national development and security priorities. However, it would be difficult to achieve the expected results if policy coordination cannot be sustained successfully between the two great powers under given potential security risks and challenges. At the same time, it is also important to recognize that China-Russia strategic partnership has evolved into a new stage where their common interests have converged in significant ways and levels. Even though domestic convergence of their foreign policies is based on their shared understanding of developing an integrated approach to linking BRI into the GEP, foreign policy convergence in regional and global contexts reflects partial alignment which also indicates existing disagreements about how to manage potential security risks surrounding Greater Eurasia. In security terms, it is not realistic to expect an alliance formed between the two great powers at the expense of any other great power. But they tend to expand security partnerships on the basis of indivisible security with respect to their positions at the UN Security Council.

While the creation of EAEU can be regarded as a counterweight to external economic expansion to Central Asia, the new framework of GEP focuses relatively more on the development of the Russian Far East and Siberia for establishing new trade connectivities. More broadly, the development of RFE is regarded as the national priority for the 21st century and the strategic value of Asia-Pacific has recently increased in terms of Russia's national interests. It is expected that the shifting focus of regional development by creating common interests on the basis of an integrated approach to their developmental efforts will be helpful to manage China-Russia strategic competition and maintain stability in Eurasia. On the other hand, the uncertainty of Russia's behavior regarding how to engage in Central Asia would be an obstacle to the future development of BRI. Russia's domestic development priorities for Russian Far East and Siberia might exceed China's overall plans in BRI, including priorities and concerns for developing Northwest China. Additionally, as Russia seeks to diversify its energy and trade relations with the Asia-Pacific region, China pursues multiple diversification attempts in energy and trade connectivities. The Eurasian integration and development will largely be dependent on building new trade connections. This remains to be seen how China-Russia strategic partnership will continue to be shaped with regard to the GEP. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that India's selective engagement to regional reorganization, the SCO and the AIIB, does not include the trade connectivity dimension, the BRI, and RCEP. So, India's position with respect to the future development of GEP also remains to be uncertain under current circumstances.

Thus, the medium-to-long-term outlook of the China-Russia strategic partnership will be affected by the developments in the international security environment. The US unilateralism, NATO's expansionism, and Western interventionism were the most important factors to establish a strategic partnership between China and

Russia, including their coordination in the UN Security Council and security collaborations within the SCO framework. As long as the structural change moves from a unipolar to a multipolar world, it will continue to be deepened. However, from a short-to-medium-term perspective, it is more likely to be influenced much by the domestic context of their foreign policies. At this point, it might be useful to remember the failure of the US New Silk Road strategy mainly because of domestic political factors. Even though the US administration had already well-experienced how to connect economics to security in its foreign policy, this economic-security connection could not have been institutionalized (Rosenberger, 2017). In this regard, the increasing Western pressure on the Eurasian region has led both China and Russia much focused on their domestic transformation. It is imperative for both countries to adapt the domestic political environment to changing international circumstances. Their political priorities for national development in order to ensure national security still remain to be unresolved.

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