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*Draft Paper for the 3rd Ghent Russia colloquium*  
*'Russia and China in the 21st century:*  
*Between Cooperation and Competition at the Regional and Global level',*  
*Ghent, 4 November 2019*

**THE RUSSIA-CHINA 'GEOPOLITICAL POWER':  
REFORMIST OR REVISIONIST?**

It is quite commonplace to hear today that Russia and China have become revisionist powers who unite their efforts to undermine the existing international order. In this manner, American political discourse has been particularly eloquent presenting Russia and China as willing to revisit the international order established after the Second World War, the first with a regard to the post-Soviet space and the second with respect to its spectacular economic expansion.

Namely, according to US major policy documents, in the context of *"increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open international order"*, of *"resilient, but weakening, post-WWII international order"*<sup>1</sup>, Russia has been trying to *"change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor"*. Similarly, we learn from the US National Security Strategy (2017) that *"China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence"*. To enlarge on, the Defense Department's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (2019) clearly defines China as a revisionist power who intends to undermine *"the international system from within by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously eroding the values and principles of the rules-based order"*

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<sup>1</sup> National Defense Strategy of the USA, 2018

These accusations (that are, we must mention, reciprocal) come to being in a very particular context of international relations marked by major transformations in international system's functioning. Some of them more tangible than the others, they indicate clearly the presence of aspirations to alter the way international affairs are decided and done among the states, or in other words, of the attempts to reform or even revisit the foundations of the international order.

However, revisionist patterns of behavior are often associated exclusively with the attitude towards the U.S. and attributed precociously to the states having any conflictual relation with the latter. Such generalizations stem essentially from the problem of definition of international order and, namely, from leaving out of its multidimensional nature. In this paper, we argue that attribution of revisionist, reformist or status quo orientations to states should be accompanied by a disaggregated approach to international order. In this optic, Russia and China may be seen as revisionist, reformist and status quo at the same time depending on which dimension of the international order is being analyzed.

After identifying the tendencies of contemporary international relations that provide favorable conditions for speculations on revisionist and status quo states (I), we propose to look into the nature of the notion of international order (II) to proceed then with the analysis of Russia's and China's foreign policy orientations. (III)

## **I – Current tendencies conditioning the debates on revisionism**

There is a widely shared understanding among IR scholars that international system is currently going through a major transition phase.<sup>2</sup> After what was known to be 'bipolar stability' had come to its end with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the power vacuum left by it was quickly filled by its former counterpart. It laid basis for the so called 'unipolar moment' underpinned by its supremacy and guaranteed by no other power being capable or willing to contest its hegemony. However, the unipolar world was not

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<sup>2</sup> See John Ikenberry, Power and liberal order: America's postwar world order in transition. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 5 (2005) 133–152; Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline. *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (summer 2011), pp. 41-72; Andrei P. Tsygankov, From Global Order to Global Transition. *Russia in Global Affairs*, n°1, 2019; Yu Bin, From Global Governance to Global Disorder: Implication for Russia and China in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. by Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 191-214; and others.

destined to last long and while “*the idea that a system with many great powers will follow the era of the United States as the sole superpower [has started] fading*”<sup>3</sup>, the question of what international order is going to look like in the future remains open.

Firstly, we can observe today the step back of the United States as a global superpower. Yet, we would not confuse it with a so-called *decline* of the U.S. It is instead the idea that the United States renounces on some of the responsibilities inherent to an actor with a superpower status<sup>4</sup>, or what Yan Xuetong called “*abdication of its global leadership*”<sup>5</sup>, which is not accompanied by actual decline of its economic or military power. Such responsibilities range from active participation in global political, financial, economic and judicial institutions to involvement and management of military conflicts around the globe. In other words, whereas its relational power, “*sourced from the uneven distribution of ideational and material resources among actors*”<sup>6</sup> – remains uncontested, as the United States remains still the most powerful state in the world,<sup>7</sup> it is otherwise when it comes to structural power. Notably, the US is no longer capable of sustaining the current international order and, more importantly, it is at some point denying the foundations of that order.<sup>8</sup> There is a divergence of opinions on whether the US’s ‘step-back’ is conditioned by the rise of regional, and specifically, authoritarian powers (N. Ferguson) or if it is motivated by the logic of its internal development (J. Mearsheimer, S. Walt). However, it is generally agreed that the US development vector is now oriented inside rather than outside or, as Fareed Zakaria put it, it has become today ‘*a distant well-wisher, not an engaged superpower*’.<sup>9</sup> To illustrate this idea, we may refer to the United States abandoning the idea of the Trans-Pacific Partnership or withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran. In addition, it launched a withdrawal of its troops from their deployment zones and it has considerably diminished its support for its allies in the Middle East and in Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> Yan Xuetong, From a Unipolar to a Bipolar Superpower System: The Future of the Global Power Dynamic. *Global Times*, December 30, 2011

<sup>4</sup> It is, on one hand, the capacity to influence international affairs through its material and non-material power, and, on the other hand, to sustain international order where each actor can fit in.

<sup>5</sup> Yan Xuetong, The Age of Uneasy Peace. Chinese Power in a Divided World. *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2019

<sup>6</sup> Albenaz Azmanova, Relational, structural and systemic forms of power: the ‘right to justification’ confronting three types of domination. *Journal of Political Power*, 11(1), p. 70

<sup>7</sup> To illustrate this affirmation, we may consider such indexes as GDP, military expenditure

<sup>8</sup> In this sense, we refer to what S. Strange calls ‘structural power’, distinct from ‘relational power’, or the capacity to delineate and control the structures that define the environment within which intrastate interactions take place. (Strange, S., 1988. *States and markets*. London: Pinter )

<sup>9</sup> Fareed Zakaria, Self-destruction of American Power. *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2019

Finally, the U.S. did not hesitate to use economic leverages not just against its opponents, but against its allies as well, as it did in 2018 by imposing tariffs on the imports of steel and aluminum from the EU.

Secondly, in parallel to the ‘fading’ of the American superpower, accelerated multipolarization, pluri-centralization or what F. Tolipov calls ‘multilateralization’<sup>10</sup> have become a distinct feature of contemporary international relations marked by the ‘awakening of regions’. Indeed, while “*the moment of unipolarity is coming to an end, regional powers and especially regional non-Western powers like China, Russia, Turkey and India are all ‘potential great powers in a not-so-far distant multi-polar world order’*”.<sup>11</sup> The emergence of superpowers’ contesters creates by implication the dilemma of (re)distribution of power and prestige: while the gap between the hegemon and its contesters’ military, economic or other potentials diminishes, they still may not dispose of the same level of prestige or reputation. In order to maintain balance in the system, as R. Schweller affirms, a weakening hegemon must share influence with the counterpart till the moment its prestige is commensurable to its factual influence.<sup>12</sup> Therefore we can observe that China (already) and Russia (still) are demonstrating significant results in their diplomatic, economic and military development and therefore they are in position to challenge the US supremacy, on a regional level to start with.

Operating mainly, but not only, in their respective immediate neighborhoods, emerging power gravity centers claim the status corresponding to their actual potential. In this light, Russia has begun to actively promote the Eurasian idea (‘Central Eurasian space’) in the post-Soviet space, while China sticks to the Belt and Road initiative as a means of affirmation of its power status, especially with regard to the Asia-Pacific region, and to construct a regional “community with common destiny”. When both have encountered skepticism of their Western partners, justified or not, they have accused the latter of infringing on the principles of pluralism. Emergence of contesting powers and the realignment of alliances which have taken place is, according to D. Trenin, mainly “*due to the inability to construct an inclusive world order that*

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<sup>10</sup> Farkhod Tolipov, Концепция ответственного лидерства Узбекистана в Центральной Азии. *Bilim Karvoni*, 22 juillet 2019

<sup>11</sup> Sten Rynninga, Jens Ringsmose, Why Are Revisionist States Revisionist? Reviving Classical Realism as an Approach to Understanding International Change. *International Politics*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, n°45, 29

<sup>12</sup> Randall Schweller, Восходящие державы и ревизионизм в условиях зарождения новых мировых порядков. *Global Affairs*, October 7th, 2015

*accommodates all major players after the Cold War*<sup>13</sup>. Though China and Russia are rightful members of the international *system*, they often find themselves on the periphery of international *society* in the sense that Hedley Bull attributed to it<sup>14</sup> when it comes to democracy and liberal reforms issues.

Thirdly, in this context of weakening structures of intrastate interactions framed previously by the US supremacy and catalyzed through global institutions, *multilateral cooperation yields to the force of resurgent great-power competition*<sup>15</sup> and efficiency of these institutions becomes questioned. As the room for challenging the ‘fading’ hegemon becomes larger, unpredictability of IR rises, too. And while new gravity centers are forming and former decline putting international relations in a state of flux, global antagonism and great-power rivalry are rising and, at some point, escalating both on global and regional levels. In this context, intrastate relations are described in such terms as ‘Central Asian great game’, ‘US – China trade war’ or ‘Russia – West *bras de fer*’, expressive journalist clichés reflecting an overall perception of international affairs where “*geopolitical tensions weigh on the existing architectures*”.<sup>16</sup> It has had a significant impact on conflict management and has underscored major default of international governance mechanism, notably the UN. It is not a novelty that the Security Council happens to be unable to put an end to armed conflicts, especially in the cases when they touch upon the interests of its permanent members disposing of a veto right.<sup>17</sup> However, it has been relatively successful in doing so after the collapse of the USSR and till the beginning of 2000s. In actual context, back again, states prefer to adopt unilateral measures and actions in order to resolve disputes rather than dealing with them by means of international organizations. To give an example, we may refer to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 bypassing the UN Security Council authorization or the today’s Syrian crisis as illustrating coalitions-

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<sup>13</sup> Dmitri Trenin, China, Russia and the United States contest a new world order. *East Asia Forum*, 5 mai 2019

<sup>14</sup> 'A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.' (Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*. London, 1977, p. 13)

<sup>15</sup> Will Moreland, The Purpose of Multilateralism. A Framework for Democracies in a Geopolitically Competitive World. *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, September 2019, p. 3

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>17</sup> In this manner, the most significant failure of the UN Security Council has been so far its incapacity to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lasting for more than half a century now. The roadmap adopted in 2003 implied multilateral conflict management. Yet, it is essentially the United States who is actively engaged in the process.

based negotiations of terms and designating of spheres of influence.<sup>18</sup> We may also mention a recurrent resort to unilateral sanctions as a protectionist and political tool as an evidence of malfunctioning global economic and financial institutions which were initially supposed to amortize the disputes between the countries. Namely, sanctions are being introduced more with didactic purposes rather than as aim-oriented tool. As a result of fading efficiency of 'traditional' global institutions and lack of their credibility in the eyes of 'traditional' and rising powers, we see appear parallel architectures on regional levels, such as the AIIB, which offer a 'more satisfying alternative'.

The features mentioned above <sup>19</sup> define contemporary international relations, transitioning from the unipolar moment to new forms of existence, and condition their future developments. However, such transition is perceived differently since not all the states share a common view of a so-called future world-order, and it is often perceived as a movement towards a disorder triggered by the rising powers. In this context, states' patterns of behavior tend to be explained in terms either of preservation of the current international order or of supporting its reform and revisiting.

## **II – Conceptualizing international order**

The notion of revisionism originated from historical science which defines it as a re-interpretation of the historical record, an attempt to examine and to change the existing beliefs about how events happened or what their importance or meaning is.<sup>20</sup> Revisionism thus represents not merely a static quality of a state, but more its orientation and objectives motivated by the intention to revisit its attitude towards a previously accepted situation. Reformism is initially related to the political initiatives of 1970s which sought to rebalance the world economic order and organize the interdependency between the global North and the global South more in benefit of the latter. The term is also associated to a change operated in order to improve something, not replace it.

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<sup>18</sup> Two conflict managing forces can be distinguished in particular: the so-called Western coalition which includes among other the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Turkey, on one hand, and Russia and Iran on the other hand. In addition, peace negotiations have taken place in various format, such as the Astana forum which united Russia, Turkey and Iran.

<sup>19</sup> Those given here do not undoubtedly present an exhaustive list.

<sup>20</sup> Cambridge dictionary [Online]

If applied to the IR field, these two terms lead us to the assumption that there exists an international *order*, a certain set of rules, norms, and expected types of behavioral patterns accepted by all the states. It is *vis-à-vis* these norms and patterns that status quo or revisionist qualities are attributed to states. However, the very definition of international order presents an uneasy task, while its existence is a relative phenomenon.

In this section, we will look into multidimensional and heterogeneous nature of international order which in return conditions a “*disaggregated understanding of revisionism*”<sup>21</sup>. In that sense, confronting a state to various qualitative parameters of international order may lead to different conclusions regarding revisionist (or not) nature of the state in question.

Yet, the very existence of international order is not a subject of compromise among the IR scholars. Accordingly, *classical realists* defend that ultimately, international system is anarchic since states are their own sovereigns and there is no other source of authority above them. The only possible way to organize interactions between these driven by pursuit of power atomized actors and avoid a permanent war is by reaching a certain balance of power – alternatively, of threats or interests – the equation of their capabilities and dependencies. By implication, the actual *modus vivendi* among the states is understood in terms of distribution of power and goods<sup>22</sup> as a product of balancing mechanisms and no matter which configuration is established, the political units of this system will be organized according to the hierarchy determined by the force that each unit is capable of mobilizing.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to the thesis of absolute anarchy, some IR scholars believe that despite of their complexity, international relations are not developing in arbitrary manner, but they submit to certain rules tending to their stabilization. Thus, power games between actors are not a source of disorder, but lack of organizing power is. As writes S. Sur, power is in fact cohesive and it regroups and assembles around itself other players.<sup>24</sup> In other words, power is viewed here as a regulating mechanism, objective and spontaneous by nature, which

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon and Steven Ward, Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 2019, 1

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon and Steven Ward, Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 2019, 5

<sup>23</sup> Raymon Aron, *Paix et guerre entre les nations*. Calmann-Lévy, 2004 (réédit. de 1962)

<sup>24</sup> Serge Sur, *Relations internationales*. Montchrestien, Lextenso editions, 6th ed., 2011, p. 219

organizing potential is translated by its “*capacity to do, to make somebody do something, to stop somebody from doing something and to refuse to do something*”.<sup>25</sup> In this optic, a state that concentrates sufficient power – relation and structural - l is viewed as a custodian of such power structured international order and therefore any redistribution of power would mean revisiting of its foundations. As H. Morgenthau put it, “*the policy of the status quo aims at the maintenance of the distribution of power as it exists at a particular moment in history*”, while an ideal-type revisionist actor will be presented by a state with imperialist ambitions.<sup>26</sup> Such “*prominent understandings [that] associate hegemons with status-quo orientations and rising challengers with revisionist ones*”<sup>27</sup> result in an affirmation that a shift of gravity center or its multiplication appears to be a precursor of revisionism.

Alternatively, power transition theorists defend that “*not all states if given the opportunity would change the system if the conditions in place are ‘satisfying’*”. Specifically, the rationale of a rising power will be determined by its intention to get more net gains<sup>28</sup> and its ‘inclination to revisionism’ will depend on whether it is satisfied with the actual distribution of benefits and its room for maneuver within international system. As in case of China, we might allow the hypothesis that since its spectacular economic development has taken place within the current international order, it may be then contented with it and take the stance of a status quo state. It will be then the contrary case of a revanchist state, as Russia is often presented, who shows a rather high degree of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and whose gains remain limited and hardly obtainable in such framework.

In addition to the vision of the international order as power-structured, some IR scholars believe there exists an implicit set of rules of conduct, principles, norms and procedures that are imposed on states by themselves.<sup>29</sup> They agree on a certain kind of a ‘social contract’ to guarantee predictability and stability of international relations and, subsequently, their own survival. In this perspective, states, as E.H. Carr put it, are not

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249

<sup>26</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 5th ed., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, p. 46

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon, Steven Ward, Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 2019, 1-20

<sup>28</sup> Organski & Kugler, 1989

<sup>29</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables. *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, International Regimes (Spring, 1982), p. 186

motivated by power calculations alone, also conform to the idea of a “*global moral codex*”<sup>30</sup>, a “*well-developed and widely-accepted body of idealist or liberal norms in international politics*” that “*prescribe acceptable forms of state behavior*”.<sup>31</sup>In this manner, H. Bull defined international order as “*a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals*” of international society, which is not mechanic, but rather self-conscious and oriented towards preservation of the state system and maintaining the independence of states and relative peace or absence of war as normal conditions among states.<sup>32</sup>

These norms exist in their most formalized and fixed version as international law, public and private, enforced by international institutions – what J. Ikenberry calls ‘constitutional order’, “*organized by a rule of law principle, in which binding institutions diminish levels of distrust because there are lower ‘returns to power’ for the strongest states*”.<sup>33</sup> Besides that relatively tangible and the most evident dimension of international norms and rules, there are other aspects, much more ‘slippery’ and hardly identifiable. In IR literature, they are defined as “*the settled rules and arrangements between states that define and guide their interactions*”<sup>34</sup> “*such as international norms and regimes, diplomacy features and property rights on global scale*”<sup>35</sup> or “*governing arrangements among the units of a system, including their rules, principles and institutions, which are designed to make interactions predictable and to sustain the goals and values that are collectively salient*”<sup>36</sup>. These rules and norms are quite dubious, and it is not transparently clear who fixes them and who endorses them. Yet, we believe that their acceptance is twofold motivated: by the internal acknowledgement of the need to follow these rules in order to preserve stability, security and predictability (assuming that such acknowledgement is reciprocal), and by the structural power exercised by the dominant actors in charge of benefits distribution. In the latter case, a prospective leader would present ‘his

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<sup>30</sup> Sten Rynninga, Jens Ringsmose, Why Are Revisionist States Revisionist? Reviving Classical Realism as an Approach to Understanding International Change. *International Politics*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, 45, p. 29

<sup>31</sup> John Mearsheimer, E.H. Carr vs. Idealism: The Battle Rages On. *International Relations*, vol 19(2), p. 142

<sup>32</sup> Amitav Acharya, The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics. *World Politics*, vol. 59, n°4, juillet 2007, 637

<sup>33</sup> Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, Derrick Frazier, *Regional Powers and Security Orders*. Routledge, 2012, p. 21

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon and Steven Ward, Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 2019, 1

<sup>35</sup> Randall Scweller, Восходящие державы и ревизионизм в условиях зарождения новых мировых порядков. *Valday*, 7 october 2015

<sup>36</sup> Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, Derrick Frazier, *Regional Powers and Security Orders*. Routledge, 2012, p. 16

particular visions as universal, so that they become acceptable to relevant followers' and would be qualified in this sense as a hegemon.<sup>37</sup>

To sum up, we can distinguish two dimensions of international order - one pertaining to power distribution and another one related to the rules and implicit norms and behavioral practices. In this optic, the division of states on status quo and revisionist will be done depending on what S. Ward calls distributive dissatisfaction and normative dissatisfaction.<sup>38</sup> However, other variations of such disaggregated approach to conceptualization of international order exist. In this manner, R. Gilpin has identified three components, namely the distribution of power, the hierarchy of prestige and "*rights and rules that govern or at least influence the interactions among states*"<sup>39</sup>. Alternatively, A. Cooley hives off state orientations towards the balance of power from the international order *per se* which he defines as ecologies of public, club, and private goods and their associated rules, norms, and arrangements.<sup>40</sup>

Multi-dimensional nature of international order has an unambiguous implication for analysis of states' foreign policy orientations. While we may recognize that one state demonstrates a revisionist attitude towards one aspect of international order, we may as well assume that it adopts a status-quo stance towards another one. Besides, quantitatively, 'revisionism' may be different from one state to another depending on the depth of dissatisfaction that the state experiences. Therefore, labeling one state as revisionist, without any further precision, seems to be fallacious and leaves out all the complexity of its motivations.

Following this two-dimension scheme, we propose to examine the attitudes of China and Russia towards the unipolar power-structured system (distribution of power dimension) and towards global governance institutions and promoted values (normative dimension).

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<sup>37</sup> Dirk Nabers, Power, Leadership and Hegemony in International Politics in *Regional leadership in the Global System*, ed. By Daniel Flesmes, Ashgate, 2010, p. 64

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon and Steven Ward, Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 2019, 5

<sup>39</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon and Steven Ward, Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 2019, 19

### III - China's and Russia's various revisionisms

In order to address the problematic of China and Russia being 'revisionist geopolitical powers' we will focus on two questions: whether we can consider China and Russia to be revisionist states and whether their revisionisms are alike.

#### **1. Attitude towards unipolarity: balancing against the superpower?**

Russia and China political leaders' declarations leave today little doubt on their contesting approach toward global distribution of power and, namely, the unipolarity. Since the signing of the strategic partnership agreement in 1994 underpinned by the Sino-Russian Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation adopted in 2001, Russia and China have been actively cooperating on promoting a 'multipolar world' where both countries claim the status of global powers.

In Russia the idea of a multipolar world was conceptualized in 1996 by its former foreign affairs minister Yevgeny Primakov. He put forward the idea of regional stability based on regional associations of states and viewed the strategic triangle 'China – Russia – India' as a stability guarantor for the Eurasian regional space.<sup>41</sup> Such vision has persisted until today, though it has now concentrated essentially on Russia-China strategic partnership, with Indian variable entering occasionally in the equation. Hence, Russian foreign affairs minister Sergey Lavrov admitted that "*the period of several centuries when what we call the West was dominating in international affairs is passing*"<sup>42</sup> and that "*international order transformation has become irreversible [...] new powerful actors [...] seek to influence more on regional and global processes, and demand legitimately a more significant participation in key decision making*".<sup>43</sup> In China the concept of multipolarity – *duojihua* (多极化) – entered the political discourse in the late 1980s and was formally incorporated into Chinese foreign policy by Deng Xiaoping's successor Jiang Zemin in 1992 at the 14th Party Congress. It has gradually evolved "*from a critique of bipolarity in the late Cold War period into a*

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<sup>41</sup> Andery Gorokhov, 'Yevgeny Maksimovitch Primakov o mnogopolyarnom mire XXI veka' ('Yevgeny Primakov on multipolar world in the XXI century'). *Russian Political Science*, n°1, 2016, p. 11

<sup>42</sup> 'Lavrov: mnoguie politiki yavlyautsya storonnikami teorii upravlyaemogo haosa' ('Lavrov: many politicians support the theory of controlled chaos'). *TASS*, August 11, 2017

<sup>43</sup> Sergey Lavrov, 'Mir na pereputie i sistema mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy budutchego' ('The world at crossroads and the future system of international relations'), *Global Affairs*, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

*critique of American unipolarity*"<sup>44</sup>. More recently, Xi Jinping proclaimed at the XIX<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China<sup>45</sup>, "*China has become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence*" and it positions itself as a defender of international order.

Indeed, today Russia and China are actively implementing their policy of balancing against the United States and they have already achieved considerable success in various fields. Both together and individually, Russia and China are making efforts to catch up with the United States in military and diplomatic spheres. Their cooperation was reinforced after 2014 and gained additional motivation after the U.S. National Security Strategy had clearly designated Russia and China as a threat to the American national interests and pushed them further towards forming a military counterbalance.

While the negotiations on a new agreement on Russia-China military cooperation are being held, its practical implementation provokes alarmism of Western counterparts. In the framework of 'major country relationship'<sup>46</sup> Russia and China conduct regular military exercises, bilateral and multilateral (including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). For instance, China became part of the 'Vostok-2018' maneuvers, the largest of those organized by Russia since the collapse of the USSR in September 2018 mobilizing approximately 300,000 troops and one year later it was invited among others (India, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan ) to participate in 'Tsentr 2019' maneuvers destined to put into practice the "*use of force groupings in solving the tasks of combating international terrorism and ensuring military security*".<sup>47</sup> Likewise, the two states have held multiple joint naval exercises, including those in the South China sea (September 2016), East China sea (May 2014), Yellow sea (April 2012, April-May 2019) and – in the European surroundings – the Baltic sea (July 2017) and the Mediterranean sea. The Chinese army, yet untested (since the Vietnam war), benefits from cooperation with Russia to "*implement its maritime strategy,*

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<sup>44</sup> Brantly Womack, Asymmetry theory and China's concept of multipolarity. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 13(39), 2004, p. 351 (366)

<sup>45</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech at the XIXth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2107

<sup>46</sup> Xinhua Commentary: China, Russia set paradigm for major-country relations. *Xinhuanet*, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>47</sup> *Tsentr 2019* maneuvers kick off in Armed Forces of Russian Federation. Ministry of the Defense of Russian Federation, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019

*enhance maritime security, and develop capabilities for 'offshore operations' ".<sup>48</sup> In addition, Russian-Chinese military cooperation was marked by a first joint air patrol which took place in July 2019 over the waters of the sea of Japan.*

Furthermore, in the context of the USA's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, V. Putin announced during the 16th Valdai International Discussion Club meeting in October 2019 that Russia was helping China to construct an early warning system able to counter ballistic and cruise missiles,<sup>49</sup> opening prospects for coordination of their strategic arms forces. While the details remain unavailable, observers tend to agree that at this point Russia-China cooperation is moving yet closer to the model of an actual alliance able to contain American influence. This upgrade has been additionally translated by the mechanism of regular consultations between military commands of the two states, as well as by the transition from arms sales to cooperation in arms development.<sup>50</sup>

In diplomatic sphere, Russia and China have shown solidarity towards each other by coordinating their policies on a broad range of issues. Their respective activities within the Security Council of the United Nations demonstrate that since 2007 all of the eight vetoes imposed by China were supported by Russia, while 2 of the 13 vetoes imposed by Russia were supported by China and the latter abstained in the remaining 11 cases.<sup>51</sup> Such stance was eloquently summarized by D. Trenin who estimates that "*Russia and China will never be against each other, but they will not necessarily always be with each other*", which implies that any problematic issues that are susceptible to be brought about – such as the Syrian question or the South China sea dispute – are getting an *a priori* tacit support or guarantee of non-interference at least.

While Russian-Chinese balancing against the United States leaves little doubt, its teleological meaning remains obscure. While both insist on containing the United States in order to provide conditions for a so-called multipolar world, it seems that the

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Paul Partnership on the High Seas. China and Russia's Joint Naval Maneuvers. SWP Comment, n°26, June 2019

<sup>49</sup> Minnie Chan, Vladimir Putin says Russia is helping China build a missile early warning system. *South China Morning Post*, October 4, 2019

<sup>50</sup> Vasilij Kashin, Koreiskiy obstrel. Chto oznachaet pervoe sovместное patrulirovanie samoletov Rossii i Kitaya ('Korean shooting. What means the first Russian-Chinese joint air patrol'). *Carnegie Moscow Center*, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>51</sup> Security Council - Veto List, Dag Hammarskjöld Library [online]

interpretations given by Russia and China to the multipolar order are not quite the same.

Multipolarity has legal and political sense. Legally, it will mean sovereign equality of states, their equal legal capacity and aptitude to participate in negotiations and international institutions. Politically, it implies the existence of multiple 'poles' or power gravity centers which leads to disorganization and impossibility to define common rules and to manage international relations in a concerted manner.<sup>52</sup> It is the political dimension of multipolarity which presents a particular interest.

As we have mentioned earlier, Russia and China's claim for multipolarity stems essentially from their denunciation of unipolarity. In this perspective, it is crucial to explain the rationale of China and Russia for contestation of the unipolar order.

Regarding Russia, its dissatisfaction originates from its unacceptance of the outcome of the Cold war and the loss of its great power status in the 1990s. Russian political discourse emphasized the deception towards American neglect of Russia's 'droit de regard' (as during Yugoslavia conflict or intervention in Iraq in 2003) and the expansion of the NATO closer to its borders. After fruitless attempts to construct a 'big European home', normative and political contradictions have revealed themselves quite soon, while military escalations in Georgia and Ukraine have put a precipitated end to these endeavors. Starting from the second mandate of V. Putin, it fixed new priorities and began to develop a new, Eurasian, dimension of its foreign policy, launching its 'opening to the East' course. Basically, it came as a response to its 'geopolitical solitude': rejected by the club of Western countries, Russia redirected its political efforts to construct a non-Western political community, baptized the Eurasian community, by developing strategic partnerships with regional powers like Turkey, Iran, India and China. Thus, Russia's motivations can be best described as revanchist as it is seeking to establish a new order with a different distribution of power as reaction to not being accepted as an equal in the current power architecture.

In its turn, China managed to become a great power within the order that was not created by it, but which provided necessary conditions for it to become a powerful and influential actor, not least due to its success in establishing a good rapport with the United States. As remarks S. Turner, "*China has justifiably exerted extreme caution in*

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<sup>52</sup> Serge Sur, *Relations internationales*. Montchrestien, Lextenso editions, 6th ed., 2011, p. 288

*propagating the cause of multipolarity and directly criticizing U.S. hegemony*” and accompanied its ascending to power by narratives of a ‘peaceful rise’ and ‘harmonious world’.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, as writes Yan Xuetong, “*rather than unseating the United States as the world’s premier superpower*”, Chinese political leaders are trying to avoid an open confrontation with the United States and its allies.<sup>54</sup> However, formulated today as the Belt and Road Initiative, its economic ambitions have now stepped up on a worldwide level out of necessity of sustaining its economic growth and it has had inevitable political repercussions on the regional and global power balance. China’s omnipresence and growing influence put into question the U.S. capacity to maintain its global power status in various regions. In Asia the United States traditionally relied on its allies such as Japan, India, South Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan to keep a firm foothold in regional affairs and to contain China. It does so, for instance, by putting efforts towards developing the Indo-Pacific space, levying tariffs on Chinese goods or acting against China’s ‘one-China policy’.<sup>55</sup> Economic expansion and territorial integrity being vital national interests of China, the latter has inevitably engaged in the competition with the United States.

In this light, what kind of multipolar world do China and Russia envision?

We acknowledge that both states realize that the American superpower is still present and tangible and that neither of them – at least unilaterally – is not capable of replacing it. As Russian president noted during the Saint-Petersburg economic forum in 2016, “*America is a great power. Today, probably, the only superpower. We accept that*”.<sup>56</sup> In other words, they may be expressing a certain dissatisfaction with the U.S. preeminence, but it remains rather limited and, even more, their readiness and capacity to take its place and its global responsibilities. In this optic, contesting does not necessarily mean revisionism, as defying the unipolar world does not necessarily lead to obliterating the superpower. Neither Russia nor China have a clear plan “*for*

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<sup>53</sup> Susan Turner, Russia, China and a Multipolar World Order: the Danger in the Undefined. *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2009), p. 168

<sup>54</sup> Yan Xuetong, The Age of Uneasy Peace. Chinese Power in a Divided World. *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2019

<sup>55</sup> On December 2, 2016 the U.S. president-elect Donald Trump directly called – for the first time since 1979 – the president of the Republic of China Tsai Ing-wen, while Taiwan is not recognized as an independent state by China.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Putin nazval SShA edinstvennoi sverhderzhavoi’ (‘Putin called the U.S. the only superpower’). *RBK*, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016

*filling this leadership vacuum and shaping new international norms from the ground up*".<sup>57</sup> Multi-polarity is thus not an ultimate goal and a comprehensive alternative, but a mechanism allowing to check the superpower and to restrict its influence on the regional level.

To complicate matters, Russian political discourse tends to combine two narratives – that of a multipolar world and that of a bipolar structure of international politics, as notes A. Kortunov, the latter being articulated by the East-West, liberal-conservative and other dichotomies.<sup>58</sup> It is hence inclined to present China and Russia as part of a USA – China – Russia strategic triangle; where the two countries present a unified counterbalance to the U.S.-led liberal world order. At the same time, China, though also insisting on a more inclusive environment and formats of cooperation, considers the U.S. as *'the epicenter of its foreign policy'*. It is therefore *'interested in maintaining a functional relationship with the USA'*, while Russia is *'one of the several'* regional powers. In other words, while the United States is viewed as a major counterpart to China, it is at the same its point of reference *vis-à-vis* which it is pursuing the *'policy of cooperation and accommodation'*.<sup>59</sup> We observe then that while undertaking common measures to balance against the U.S., China and Russia do not share a common attitude towards it.

The analysis of China and Russia's attitudes towards unipolarity reveal that both states are indeed dissatisfied with the current distribution of power, but not necessarily with the U.S. being a superpower. While China is potentially capable of but not necessarily willing and Russia willing without being capable of assuming the superpower's position, they are seeking to check the U.S. influence, but in different ways. China's primary objective is to stop the U.S. actions directed at containing China's economic expansion and to keep its trade partnership with the U.S. while Russia's seeking to preserve its influence on the regional level and to protect its *droit de regard* in international affairs even if it leads to deterioration of its relations with the U.S. Thus, compatibility of political goals being the most important determinant of alignment decisions, Russia and China's revisionisms *vis-à-vis* the unipolar international order differ significantly and, in this respect, they do not necessarily form a united geopolitical front against the

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<sup>57</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 98, n°1

<sup>58</sup> Andrey Kortunov, 'Pочему mir ne stanovitsya mnogopolyarnym' ('Why does not the world become multipolar'), *Россия в глобальной политике*, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018

<sup>59</sup> Bobo Lo, Brookings conference 2019

superpower. Hence, both sides affirm regularly that their relationship is best characterized as a 'partnership' rather than an alliance, the latter being mainly due to China's non-alignment strategy. As Fu Ying, Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress of China, remarked, China and Russia should "*be very close friends, very close partners, but axis is an obsolete concept*"<sup>60</sup>. In this perspective, the two states enlarge and deepen their cooperation without going beyond its "safe limits" and impinging on their "sovereignty and freedom of maneuver"<sup>61</sup>, in particular *vis-à-vis* the United States.

## **2. Normative dimension: alternative format of intrastate interactions**

Normative dimension of international order implies producing, promotion and implementation of norms, rules and procedures. In this part, we will study Russia's and China's attitudes towards participation in global governance institutions (a) as principal lieu of norms production and promotion by their unilateral and bilateral actions. (b)

### *a) Participation in global governance institutions*

During the first decade after the collapse of the USSR, Russia had to reconstruct its relations with foreign countries, and its participation in international organization served the objective of its socialization and integration into the international society dominated by democratic states. It integrated among others the IMF (1992) and the WTO (2012) and benefited from liberal market economy to develop commercial ties with European countries – its main commercial partners.<sup>62</sup> Russia was also admitted to informal political clubs of influential actors as G20 and (former) G8 and became a member of regional organizations such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

By the 2000s, it had gained confidence it began to seek to reaffirm its influence in international affairs and to protect what it considered to be its sphere of influence. The year 2014 marked a turning point in Russia's relations with the Western countries and

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Fu Ying, Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress of China, and with F. Lukyanov on November 22th, 2016

<sup>61</sup> Dmitri Trenin, Russia, China Are Key and Close Partners. *China Daily*, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>62</sup> In particular, the Netherlands, Germany, Belarus and Italy occupy 23.2% of Russia's exportations in 2017, almost twice more than China's part. (Source: *Observatory of Economic Complexity*)

impacted its participation in international organizations dampened by its exclusion from the G8 and suspension of its voting rights in the Council of Europe. When its relations with the Western countries deteriorated, Russia used its veto power within the UN Security Council as a means to counter the undertakings which went contrary to its interests and that, according to its representatives, “*more than once spared the United Nations from getting involved in dubious enterprises*”.<sup>63</sup>

In its turn, communist China had to gain its right to be recognized internationally and to integrate the United Nations in 1971, and during the first years of its participation in international organization it played the role of a learner rather than leader. However, following Deng Xiaoping policy of reform and opening it gradually acceded to global market and as a result became what it is today – an economic power with unprecedented development achievements. With its growing economic power China multiplied significantly its presence and activities in global governance institutions. By 2000, China had become a member of over 50 intergovernmental organizations and 1,275 international non-governmental organizations. China has participated in nineteen UN peacekeeping operations and has sent to this purpose 17,390 troops.<sup>64</sup> Participation in international organizations is viewed as essential for protecting and extending China’s sovereignty and ensuring its territorial integrity, enhancing its international status and preserving strategic independence, as well an “*external environment conducive to its own internal development goals*”.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, emphasizing China’s “international status as the world’s largest developing country”, it has committed itself to “*playing an active role in international affairs, and supports the efforts of other developing countries to increase their representation and strengthen their voice in international affairs*”, intention reiterated by Chinese delegates to the WTO<sup>66</sup> and to the UN General Assembly.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Russian delegate Alexey R. Boguslavskiy’s statement at the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018

<sup>64</sup> Sergei Luzyanin, *Rossia-Kitai: formirovanie obnovlennogo mira* (‘Russia-China: formation of a renewed world’). Ves’ mir, 2018, p. 23

<sup>65</sup> Ann Kent, Chapter Title: China’s participation in international organisations in *Power and Responsibility in Chinese Foreign Policy*, edit. by Yongjin Zhang, Greg Austin, ANU Presse, 2013, p. 145

<sup>66</sup> China’s Proposal on WTO Reform. Communication From China, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>67</sup> Chinese delegate Ma Zhaoxu’s statement at the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Meetings, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018

In this context, it seems unlikely that Russia or China will seek to undermine the current system of global governance institutions. Both states are perfectly aware of the fact that multilateralism of global institutions combines not only the logic of mutual agreement, but also the logic of domination,<sup>68</sup> it is unlikely that either of them would seek to undermine such efficient tool.

Whereas Russia bets primarily on political and security organizations, in particular the UN Security Council, to assert itself as a great power, China is mostly active in economic global governance institutions.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, knowing that its 'rise' has been possible within the current system of global institutions, it is naturally interested in its preservation and even if it promotes their reform, the demand for changes takes place within the framework of the current international system.<sup>70</sup> Thus, China joined the WTO in 2001 and ensured compliance of its legislature with most of the WTO requirements concerning by 2010. Its GDP has multiplied by ten ever since, from 1.34 trillion USD in 2001 to 13.6 trillion USD in 2018.<sup>71</sup> According to its 2018 White Book on China and the WTO, "*China has embraced the world with open arms, made a significant contribution to promoting international trade and increasing global wellbeing, and become a key anchor and driver for the world economy.*" Therefore, even if China envisages to reform global institutions,<sup>72</sup> it does it in a cautious manner with only purpose to "*improve it so that it better serves China's interests and reflects its rising status*".<sup>73</sup> As for Russia, it supports China in its endeavors and joins it in promoting a more representative nature of global institutions, and a more pluralistic and inclusive vision of international relations.

On the contrary, while on a global level Russia and China are trying to influence these institutions *via* their reform, we observe a different tendency on a regional level. In order to assert their influence and the status of regional powers, both states are conceiving a parallel architecture of regional institutions resulting in what we may call regional orders, ones less closely wedded to U.S. power and purpose.<sup>74</sup> These

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<sup>68</sup> Serge Sur, *Relations internationales*. Montchrestien, Lextenso editions, 6th ed., 2011

<sup>69</sup> Charles Grant, Russia, China and Global Governance. *Center for European Reform*, pp. 12-13

<sup>70</sup> Evan A. Feigenbaum, Незаинтересованный игрок: почему китайский ревизионизм более опасен, чем думают в Вашингтоне, 2018

<sup>71</sup> World Bank [Online]

<sup>72</sup> Reforms in question concern mainly expansion of its voting rights and key posts appointment procedures.

<sup>73</sup> Bobo Lo, The Illusion of convergence - Russia, China, and the BRICS. *IFRI*, March 2016, p. 13

<sup>74</sup> Amitav Acharya, The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics. *World Politics*, Vol. 59, n° 4, July 2007, p. 646

endeavors have been translated into the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. We have also seen appear a series of financial institutions, such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) that privilege investments into hard infrastructure with less accent put on democratic and liberal reforms. Although these new institutions neither present a revisionist attempt against the *global* institutional architecture nor do they reflect a clear vision of an alternative one, they reflect China and Russia's intention to set up their own rules on the *regional* level. Described by some as 'virtual regionalism', quantitative success of regional initiatives promoted by China and Russia does not often imply qualitative efficiency. As write Alessandra Russo and Edward Stoddard, they provide "*an additional legitimizing narrative to which regime leaders can anchor their symbolic power, helping them cope with the conflicting identities, norms, values and loyalties*".<sup>75</sup> Indeed, most of the regional associations, such as BRICS, the SCO, the BRI and – to a lesser extent – the EAEU, are incomparable to such developed forms of regional integration as the European Union. However, they serve as important channels through which China and Russia can communicate their conception of intrastate and intraregional relations.

#### *b) Promotion of alternative norms and forms of cooperation*

As once declared former Russian president D. Medvedev, there are competing value systems between Russia and the West and different development models that simply require different forms of governance.<sup>76</sup> Such values and norms play the central role in shaping the order's very operating system. However, as W. Moreland notes, whereas "*globalization amidst the "end of history" spurred the impression that the world was converging on a set of common norms*", "*this process effectively entailed exporting Western, liberal principles, including often via multilateral institutions, across the globe*".<sup>77</sup> In this perspective, international intrastate cooperation appears to be founded on the values universally valid, but of Western provenance.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Alessandra Russo, Edward Stoddard, Why do Authoritarian Leaders do Regionalism? Ontological Security and Eurasian Regional Cooperation. *The International Spectator*, n°53(3), p. 21

<sup>76</sup> Suzanne Loftus and Roger E. Kanet, Whose Playground Is It, Anyway? Power Rivalries in Post-Soviet Space in *Power, Politics and Confrontation in Eurasia*, edit. by Roger E. Kanet and Matthew Sussex, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p. 25

<sup>77</sup> Will Moreland, The Purpose of Multilateralism. A Framework for Democracies in a Geopolitically Competitive World. *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, September 2019, p. 9

<sup>78</sup> Hedley Bull, State systems and International societies. *Review of International Studies*, 1987, 13, p. 152

The universal character of these values comes into question as actors promoting alternative norms, among which Russia and China, become more and more influential. Currently, they put forward the idea of a pluralistic world where ‘European dogmatism’ gives way to ‘economic pragmatism’, preeminence of state’s sovereignty and non-interference. This idea is not new and it was first conceptualized as the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ by India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and China’s first premier, Zhou Enlai, in 1954: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs and equality and cooperation for mutual benefit. In order to acquire some normative weight in international affairs, China promotes a new model of ‘major countries relations’ founded on the following principles summarized by China’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi: “no conflict or confrontation”, “mutual respect” and “win-win cooperation.”<sup>79</sup> In more concrete terms, such model of intrastate relations has been implemented by China with regard to the BRI. The ambitious project setting primarily economic expansion objectives incorporates a non-negligible normative dimension. It serves as a platform to develop shared beliefs and norms to build a “community of shared destiny” through balanced regional economic cooperation architecture and policy coordination. In this perspective, it is seen by many as a cultural and moral alternative to what is seen as the U.S.-led world order.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Russia has been developing regional integration in the post-Soviet space, as in case of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). As leaders of its member-states regularly reiterate, the EAEU is an intragovernmental and not a supranational organization, where non-interference in internal affairs and respect for state sovereignty is guaranteed by the consensus-based decision-making mechanisms. In overall, the idea behind the creation of the EAEU is to form a “*common space of harmonious development*” in the context of “*politization*

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<sup>79</sup> Wang Yi, Toward a New Model of Major-Country Relations Between China and the United States. Speech delivered at the Brookings Institute on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>80</sup> Shaun Lin, James D. Sidaway, Chih Yuan Woon, Reordering China, Respacing the World: Belt and Road Initiative (一帶一路) as an Emergent Geopolitical Culture. *The Professional Geographer*, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, p. 8

*of economy, trade disputes and unfair competition*<sup>81</sup> and the “*erosion during last fifteen years of the U.S.-led liberal order*”<sup>82</sup>.

It is indeed true that China and Russia promote alternative forms of interstate and intraregional cooperation. However, it does not imply promotion of a particular *alternative order* on a global level. Instead, they put forward the idea of a certain kind of multilateralism excluding any universalization of norms. In this logic, cooperation between states should be inclusive and outcome-based rather than rule-based. Its purpose is to make global institutions function as platforms for cooperation and solving concrete issues instead of frameworks creating the rules of the game.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, the dividing line between revisionism, reforming and status quo is not as obvious as it seems to be and the disaggregated approach reveals that one state can be revisionist and reformist and status quo at the same time depending on the point of reference and the level of analysis, systemic or regional.

With regard to the distribution of power, we presume that Russia and China are indeed contesting the preeminence of the U.S., but they do not seek to undermine and eventually replace it as a unique superpower, so their demarche is rather limited. Although China under the Xi Jinping presidency has abandoned the principle of ‘hiding its capacities and biding its time’ (*tao guang yang hui*) and moved “*closer to center stage and making greater contributions*”<sup>83</sup>, it would be precocious to say that it is ready to assume global responsibilities implied by the superpower’s status. Russia, in its turn, is actively claiming its great power status and accepting implied responsibilities, but it lacks economic, financial and political resources necessary to sustain such status. Hence, the sphere of its political influence remains quite limited. Consequently, Russia and China do not share the same motivations and objectives and can hardly be seen as a ‘revisionist geopolitical force’.

With regard to normative dimension, Russia and China promote norms and values – and at this point Russia and China act together – that question the existence of the

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<sup>81</sup> ЕАЭС: *формируя общее пространство совместного гармоничного роста*, Eurasiancommission.org, le 7 juin 2019

<sup>82</sup> Bobo Lo, Greater Eurasia. The Emperor’s New Clothes or an Idea whose time has come? *Etudes de l’IFRI*, Russie.Nei.Reports 27, juillet 2019, p. 15

<sup>83</sup> Xi Jinping, speech at the XIXth National Congress of the Communist Party of China

*universal liberal* world order. Yet, what they seek to promote is not an order that would exclude liberalism but an alternative format of intrastate interactions and regional integration that would exclude creation of universal rules. To do so, the two states unite their efforts to preserve the existing global institutions network while reforming them by introducing there more 'likeminded' actors.