

Samprity Biswas
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Russia- China Strategic Relations: Beyond Rapprochement or Rivalry

The resentment of Russia with the West due to the latter's hegemonic ambitions have led Russia to turn towards the East in search of allies. China, in this context has emerged crucial for Russia as it shares Russia's vision of a multipolar world order and its security concerns in the Eurasian region. As Russia-China strategic relations have intensified, analysts have voiced hope or suspicion of this partnership, in effect ending up categorizing the relation as either 'rapprochement' or 'rivalry'. This has been clearly evident from the titles of some scholarly works on Russia-China relations that have set forth to strictly categorize this bilateral relation as either '*rapprochement*' or '*rivalry*,' as if cooperation is not possible even when certain confrontational issues exist. The author seeks to argue that the adoption of specific binaries to describe Russia-China strategic relations has proved to be inadequate and restrictive in explaining the changing dimensions of Russia-China relations in the new geopolitical setting of the post Cold-War period. Usage of certain terms like '*an axis of convenience*' (Lo 2009), '*imbalanced relationship*' (Flikke 2016), '*status exchange*' (Flikke 2016), '*second chance*' (Levine 1992) by scholars to describe the Russia-China relations lacks the much needed interpretive approach in analyzing the present relations between Russia and China.

The study shall endeavor to point out the limitations of mainstream theories of International Relations in their explanation of Russia-China strategic engagement and employ Social Constructivism as a preferred theoretical framework to explain the same. The author will attempt to study the factors driving close cooperation between Russia and China and seek to rationalize that it is Russia's national interest rather than the systemic level factor of opposing US hegemony that is paramount in driving Russia to cultivate comprehensive strategic relations with China today.

¹ Doctoral Candidate, Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India