

Bernardo González-Lázaro Sueiras

*Lieutenant-Colonel of the Army, Material Resources Analyst in the Logistics
Division of the Army General Staff*

*Distinguished Graduate from the U.S. Army War College. Master's in Strategic
Studies from the same institution (Carlisle, PA, USA), Master's in Peace, Security
and Defence at the Gutiérrez Mellado Institute (UNED, Madrid) and Master's in
Military Sciences (IUM, Lisbon)*

Email: bglazaro@yahoo.es

Chinese-Russian strategic synergies in North Africa: application of the Carlisle Scholars Program's Strategic Analysis Model

Abstract

This article examines the potential synergies between Russian and Chinese strategies in North Africa by applying the Army War College's (AWC) U.S. Carlisle Scholars Program (CSP) Strategic Analysis Model. The research analyses how coordinated efforts between the two powers in the diplomatic, media, military and economic domains could significantly amplify their regional influence and undermine Western interests. The study employs a systematic methodology that assesses the ends, ways and means of each actor, identifying specific areas of strategic convergence. The findings suggest that this cooperation, although not formalised in an explicit alliance, generates effects in terms of synergy that amplify the influence of both powers and effectively challenge Western interests in the region, particularly in the control of critical infrastructure, military power projection and anti-Western narratives. The analysis suggests that the war in Ukraine has accelerated this coordination, as evidenced by the divergent responses of North African countries to the conflict. The article concludes by proposing specific

recommendations for adapting Western strategies to this emerging strategic environment, emphasising the need for a comprehensive approach that recognises the particularities of each North African country.

Keywords

Strategic analysis, Geopolitical competition, Multilateral influence, North Africa, Regional synergies.

Cite this article:

González-Lázaro Sueiras, B. (2024). Chinese-Russian strategic synergies in North Africa: application of the Carlisle Scholar Programme's Strategic Analysis Programme. *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*. 24, pp. 611-640.

I Introduction

The growing presence and influence of Russia and China in North Africa constitutes one of the most significant geopolitical challenges for the West in the region (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023: 2-3). Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has intensified the debate about how these two powers might coordinate their efforts to challenge the established international order (Kendall-Taylor and Shullman, 2021a: 4). Although they have different strategies and capacities, their potential coordination could generate synergistic effects that would significantly amplify their impact beyond the mere sum of their individual efforts.

This study addresses this problem by systematically applying the strategic analysis model developed by the U.S. Army War College's Carlisle Scholars Program (CSP) (Yarger, 2006: 1-5). This methodology, which systematically examines the alignment between objectives, ways and means of strategic actors, provides a robust methodological tool to identify and assess potential synergies between different national strategies. Its application to the case of North Africa allows for a disaggregation and analysis of the fundamental components of Chinese-Russian cooperation, revealing patterns of complementarity that could have significant implications for the regional order.

The importance of this research is based on three critical factors. Firstly, North Africa represents a region of vital strategic importance to Europe and the United States, both because of its geographic proximity and its role in security, migration and energy issues (Hill and Yerkes, 2021: 1-3). The divergent responses of North African countries to the war in Ukraine have highlighted the complexity of regional alignments and the effectiveness of Chinese-Russian influence. For example, while Morocco has supported resolutions condemning the Russian invasion, Algeria has maintained a posture of strategic neutrality that reflects its deep dependence on Russian armaments and its growing ties to Chinese infrastructure projects.

Secondly, the war in Ukraine has accelerated the reconfiguration of global alliances, with direct implications for North Africa (Kendall-Taylor and Shullman, 2021b: 4-6). Russia's need to evade Western sanctions has intensified its search for alternative partners, while China has taken advantage of the situation to expand its economic influence in the region. These dynamics are evidenced by the significant increase in bilateral trade with North African countries and the deepening of strategic cooperation agreements.

Third, Chinese-Russian coordination in North Africa could serve as a model for broader collaboration in other regions of the world (Pardo de Santayana, 2023: 5-6). The patterns of cooperation identified in this study could be replicated in other geographical contexts, with significant implications for the international order. The ability of the two powers to complement each other's capabilities and resources without the need for a formal alliance presents particular challenges to traditional Western containment and deterrence strategies.

The article is structured in six main sections. Following this introduction, the second section describes the CSP strategic analysis model in detail and justifies its application to the case study. The third section examines the current context of North Africa as a strategic theatre, looking particularly at the impact of the war in Ukraine on regional dynamics. The fourth section analyses Russia's and China's individual strategies in the region, while the fifth section identifies and assesses potential synergies between the two. The sixth section examines US and EU regional strategies, the implications of a potential Chinese-Russian synergy for Western interests and proposes strategic recommendations.

This research contributes to the academic and policy debate on contemporary strategic competition in three key ways. Firstly, it systematically applies an established model of strategic analysis to a contemporary case study, demonstrating its usefulness in understanding complex dynamics of great power competition. Second, it provides a detailed and up-to-date assessment of Chinese-Russian synergies in North Africa, based on recent empirical evidence. Third, it offers concrete recommendations for Western policy, based on a rigorous analysis of regional dynamics.

The methodology employed in this study combines documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources with a structured analytical framework. Official Russian and Chinese foreign policy documents, statements from their respective African summits, and recent academic studies on their presence in the region have been examined. The CSP model is applied systematically to analyse the strategic objectives, operational approaches and resources employed by each actor, allowing points of convergence and complementarity to be identified. This rigorous methodological approach facilitates an objective assessment of the potential synergies between Russian and Chinese strategies, as well as their implications for Western interests. The research pays particular attention to the evolution of these dynamics since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, incorporating updated data on UN voting patterns, trade flows, and military cooperation agreements.

The findings of this research suggest that Chinese-Russian coordination in North Africa is more sophisticated and effective than is generally recognised, particularly in areas such as the control of critical infrastructures, military power projection and the dissemination of anti-Western narratives. The war in Ukraine has accelerated these trends, creating new opportunities for bilateral cooperation and challenging Western influence in the region.

2 Methodological framework: the Carlisle Scholar Program's Strategic Analysis Model

The strategic analysis model used in the AWC's CSP is a systematic and structured methodological tool for assessing national strategies and their interactions. This analytical framework is based on the definition of strategy: "the risk-informed alignment of ends, ways and means to achieve proposed goals" (Yarger, 2006). This methodology

was chosen for this study because of its ability to systematically disaggregate and analyse the key components of national strategies, allowing for the identification of areas of convergence and complementarity between different actors.

The model structures the strategic analysis into three interrelated building blocks:

- “Strategic aims” (*ends*): they comprise both permanent national interests and context-specific objectives.
- “Modes of action” (*ways*): they encompass the full spectrum of actions that an actor can take to achieve its objectives.
- “Means available” (*means*): it refers to the instruments of national power available in the diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME) domains.

The analysis of *strategic goals* requires a clear distinction between fundamental national interests and specific regional objectives.

- National interests represent the permanent aspirations of any State, such as survival, economic prosperity or global influence.
- Regional objectives, on the other hand, are more concrete and contextualised goals that contribute to the achievement of these national interests. This distinction makes it possible to assess the coherence between the two levels and to understand how regional actions align with the actor’s global ambitions.

As for the *modes of action*, the model identifies six main categories of strategic action that form a continuum from persuasion to the use of force:

- Persuasion: the use of logical arguments and appeals to shared interests to influence the behaviour of other actors.
- Incentives (*inducements*): offering tangible or intangible benefits to motivate desired actions.
- Guarantees (*assurances*): promises of restraint or moderation conditional on compliance with specific demands.
- Coercion (*compellence*): threats or limited use of force to modify the behaviour of other actors.
- *Deterrence*: demonstration of ability and willingness to impose significant costs to prevent unwanted actions.
- Brute force: direct application of military power to achieve objectives when other methods have failed.

The *available means* are analysed through the DIME framework, which examines the four key instruments of national power:

- Diplomacy: it includes bilateral and multilateral relations, participation in international organisations, and use of formal and informal diplomatic channels.

- Media: it encompasses information operations, public diplomacy, strategic narratives and the ability to influence global perceptions.
- Military: it includes conventional and non-conventional capabilities, military presence, joint exercises, arms sales and defence cooperation.
- Economic: it encompasses trade, investment, development aid, economic sanctions and control over strategic resources.

Practical application of the model requires a systematic analysis of how these three components interact and reinforce each other. For each strategic actor, a matrix is constructed that relates ends, ways and means, allowing to identify patterns of behaviour and to assess the internal coherence of their strategy. This approach facilitates the identification of strengths and vulnerabilities, as well as points of convergence or friction between different actors.

The methodology is particularly appropriate for analysing strategic synergies for several reasons. First, its systematic structure allows for the disaggregation of complex strategies into analysable components, facilitating the identification of areas of complementarity. Second, the DIME framework provides a common basis for comparing the capacities and actions of different actors. Third, the distinction between different modes of strategic action allows us to understand how actors with different approaches can effectively coordinate.

In the specific case of Chinese-Russian synergies in North Africa, the model is applied at three levels (Arquilla *et al.*, 2019: 117-120):

1. Individual analysis of Russian and Chinese strategies, assessing the coherence between their ends, ways and means in the regional context.
2. Identification of areas of convergence and complementarity between the two strategies, particularly in terms of capabilities and operational approaches.
3. Assessment of the combined impact of these strategies on Western interests and regional stability.

This methodological framework provides a solid basis for assessing Chinese-Russian strategic synergies in North Africa, allowing for the identification of both explicit patterns of cooperation and more subtle forms of operational complementarity. The systematic application of the model in the following sections of the analysis will demonstrate its usefulness in understanding complex dynamics of great power competition and its implications for regional stability.

3 North Africa as a strategic theatre

North Africa is a critical geopolitical space that connects European, US, Middle Eastern and sub-Saharan strategic interests. The region, comprising Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and the disputed territory of Western

Sahara, is undergoing significant transformations in its international alignments and internal dynamics, catalysed by the growing Chinese-Russian presence and relative Western retreat, and intensified by global developments such as the war in Ukraine and growing competition between great powers (Yerkes and AlHomoud, 2023: 236-238).

3.1 *Current geopolitical context*

Regional dynamics are characterised by a multidimensional transformation that simultaneously affects the political, economic and security spheres. The gradual withdrawal of Western influence has created vacuums that Russia and China seek to fill through differentiated but potentially complementary strategic approaches. These dynamics play out against a backdrop of persistent structural challenges including chronic political instability, intense demographic pressures, recurrent economic crises and multifaceted security threats.

The region experiences basic transformations in three interconnected spheres (Gebremariam *et al.*, 2022: 16-18). On the economic front, the search for diversification beyond oil and gas coincides with ambitious infrastructure projects, mainly driven by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The need for infrastructure modernisation creates opportunities for external economic penetration, particularly in strategic sectors such as ports, energy and telecommunications.

In the security sphere, the proliferation of unconventional threats, from transnational terrorism to irregular migration, generates new dynamics of cooperation and competition between regional and international actors. Regional experience with groups such as the Islamic State in Libya has created demand for security and counter-insurgency assistance, opening spaces for Russian influence through private military contractors and arms sales.

At the political level, the permanent tension between authoritarian stability and reformist pressures continues to define national trajectories. The Chinese-Russian ability to offer support without democratic conditions is particularly attractive to regimes seeking to maintain control while modernising their economies.

3.2 *Impact of the war in Ukraine*

The Ukrainian conflict has acted as a catalyst, exposing and accelerating pre-existing trends in the reordering of regional alliances. The divergent responses of North African countries to the Russian invasion have revealed the complexity of their strategic calculations and structural dependencies (Ramani, 2022: 4-6).

Algeria has adopted a stance of deliberate strategic neutrality, abstaining on crucial UN votes while deepening its military and energy ties with Russia. This position reflects both its historical dependence on Russian weapons and its desire to maintain strategic

autonomy. Egypt has implemented a more nuanced approach, formally backing resolutions condemning the invasion but maintaining significant cooperation with Russia, particularly on the El-Dabaa nuclear project and grain trade. Morocco, more clearly aligned with the West after the Abraham Accords, has consistently supported resolutions against the Russian invasion.

The war has also intensified competition for strategic resources and trade routes. Europe's search for alternatives to Russian gas has renewed interest in North African producers, while sanctions against Russia have accelerated efforts to develop alternative trade routes, potentially benefiting Chinese infrastructure projects under the BRI.

3.3 Key regional dynamics

The regional strategic environment is shaped by multiple interrelated dynamics that create both opportunities and challenges for external influence. Historical tension between Algeria and Morocco, exacerbated by the Western Sahara dispute and Moroccan normalisation with Israel, constitutes a significant factor of instability that conditions regional and international alignments (Pavia *et al.*, 2022: 33-35).

The persistent migration crisis profoundly affects relations with Europe and generates significant internal socio-political pressures. Mixed migration flows, combining economic migration with forced displacements, have turned border control into a strategic negotiating tool with European partners.

The continuing threat of violent extremism has a decisive influence on security policies and international partnerships. Regional experience with groups such as the Islamic State in Libya has generated demand for security and counter-insurgency cooperation, creating opportunities for Russian influence through private military contractors and arms sales.

The development of critical infrastructure, particularly ports and energy connections, emerges as a crucial field of strategic competence. China, through the BRI, is establishing a significant presence in key points such as the Suez Canal and Mediterranean ports, while Russia seeks to secure access to strategic military installations such as Port Sudan.

3.4 Country analysis

The materialisation of China's and Russia's strategies varies significantly between countries in the region, reflecting different national contexts and specific vulnerabilities.

Algeria maintains a distinctive position as Russia's main military customer in the region, receiving approximately two-thirds of its weapons from Moscow since 2002. This relationship is complemented by a growing trade dependence on China,

which accounts for about 18% of Algerian imports and maintains a significant presence in infrastructure projects. This double dependency exemplifies the potential complementarity between Russian and Chinese influences (Zoubir, 2023: 1-3).

Egypt has developed a sophisticated balance of power policy that maximises its strategic autonomy. Its comprehensive strategic partnership with China since 2014 coexists with significant Russian military cooperation, including the El-Dabaa nuclear project and major arms purchases. Egypt's position in the Ukrainian conflict reflects this search for balance, avoiding alienating key partners while keeping its options open.

Libya continues to experience significant instability following the fall of Gaddafi, with different powers backing rival factions. The presence of the Russian Wagner Group alongside Chinese infrastructure investments illustrates how Beijing and Moscow can pursue complementary objectives even in highly volatile contexts. The Libyan situation represents a microcosm of how Chinese-Russian coordination can effectively challenge Western influence even without explicit formal cooperation.

Morocco has deepened its ties with the West, particularly following the Abraham Accords and the US recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. However, it has a significant economic relationship with China, evidenced by its accession to the BRI in 2022 and the 50% increase in bilateral trade since 2016. This diversification of relationships reflects a sophisticated strategy of maximising strategic autonomy in a multipolar environment.

Sudan represents a particularly illustrative case of potential Chinese-Russian cooperation. Russian interests in gold mining and the development of a naval base in Port Sudan are complemented by massive Chinese investments in port infrastructure and energy projects. This convergence of interests could significantly alter the strategic balance in the Red Sea, a vital commercial artery for global trade.

3.5 Implications for strategic competence

This complex regional landscape offers both opportunities and challenges for Chinese-Russian coordination. The diversity of national contexts and the multiplicity of actors involved create spaces for strategic complementarity, but also introduce potential frictions and constraints. The effectiveness of this coordination will depend to a large extent on Moscow and Beijing's ability to adapt their approaches to local realities while maintaining the coherence of their broader strategies of challenging the liberal international order.

4 Analysis of individual strategies

Applying the CSP model to the analysis of Russia's and China's strategies in North Africa reveals distinctive approaches that, while different in their means and modes of implementation, present significant potential for complementarity (Kendall-Taylor and

Shullman, 2021b: 1-2). This section systematically examines the individual strategies of each actor, providing the basis for subsequently identifying specific areas of synergy.

4.1 *Russia's strategy: opportunistic disruption and power projection*

Russia's strategy in North Africa has intensified markedly since the invasion of Ukraine, evidencing an opportunistic approach that capitalises on State fragility and regional conflicts (Townsend *et al.*, 2021: 9). Quantitative data support this observation: Russian trade revenues with African countries doubled in the period 2013-2021, while its share of grain supplies to the continent reached 30%. Particularly significant is its dominance in the weapons, where Russia accounts for 40% of African imports of major systems between 2018 and 2022 (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023).

Russia's strategic aims in the region are articulated on two levels. At the level of national interests, Russia seeks to reassert its status as a great power in a multipolar world and exert dominant influence beyond its traditional post-Soviet space. At the regional level, it pursues three main objectives: gaining diplomatic support in international forums, establishing strategic military advantages, and securing economic opportunities to counter the impact of Western sanctions.

Russian modes of action range from persuasion to brute force, with particular emphasis on coercion and guarantees of non-interference. Persuasion is exercised mainly through promises of continued military support, while incentives include debt relief and preferential trade agreements. Coercion manifests itself in veiled threats to withdraw critical military support, particularly effective with dependent partners such as Algeria. Direct employment of force is done through private military contractors.

	RUSSIA	PRC
ENDS. National interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great power status in a plurilateral world Exerting dominant influence in the post-Soviet Eurasian space Defending Russian interests, countering Western influence Access to resources and markets (Mazarr, 2022: 31) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inviolability: sovereignty, survival, CCP legitimacy and territorial integrity (including Taiwan) Global social stability: sustainable economic and social development Become a global superpower by reforming the global governance system (Allal, 2022: 128; Mazarr, 2022: 28)
ENDS. Regional objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain diplomatic support Military advantage, increase presence Secure economic opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain diplomatic support Economic growth: expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Protect citizens, investments and resources
WAYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuasion through promises of continued military support and diplomatic alignment Incentives through debt relief, preferential arms deals and investment opportunities Guarantees of non-interference in internal governance matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuasion by appealing to shared histories of colonial exploitation Incentives through unconditional infrastructure investments and favourable commercial terms Guarantees of non-interference in internal governance matters

	RUSSIA	PRC
WAYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coercion by threatening to withdraw assistance or exploit vulnerabilities of client regimes Deterrence of NATO/US/EU forces through existing military deployments in the region Brute force through direct kinetic warfare, mercenary operations and hybrid tactics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coercion through threats of economic isolation of non-compliant regimes Brute force: applied exclusively by Chinese private contractors (PMCs) to defend BRI projects against hostile intentions
MEANS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diplomacy, intelligence, military cooperation, arms sales, mercenary groups, economics, debt relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economy, diplomacy, information, infrastructure projects, arms sales, debt relief

Table I. Strategic analysis matrix of Russia and China in North Africa. *Source:* author's own work

The means employed by Russia are concentrated in the military and security domains. The Wagner Group has emerged as a key instrument of power projection, operating in countries such as Libya and Sudan. Arms sales are another key pillar, with Algeria receiving 76% of its arms imports from Russia since 2002. Energy diplomacy and nuclear cooperation, exemplified by the El-Dabaa project in Egypt, complement this arsenal of leverage tools. (Townsend *et al.*, 2021: 4-5).

Actors	Putin's regime, Russian oligarchies, Russian State-owned enterprises, the Wagner Group
Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuasion: Russia has provided political and military advisers and assistance in Sudan. This allows Russia to have a military base with access to the Red Sea, exploit valuable resources and achieve its strategic objectives (Arbuniés, n.d.). Incentives: Putin invited Algerian President Tebboune to visit Moscow from 13th to 17th of June 2023. They discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations. Russia considers Algeria as one of Africa's top three economic partners. Algeria has received 76% of its arms imports since 2002 from Russia. Algeria does not criticise the intervention in Ukraine (Askar, 2023). Guarantees: Russia provided a 'green light' and protected at the UN the military regime that seized power in Sudan after the October 2021 <i>coup d'état</i>. These actions were aimed at securing Moscow's preferred political outcome and military operational privileges (Abdelaziz <i>et al.</i>, 2021). Coercion: Russia could limit arms supplies to its clients or withdraw military support to some factions in Libya or Sudan. Currently, there is no evidence of coercion. Dissuasion: Russia provided arms, funding and mercenaries to support the Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar. This support has had a tangible impact on the ground, influencing the balance of power in the conflict. A blockade of oil installations and Russian support have deterred further external intervention (Wehrey, 2020). Brute force: The Wagner Group contractors operate alongside Moscow-sponsored militias in Libya, where violent clashes have caused hundreds of casualties since 2020 in battles over sovereign territory. These kinetic deployments and mercenary operations generate bloody geopolitical coercion, fulfilling Russian objectives (Wehrey, 2020).

Table II: Implementation of Russia's strategy in the region. *Source:* author's own

4.2 China's strategy: systematic expansion and enduring presence

The Chinese strategy contrasts sharply with the Russian approach, characterised by a more robust presence defined by decades of growing economic and commercial activity (US Department of Defense, 2023: 1). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the main framework for this expansion, reflecting deliberate efforts to take a leading position in a competitive multilateral world.

China's strategic goals prioritise the sanctity of its sovereignty and the survival of the CCP regime, along with sustainable economic development objectives and favouring the reshaping of the international order. At the regional level, China seeks to secure strategic resources, expand markets for its products, and establish critical infrastructure to facilitate its global trade.

Chinese ways of action emphasise persuasion and economic incentives, generally avoiding explicit coercion. Persuasion is based on narratives of shared history and common development, while incentives take the form of massive investments in infrastructure and favourable terms of trade. Guarantees of non-interference in internal affairs are particularly attractive for regimes facing Western criticism.

Actors	PRC Government, Chinese State-owned and private companies, security contractors
Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuasion: in 2016, China launched the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) to strengthen anti-imperialist solidarity with Arab League members, including key North African States. This seeks to encourage a preference for greater Chinese regional economic engagement (BRICS Policy Center, n.d.). • Incentives: on the 19th of August 2022, China announced that it would forgive 23 interest-free loans (IFLs) for 17 African countries by the end of 2021 (Hwang, 2022). These actions encourage greater PRC collaboration by paying States to accept and rely on additional Chinese assistance (Mukete Dynamic, 2020). • Guarantees: PRC State Councillor Wang Yi in July 2021 said: "China firmly supports Algeria in the pursuit of a development path suited to its national conditions", signalling an unwavering defence of interests. Algeria regards China as a "geopolitical insurance policy" (Foreign Ministry, 2021; Yi, 2021). These appeals to regimes facing Western pressure over domestic policies ensure that China will protect and support their questionable actions, offering a more convenient alternative (Zoubir, 2023: 1). • Coercion: after Australia called for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19, China halted imports of beef and barley and imposed tariffs on wine exports. Similar coercive economic isolation can await individual North Africans (Walsh, 2021). • Brute force: Chinese private security contractors occasionally collaborate with local armies in countries such as Egypt and Algeria to defend PRC assets and personnel against non-State extremists or criminal groups that threaten key Silk Belt and Road Initiative projects. Violence is concentrated only on designated hostile elements, rather than on overt political blackmail (Arduino, 2023).

Table III. Implementation of China's strategy in the region. *Source:* author's own

The means deployed by China are concentrated in the economic and technological domains. The BRI has channelled significant investments into port, energy and digital connectivity projects. Bilateral trade has grown substantially, with China accounting for about 18% of imports in countries such as Algeria. Cultural diplomacy, through Confucius Institutes and educational exchange programmes, complements this multidimensional approach.

4.3 Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis reveals fundamental differences in strategic approach. Russia takes a more opportunistic and disruptive approach, capitalising on existing instabilities and employing military and security tools. In turn, China is pursuing a more systematic and long-term oriented strategy, prioritising economic influence and infrastructure development (Hamilton, 2023: 7-11).

Differences are also apparent in the scope and depth of their regional engagement. Russia's presence, while significant in specific sectors such as defence and energy, lacks the breadth and sustainability of China's footprint. The BRI provides China with a coherent framework for expanding its influence, while Russia operates in a more *ad hoc* manner, responding to tactical opportunities.

However, these differences do not exclude the possibility of strategic complementarity. Russia's military expertise and willingness to take security risks can complement China's ability to finance and develop critical infrastructure. The convergence of their interests in countering Western influence provides a basis for tactical coordination, even in the absence of a formal alliance.

4.3.1 Practical implementation of strategies

The materialisation of these strategies on the ground reveals distinctive patterns of action. In the Russian case, implementation is characterised by significant tactical flexibility. In Libya, for example, support for General Haftar's Libyan National Army combines elements of direct military cooperation, through the Wagner Group, with diplomatic backing in international fora. This multifaceted approach has allowed Russia to establish a significant presence at a strategic point in the Mediterranean, despite its limited economic resources.

The Chinese strategy, on the other hand, demonstrates greater coherence and systematisation in its implementation. The development of the port of El Hamra in Egypt illustrates their characteristic approach: long-term financing, technology transfer, and linkage to wider regional connectivity initiatives. This project not only strengthens China's presence in a crucial node of global maritime trade, but also creates structural dependencies through debt and technological integration.

4.3.2 Adaptation to national contexts

The effectiveness of both strategies depends significantly on their ability to adapt to specific national contexts. In Algeria, the convergence of strategic interests with Russia, particularly in the military sphere, has facilitated a privileged relationship that includes preferential access to advanced weaponry

and cooperation in military training. Recognising this reality, China has complemented Russian influence with significant investments in civilian infrastructure and industrial development.

In Morocco, the situation is reversed. The country's traditional pro-Western orientation has limited Russian penetration, but has not prevented China from establishing a substantial economic presence. Morocco's accession to the BRI in 2022 and the 50% increase in bilateral trade since 2016 demonstrate China's ability to advance its interests even in countries aligned with the West.

4.3.3 Post-Ukraine developments

The war in Ukraine has catalysed significant changes in the implementation of both strategies. Russia has intensified its efforts to secure diplomatic and economic support in the region, as evidenced by the second Russia-Africa summit in 2023. Increased grain trade and the expansion of bilateral currency agreements reflect attempts to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions.

China has strategically taken advantage of this juncture to deepen its economic penetration in the region. The availability of Chinese financing and its willingness to trade in local currencies have gained additional relevance in a context of global financial uncertainty. The development of alternative international payment infrastructures, for example, has found fertile ground among countries seeking to reduce their vulnerability to Western sanctions.

4.3.4 Dimensions of complementarity

The comparative analysis reveals several key dimensions where Russian and Chinese strategies could effectively complement each other:

- Military and economic capabilities: Russian expertise in military operations and counter-insurgency complements China's ability to finance and develop strategic infrastructure. This combination is particularly potent in countries facing security challenges while pursuing economic development.
- Political and technological influence: Russia's willingness to openly challenge Western norms may create space for the more subtle expansion of Chinese influence. Chinese surveillance technology, for example, finds natural application in regimes backed militarily by Russia.
- Networks of influence: Russian military contacts inherited from the Soviet era complement the new economic and technological networks developed by China. This overlapping relationship strengthens joint resistance to Western influence.

5 Identification and analysis of strategic synergies

Systematic application of the CSP model reveals multiple areas where Russian and Chinese strategies in North Africa exhibit effective synergies that transcend mere tactical coordination. These synergies emerge from the natural complementarity between their capabilities and strategic approaches, creating effects that exceed the sum of their individual actions (Berzina-Cerenkova and Rühlig, 2023: 5-7).

5.1 Synergies in the diplomatic domain

In the diplomatic sphere, Chinese-Russian coordination manifests itself mainly in their ability to align positions in multilateral fora and provide mutual support for their regional initiatives (Hamilton, 2023: 7). This cooperation is evidenced by coordinated voting patterns at the UN and reciprocal support for their respective projects in the region. For example, China has consistently avoided criticising Russian military operations in Libya, while Russia actively supports the expansion of the BRI in North Africa (Guan, 2022: 21-38).

The effectiveness of this diplomatic coordination has been particularly evident in regional responses to the war in Ukraine. The abstention or veiled support of several North African countries for the Russian position reflects the combined influence of Moscow and Beijing. In particular, the Chinese-Russian ability to influence the positions of key countries such as Algeria and Egypt demonstrates how their cooperation can effectively counter Western influence.

Diplomatic synergies materialise at three main levels:

1. Coordination in international organisations: Russia and China systematically align their positions in the UN Security Council and other multilateral fora when addressing North African issues. This coordination significantly increases their ability to block unwanted Western initiatives.
2. Mutual support to regional initiatives: China tacitly supports Russia's military presence in countries such as Libya and Sudan, while Russia facilitates the expansion of Chinese infrastructure projects through its political and military influence.
3. Complementary diplomatic narratives: both powers promote discourses that emphasise non-interference in internal affairs and criticise Western interventionism, resonating particularly in countries with colonial experiences.

5.2 Synergies in the information domain

Collaboration in the information domain represents one of the most sophisticated and effective aspects of Chinese-Russian cooperation. State media in both countries mutually

amplify narratives that challenge the Western-led international order and promote alternative models of development and governance (Gebremariam *et al.*, 2022: 62-64).

This information synergy is materialised through:

- a) Coordinated media platforms: *RT*, *Sputnik*, *CGTN* and *Xinhua* develop complementary narratives that reinforce each other's key messages. Russian coverage tends to emphasise security and sovereignty issues, while Chinese media focus on economic development and South-South cooperation (US Department of State, n.d.).
- b) Digital influence operations: Russian capabilities in information warfare are complemented by China's technological infrastructure, creating an alternative information ecosystem that effectively challenges Western narratives.
- c) Coordinated cultural diplomacy: Chinese Confucius Institutes and Russian cultural centres operate in a complementary way, promoting alternative visions to the Western model of development and governance.

The effectiveness of this information coordination is evidenced by the growing regional receptivity to anti-Western narratives and the progressive legitimisation of authoritarian development models.

5.3 Synergies in the military domain

In the military sphere, the complementarity between Russian and Chinese capabilities creates significant opportunities for coordinated power projection. Russian expertise in military operations and arms sales is complemented by China's ability to finance and develop military infrastructure (Arduino, 2023).

Military synergies are manifested in a number of activities:

- a) Military infrastructure cooperation: port facilities developed with Chinese funding can serve as staging points for Russian naval operations. The case of Port Sudan exemplifies this complementarity, where China's port infrastructure facilitates Russia's naval presence.
- b) Weapons systems integration: Russian weapons systems are increasingly integrated with Chinese command and control technology, creating capabilities that benefit both powers.
- c) Training and doctrine: Russian expertise in counter-insurgency operations combines with China's focus on information and cyberwarfare, providing its regional partners with multidimensional capabilities.

Joint naval exercises in the Mediterranean, initiated in 2015, demonstrate the evolution of this military cooperation towards regular demonstrations of coordinated capabilities.

5.4 Synergies in the economic domain

Chinese-Russian economic coordination in North Africa represents perhaps the most promising area for expanded collaboration. The integration of China's BRI with Russian trade corridors creates an infrastructure and trade network that could significantly reduce Western economic influence in the region (Shakhanova and Garlick, 2020: 34-49).

Economic synergies are manifested in:

- a) Financing and infrastructure: China's ability to finance and build critical infrastructure combines with Russia's political and military influence to secure strategic projects. Mediterranean ports and energy facilities exemplify this complementarity.
- b) Alternative financial systems: cooperation in the development of alternative payment mechanisms to SWIFT and the promotion of trade in national currencies reduce vulnerability to Western sanctions.
- c) Joint energy projects: Russian expertise in hydrocarbon exploration and production is complemented by China's ability to finance and develop energy infrastructure.
- d) Resilient supply chains: the combination of Russian overland routes with Chinese maritime corridors creates alternative trade networks that are less vulnerable to Western disruption.

5.5 Combined impact analysis

The synergy between the Russian and Chinese strategies has the potential to produce effects that exceed the sum of their individual components:

- a) Multiplication of influence: the combination of Russian military and Chinese economic power creates a more robust and multidimensional presence than either could achieve individually.
- b) Vulnerability reduction: the weaknesses of each actor are offset by the strengths of the other, creating a presence that is more resilient to Western pressures.
- c) Expanding strategic options: North African countries gain diplomatic and economic flexibility, reducing their dependence on traditional Western partners.
- d) Creation of alternative spaces: Chinese-Russian cooperation facilitates the development of institutions and mechanisms parallel to those dominated by the West, contributing to the gradual erosion of the liberal international order.

5.6 Limitations and vulnerabilities

However, this cooperation faces significant limitations:

- a) Structural asymmetries: disparities in economic capacities and strategic priorities can lead to tensions in the implementation of joint projects.
- b) Residual competence: in certain areas, such as arms sales and infrastructure projects, Russia and China continue to compete for influence.
- c) External constraints: international sanctions and Western pressure may also limit the scope for Chinese-Russian cooperation, although paradoxically these restrictions have tended to intensify their collaboration in search of alternatives to Western-dominated economic and financial systems.

5.7 Future perspectives

The future development of these synergies will depend on several key factors:

- a) Resolution of the Ukrainian conflict: the outcome of the war will significantly influence Russia's ability to maintain its regional presence.
- b) Evolution of the BRI: the sustainability of the Chinese funding model will condition the scope of future joint projects.
- c) Western response: the effectiveness of Western initiatives to counter Chinese-Russian influence will determine the space available for cooperation.

The deepening of these synergies could signal a fundamental transformation in the regional order, with significant implications for Western interests. This emerging reality requires a coordinated and nuanced Western response, a theme that will be explored in the next section.

6 Implications for Western interests

Growing Chinese-Russian coordination in North Africa presents multidimensional challenges to Western interests that require a fundamental reassessment of traditional US and EU strategies in the region. Systematic analysis of these implications, using the CSP framework, reveals significant vulnerabilities in the Western position that demand urgent adaptive responses (Hill and Yerkes, 2021: 6-9).

	United States	European Union
ENDS. National interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguard the security of the nation • Maintain technological and economic strengths and advantages • Preserve a global system and regional orders that represent free sovereign choice • Achieve a sustainable balance between competition and cooperation with rivals (Mazarr, 2022: 22; US Government, 2022) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens • Contribute to peace and security as well as to the sustainable development of the planet • Contribute to solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, poverty eradication and the protection of human rights • Strict observance of international law (European Union, 2007)
ENDS. Regional objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the influence of your competitors • Promote regional stability • Address security threats • Support economic prosperity and democratic governance • Protect their economic interests (Hill and Yerkes, 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote regional stability • Stabilisation of economic development • Security and counter-terrorism • Control migration and mobility • Diversify energy suppliers (Megerisi and Stella Martini, 2023)
WAYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuasion: diplomatic efforts, economic incentives and promotion of shared values and interests • Incentives: assistance, investment or security cooperation to encourage positive behaviour or policy change • Guarantees: avoid neo-colonialism and promote regional development • Coercion: imposing sanctions or other measures • Deterrence: credible threat of military force or other measures • Brute force: if necessary, to protect their interests or respond to security threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuasion: diplomatic efforts, economic incentives and promotion of shared values and interests • Incentives: financial assistance, trade incentives and development programmes to encourage positive behaviour or reforms • Guarantees: avoid neo-colonialism and promote regional development • Coercion: imposing sanctions or other measures • Deterrence: credible threat of military force or other measures
MEANS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomacy, military cooperation, economics, trade agreements, USAID projects, counter-terrorism operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomacy, military cooperation, economics, trade agreements, development aid, counter-terrorism operations

Table IV. US and EU's strategic analysis matrix in North Africa. *Source:* author's own

6.1 US strategy: promoting stability and containing terrorism

The US strategy in North Africa focuses on promoting regional stability, combating terrorism and supporting democratic political transitions (Hill and Yerkes, 2021). The US has been a key actor in supporting economic reforms and improving the security capacity of States in the region. This strategy is articulated through a combination of military, economic and diplomatic assistance, seeking to strengthen bilateral relations and promote mutual interests.

US national interests include the security of its European allies, access to critical energy resources and the containment of extremist groups that might threaten its interests. At the regional level, it seeks to ensure a stable environment conducive to international trade and investment free from the destabilising influence of rival powers such as Russia and China (US Government, 2022: 42-45).

The US employs a variety of tactics ranging from active diplomacy and governance support to direct military intervention in extreme cases. Development initiatives and economic aid are used to promote stability and reduce the appeal of extremism. Military cooperation and training of local security forces are essential to combat terrorism and improve regional security.

Means employed include high-level diplomacy, strategic military presence through bases and defence agreements, as well as economic leverage through direct aid and preferential trade agreements. In addition, programmes such as the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) underscore the US commitment to long-term regional security.

Actors	Pentagon, Department of State, USAID
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuasion: US diplomats urged Tunisia's leaders to continue democratic reforms in the wake of the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, including electoral integrity and civic freedoms. This sought a gradual realignment compatible with American political values (US Embassy in Tunisia, n.d.). • Incentives: after Morocco normalised ties with Israel in 2020, the US recognised Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. This rewarded a key regional partner for a diplomatic concession in tune with US priorities (Yerkes and AlHomoud, 2023: 239). • Guarantees: not observed.
Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion: the Trump Administration briefly withheld \$300 million in military aid to Egypt in 2017 over human rights concerns, although the funds were later released citing security imperatives. The threat of suspension and withdrawal of aid seeks to compel an improvement in governance (Gallo, 2017). • Brute force: US special operations raids and drone strikes assist local partners in counterterrorism missions targeting violent extremists, especially those affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda, across North Africa. These direct actions project military force where terrorist movements threaten regional stability and American interests (Bergen and Sims, n.d.).

Table 5. Implementation of US strategy in the region. *Source:* author's own

6.2 *The EU strategy: promoting stable neighbourhoods and managing shared challenges*

The EU's strategy in North Africa is strongly influenced by its geographical proximity and shared challenges in the areas of migration, security and energy (Megerisi and Stella Martini, 2023). The EU seeks to promote a stable neighbourhood through support for political and economic reforms, security cooperation and critical infrastructure development.

The EU's strategic objectives include promoting stability and security on its southern border, managing migration flows and diversifying its energy sources. At the regional level, it aims to create an environment of economic and political cooperation that prevents the proliferation of conflicts and the strengthening of extremist groups.

The EU uses a combination of diplomatic, economic and, to a lesser extent, military tools. It prioritises soft diplomacy through the negotiation of free trade agreements

and association agreements, and promotes regional integration through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Means include significant investments in development aid, funding for critical infrastructure and support for institutional and economic reform through programmes such as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Security cooperation and border management are handled through agencies such as Frontex and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations.

These analyses highlight how, despite their different approaches and priorities, both the US and the EU seek to positively influence development and stability in North Africa, each using their strategic capabilities and tools to achieve their respective regional and global objectives.

Actors	European Commission, European Council
Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuasion: the EU uses increased trade and investment opportunities to encourage progress on human rights, democratisation and good governance in North Africa (European Commission, n.d.). • Incentives: the EU has pledged millions of euros for migration control in Morocco and Tunisia. These funds provide budgetary support for the country and facilitate migration cooperation (European Parliament, 2023). • Guarantees: the EU is the largest donor of development assistance in Africa, promoting sustainable development and negating suspicions of neo-colonialism (European Parliament, 2023). • Coercion: the EU has taken action against migrant trafficking, including the threat of sanctions to compel local authorities to contain security threats and migration flows.

Table VI. Implementation of the EU strategy in the region. *Source:* author's own

6.3 Challenges for the regional security architecture

Chinese-Russian synergies create multiple challenges for the Western security architecture in North Africa. The combination of Russian military capabilities with Chinese infrastructure creates restricted access zones that limit Western freedom of operation (Henriksen, 2023: 3-5). This phenomenon is particularly evident in three critical areas:

- a) Maritime control: the emerging network of Chinese-Russian naval facilities, from Port Sudan to Mediterranean ports, threatens to upset the regional naval balance. China's ability to finance and develop port infrastructure, combined with Russia's naval presence, creates strategic control points that could restrict Western maritime access in crisis situations.
- b) Air defence: the integration of Russian air defence systems with Chinese surveillance technology, particularly in countries such as Algeria, establishes zones of denial of access that compromise traditionally-assumed Western air superiority in the region.

- c) Counter-terrorism: the presence of the Wagner Group, backed by Chinese infrastructure and funding, complicates Western counter-terrorism operations by introducing additional actors with potentially divergent agendas.

6.4 Economic challenges

In the economic sphere, Chinese-Russian coordination presents significant challenges to Western interests:

- a) Alternative financial systems: the development of payment mechanisms independent of the SWIFT system and the promotion of trade in domestic currencies erodes the effectiveness of economic sanctions as a Western foreign policy tool.
- b) Critical infrastructure control: the combination of Chinese funding and Russian security in strategic infrastructure projects creates structural dependencies that are difficult to counteract. Ports, pipelines and telecommunications networks under Chinese-Russian influence can be used as instruments of pressure against Western interests.
- c) Competition for resources: Chinese-Russian coordination in the energy sector threatens Western access to strategic resources. The combined capacity to offer integrated development and security packages often surpasses Western alternatives.

6.5 Challenges for political and diplomatic influence

The effectiveness of Chinese-Russian coordination in the diplomatic sphere generates particular challenges:

- a) Influence erosion: the Chinese-Russian ability to present credible alternatives to the international liberal order weakens Western diplomatic influence. The abstentions of North African countries in crucial votes on Ukraine exemplify this trend.
- b) Narrative competence: the mutual amplification of anti-Western narratives by Russian and Chinese State media effectively challenges the credibility of Western messages in the region.
- c) Fragmentation of alliances: the Chinese-Russian ability to exploit divisions between Western partners, particularly between the US and the EU, complicates the implementation of coherent strategies.

6.6 *Western structural vulnerabilities*

The analysis reveals fundamental vulnerabilities in the Western position that require urgent attention (Carter, 2023: 8-11):

- a) *Asymmetry of commitment*: the perception of fluctuating Western engagement contrasts with a consistent Chinese-Russian presence, undermining Western credibility as a reliable partner.
- b) *Conditionality vs. pragmatism*: Western demands for political and economic reform contrast with the more pragmatic Chinese-Russian approach, creating competitive disadvantages in relations with authoritarian regimes.
- c) *Institutional complexity*: Western decision-making processes, characterised by multiple layers of oversight and approval, make it difficult to respond swiftly to Chinese-Russian initiatives.
- d) *Fragmentation of approximations*: the lack of effective coordination between US and European initiatives reduces their combined impact and creates opportunities for Chinese-Russian penetration.
- e) *Budgetary constraints*: Western financial commitments often cannot compete with Chinese financing, particularly in large-scale infrastructure projects.
- f) *Divergence of priorities*: differing threat perceptions between the US and the EU complicate the development of effective coordinated strategies.

6.7 *Implications for strategic adaptation*

These realities suggest the need for significant adjustments in the Western approach (Anonymous, 2021: 14-16):

- a) *Strategic coordination*: the US and the EU must develop more effective mechanisms to align their regional strategies, particularly in critical areas such as maritime security and infrastructure development.
- b) *Competitiveness of offers*: Western initiatives must evolve to offer more attractive and practical alternatives to Chinese-Russian cooperation, especially in terms of financing and infrastructure development.
- c) *Tactical adaptability*: Western strategies must demonstrate greater flexibility to respond to local realities without compromising fundamental values.

To maintain its influence in North Africa, Western strategic adaptation must include:

- The development of more competitive and agile financial instruments for strategic infrastructure project.

- The strengthening of coordination between US and European initiatives.
- The reconsideration of the balance between value promotion and pragmatism in relations with regional partners.
- The improvement of the ability to offer integrated security and development packages that can compete effectively with Chinese-Russian offers.

These implications suggest the need for a fundamental reassessment of Western strategies in North Africa. The effectiveness of Chinese-Russian coordination evidences that traditional approaches may be insufficient in an increasingly competitive and complex strategic environment.

7 Conclusions

The systematic analysis of Chinese-Russian strategic synergies in North Africa, conducted through the application of the CSP model, reveals significant patterns of complementarity that transcend mere tactical coordination. This research has evidenced that, despite their different approaches and capabilities, Russia and China have developed effective forms of cooperation that amplify their regional influence and challenge Western interests more significantly than their individual actions.

The used methodology has identified four main domains where these synergies are particularly effective:

In the diplomatic sphere, Chinese-Russian coordination is evidenced by the ability to align positions in multilateral forums and provide mutual support for their regional initiatives. The war in Ukraine has highlighted the effectiveness of this coordination, as evidenced by North African countries' divergent responses to the conflict and their increasing willingness to challenge Western positions in international forums.

1. In the information domain, the complementarity between Russia's information warfare capabilities and China's technological infrastructure has created an alternative media ecosystem that effectively challenges Western narratives. The mutual amplification of anti-Western messages and the coordinated promotion of alternative models of development and governance have found particular resonance in societies with colonial legacies.
2. Synergies in the military field are particularly significant. Russian expertise in military operations and arms sales is effectively complemented by China's ability to finance and develop strategic infrastructures. The emerging network of naval facilities and military bases that combines Chinese funding with Russian operational presence exemplifies how this cooperation can fundamentally alter the regional strategic balance.
- c) In the economic domain, the integration of China's Belt and Road Initiative with Russian trade corridors is creating an alternative economic architecture

less vulnerable to Western influence. The development of payment mechanisms independent of the SWIFT system and the promotion of trade in national currencies demonstrate how such cooperation can reduce the effectiveness of traditional Western instruments of influence such as economic sanctions.

Country-by-country analysis reveals differentiated but complementary patterns of Chinese-Russian influence. In Algeria, Russia's military dependence is complemented by a growing Chinese economic presence, creating a multidimensional dependency relationship that is difficult to counter. In Egypt, the combination of Russian energy projects with Chinese investment in the Suez Canal has significantly strengthened the combined influence of the two powers in a crucial geostrategic location. In Sudan, the convergence of Russian mining interests with Chinese investment in port infrastructure threatens to establish a strategic corridor to the Red Sea that could fundamentally alter regional equilibriums.

The war in Ukraine has acted as a catalyst, accelerating and deepening these dynamics of Chinese-Russian cooperation. Russia's need to evade international sanctions has intensified its reliance on alternative partners, while China has strategically exploited this juncture to expand its economic influence in the region. These developments suggest that the identified synergies could be further strengthened in the near future.

The implications for Western interests are profound and multifaceted. The effectiveness of Chinese-Russian coordination in North Africa fundamentally challenges traditional Western approaches based on unilateral influence and political conditionality. Russia and China's ability to offer credible alternatives in critical areas such as financing, infrastructure development and security cooperation is progressively eroding Western influence in the region.

The West's response to these challenges requires a fundamental reassessment of its regional strategies. The research suggests that this response should be articulated at three distinct but interrelated temporal levels:

1. In the short term, it is crucial to strengthen coordination between US and European initiatives to maximise their combined impact and avoid counterproductive duplication. This coordination should particularly extend to critical areas such as maritime control and strategic infrastructure development. The creation of formal US-EU consultation and coordination mechanisms specifically dedicated to North Africa could facilitate more coherent and effective responses.
2. In the medium term, there is a need to develop more competitive and agile financial instruments that can effectively rival Chinese-Russian offers in critical areas such as infrastructure development and energy cooperation. This could include the creation of specific investment vehicles for critical infrastructure and the development of more flexible financing mechanisms that combine public and private resources. The Build Back Better World initiative and the European Global Gateway must evolve to offer truly competitive alternatives to the Chinese BRI.

3. In the long term, the West must fundamentally rethink the balance between value promotion and pragmatism in its relations with regional partners. Without abandoning fundamental principles, there is a need to develop more nuanced approaches that recognise local realities and offer realistic pathways for incremental progress. The effectiveness of Chinese-Russian coordination demonstrates the limitations of overly doctrinaire approaches.

The research has also highlighted a number of areas that require further study. Firstly, it is necessary to analyse in depth how different North African societies perceive and respond to Chinese-Russian influence, beyond the official positions of their Governments. Secondly, a more detailed assessment is required on the relative effectiveness of different leverage tools used by China and Russia, particularly in the context of growing technological and information competition. Finally, it is crucial to examine how the specific dynamics observed in North Africa might inform our broader understanding of global strategic competition between the great powers.

The application of the CSP model of analysis has proven useful in systematically examining the complexities of contemporary strategic competition. Its emphasis on the interrelationship between ends, ways and means provides a robust analytical framework to identify and assess strategic synergies between different actors. Extending this methodology to other regional contexts could provide valuable insights into emerging patterns of cooperation between revisionist powers and their implications for the international order.

The evolution of Chinese-Russian relations in North Africa represents a microcosm of the broader challenges the liberal international order faces. The ability of these powers to coordinate their actions effectively, despite their different approaches and priorities, suggests the need to fundamentally rethink how the West conceptualises and responds to strategic competition in the 21st century. The future success of Western policy in the region will depend on its ability to design approaches that are inspired by principles whilst being pragmatic, recognising the legitimacy of regional development aspirations while upholding fundamental values.

Building a more stable and prosperous regional order will require a sustained engagement that goes beyond traditional geopolitical competition to address the root causes of instability and underdevelopment. The effectiveness of Chinese-Russian coordination evidences the importance of multidimensional approaches that integrate diplomatic, media, military and economic elements in a coherent manner. The Western response must evidence similar sophistication and adaptability, recognising that lasting influence requires more than substantive or moral superiority; it demands the ability to offer practical solutions to the specific challenges North African societies face.

Bibliography

Abdelaziz, K. *et al.* (2021). Insight: Sudanese general ignored U.S. warning as army rolled out coup plan. *Reuters*.

- Allal, A. G. B. (2022). La Unión Europea y la OTAN ante el aumento de poder de China en África y en la cuenca del Mediterráneo: análisis a la luz del Concepto Estratégico de la OTAN 2022: Analysis in light of the NATO Strategic Concept. *Revista del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos*. 20, pp. 135-386.
- Anonymous. (2021). *The Longer Telegram: Toward a new American China strategy*.
- Arbuniés, P. (n.d.). *Russia's sharp power in Africa: the case of Madagascar, Central Africa Republic, Sudan and South Africa* [online]. Universidad de Navarra. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/russia-s-sharp-power-in-africa-the-case-of-madagascar-central-africa-republic-sudan-and-south-africa>
- Arduino, A. (2023). *Chinese Private Security Companies: Neither Blackwater Nor the Wagner Group* [online]. War on the Rocks. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2023/12/chinese-private-security-companies-neither-blackwater-nor-the-wagner-group/>
- Arquilla, J. et al. (2019). *Russian Strategic Intentions*. Department of Defense of the United States of America. SMA TRADOC White Paper.
- Askar, A. (2023). A Strategic Partnership: What Are the Dimensions of the Russian-Algerian Rapprochement? [online]. *Interregional*. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.interregional.com/article/A-Strategic-Partnership:/1686/En>
- Bergen, P. and Sims, A. (n.d.). Airstrikes and Civilian Casualties in Libya [online]. *New America*. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <http://newamerica.org/future-security/reports/airstrikes-and-civilian-casualties-libya/>
- Berzina-Cerenkova, U. and Rühlig, T. (2023). China's Complex Relations with Russia: Tracing the Limits of a "Limitless Friendship" [online]. *Internationale Politik Quarterly*. [Accessed: 24 October 2023]. Available at: <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/chinas-complex-relations-russia-tracing-limits-limitless-friendship>
- BRICS Policy Center. (n.d.) *China Arab States Cooperation Forum* [online]. BRICS Policy Center. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://bricspolicycenter.org/en/forum-de-cooperacao-china-paises-arabes/>
- Carter, B. L. (2023). Why the New Cold War Will Split Africa. *Foreign Aff.*
- Droin, M. and Dolbaia, T. (2023). *Russia Is Still Progressing in Africa. What's the Limit?*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- European Commission. (s. f.). *International Partnerships. Initiatives by region* [online]. Comisión Europea. [Accessed: 8 January 2024]. Available at: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/initiatives-region_en
- European Parliament. (2023). *Africa | Fact Sheets on the European Union* [online]. [Accessed: 23 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/180/africa>

- European Union. (2007). *Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community*.
- Foreign Ministry. (2021). Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on July 20, 2021 [online]. Chinese Government. [Accessed: 8 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202107/t20210720_9170789.html
- Gallo, W. (2017). US Withholds Aid From Egypt Over Rights Concerns [online]. Voice America. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-aid-egypt-kushner/3997081.html>
- Gebremariam, E. B. (2022). *African Spaces*. Paris, European Union Institute for Security Studies. Chaillot Paper.
- Guan, G. (2022). Thirty years of China–Russia strategic relations: achievements, characteristics and prospects [online]. *China International Strategy Review*. 4, pp. 21-38. [Accessed: 2024]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-022-00101-6>
- Hamilton, R. E. (2023). *The Dragon and the Bear in Africa Stress-Testing Chinese-Russian Relations*. Eurasia Program. Filadelfia, Foreign Policy Research Institute.
- Henriksen, T. H. (2023). *Power And Persuasion In Africa* [online]. Hoover Institution. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.hoover.org/research/power-and-persuasion-africa>
- Hill, T. and Yerkes, S. E. (2021). *A New Strategy for U.S. Engagement in North Africa: A Report of the North Africa Working Group* [online]. Carnegie Endowment. Int. Peace. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/02/23/new-strategy-for-u.s.-engagement-in-north-africa-report-of-north-africa-working-group-pub-83926>
- Hwang, J. (2022). *China's Interest-Free Loans to Africa* (015). Boston, Global Development Policy Center. Global China Initiative Briefs.
- Kendall-Taylor, A. and Shullman, D. (2021a). *The Future of Russia-China Relations, Navigating the Deepening Russia-China Partnership*. Center for a New American Security.
- . (2021b). *Navigating the Deepening Russia-China Partnership* [online]. Center for a New American Security. [Accessed: 26 September 2023]. Available at: <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/navigating-the-deepening-russia-china-partnership>
- Mazarr, M. J. (2022). *Understanding Competition: Great Power Rivalry in a Changing International Order — Concepts and Theories*. RAND Corporation.
- Megerisi, T. and Stella Martini, L. (2023). *Road to nowhere: Why Europe's border externalisation is a dead end* [online]. European Council on Foreign Relations.

- [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/road-to-nowhere-why-europes-border-externalisation-is-a-dead-end/>
- Mukete Dynamic, B. (2020). *Chinese Loans to Africa: Trap or Treasure?* [online]. China Story. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2020-crisis/forum-of-mao-and-money/chinese-loans-to-africa-trap-or-treasure/>
- Pardo de Santayana, J. (2023). *Sino-Russian strategic partnership continues to enjoy good health* [online]. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. Analysis Papers. [Accessed: 2024]. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA03_2023_JOSPAR_Asoacion_ENG.pdf
- Pavia, A. et al. 2022. *Crisis in the Maghreb, North Africa's transatlantic relations amid change and continuity*. Atlantic Council.
- Ramani, S. (2022). *Russia Has Big Plans for Africa*. Foreign Affairs.
- Shakhanova, G. and Garlick, J. (2020). The Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union: Exploring the «Greater Eurasian Partnership» [online]. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*. 49, pp. 33-57. [Accessed: 2024]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868102620911666>
- Townsend, J. et al. (2021). *A Limited Partnership. Russia-China Relations in the Mediterranean*. Center for a New American Security.
- US Department of Defense. (2023). *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China (Annual report to Congress No. 2023)*. Washington D. C.
- US Department of State. (n.d.). *Report: RT and Sputnik's Role in Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* [online]. U. S. Department of State. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/report-rt-and-sputniks-role-in-russias-disinformation-and-propaganda-ecosystem/>
- US Embassy in Tunisia. (n.d.). *Fact Sheet: Enduring U.S.-Tunisian Relations* [online]. US Embassy Tunisia. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://tn.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/history-of-u-s-tunisia-relationship/president-beji-caid-essebsi-official-visit-to-u-s/fact-sheet-enduring-u-s-tunisian-relations/>
- US Government. (2022). *National Security Strategy*.
- Walsh, M. (2021). Australia called for a COVID-19 probe. China responded with a trade war. *ABC News*.
- Wehrey, F. (2020). *Resurgent Russia: View From Libya - The Day After* [online]. Carnegie Endowment. Int. Peace. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/09/09/view-from-libya-pub-82521>
- Yarger, H. R. (2006). *Strategic theory for the 21st century: the little book on big strategy*. Carlisle Barracks, Letort papers.

- Yerkes, S. E. and AlHomoud, M. S. (2023). North Africa in the World. In: Yerkes, S. E. (ed.). *Geopolitics and Governance in North Africa, Local Challenges, Global Implications*. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 234-272.
- Yi, W. (2021). *Wang Yi Holds Talks with Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra* [online]. Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Jamaica. [Accessed: 7 January 2024]. Available at: http://jm.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxw/202107/t20210721_9005432.htm
- Zoubir, Y. H. (2023). Algeria and China: Shifts in political and military relations [online]. *Global Policy*. 14(1), pp. 58-68. [Accessed: 2024]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13115>

Article received: October 10, 2024

Article accepted: January 21, 2025
