

Chapter 4

Sino–Russian Naval Cooperation in the Indo–Pacific: Strategic Convergence, Regional Responses, and Security Implications (2021–2025)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the intensification of Sino-Russian naval cooperation in the Indo-Pacific from 2021 to 2025, analyzing its strategic drivers, operational patterns, and regional implications. The study reveals that mounting Western pressure has

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accelerated bilateral maritime coordination, manifested in increased joint exercises across sensitive areas including the Bering Sea, Sea of Okhotsk, and Arctic waters. However, this cooperation remains strategically calibrated rather than alliance-based, constrained by mutual sovereignty concerns and divergent long-term interests. Regional responses, assessed through Evelyn Goh's framework of comprehensive engagement and balanced influence, demonstrate varied approaches: while U.S. exclusionary mechanisms inadvertently reinforced Sino-Russian alignment, ASEAN's inclusive strategy preserved strategic autonomy without direct confrontation. The chapter concludes with policy recommendations emphasizing multilateral engagement and confidence-building measures to mitigate security dilemmas and maintain regional stability.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the principal arena of strategic competition in the 21st-century international system, characterized by intensifying multidimensional power rivalries, strategic realignments, and the restructuring of regional order (He & Li, 2020). In response to China's rapid ascent and its growing challenge to the US-led liberal international order, Washington has actively promoted the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy while simultaneously consolidating and expanding its network of alliances and partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and other regional actors (Hiep et al., 2024).

Within this context, the strategic repositioning of the US and its allies has generated significant security adjustments across the Indo-Pacific. Naval cooperation has emerged as a particularly critical indicator, reflecting not only military capabilities but also the degree of convergence in strategic interests, foreign policy orientations, and visions of regional order among major powers. Against this backdrop, Russia and China have increasingly demonstrated a convergence of interests as both seek to expand their strategic space, mitigate isolation, and signal alignment within an increasingly fluid and contested regional order (Wilson, 2002). Notably, the period from 2021 to 2025 witnessed a marked intensification of naval cooperation between Russia and China in the Indo-Pacific in terms of both geographic scope and operational coordination.

The significance of this study is underscored by three key developments. First, major-power competition in the Indo-Pacific is becoming increasingly systemic, with naval power playing a central role due to its close association with freedom of navigation, sea lane control, and the capacity to shape regional order. Second, Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine since 2022 has accelerated Moscow's strategic pivot toward the Asia-Pacific, while China has sought to diversify its security

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