



# Russia and China as potential systemic threats to the EU

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## Abstract

In recent years the world has witnessed a 'rise of the rest', rising powers which challenge the current international system and the hegemony of the United States. These changes affect many aspects of political and economic life and bring many opportunities, but also come with many potential systemic threats. The European Union will also come to feel such changes caused by these rising powers, most particularly from Russia and China, both of whom are seen as some of the major threats to the union as a whole due to their recent developments. If it is to deal with such threats, decision makers within the EU need to know more about Russia and China. This thesis therefore explores different ways in which the two nations pose systemic threats to the EU as a whole.

A deductive method focussing mainly on qualitative research forms the basis for the thesis. The theoretical approach applied is one which is based upon both neorealist and neoclassical realist theory. These two serve as the foundation but are divided into five variables of threat analysis: (1) Aggregate Power (2) Proximate Power (3) Offensive Capabilities (4) Offensive Intentions (5) Executive Power. The first four are based on Stephen Walt's notion that how a state might pose a threat to others can be analysed by focussing on these variables. The fifth variable is based primarily on neoclassical realism and the idea that states can only be a threat towards others if the executives in charge have both the option and the will to turn the other four variables into concrete actions. Hence, executive power is added to Walt's original variables to allow for an analysis that is not purely systemic but also incorporates a domestic variable, albeit the systemic approach is still the main one. Each variable is first analysed individually and then serve as stepping stones towards the next. Finally, all of them are combined in an analysis of Russia and China as threats to the EU at an overall level.

The thesis finds that Russia and China can both be seen as systemic threats towards the EU, but in different ways. Russia has a more clearly defined military dimension while China emphasises economic and political dimensions. In the case of Russia, concerns about NATO are shown to greatly affect its foreign policy choices and rhetoric as well as form the basis for its broad modernisation of its Armed Forces. China, on the other hand, is also militarising, yet its reasoning is more about protecting its interests abroad rather than about protecting itself from an imminent threat. What is found by adding the executive power variable is that both are strong, centralised states with powerful de-facto national leaders who have both the means and the will to use their capabilities. Thus, both can with relative ease translate aggregate power into state power. Finally, it is concluded that Russia represent a current military threat due to a security dilemma occurring in Eastern Europe as a result

of NATO expansion, while China represent both a political and economic threat as well as a potential military threat in the future.

## Table of Content

<b>Abstract</b> .....	
<b>List of abbreviations</b> .....	
<b>List of figures</b> .....	
<b>1.0 Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>2.0 Literature review</b> .....	3
<b>3.0 Methodology</b> .....	6
3.1 Research strategy .....	6
3.2 Delimitations .....	7
3.3 The EU as a unit .....	8
3.4 Empirical data .....	9
<b>4.0 Theory</b> .....	10
4.1 General Introduction to Realism: .....	10
4.2 Neorealism .....	10
4.3 Neoclassical realism .....	15
4.4 Accounting for variables .....	16
4.4.1 Aggregate power .....	16
4.4.2 Proximate power .....	17
4.4.3 Offensive capabilities .....	18
4.4.4 Offensive intentions .....	18
4.4.5 Executive power .....	19
4.5 Theoretical perspectives .....	21
<b>5.0 Analysis</b> .....	25
5.1 Aggregate power .....	25
5.1.1 Russia .....	25
5.1.2 China .....	30
5.1.3 Summarising discussion .....	37
5.2 Proximate power .....	38
5.2.1 Russia .....	39
5.2.2 China .....	42
5.2.3 Summarising discussion .....	45
5.3 Offensive capabilities .....	46
5.3.1 Russia .....	46
5.3.2 China .....	49
5.3.3 Summarising discussion .....	51
5.4 Offensive intentions .....	52

5.4.1 Russia .....	52
5.4.2 China.....	58
5.4.3 Summarising discussion .....	61
5.5 Executive power .....	62
5.5.1 Russia .....	63
5.5.2 China.....	69
5.5.3 Summarising discussion .....	75
<b>6.0 Threat-perspective of the EU.....</b>	<b>77</b>
6.1 EU and Russia .....	77
6.2 EU and China .....	82
6.3 Executive similarities .....	85
<b>7.0 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>.....</b>

## List of abbreviations

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CDSP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CM2025	China Manufacturing 2025
CPC	Communist Party of China
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
COSCO	China Ocean Shipping Company
CSIS	Center for Strategic & International Studies
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NPC	National Party Congress
NSC	National Supervision Commission
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
SAP-2020	State Arms Programme 2020
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SSF	Strategic Support Force
UN	United Nations
US	United States

## List of figures

- Figure 1** *Russia: Total population from 2010 to 2022 (in millions) Page 25*
- Figure 2** *Russia: Gross domestic product (GDP) in current prices from 2012 to 2022 (in billion U.S. dollars) Page 27*
- Figure 3** *China: Total population from 2001 to 2021 (in millions) Page 31*
- Figure 4** *China: gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices from 2010 to 2021 (in billion U.S. dollars) Page 32*

## 1.0 Introduction

The foundation for the modern European Union (EU) rose out of the ashes of two devastating world wars with one single purpose - to avoid future wars and ensure peace and cooperation between European nations. The integration of key economic and political areas was seen as they key to achieving such lasting peace (European Union, 2018b), and the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952 thus integrated the industries of its member states of what was, at the time, the two most essential components for waging war: coal and steel (EUR-Lex, 2017). Since then, the EU has grown into an institutional colossus, encompassing an increasingly wide range of political functions and purposes as well as having created a common currency for the 19 members of the so called 'Eurozone' (European Union, 2018a).

In recent years, the collective security of the EU has become an increasingly important focal point for discussions concerning the future of the union as a whole. Mass migration, terrorism, cross-border organised crime, economic crisis and other issues are prominent in such discussions. It is no longer only about ensuring peace and cooperation between its member states but also increasingly about ensuring the collective safety of EU citizens by protecting them from all threats, internal and external, in a highly globalised and competitive international system.

The first real breakthrough towards a collective defence policy for the union came in 1991 with the Common Foreign Security Policy for the European Union (CFSP) (European External Action Service, 2016a). However, this proved ineffective at handling the military aspects of crisis in Europe at the time, the war following the breakup of Yugoslavia (Howorth, 2014). The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was similarly created as an answer to many of these pressing issues. Among the goals was to create a common security strategy for Europe, which became more clearly outlined in the Lisbon treaty of 2009. Among other things, it established a better framework for security cooperation and allowed for the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which carries out the CFSP (European External Action Service, 2016b). The most recent development of the CSDP is a plan for Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which launched in November 2017. This came about as a result of the 2016 Global Strategy and aims at working towards a strategically autonomous European Defence Union (EDU) (Lazarou & Friede, 2018), although, at this point in time, only 25 nations have signed up, with Malta, Denmark and the United Kingdom as the exceptions. Negotiations are ongoing, but for several high-ranking members of the EU such as Jean Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, the goal for the EU going forward

would be to have a fully-fledged defence union by 2025 (European Commission, 2018a). However, defence cooperation in Europe has historically been, and still is, primarily the domain of NATO with the United States as one of the main guarantors of European security.

PESCO and other initiatives come at a time where there is much unrest in the world, and where it is witnessing what can be referred to as a ‘rise of the rest’ (See Zakaria, 2008), where a number of rising powers have started to challenge the current international system. Thus, defence cooperation and the protection against threats has also become prominent in recent years, especially in light of the instability in regions surrounding Europe. What the exact unfolding of PESCO will look like remains to be seen, but nonetheless if the EU is going to be prepared to face all potential threats, it needs to assess where the majority of these threats might come from and what they will mean for the union as a whole. It is therefore necessary for European policy makers to understand what they are dealing with and what kind of challenges that may arise from a changing international system. Understanding which countries or actors pose a potential or current threat is important to ensure the safety of the union as a whole going forward.

In 2017 the president of the European Union, Donald Tusk, outlined in an open letter that among the major threats facing the union going forward was an increasingly assertive China and an aggressive Russia, both of whom were results of the changing geopolitical climate (Tusk, 2017). These two nations have long been considered to be among a number of rising powers in the global system, but have started to gain more attention in recent years due to their political developments. While the survival of the union as a whole is perhaps not the major concern here, due to the security that NATO provides, rising powers such as Russia and China could possibly minimise European influence going forward as well as fuel internal division. This would put the EU at a disadvantage if such potential threats are not taken into consideration and acted upon collectively. Although the union is not a sovereign nation in its own right, it should be in the best interests of all member states to react to potential threats to the union as long as they are members of it.

This brings us to the purpose of this thesis, which will be to attempt to outline these potential threats from a systemic perspective, to the union as a whole, posed by the two actors that Donald Tusk and others have outlined as two of the major threats facing the EU going forward: Russia and China. To set the basis for the analysis of the subject, the following problem statement has been made:

*In which ways can Russia and China be seen as potential systemic threats to the EU?*

## 2.0 Literature review

This literature review will seek to outline and review some of the existing works on rising powers, as well as account for some of the general trends in research directed at this topic. More specifically, the goal is to explore literature related to Russia and China.

Much has changed in the past 30 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union and China's gradual 'opening up' has called for new ways of looking at Russia and China. The premise for modern discussions of Russia and China is that they are two among a number of rising powers that might come to challenge Western, and particularly American, hegemony. In his book *The Post-American World* Fareed Zakaria (2008) notes how globalisation and global economic growth is increasingly changing the landscape of international relations, and how we are witnessing a power shift towards a new international system likely to challenge to one we are witnessing now under the leadership of the United States. He refers to this as the 'rise of the rest'. Ikenberry (2009) states that a global growth has resulted in a global shakeup, with several countries now gradually changing position within the international system. Most notably of these he finds to be developing countries, especially China, a country which has faced one of the fastest growing economies in modern times.

The argument often presented in such debates can be seen as resonating with Brenton's (2013) statement that '*As some powers rise, others decline.*' (p. 231), thus arguing that a prerequisite for the rise of states will ultimately be a decline in power for others. Brenton is primarily concerned with the cause-effect relationship of relative power between rising states, especially that between Russia and China, arguing that it is characterised as a 'Great Power relationship'. Furthermore, he warns how '*...a major shift in the balance between two major powers such as that now under way between Russia and China will carry wide geopolitical consequences.*' (Brenton, 2013, p. 232). However, he does only account for the two countries in relation to one another and mentions that a shift in balance between the two will bring geopolitical consequences, and thus not what this means for the broader, systemic picture in terms of the international system nor how this shift in balance will affect other nations.

*So how should we see these rising powers?*

Many attempts have been made to account for recent developments in Russia and China as well as the regional and global implications following from such rising powers. Some scholars, like Ikenberry (2014), warn against misreading China and Russia, arguing that they '*...are not full-scale revisionist powers but part-time spoilers at best, as suspicious of each other as they are of the outside world*' (p.

80), while others have painted a rather dark picture of their rise. One of these scholars is John Mearsheimer, who, with work *The Tragedy of the Great Power Politics* (see Mearsheimer, 2001) describes the behaviour of states as favouring power-maximisation over balancing efforts, thus emphasising that states cannot rise peacefully. Regarding Russia, Mearsheimer (2001) argued that not too many concerns should be raised about Russia as a threat. Its army was weak despite having an immense arsenal of nuclear weapons. However, he noted that should the Russian army recover its strength and once again turn into a formidable fighting force, the US as well as its European allies, should start to worry about a Russian threat (Mearsheimer, 2001). What is relevant to note in relation to Mearsheimer's perception of a Russian threat, is that Russia since 2001 indeed has made steps towards a recovery of its military might, thus creating incentives for further analysis in relation to Russia in a modern setting. Regarding China, Mearsheimer describes its rise in an interview from 2011, in which he argues that it cannot take place peacefully. He sees China as the greatest threat towards the US because the country, primarily due to its rapid economic development, will not be interested in maintaining status-quo, but will eventually seek to achieve regional hegemony (Ræson, 2011).

When seeking out literature it furthermore becomes clear that the research seems to be divided into certain areas or topics such as economy, military on so on. However, few, if any, consider the broader, systemic picture of Russia and China's potential rise to power. Among these are, for example, Giles (2014), who focuses primarily on Russian military build-up, exploring the nation's procurement and rearmament, but without ever comparing it to that of other states or putting this in a systemic context. Others like Burlikov & Geise (2013), on the other hand, focus on both China and Russia, more specifically their naval capabilities, and how their threat perception of the leading power, the United States, affects the build-up and strategies of their maritime forces. Some, like, Balashov & Martianova (2014) explore the effect of Russian reindustrialisation policy on the competitiveness of the Russian economy, while Newnham (2011) examines the nature and importance of Russia's oil and gas power, its so called 'petro-power'. Newnham notes that '*Russia's actions extends far beyond Russia's immediate neighbors. For example, Western Europe now has great cause for concern.*' (p. 142). In the case of China, Gilboy & Heginbotham (2013) argue that the rapid economic growth will eventually lead the country into a resource deficit, resulting in an international competition for energy resources, while others, such as Abas (2015) have explored the Chinese military modernisation, more specifically the growth of domestic defence industries in relation to the country's rapid economic growth.

Thus, there has been much effort directed at accounting for both the changes within Russia and China and their relative power. In this regard it would furthermore be relevant to investigate how the two states are seen in a broader, systemic picture, that is, their position within the international system, as well as research how this affects other states. Walt (1985), whose ‘balance of threat’ theory will be one of the main foundations of this thesis, has concerned himself with such a question, albeit in more general terms than just China and Russia. In his article *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power* (1985) he has paid special attention to how and why states react against each other in forms of balancing against or bandwagoning with each other as a reaction to threats. To this, he proposed four variables, which, when combined, comprise the level of threat a state might pose to another. However, Walt uses these variables merely as a tool to determine the background for the making of alliances but does not focus in-depth on the perceived threat in its whole. Furthermore, Walt tries to analyse state behaviour in a historical context, and his empirical investigations does therefore not take into account the international system and the actors within it in a modern context.

Some scholars have investigated in more recent work how Russia and China and their rise is seen in relation to the international system. Lukin (2012), for example, speaks of changes in regional balances of power from a Russian perspective. He sees this in the context of rising geopolitical competition between China and the US in East Asia. Selden (2013), on the other hand, explores how the perceived threat from Russia and China cause many neighbouring states to align with the United States, highlighting how regional powers can be seen as more threatening than American hegemony. What becomes clear overall, however, is that while some research focus on Russia and China in from systemic perspective, this focus mainly seems to be directed at the relation to one another or in relation to the United States. What this literature review shows is therefore that there is a substantial amount of research into the rise of both Russia and China. What that there seems to be a lack of, however, is academic research outlining the systemic dimensions of Russia and China as potential threats, and this is particularly in relation to the EU.

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Research strategy

In order to be able to provide a general orientation of how research is to be conducted within this thesis, the first thing which has to be established is a research strategy. Therefore, accounts for ontological and epistemological standpoints will now be clarified and an explanation of the methods used to answer the problem formulation in hand will be given.

The ontological base revolves around the question of the existence of a social reality and how this should be considered. The overall ontological assumptions applied in this thesis will be based on objectivism, an ontological position in which social phenomena are to be understood independently from actors and where the world exists as an objective entity (Porta & Keating, 2008). As the theories and theoretical perspectives applied in the thesis all derive from the realist tradition, the thesis will furthermore find its basis in the ontological thinking inherent to this tradition; that is, that the international system is characterised as anarchic, imposing structural constraints on the actors within it.

In prolongation of this, the epistemological base in the thesis will be positivist. In general, epistemology seeks to answer how we can achieve knowledge of the world. Within the field of IR theory, the positivist epistemology ‘...aims at singling out causal explanation, on the assumption of a cause-effect relationship between variables.’ (Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 26). Thus, the research will seek an explanation based on structure and reactions between states.

By seeking causal explanations based on variables, a deductive method is furthermore used. The deductive method is used as the theories applied serve as a guide for the operationalisation of the thesis; from the theories five distinct variables have been chosen, variables which will thus lay the ground for further analysis. The five variables will be described in depth in section 4.4. Thus, by using the deductive method in the thesis we will be able to not only analyse the relationship between the given variables, but also how the combination of these play a role in assessing which ways Russia and China can be seen as potential systemic threats to the EU.

The thesis will furthermore predominantly be constructed from qualitative research, as we consider it impossible to answer the research question by applying mainly quantifiable data. The qualitative method allows us to gain a deeper understanding of how Russia and China can be seen as potential threats to the EU, by making certain observations and analyse these observations as we progress. However, quantitative data will be used when deemed necessary, to complement the analysis. This will make it possible to explain, for example the development of the economies of

Russia and China, while statistics showing the development of population, economy, military etc. will also be used. Thus, the quantitative method serves as a tool for providing a more complete analysis.

The five variables will be the focal point of the analysis and will serve as the foundation for answering the whole thesis by clearly structuring and categorising the data. However, each variable will also serve as a stepping stone for the next. This means that some of the data will be explored in several variables as the thesis progresses. The idea is that the longer the thesis progresses, the more analytical it gets, while the need to add new empirical data decreases. This should allow the thesis to eventually have a broad separate analysis at the end of Russia and China in relation to the EU, where all the variables become intertwined.

### 3.2 Delimitations

While the overall goal of this thesis is to understand threats in relation to the EU, it is not possible, nor is it the purpose, to analyse the EU itself in terms of the five variables. The goal is not to pinpoint which of Russia and China pose the largest threat, nor is it the purpose to draft recommendation about what the EU can or should do to fight these threats. The goal is to outline from a systemic perspective, guided by the five variables, what should theoretically be seen as a threat. How the EU then interprets and acts to these threats is not within the scope or purpose of this thesis.

Security as a concept within this thesis will be based around neorealist notions of primarily military and economic security and will therefore to a large degree ignore more broad definitions of security as including for example protection against cyber-warfare, terrorism, organised crime etc. because the theoretical framework is derived from an approach to threat-analysis which does not account for these variables. Hence, it makes sense to delimit the thesis from exploring such threats.

Finally, the thesis will ignore balancing efforts against other nations by Russia and China or vice versa. Similarly, the role of the United States as such will not be covered. We realise that European security is closely linked with the US through NATO and other institutions, however this thesis will not take into account efforts made at either balancing against or siding with the US. To this extent, we realise that Russia's and China's efforts might not directly relate to the EU, but nonetheless they will be taken into account because the theoretical approach assumes that these developments will potentially have implications for the EU due to the structure of the international system.

### 3.3 The EU as a unit

In this thesis, the premise for analysing threats is that the EU is seen as an actor in its own right. While neorealist theory, the foundation for our analysis, does not traditionally see institutions such as the EU as representing a sovereign actor on par with nation states, there is nonetheless arguments to be made as to why considering the EU as a unit might be feasible. What we have witnessed in the last few decades is an EU which has grown more connected on all fronts. In spite of rising nationalist and populist, Eurosceptic movements, EU member states are still closely integrated and to a large degree share common interests and concerns. As the economic crisis in 2008 highlighted, the fates of EU member states are closely linked. Weak economies in the south of Europe, such as Greece, began facing severe financial troubles and other members of the union, such as Germany, had to bail them out with large loans on several occasions in order to avoid a collapse of their economy, which would have weakened the Euro currency as a whole (See Strupczewski & Koranyi, 2018). A collapse would therefore likely have been costlier for all European states than providing economic support was, and thus the decision seemed quite obvious from an EU perspective.

What is clear is that threats to one country within the union often becomes a threat to others. Terrorism, cross-border organised crime, economic crisis and so on are things that concerns all European nations, and as such has been crucial elements of the CSDP and other security initiatives. Similarly, as a result of the changing global security climate, European NATO states will have to contribute more to their own security going forward. This seems even more relevant in recent times, especially after the American president, Donald Trump's, recent comments on NATO contributions in which he expressed a strong disapproval of the European defence contribution to NATO as well as their own security (Dempsey, 2016). It seems likely that increased defence spending will be channelled into initiatives such as the PESCO agreement, which might only be the first among many initiatives that will further integrate the collective security of the union. What cannot be questioned, however, is that with the creation of the CSDP framework and its following initiatives such as the PESCO, the EU has increasingly become a security actor (See Howorth, 2014). Similarly, the EU has to a large degree been taking a common stance on issues such as economic issues, trade, social affairs and foreign policy. To analyse threats to the EU as a whole from a systemic perspective, we are forced to assume that the EU is one unit, while ignoring the concerns of individual states. This is crudely simplifying but works because we are not analysing the EU itself but the systemic dimension.

### 3.4 Empirical data

This thesis deals with a wide array of different sources, and as such there will be many different types, both official and unofficial. We will attempt to cover the majority of subjects using official sources or peer-reviewed, academic material. However, journalistic material and other sources will be used as complementary sources when needed.

We realise going into the thesis that official sources might be difficult to come by because they are often in either Russian or Chinese and rarely have an official translation readily available to the public. This will force us to look for information elsewhere to fill any gaps as they appear. Similarly, Russian and Chinese media are notorious for their pro-government bias; they can still be used as sources on the subject, but will inevitably come to represent the official views.

In general, it is difficult to analyse broad sets of data on Russia or China because of the lack of transparency, especially in official sources. It is rarely specified where the data comes from and what it measures exactly, the parameters for the research. What is particularly difficult in relation to Russia and China is to find official data which correlates with Western sources because they tend to include or exclude certain things based on their different focal points and methods. However, we will attempt to account for, when relevant, any significant deviations in the data between different sources, without, however, trying to argue for which are wrong and which are right.

An important thing to note in relation to our research question is that it is part of several large ongoing developments, wherefore new developments will happen as we write. To this extent, it is clear that by the time this thesis is finished, newer information might have emerged. However, with the broad approach that we have chosen, it will not render the analysis irrelevant regardless because the systemic dimension of our analysis will not have changed. Similarly, a majority of developments happen over a longer period than our timeframe, and thus the theoretical considerations will still be relevant because the aim of the thesis is not to explain the outcome of the developments, but merely to consider their theoretical implications.

## 4.0 Theory

### 4.1 General Introduction to Realism:

Realism is seen as one of the predominant school of thoughts within the study of international relations. Roots within the realist tradition is said to be traced back to, among others, Thucydides with his work *'History of the Peloponnesian War'*, especially emphasising his thought that the true explanation and cause of the war should be found in the imbalance in distribution of power and the fear, this created; *"The truest explanation [...] have been the growth of the Athenians to greatness, which brought fear to the Lacedaemonians and forced them to war."* (Thucydides, 1928, p. 43). Other historic notable figures, said to belong to the realist school can be found in Niccoló Machiavelli (1469-1527), and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) (Burchill, 2005). Although the realist notion thus can be argued to date back to antiquity, it was not until the Second World War that the theoretical approach became an academic discipline dominating international politics. Especially Hans Morgenthau influenced the realist tradition in the post-war period, where he with his work *'Politics Among Nations'* described international politics as being conflict-ridden and dominated by the risk of war (Kaspersen & Loftager, 2009). Morgenthau argued, that the nature of the human being should be seen as inherently flawed as they possess a fundamental drive for power and will seek to dominate others. Furthermore, one of the key principles within his theory states that *'...politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.'* (Morgenthau, 1985, p. 4), thus theorising conflict to be a result of the egoistic character of human nature.

Today, realism is diverse in the sense that the original realist notion has split into several different branches. They do, however, share certain overall realist ideas, among others that world politics is a field prone to conflict and war; the distinction between the approaches should mainly be found in what they perceive as being the cause of conflict. While Morgenthau's theory of classical realism was largely based on the assumption that human nature was the cause of conflict, neorealists would argue that the driving force of conflict should be found in the structure of the anarchic international system, while a third branch, neoclassical realism, would emphasise the importance of foreign policy (Burchill, 2005; Rose, 1998).

### 4.2 Neorealism

With his work *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Kenneth Waltz revised the classical realist idea that human nature was the main cause of conflict. Instead he introduced a new theory within the

branch of realism that neither concerned itself with the individual nor specific states, but with the relationship between sovereign states within the international system. Waltz is still today considered one of the leading realists of his generation as well as front figure of the branch of realism today commonly known as 'neorealism' (Burchill, 2005). The theory, however, is also referred to as 'structural realism', which especially reflects that the theory is primarily concerned with explaining outcomes in international politics as a consequence of the structure of the international system, while Waltz himself has chosen to refer to his theory as a balance-of-power theory (Waltz, 1979).

Regarding the structure of the system, Waltz emphasises that the ordering principle of the international system is anarchy. He agrees with the overall realist assumption that world politics is prone to conflict; however, he proposes that the driving force behind such conflict should not be found in any inherent nature of the human being, rather in the ordering principle that the international system is anarchic. When characterising the international system as anarchic, Waltz simply refers to the absence of a central authority or agent that can manage conflicting states, thus theorising states to be the main units existing in the system. He furthermore acknowledges that anarchy is sometimes associated with the occurrence of violence, but stresses that violence is not common within the international system, rather that there is an ever-present threat of violence. To further elaborate this, Waltz argues that because some states at any time could resort to the use of force, all states in the system must be prepared to do so. This does not mean that war is certain to break out, rather that it is always possible as each state decides for itself whether to make use of force or not (Waltz, 1979). This is furthermore what the realist concept 'security-dilemma' is built upon; in an anarchic system, when one state is enhancing its security measures by e.g. increasing its military power, other states are likely to respond by adopting similar measures, which in the end could create tensions and thus result in a conflict. From a realist point of view, one could argue that an enhancement in security for one state will result in insecurity for other states (Kaspersen & Loftager, 2009). The anarchic nature of the international system furthermore leads states to act within the frame of a self-help world and out of own self-interest, knowing that no higher government can protect them from a potential rival, and as Waltz describes: "*A self-help system is one in which those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer.*" (Waltz, 1979, p. 118).

As mentioned, Waltz argues that states are the main units within the international system and puts forth assumptions he believes to be accurate representations of these. First and foremost, he argues that states '*...at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for*

*universal domination.*’ (Waltz, 1979, p. 118). To further elaborate this, Waltz notes that in an anarchic world, security is any state’s primary objective; states are only able to achieve other goals once survival is secured, thus making power a means to an end, and not a goal in itself. In order to achieve the desired goal, Waltz argues that states or those who act on their behalf can make use of two means, either internal or external efforts; by internal efforts is meant that states can e.g. increase their economic capabilities, develop new strategies or increase their military strength, while external efforts centres around the strengthening and enlargement of alliances or the weakening of an opposing one (Waltz, 1979). To this extent, Waltz’ work does not differentiate between different types of states and their political, cultural or other dimensions. The only relevant variable for analysing the difference between states’ behaviour is the relative power between them.

Mearsheimer (2001) agrees with the idea of security as the ultimate goal of states, but questions how much relative power is enough in order to achieve said goal. Due to the anarchic structure of the international system and thus that all states operate within the frame of a self-help system, Mearsheimer (2001) notes, that states can never be certain of other state’s intentions. As states are considered to be rational entities, they recognize that the more relative power, they possess in comparison to their rivals, the higher are their chances of survival. Therefore, he sees that in order to achieve security states must strive to maximise their relative power capabilities, keeping in mind that ‘...states are almost always better off with more rather than less power.’ (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 19). Rosato (2010) further elaborates the notion of relative power by dividing it into two different, but equally important factors; material resources and organisational effectiveness, which combined determine the ability of states to deter or defend against a potential rival. Material resources encompasses, among others, the military might a state possess.

### *Distribution of relative power*

Waltz argues that from the distribution of power emerges a so-called ‘positional picture’, a description of the arrangement of the placement of states within international society (Waltz, 1979). Depending on the distribution of relative power capabilities between states, Waltz characterizes the international system as being either multipolar, bipolar or unipolar.

Multipolarity can be explained as an international system dominated by three or more great powers, bipolarity as a system dominated by two great powers, and finally unipolarity where the system is dominated by a single great power. Historically, Waltz argues that multipolarity is the norm. However, the international system established after the Second World War could be characterised as

a bipolar system, dominated by two great powers; the Soviet Union and the United States. This once again changed with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, leaving a unipolar international system dominated by the United States (Waltz, 1979; Waltz, 2000). Waltz argues that bipolarity is the structural type that causes the most stable system. With the existence of only two superpowers, which are relatively equal in terms of possession of capabilities, the powers can focus solely on each other and thus concentrate on enhancing their power relative to the other one. In a multipolar system, however, several great powers exist, making misjudgements in the intentions of other states more likely, thus increasing the risk of tensions between several states (Waltz, 1979). Unipolarity, however, appears to be the least durable of the three configurations, and this for two reasons; (1) the state dominating the system usually end up weakening itself by taking on too many tasks beyond their borders, and (2) even if the dominating state has success in restraining and moderating itself, other weaker states will eventually start being concerned about its future behaviour (Waltz, 2000). Thus, Waltz sees that the unipolar character of the system is merely a transitioning phase and argues for a shift towards a multipolar system, especially keeping in mind that potential candidates for becoming the next great powers, and thus restoring balance to the international system, can be found in e.g. the European Union, China or, in a more distant future, Russia (Waltz, 2000).

Mearsheimer (2001), on the other hand, argues that the international system can be seen as structured within different regions. He argues that the international system is not necessarily unipolar, as the US cannot be seen as a global hegemonic force but should be characterised as a regional hegemon dominating the Western hemisphere. He acknowledges that the United States is the most powerful state in the global system but is of the belief that global hegemony simply cannot be achieved. Instead, he classifies the international system as being dominated by 'regional hegemons', the U.S. currently being the only one, and 'great powers', which are states with the potential of achieving regional hegemony, such as China and Russia (Mearsheimer, 2001). Hence, a regional hegemon would be the most secure position a state could achieve, ensuring the most relative power compared to all other states within the system.

As previously explained, states can choose to balance by the means of internal or external efforts, and the decision of which method to choose depends on the distribution of relative capabilities within the anarchic system, that is, whether the system can be categorised as multipolar, bipolar or unipolar. Waltz argues, that in a bipolar system, states usually use internal efforts in order to balance, while external efforts are used in a multipolar system with three or more great powers (Waltz, 1979).

However, this is not to say, that alliances cannot be formed within a bipolar system, but the two dominating superpowers within the system are the only ones possessing the rightful means to truly balance each other. Regarding the formation of alliances, Waltz furthermore compares the strategy of balancing with that of bandwagoning, that is, to choose to side with the stronger power. Waltz argues, that due to the structure of the system, states will choose the weaker coalition due to the understanding that it is indeed the stronger coalition which is threatening their security. He states:

*'If states wished to maximize power, they would join the stronger side, and we would not see balances forming but a world hegemony forged. This does not happen because balancing, not bandwagoning, is the behaviour induced by the system. The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system.'* (Waltz, 1979, p. 126).

If power is seen as merely a means to an end, while the goal itself is considered to be security, states are unlikely to choose to the strategy of bandwagoning. This thought is, however, being challenged by Stephen Walt. Overall, Walt (1985) agrees that a balancing behaviour is the most common strategy for states to make use of. However, as opposed to Waltz, he argues that weaker states can make use of bandwagoning, thus assigning this strategy a part in the international system. Specifically, Walt (1985) argues that balancing, rather than bandwagoning, historically seems to be the preferred strategy when facing an external threat, as this strategy provides the best possibility of preservation of certain degree of freedom. Bandwagoning, on the other hand, would essentially mean to accept subordinating oneself to the greater power. As the anarchic nature of the system makes it difficult to determine other states intentions, the safest choice would be to balance against the threat rather than aligning with it and hoping it will remain benevolent.

Walt argues, that the strategies of balancing and bandwagoning and how states choose to form alliances should be viewed as a response to threats, that is, the level of threat they perceive from other states. Hence, Walt modifies Waltz' balance-of-power theory, as he argues that states does not necessarily balance against the state with the most relative power, and thus the most powerful state in the international system, but against the state who poses the largest threat (Walt, 1985).

### 4.3 Neoclassical realism

Neoclassical realism takes a slightly different approach. First coined in 1998 by American scholar Gideon Rose, neoclassical realism is a methodical and theoretical framework for analysing foreign policy which draws and expands upon previous neorealist theory. Neoclassical realism is explained by Rose (1998) as the middle ground between pure structuralists and constructivists; In other words, between those who believe that structure and systemic constraints largely dictates state behaviour and those who believe there are no objective systemic constraints at all and that international reality is constructed. What sets neoclassical realism apart as a distinct school, Rose argues, is the common nature of their work - to develop an explicit and generalisable theory of foreign policy, one that build and advance on previous realist works on relative power by elaborating on the role of the domestic-level and the intervening variables herein. In other words, it looks at how states operate domestically and how this influences foreign policy, but without ignoring the systemic dimension from neorealism. Thus, it is both a study of the system and the state all at once.

From a neoclassical realist standpoint, international structure is a key source of change in defence policy and cannot adequately be explained by neorealists accounts failing to account for differences in military reform amongst states of broadly comparable relative material power capabilities and external vulnerability (Dyson, 2008). This is because previous neorealist approaches have often ignored the impact of domestic political factors in constraining autonomy of the core executive (Dyson, 2008). What sets neoclassical realists apart is that they argue that *'...the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level'* (Rose, 1998, p. 146). In other words, they argue that the systemic incentives are rarely sufficient in their own right to understand international politics because other, intervening variables, such as domestic policies also have a say in shaping foreign policy. Such domestic variables hold a special place in neoclassical realism. Particularly it is made clear that state structure and executive power of key political leaders are important variables, even if they are not necessarily the main variables (Rose, 1998). Neorealist accounts therefore suggest that the anarchic logic of the international system is what drives change at the domestic level, which is leading to the adoption of new military methods in order to achieve security. Domestic variables thus come to inevitably shape both foreign policy, but also military reform. Specifically, whether reform in the defence area emulates existing policies and structures of other nations or formulate new objectives (Dyson, 2008). Neoclassical realism therefore adds an extra dimension when exploring potential threats.

## 4.4 Accounting for variables

Walt (1985) considers four factors (from hereon ‘variables’) that affect the level of threat one state might pose to another; aggregate power, proximate power, offensive capabilities, and offensive intentions. Supported by neoclassical realist theory, one can add a fifth variable to this equation: executive power. The five variables put together allows for a deeper look into the capacity of nations by looking at how power operates at the domestic level and thereby theorise on foreign policy choices while also accounting for systemic conditions.

### 4.4.1 Aggregate power

Aggregate power encompasses a state’s resources in terms of population, military strength as well as industrial and technological capability. The greater the amount of resources, and thus the amount of aggregate power, the greater a potential threat a state systemically poses to others (Walt, 1985). As already explained, Waltz (1979) argues that states resemble one another regarding the functions they perform as all states seek to pursue the same primary goal and face the same restraints due to the structure of the system. Thus, the differentiation between states should be found in the distribution of power between them, that is, how much relative power each state possesses.

Rosato (2010) refers to aggregate power as ‘material resources’, while Mearsheimer (2001) uses the term ‘latent power’ or ‘potential power’. Both argue that military capabilities is one of the most important factors. If a state wants to remain secure in an anarchic world system, it must possess a large military that has access to advanced weaponry on par with, or better than, its rivals’. Another essential part of material capabilities is the size of a state’s economy, as this makes it possible to invest in further military development. Mearsheimer (2001) states that:

*‘...great powers also pay careful attention to how much latent power rival states control, because rich and populous states usually can and do build powerful armies. Thus, great powers tend to fear states with large populations and rapidly expanding economies, even if these states have not yet translated their wealth into military might.’ (p. 24).*

Hence, aggregate power also includes physical and human capital. Here, it is important to take note of especially the amount of natural resources and the size of a state’s population because these can be

directly converted into its military capacity (Rosato, 2010). Size of aggregate power is important, as noted by Zakaria (2008), because if even if the largest nations never come to mirror the progress made by its Western counterparts, sheer size alone will mean that the total accumulated amount of wealth and resources will be massive, even if the average person is still poor by Western standards. *'It is these two factors - a low starting point and a large population - that guarantee the magnitude and long-term nature of the global power shift.'* (Zakaria, 2008, p. 21).

In neoclassical realism, aggregate power is often described in relation to relative power, which is often seen as the main independent variable, meaning that neoclassical realists are discussing *'...how that concept should be defined and operationalized. They generally confront this issue directly, setting out their reasons for re serving the term "power" to refer to "the capabilities or resources . . . with which states can influence each other"'* (Rose, 1998, p. 151). To this extent, aggregate power capabilities must be accessible and usable to result in foreign policy (Rose, 1998), or in other words, turn into state power.

#### 4.4.2 Proximate power

Proximate power revolves around distance. Walt notes that nearby states pose a greater threat than states which geographically are located further away, as the ability to project power declines with distance (Walt, 1985). To Mearsheimer (2001), proximate power does not only revolve around distance, but also geographical obstacles. As previously mentioned, Mearsheimer argues that the strongest position a state can possess is as regional hegemon, and not global hegemon. More specifically, he refers to the *'...stopping power of water'*. (p. 15), as being a dominant obstacle as to why global hegemony cannot be achieved. By this he means that a state's capability to project power is limited by large bodies of water. (p. 30). He argues; *'Not even the world's most powerful state can conquer distant regions that can be reached only by ship.'* (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 30)

Like Mearsheimer, Walt (1985) agrees that geographical proximity to great powers often results in either imperial or hostile relations between this power and nearby states. These states are likely to balance out against a nearby great power by allying with another sufficiently powerful nation that is located geographically further away, since this other nation could contribute to the defence of the less powerful nation but remain far enough away to avoid imperial relations. This can be exemplified by the United States, which Walt (1985) argues found itself in a unique position during the Cold War, due to its geographical location. It was the preferred ally for many nations during this period because its geographically relatively isolated position made it ideal for alliance building. It

could project its power globally to deter action against its allies, yet did not have the proximity to most nations to be of any significant threat to their sovereignty.

#### 4.4.3 Offensive capabilities

States with a high amount of offensive power, or offensive capabilities, are more likely to be perceived as a threat than states who are militarily weak. According to Mearsheimer (2001), all states in the international system possess some degree of offensive, military, capabilities.

Whereas he sees aggregate power as a state's potential power, he refers to offensive capabilities as a state's 'actual' power, meaning military army as well as air and naval forces that support it (Mearsheimer, 2001). Due to the anarchic nature of the system, and thus the uncertainty of how much relative power is enough in order to survive, states will strive to maximise their share of power at the expense of other states, especially if they are considered potential rivals. *'Even when a great power achieves a distinct military advantage over its rivals, it continues looking for chances to gain more power. The pursuit of power stops only when hegemony is achieved.'* (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 18)

Offensive capabilities can therefore be seen in terms of the material resources described by Rosato (2010), as being the preconditions for organisational effectiveness (executive power) to defeat threats or influence others. Offensive capabilities is therefore the link between aggregate and executive power because it refers to which capabilities the executive has access to and can translate into action.

#### 4.4.4 Offensive intentions

The final factor in Walt's approach is offensive intentions, which revolves around the appearance of states; those who appears aggressive are more likely to provoke other states into acts of balancing (Walt, 1985). This more or less directly relates to what Waltz (1979) describes as a constant preparedness to use force if necessary, which creates a constant threat of violence even if states are not planning on using their capabilities to attack other nations; The core issue here is that *'...states can never be certain whether other states have hostile intentions toward them.'* (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 83). Hence, states depend largely on subjective interpretations of the intentions behind each other's' actions by looking at the development of their capabilities. Here, one main assumption of neoclassical realism is that no matter how they attempt to define their interests, they will almost certainly attempt

to gain more external influence. States respond to the uncertainty in international anarchy by actively attempting to gain control over and shape their external environment:

*'...the relative amount of material power resources [aggregate power] countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition - the envelope, as it were - of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly.'* (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

When calculating offensive intentions, neoclassical realism thus contends, in line with neorealism, that a country's ambition in terms of foreign policy is first and foremost determined by its place in the international system and by its relative material capabilities (Rose, 1998). It predicts that an increase in relative material power will eventually lead to a corresponding expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy activity, and to this extent also arguing that a decrease in such power will eventually lead to a corresponding contraction (Rose, 1998). It also predicts that if countries have weak states they will take longer to translate an increase in material power into expanded foreign policy activity or at least that they will take a more circuitous route there (Rose, 1998).

*'The theory argues that whilst over the long run, states will seek to maximize their international influence power and security, state power - the impact of the strength of a country's state apparatus and relations to the surrounding society upon ability of the state to mobilize and extract resources from society'* (Dyson, 2008, p. 741).

#### 4.4.5 Executive power

Dyson (2008) highlights how states being confronted with the same threat vary in their ability to extract and mobilise resources from domestic society - that is, unit-level variables such as state institutions, ideology and nationalism. Systemic pressure will be perceived differently from one country to another depending on how political elites and leaders view such pressures. How they do so, again depend on the strength and importance of domestic variables in influencing this perception. An important distinction to make in neoclassical realism is thus to differentiate between national power and state power. While national power can be explained as the relative material capacity of the

nation as a whole, state power refers to state structure and the ability of political leaders to extract the necessary resources from the national material 'pool', if one will, as exemplified herein as aggregate power. Rosato (2010) refers to this determinant factor as 'organisational effectiveness', which influences how effectively states can deploy their aggregate power. It therefore matters to understand how states choose to organise their military because of how this can affect the size and effectiveness of its military force (Rosato, 2010), and hence its potential for destruction or coercion of its competitors.

It is therefore important, as Rose (1998) explains, to look at the ability of political leaders, the executives of the state, to access whatever resources they deem necessary to fulfil their political goals. Because this also influences how states act, states with different structures are likely to act differently even while facing similar issues. To this extent, Dyson (2008) emphasises the argument that foreign policy is not made by the nation, but by its government, hence what matters is state power and not national power. State power, or executive power, becomes that portion of national power that the government and/or heads of state can extract for its political purposes and the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends. Thus, *'Any foreign policy strategy is based on ambitions, objectives, apprehensions and values of a state's leadership.'* (Piontkovsky, 2015, p. 6). Aggregate power establishes the basic parameters of a country's foreign policy but does not dictate its actions. Foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and thus it is their perception of power that matters, not *'...simple relative quantities of physical resources or forces in being'* (Rose, 1998, p. 146). For example, while a state might possess aggregate power capabilities that are superior to that of its competitors, these weapons have no real value, no political purpose if one will, unless these leaders have both the will and the option to use these (Cimbala & McDermott, 2015).

The institutional structure of a state and the domestic power relations on state power all affect policy creation. Centralisation/decentralisation, the constitutional powers of core executives and linkages between social, finance and defence policy can all be key intervening variables (Dyson, 2008). To this extent, executive power and perception is a key intervening variable in explaining the extent to which policy leaders will be preoccupied with the domestic political ramifications of framing military reform with the national interest and systemic imperatives (Dyson, 2008). Baturo & Elkink (2017) note how executive power is especially difficult to assess because leadership and sources of power have both a formal and informal dimension. Political leaders derive power both their official positions, but also from personal standing. While the former is observable, the latter rarely is. To this extent, they note how it is important to differentiate between nominal leadership

positions, the institutionalised positions of power, and the identities of national leadership, the de facto leaders.

#### 4.5 Theoretical perspectives

Kenneth Waltz' theory was written at a time in history where unipolarity was thought to be unrealistic. To this extent, his theory did not factor in the possibility of a Soviet collapse and the United States emerging as a sole, global superpower. As noted by Zakaria (2008), no other nation in history has ever been in this position, and it is almost certainly going to change within the twenty-first century. Reviewing his own original theory, Waltz (2000) noted that the unipolarity after the cold war does not mean that his balance of power theory is obsolete, but rather argues that it is not the system itself that has changed, merely the conditions within it. Eventually, someone will challenge this unipolarity, and thus the systemic approach he presented is still relevant if the system itself remains unchanged.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, liberalism became increasingly popular. Perhaps best symbolised by Francis Fukuyama's *'The end of history'* (1989), many scholars argued that Western style, liberal democracy had won what was essentially a war of ideologies that had been going on since the beginning of civilisation. The new unipolar world, led by the United States, would increasingly focus on international frameworks of cooperation and economic development (see Grenville, 2005). This line of thinking is increasingly being challenged when looking at the threats that so-called today's liberal, democratic order faces, which is, among others, an emanating challenge from the rise of the non-democratic great powers such as Russia and China and the rise of authoritarian, state-led development (Gat, 2007).

Waltz (2000) argues that according to neorealist logic NATO should have disappeared after the cold war ended, since the preconditions for its existence were no longer there. This has caused some scholars to argue that neorealism was obsolete as a theory because some institutions appeared to take on a life of their own. However, he does not agree with such notions. Waltz (2000) believes that this notion is wrong, arguing that NATO is still, after all, a result of the national interests that created it, and NATO has been given a new role as *'...a means of maintaining and lengthening America's grip on the foreign and military policies of European states.'* (p. 20). Alliances do not necessarily disappear when their original purpose is exhausted, but they appear to be repurposed to serve the interests of the strongest states within them. This fits well with Mearsheimer (2001), who argues that unipolarity is an illusion, that the United States cannot be seen as a global hegemon despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The inherent idea of neorealism is that there will always be several

states contending for power, and thus always potential threats. While the United States is the most powerful state in the system as of now, others will attempt to take its place. Hence, the analysis of potential threats, remains a logical choice for any state, even after the Cold War. Walt's (1985) four factors will still affect the level of threat that states pose and are thus a good starting point for such approaches.

The main problem with neorealism is that it excludes non-state actors as meaningful units of analysis in the study of international relations. While neoclassical realism provides more room by including some aspects of the domestic dimension, it only looks at the elite, those in power and their perception and motives, and not everything supporting it. Civil society is considered one of the main foundations of a liberal democracy, and to this extent liberalism and social constructivism would both argue that it is an important factor behind the creation of state structure and foreign policy. One could argue, however, that neorealism is better for understanding authoritarian states, as these are more top-down oriented than democratic states where power traditionally emanates upwards from civil society. In our approach to understand Russia and China, two countries that both have a long history of strong, authoritarian rule, the neoclassical approach focussed on executive power as the domestic variable might provide us with more answers than by looking at civil society. This is not to say that civil society has no role in China or Russia, rather that the state plays a larger role.

#### *Nuclear weapons and technological developments*

One big question that is posed when discussing relative power is the role of nuclear weapons and other technological developments. Nuclear weapons are difficult to include in calculations of relative power because they are primarily seen as a last resort, a guarantee of certain destruction in the event of aggression. They are, after all, referred to as 'weapons of mass destruction', a means of damaging beyond repair and rendering the impacted area radioactive and useless for a significant period afterwards. This makes them great for deterrence purposes, but it seems highly unlikely that any rational state would use them offensively against other states that have nuclear capacity of their own. Ground forces, on the other hand, can conquer land without rendering it useless, and often so with less destruction and loss of civilian life. To this extent, Mearsheimer's idea that ground forces are still relevant in the nuclear era has its merits. What is arguably changing, however, is the amount of ground forces needed to achieve such strategic goals. Perhaps best exemplified by the first Gulf War, technology has an ability to render superior numbers useless in the face of a technological superior foe. An example of this can be found when The United States, making use of superior artillery range,

undetectable stealth bombers and jamming devices, took out an Iraqi army that was substantially larger in numbers by crippling the Iraqi forces' ability to respond (Abas, 2015).

In spite of nuclear and technological developments, there is little evidence to suggest that traditional notions of stopping power become obsolete as technology improves. While it does change the way in which warfare is conducted, the systemic constraints imposed on states remain largely the same, and thus they will still have to use means of balancing. These states will have to keep up with technological improvements made by their peer competitors, as well as in traditional terms of military power. Both are important, as they would not work without the other. It does mean, however, that it is becoming harder to compare military capabilities, as there are more factors to focus on than previously. Since states have the same interests as before, self-preservation and also rely on balancing against other states, neorealism in the nuclear age can still be seen as relevant for understanding international relations.

### *Combining variables*

By combining the four variables from Walt with a domestic variable in the shape of executive power, it will be possible to dig deeper into the other variables, for example understanding offensive intentions, which can be difficult if one does not account for the perception a certain state has of its own power and the motivations driving those in power towards certain foreign policy choices. Similarly, variables such as aggregate and executive power are mutually dependent, since aggregate power needs executive power to translate into action, while reversely executive power needs aggregate power to fuel political ambition. The five variables are, for the most part, interdependent because they always relate to, or rely on, each other to be significant. To this extent, neither variable can be a threat on its own, unless it is supported by executive power - that is, the possibility and/or will to make these powers materialise. Simultaneously, executive power would not be able to stand on its own, since the context behind such power would be obscure. Thus, the logical choice is to consider all five variables both individually and in relation to each other.

The five variables can therefore largely be explained in the following terms when exploring how Russia and China can be perceived as threats towards the EU: (1) Aggregate Power looks at the 'resources' that a state can draw its strength from - its population, its economy and industry and its military (particularly in terms of manpower). (2) Proximate Power is based around geography and the opportunities and obstacles arising due to it. Thus, it will both be concerned with geographical proximity, the notions of stopping power, power projection and external vulnerability, but also what

this means for its relationship with nearby states or states to which it has power projection capabilities. It is therefore both geostrategic and geopolitical. (3) Offensive Capabilities will refer to the most important traditional means for waging war such as naval power, air power, technological level (low or high-tech). Other aspects such as nuclear power will also be touched upon. (4) Offensive Intentions is based on observations of states intentions towards others, analysing patterns of behaviour as well as interpreting information from previous variables. Official statements, doctrines and other documents will all be used to make an evaluation based on the overall pattern. (5) Executive Power will be broadly understood as state power used to briefly explain what those in power can do, who they are and making an interpretation based on available information of what their interests and motives are. To an extent it will therefore be concerned with what executive power means for the rest of the variables in terms of relevance for the EU.

## 5.0 Analysis

### 5.1 Aggregate power

As previously explained, Aggregate Power looks at the ‘resources’ that a state can draw its strength from - its population, its economy and industry and its military (particularly in terms of manpower). This section will therefore encompass the potential amount of power Russia and China possess.

#### 5.1.1 Russia

##### *Population*

The official 2017 population census of the Russian Federation sets the population of Russia at 146,8 million people (Federal State Statistics Service, 2018). However, other sources estimate that this number might be lower, at roughly 142 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018b) to 143 million (Statista, 2018c, see figure 1). This is because, in the official census, there is a significant increase from 2014-15 which coincides with the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula the same year. This is most likely why there is a relatively significant discrepancy between these numbers, as Crimea, along other disputed regions, is perhaps not included in other sources because it is not internationally recognised as Russian. With a population above 142 million, however, Russia is in any case the 9th most populous nation in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018b).

##### **Russia: Total population from 2010 to 2022 (in millions)**

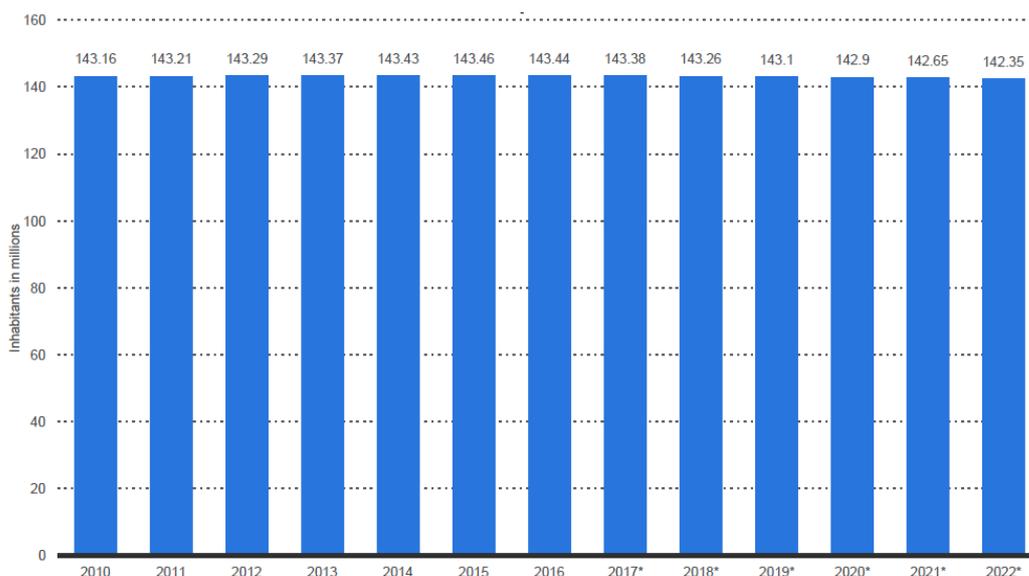


Figure 1: Source: (Statista, 2018c, p. 7).

As illustrated by figure 1 above, Russia is suffering from a projected negative growth going forward to 2022, likely shrinking from roughly 143 million to about 142 million in just five years. This is estimated to be a result of the fertility rate in Russia, which seems to be experiencing a downwards trend. A 2017 report made by the United Nations (UN) concerning the World Population Prospects argues that: ‘*When fertility falls below the threshold of about 2.1 live births per woman, the number of births is insufficient to replace the parents’ generation, a situation known as below-replacement fertility.*’ (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, p. 6). In context, in 2015, the fertility rate in Russia was an estimated 1.75 (Statista, 2018c), while a 2017 estimate puts the current rate at 1.61 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018b). Thus, the fertility rate does not only show a significant drop, and therefore a possible explanation as to why the population is shrinking, but it also reflects a potential future socio-economic aspect. Should this trend continue, it could result in both a lack of available manpower for its defence and industry as well as a growing national burden of an increasingly older population. In defence terms this would mean that there will be fewer people who can serve in its armed forces, while economically, the labour force would decrease as a result of fewer people in the working age, hence fewer people to both work and pay taxes. It thus represents a potential problem going forward for Russia. This is of course an aspect of Russian aggregate power which represent a future scenario rather than the current situation, but it should nonetheless come to influence current political decisions because of its importance for the nation as a whole.

### *Economy & Industry*

After the austerity that characterised the Russian society in the 1990s following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (see Grenville, 2005), Russian economy started growing substantially during the 2000s, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. As illustrated in figure 2 below, however, the Russian economy has experienced a significant drop in recent years. This can be argued to be directly linked to the way in which the Russian economy has operated both in recent years and during the Soviet Union’s in the past; that is, promoting an economy dominated by the export of natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which as a result directly links Russia’s domestic economy to the global resource markets (Bradshaw & Connolly, 2016). In 2016, it was estimated that Russia produced roughly three times the amount of oil and gas needed for domestic consumption (Energy Information Administration, 2017). It is therefore extremely important for its federal budget revenue, of which oil and natural gas revenues accounted for 36% in 2016 (Energy Information Administration, 2017). This highlights a national dependency on the sale of these resources, particularly in relation to its largest

trading partner, the EU, to which Russia is the main energy supplier (Eurostat, 2018). This trade has been severely hurt following the Ukraine crisis and the following sanctions in 2014, and as a result, trade with the EU has dropped by 44% between 2012 and 2016 (European Commission, 2018b). This has strained the relationship between the two and will be explored further in the Proximate Power section.

### Russia: Gross domestic product (GDP) in current prices from 2012 to 2022 (in billion U.S. dollars)

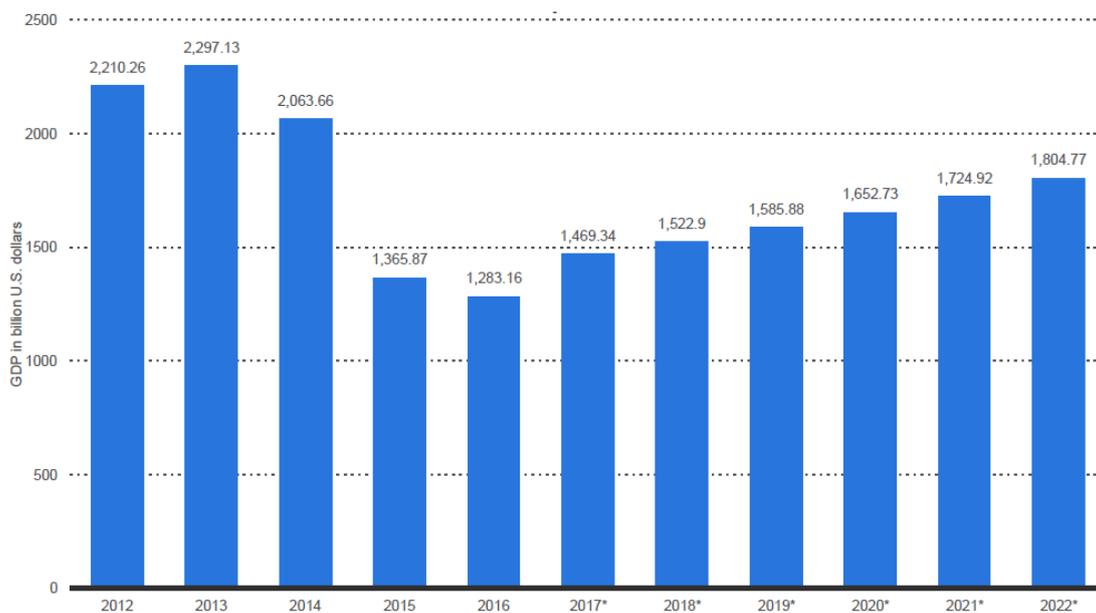


Figure 2: Source: (Statista, 2018c, p. 17).

While the Russian economy performed well in the 2000s, the 2009 global economic contraction and the changing direction towards a less consistent economic policy than previous years has left the Russian economy struggling to find its own route with a specific ‘Russian economic model’. This has been exacerbated by economic sanctions following the 2014 Ukraine crisis as well as falling oil and gas prices (Oxenstierna, 2016). This is clearly illustrated in figure 2 above, where a significant drop from 2014-15 is observable. In 2015, Russia thus experienced low growth, facing a substantial contraction of its GDP and faced growth prospects that were weak for the foreseeable future (Oxenstierna, 2016). Hence, Russian aggregate power in terms of its economy means, this will affect any efforts by its government to improve its state power and technological capabilities. This will be relevant in terms of the development of its offensive capabilities and will be covered later in section 5.3.

## *Military*

Few, if any, Russian policy areas currently enjoy a higher political priority than its armed forces. Since 2010, defence spending has seen an average annual real growth of 10% (Hakvåg, 2017). This is highlighted by nominal expenditures of the federal budget on national defence, which from 2000 to 2014 rose by a factor of 4.89 - from 209.4 billion rubles in 2000 to 1.024 trillion rubles in 2014 (Balashov & Martianova, 2016). In spite of a deep and protracted recession having imposed constraints on federal government spending, the share of Russia's GDP devoted to its defence and military spending grew all while the share of spending assigned to other parts of the budget, such as health and education, declined (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016).

This can be illustrated by looking at Russian defence spending as percentage of GDP has increased from 3,4% in 2008 to 5,4% in 2016 (World Bank, 2018c). The official number will be about 2,85% of GDP in 2018, Putin has argued in a speech from 2017 year (Tass, 2017). This is substantially different from what was noted by the World Bank, unless Russian defence spending has been cut in half since 2016, which does not appear to be reflected by current developments in Russia, where the military has assumed a larger role.

In the wake of the 2008 summer war in Georgia, the current transformation of the Russian Armed Forces marks the final demise of the Soviet military (Giles, 2014). The significant restructuring and modernisation has resulted in what can be seen as a more quality-based Russian army; while the air force and the navy in 2011 were reduced by 48% and 49% respectively and the total number of military personnel decreased from about 1.2 million in 2008 to 1 million in 2011, there has been given large budgetary infusions to improve the material and technological support of troops (Balashov & Martianova, 2016). Furthermore, this is reflected in the Decree No. 604 on military service signed by Putin in 2013, which states that the required number of contract soldiers should rise by 50,000 per year up to 2018, emphasising the wish for more professional personnel over temporary conscripts (see Oxenstierna, 2016). It is a decisive step away from the mass mobilisation structure inherited from the USSR and has been described as shock-therapy to the Russian military (Giles, 2014). Up until 2011, however, the transformation was highly unstable, but was gradually smoothed out by this point. It was also at this point that a new arms purchasing programme was announced, scheduled to run until 2020 and brake all previous levels of spending (Giles, 2014).

The levels of spending proposed in the State Arms Programme going forward to 2020 (SAP-2020) was set at 20.7 trillion rubles, out of which 19 trillion were to be spent on procurement of new military hardware and equipment, and as much as 80 percent of this would be spent directly on the

purchase of arms (Oxenstierna, 2016). It was hoped that by 2020, 70% of equipment available to the Armed Forces would be classified as 'modern' (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016). SAP-2020 has been widely described as the first successful armament programme of Russia's post-Soviet history, designed to help the Russian military catch up from the extended procurement holiday caused by Russia's economic collapse in the 1990s (Gorenburg, 2017). This was partly due to the fact that previous programmes had been underfunded and unfulfilled (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016). However, the programme was met with strong criticism from the ministry of finance due to the strain it would put on the Russian economy and ultimately ended with the resignation of its minister, Alexei Kudrin, in September 2011 (Balashov & Martianova, 2016). What this arguably shows is that the Russian government is spending more of its economy than it realistically should in light of its current economic situation. This also shows that keeping up with its military competition is more important in the short term than economic growth.

A fundamental condition for the increase in Russia's military spending was its exceptionally high economic growth during the 2000s, a growth which is no longer present (Oxenstierna, 2016). It has therefore been argued that the SAP-2020 had several shortcomings, and it has been considered unrealistic in terms of the current budgetary and financial situation and lacks a clear regulatory mechanism (See Balashov & Martianova, 2016). To this extent, it was also argued that there was a severe discrepancy between the economic state of Russia as a whole and its level of military spending - that *'...the implementation of the reindustrialization policy in the face of declining revenues and limited technological relationships with the developed world translates into support for inefficient sectors and industries at the cost of the effective ones.'* (Balashov & Martianova 2016, p. 1002). One can argue that this highlights a short-term approach to ensuring national security, which fits well in line with neorealist thinking that ensuring the survival of the nation-state is more important than any other policies.

It's relative isolation in recent years has meant that Russia's defence industry focuses primarily on making use of domestic capacity, in the lack of cooperation with other nations. To this extent, it has been argued that certain structural problems will likely persist going forward, many of which arise from the aging population and the potential lack of manpower in labour intensive industries as well as a decline in the degree of integration with foreign companies and an innovation system that may prove unable to compete at the forefront of the defence industrial technological frontier (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016). This serves to illustrate how the different aspects of aggregate power form a combined picture of the challenges and opportunities facing a nation.

In spite of a negative economic trend and the strain on its economy, the quantity and quality of the new equipment of the Russian Armed Forces has been described as impressive, and it has been argued that few other countries besides the US is able to produce such a wide array of weapon systems using largely indigenous capabilities (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016):

*'...Although Russia may not yet be able to produce the types of advanced weaponry produced by the United States, its current productive capabilities mean that it has an independent defense- industrial base that can produce weaponry that is of sufficient quality to support the Russian state in its pursuit of its strategic objectives'* (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016, p. 13)

What can therefore be seen as important to use in further analysis of Russia is that it has the aggregate power to be a potential threat towards the EU. Although it is not possible to tell what the results of its aggressive militarisation policy will mean for its economy, it is possible to argue that it has the will to convert its aggregate power into military power.

### 5.1.2 China

#### *Population*

China is the most populous country in the world. Projections made by the UN estimates that the Chinese population in 2018 has reached a staggering 1.4 billion people (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017). As highlighted in figure 3 below, the Chinese population has been steadily growing since 2001, and is expected to continue this trend going forward to at least 2021.

### China: Total population from 2001 to 2021 (in millions)

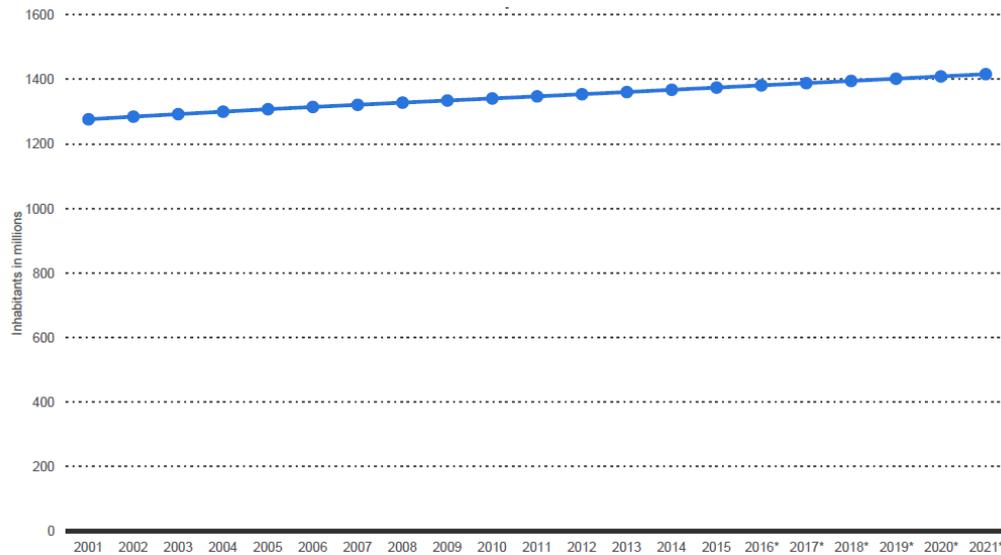


Figure 3: Source: (Statista, 2018a, p. 7).

However, concerns have been raised as to future problems regarding the growth in the Chinese population and the effects this might have on socio-economical aspects of the country. Due to the one-child policy introduced in 1979, among other factors, the fertility rate declined drastically and consequently altered the population structure (Greenhalgh, 2003). This means, that China finds itself in the same situation as was the case with Russia, with a fertility rate below what is 'required' to replace the parents' generation. China's yearly population growth rate was sitting at 0.41% in a 2017 estimate, a growth rate that sits behind 159 other countries (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a). It has been reported that the Chinese eligible workforce, in this case defined as those aging between 15-59 years, declined by 3.7 million between 2013 and 2014, while this even further declined with 4.9 million between 2014 and 2015 (European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, 2017). Even though China's one-child policy was abandoned in 2015 and replaced by a two-child policy, discussions have arisen whether the decreasing labour force will consequently slow down China's economic growth (see Cai, 2010; Greenhalgh, 2003). This means that China will face a growing number of elderly while the labour force will decrease, even if the overall population grows, as with the case of Russia. A larger population, however, has no direct effect on foreign policy if it cannot be translated into something accessible and usable. It should, theoretically, decrease their overall aggregate power, and it will undoubtedly have some socio-economic consequences for China - but sheer size of the population, especially seen in the context of China being the most populous nation in the world, will mean that the total accumulated amount of human capital will still be larger than

the combined population of the EU (see Statista, 2018b). This will be discussed in more detail later on in relation to the EU specifically.

### *Economy & Industry*

Since 1978, China, has gradually taken steps towards ‘opening up’ its economy. Under leadership of Deng Xiaoping it began implementing market reforms shifting from a centrally-planned economy to an economy which can be characterised as a socialist market economy, that is, a market economy, however, with a high degree of state involvement and emphasis on state-owned companies (World Bank, 2018d). Since then, the country has faced an immense economic growth and has become an increasingly influential state in the international system, gaining the reputation as ‘the world’s factory’ due to its manufacturing sector which for a long time was the largest in terms of both size and output (Gilbooy & Heginbotham, 2012; Cai, 2017). Today, China is the second largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP, only surpassed by the US.

**China: gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices from 2010 to 2021  
(in billion U.S. dollars)**

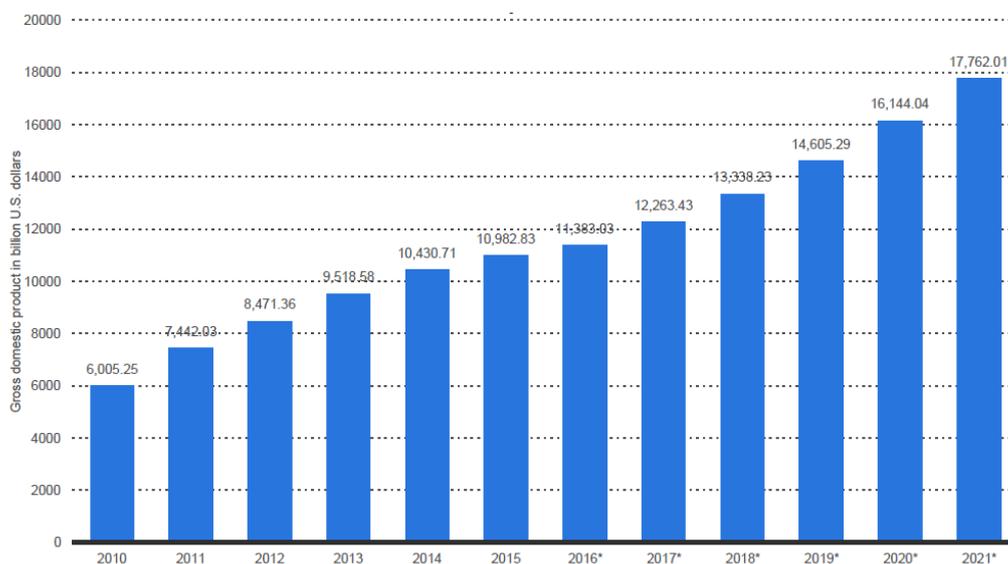


Figure 4: Source: (Statista, 2018a, p. 17).

It is interesting to note, however, that if one calculates the combined GDP of the EU nations as one unit, it is substantially larger than China’s, sitting at around \$16,491 trillion in 2016, albeit growing at a slower pace (see Statista, 2018b). As depicted in figure 4 above, while China in 1978, at the time of implementation of reforms, had a GDP at \$149,5 billion, this reached a total at around \$11,199

trillion in 2016 (World Bank, 2018a). This means, that China has had an average GDP growth at a 10 percent a year, which is an unprecedented double-digit growth (World Bank, 2018a). Since 2012, however, the growth rate in GDP has been gradually slowing down, resulting in an all-time low growth rate at 6,7% in 2016, compared to the year 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017). Commonly referred to as the stage of ‘the new normal’, it is argued that the Chinese economy is thus entering a new phase, shifting from a growth pattern of high-speed to one of a mid- to high-speed, meaning that the economy is still growing, however, at a slower pace (Amighini, Berkofsky & Magri, 2015). What is clear so far is that the Chinese economy is not currently a threat due to its size as such, but that the threat lies in the assumption that a large economy will eventually be translated into a large and powerful army.

What can be seen, however, is that there are several important challenges that China has to address. Not only has there been a decline in GDP growth rate, but China’s comparative advantages in manufacturing such as e.g. low labour costs, have also suffered a decline, thus weakening the country’s reputation as the ‘world’s factory’. As a response to what many see as a fourth wave of the industrial revolution, most commonly referred to as ‘Industry 4.0’, powerful nations like Germany, Japan and the United States have started to strategise how to prompt adjustments in order to keep up with the changes within the global manufacturing industry (Sendi, 2018), increasingly incorporating and promoting high technological products and centre production around technology, contributing further to international competition. It marks a radical restructuring of the global financial and technological system. Those who fail to ‘upgrade’ their industries to accommodate these changes will likely be unable to keep up with the advancements made by competing nations, and thus lower their potential to create and sustain aggregate power relative to these.

After several decades with economic reforms and rapid economic development, a Chinese middle-income group has emerged, increasing the domestic demand for higher quality goods. As this demand has not been met by the low-quality manufacturing sector in China, overseas purchases made by Chinese consumers has become increasingly popular (The State Council, 2016). As a response to, among others, these challenges, China has launched its ‘China Manufacturing 2025’ plan (CM2025), also commonly referred to as the ‘Made in China 2025’ plan, an ambitious and comprehensive industrial strategy, highly representing a Chinese response to ‘Industry 4.0’. With CM2025, China is specifically aiming at a ‘quality revolution’, forcing the Chinese manufacturing industrial chain to improve into an industry emphasising quality over quantity (The State Council, 2016; Cai, 2017). CM2025 has been referred to as an ‘industrial masterplan’ which aim is to transform the country into

of the most advanced and competitive economies in the world, and this with the help of innovative manufacturing technologies (Wübbecke, Meissner, Zenglein, Ives & Conrad, 2016). In short, CM2025 is a strategy initially presented by Premier Li Keqiang in March 2015 at the National People's Congress. It is said to aim at addressing some of the economic difficulties the country has started to face and has been predicted to face in the future. The plan is covering 10-year periods and has set three major goals to be achieved in 2025, 2035 and 2049, respectively; By 2025 China aims at becoming a powerful manufacturing nation, by 2035 a middle-level world manufacturing power, and a top world manufacturing power by 2049. In a speech made by President Xi Jinping in 2017 he addressed these goals further, stating that China, between 2020 and 2035 should '*...become a global leader in innovation.*' (Xi, 2017, p. 24), while the nation from 2035 to the middle of the 21st century further should '*...become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence.*' (Xi, 2017, p. 25).

Hence, the ultimate goal of CM2025 is to establish China as a leading global manufacturing power by the year 2049, coinciding with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, 2017). What this technological emphasis seems to suggest is that China perceives a technological arms race is inevitable and that there is a need for it to move towards a more high-technological approach to both its economy and military. This perhaps even further serves to illustrate the importance of technology in relation to aggregate power because nations that possess such technological advantage will have an edge over those who do not, and thereby theoretically have an easier task of ensuring their survival and power projection capabilities. One can therefore argue that China is attempting to actively enhance aggregate power by focussing particularly on its economic capabilities and output. As we have already established, rich and populous states usually can and do build powerful armies. Thus, while China cannot yet be considered to be a rich nation in terms of per capita measurements, it already has a large population, and thus it makes sense to focus on economic development. Its plans to reach a higher economic status by 2049, combined with the Xi Jinping's goal of becoming a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence by mid-21st century, suggests that enhancing its internal efforts is seen as the optimal way to strengthen its international influence in the long run and thereby increasing resources that, in the future, could be translated into military might. This does not affect its aggregate power immediately but allows for a gradual translation of these new resources into other areas as the CM2025 progresses.

In 2013, it was reported by the UN that China was outpacing the rest of the world in natural resource consumption as a direct result of its economic growth, which was increasing its domestic demand for energy across the board (United Nations Environment Programme, 2013). The main issue here is, it has been argued, that China has a low natural resource-to-population ratio, with only coal being in abundance. This has been exacerbated by its growth and is constraining China's ability to develop further (Larson, 2013). As the Chinese economy grows, private and public sectors alike need a continuous flow of raw materials; for example, while China is a leading mining nation in many areas, it is burning through its natural resources at an alarming pace. Local state-led enterprises and private companies have thus been entitled by the Chinese government to pursue mining deals globally (Basov, 2015). Similarly, the Chinese demand for oil and natural gas are on the rise. Here, the Chinese domestic production cannot supply the necessary amount of energy. It is estimated that by 2030, 80 percent of China's crude oil supply will be imported (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017). As the Chinese economy expands, it will therefore have a direct effect on its foreign policy and military development:

*'Notably, China states that its vulnerabilities have grown as its overseas interests have expanded, referencing energy, sea lines of communication, and assets abroad. Chinese analysts emphasize how China's increasing demands for natural resources from overseas, especially oil and gas, create security challenges'* (Rinehart, 2016, p. 9)

What is seen currently, then, is that there is somewhat of a discrepancy between China's current aggregate power and its ambitions to continue the developments outlined in its CM2025 plan. To expand economically and industrially, an increasingly high amount of external resources will need to be added to the Chinese domestic supply of energy.

### *Military*

As already explained, the Chinese economy has slowed down in recent years. As a consequence of this declining economic growth rate, the country's defence budget has, once again, been set at one of its lowest in decades. While, as an example, the defence budget of 2009 had expanded a 15% from the previous year's budget (Yan, 2017), the defence budget expanded by 'only' 7% in 2017. The budget for 2018 has, however, been slightly raised by 8.1%, amounting to \$175 billion (Liangyu, 2018), corresponding to around 2% of the national GDP (Center for Strategic & International Studies,

2018). However, speculations have been made about whether the actual figure for the Chinese defence spendings is larger than acknowledged officially by the government (Rinehart, 2016). According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), there has been little transparency in the budget, giving reason to believe that *'The official government defence budget covers only a proportion of China's total military spending...'* (Perlo-Freeman, 2014). This thought is further enhanced by a 2016 report made by the Congressional Research Service, stating that *'China may seek to diminish concerns about the growth of its defense budget by under-reporting defense spending.'* (Rinehart, 2016 p. 23).

The Chinese army is divided into four overall forces; ground, air, naval, and missile forces (Rinehart, 2016). In 2016, the Chinese military and security personnel amounted to 2.3 million, 1.6 of which were under the service of the ground forces. Since the 1990's, China has actively put effort into transforming and modernising the People's Liberation Army (PLA), from an army being infantry-heavy, focused on its ground forces and with a relatively low amount of military technology into one that emphasises high-technology as well as naval- and air power (Rinehart, 2016). With this focus on quality over quantity, the total number of platforms (e.g. fighter aircrafts and tanks) has declined, however, it can be argued that the overall capabilities of the PLA have increased. An example of this can be found in the Chinese inventory of fighter aircrafts, that since the 1990's has declined from around 3000 to about only 1,500; however, the percentage of *'...modern, fourth-generation-and-above fighters has grown to nearly 50%'* (Rinehart, 2016, p. 6). Furthermore, while in 2016 the PLA had active personnel of around 2.3 million, this amounted to about 3 million in 1992; however, the PLA has, once again, focused quality over quantity by emphasising the recruiting process, recruiting more educated and qualified personnel and thus raising the overall quality of its military personnel. The same is the case with the Chinese maritime forces, represented by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which has focused on the development of new, better vessels - e.g. submarines and aircraft carriers, instead of focusing on increasing the size of the navy (Rinehart, 2016).

Seen in a broader, regional context, in 1990, China constituted only 25% of East Asian defence spending while this in 2016 amounted to 71%. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has found that the Chinese military budget constitutes just over 50 percent of the total cumulative spending of East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and Oceania combined (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018). The CSIS furthermore argues that; *'Should China's military budget continue to grow, even at a rate substantially lower than its current level,*

*China's spending may converge with that of the United States within the coming decades.*' (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018). To this, Fu Ying, Spokesperson of the 12th National People's Congress held in 2017 stated that *'China's military capacity building will be continued. This is the requirement for safeguarding our national sovereignty and security...'* (Shaohui, 2017), emphasising that the development of military capabilities will continue despite the slowdown in economic growth rate. As with all states in the anarchic system, China's main goal would be to ensure its own survival. By stating that a requirement for safeguarding national security is indeed military capacity, it would be unlikely to assume that China would decrease its military spending in the near future, thus giving reason to believe that the nation's aggregate power in terms of economy will be further used to expand its military capabilities. What the analysis so far highlights is that China is using internal efforts by strengthening their military power.

### 5.1.3 Summarising discussion

What the analysis has shown thus far is that Russia and China both seem to agree that the size of its military is less important than keeping up with technological developments. Both nations seem to have started emphasising quality over quantity. It would therefore appear that both countries take part in a modern arms race, where advanced technology is now more important than brute force. It is impossible to make a direct comparison between the defence spending for Russia and China, however, because the actual numbers are only known by high-ranking officials within domestic political and military circles. China will officially spend around 2% of its GDP on defence in 2018, while Russia will spend around 2,8%. Particularly Western sources put these numbers higher, and in the case of Russia almost at double the official amount. What can be done, however, is to look at in which areas of defence they choose to spend their money.

The economic dimension is where the two nations are the furthest apart. It appears that for China, increasing economic power is the foundation for increasing its technological capabilities and thus military power, while Russia to a large degree ignores the economic situation of the nation by forcing high levels of military spending in spite of economic recession. This could arguably be seen as a result of Russia practically self-reliant resource production, previously discussed. On the other hand, China is facing an increasing reliance on imported natural resources that only gets larger over time, hence it will have to create an economic foundation (or military) that will enable it to acquire such resources from other nations. As established, the foundation of neorealism is that states try to ensure their own security, for example by making use of either external or internal efforts. In the case

of China, it appears that it sees the most optimal way of achieving such power, and thus security, by increasing economic capabilities alongside its military, while Russia seems more focussed on its military, and less so on its economy. When they enhance their security measures, in this case by focusing on the enhancement of aggregate power, other states are likely to feel threatened, resulting in the neorealist notion of 'security-dilemma'. However, it is impossible to answer how Russia and China can be seen as threats toward the security of the EU solely based on the aggregate power they possess. Therefore, it makes sense to further analyse the remaining four variables in depth, in order to create a more wholesome picture of the threats they may pose.

What is clear, however, is that both nations have seen an increase in aggregate power over the last decades. Their economic and technological capacity has changed, albeit China is perhaps the only one of the two that realistically has a potential for any significant increase going forward. The focus by Russia and China on technology and keeping up with other nations or improve upon these, can have negative effects on global threat perception. A significant ramp-up of military capacity could cause a security dilemma as well as a corresponding arms race, or in this case, a technological race. To some extent, this is already happening and will be discussed further in section 5.2.

What can thus be established, is that both nations have a large amount of aggregate power, but this power is found within different areas. First of all, they have both seen an increase in their technological capacity, but while China's large economy comes with a large potential for future expansions of military capacity, Russia's does not. In terms of population it is clear that neither will see an increase in their aggregate power in this field. Russia's population appears to shrink slightly over the coming years and China will likely see a minor increase. However, both nations will experience having an older population with less manpower available to its military and industry. This will slightly lower their future potential. China thus appears to pull ahead of Russia in terms of population, economy and technological potential. However, Russia has superior access to natural resource as well as a stronger potential for self-reliance that China does not.

## 5.2 Proximate power

As explained, Proximate Power is based around geography and the opportunities and obstacles arising due to it. This section will therefore aim at shedding a light on why and how Russia and China's geographical position affects their behaviour and interests. Thus, it will both be concerned with geographical proximity, the notions of stopping power, power projection and external vulnerability,

but also what this means for their relationship with nearby states or states to which it has power projection capabilities.

### 5.2.1 Russia

#### *Geopolitical ambitions*

Russia is the largest country in the world, stretching all the way from the eastern part of Europe to China and Mongolia in the east. Historically, it has taken advantage of this to become a great power within the Eurasian region, dominating or coercing nearby states, most prominently in the shape of the Soviet Union which became a superpower in its own right. As Russia starts building a stronger and more modern military, more Aggregate Power, the neorealist idea would dictate that nearby nations would start fearing that Russian ambition might stretch well beyond its own borders. This of course relates to the fact that states can never be sure of each other's intentions, and hence it would make sense for Russia's neighbours to assume that the scale of Russian ambition change as its relative power changes, especially seen in the light of Russia's recent behaviour. It is therefore perhaps not its proximity alone which can be perceived as a threat to these states, but a mix of increased relative power and the actions already taken by Russia in places such as Ukraine. Following a neorealist logic, it seems reasonable to assume that an increase in Russian foreign policy ambitions is made evident by current developments of relative power as well as its choice to actively use it in its immediate neighbourhood. If Russia wants to establish itself as a regional hegemon, and thus ensure its survival, then it makes sense to use its military advantage over nearby nations to attempt to achieve dominance. However, this would necessitate that Russia continues to develop a significant and costly conventional military capability focused on rapid power projection (Goure, 2014).

The first major example of increased Russian ambition can be found in its swift military campaign against neighbouring Georgia in August of 2008, which came as a shock to international observers and provoked vigorous international reactions among European states (Larsen, 2012). It has been argued that the war became an efficient means of demonstrating to the Western states that Russia was back as great power on the international scene and that the West should refrain from intervening in Russia's sphere of interest in large parts of the post-Soviet space (Larsen, 2012). In 2014, Russia once again flexed its muscles in its near proximity by annexing the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea. Few events in recent times have had a more profound influence on European security than the events that unfolded hereafter. Instead of ordering a massive cross-border invasion of eastern Ukraine, Russian military executed the Crimea operation by rapidly seizing the peninsula with

minimal casualties while managing to keep Kiev of balance and deterring any Western aggression by signalling its willingness and capacity to compete militarily with NATO if need be (Trenin, 2016). Russia also regularly holds military exercises across the country, some of which come alarmingly close to NATO territory. Russia has shown that it can project power to states in its proximity. This became clear after Ukraine, but perhaps even more so in the last year or two. In 2017, as part of its *Zapad* (West) exercise, Russian armed forces trained with Belarusian forces in an event with special strategic significance. It involved a training scenario in which Belarus was under attack from extremist groups and needed external aid from Russia, which included both ground and air forces. The *Zapad* exercise was not only limited to Belarus but covered a multitude of different states and types of warfare. Armenia, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan thus all took part in the large exercise. Russia's Northern Fleet task group executed a parallel air-defence exercise in Northern waters, with naval activity centred around the Baltic (The wider implications of Zapad, 2017). A statement made by the Russian Ministry of Defence furthermore stated that '*The Zapad 2017 anti-terror exercise is a purely defensive one.*' (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2018)

Despite the claim of the Zapad 2017 being of a purely defensive character, the exercise caused a stir in nearby NATO countries, accusing Russia of using the exercise as a ploy to secretly leave behind troops and material in Belarus for potential future military operations against nearby states, such as Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (The wider implications of Zapad, 2017), which are arguably seen by Russia as NATO's weak point, thus naturally offering the greatest potential for success. There is much debate about Russia's intentions in NATO - this is something which will be explored in section 5.4.

It is expected that Russia will soon be capable of running several Ukraine sized operations simultaneously on European soil (Blank, 2015). This serves to illustrate an increased Russian capacity to project power but can also be seen in the case of Belarus and its other allies, as an increase in its ability to protect and aid its allies militarily. While the post-cold war security climate in Europe has almost solely been the domain of NATO, Russia has shown with recent events that it has developed the capacity to once again successfully conduct military operations outside of its own borders. This can either be seen as a way to guarantee the security of its allies or as a means of threatening or coercing its neighbours, depending on how these nations perceives Russia's ambition. For example, while the exercise in Belarus and around the Baltic seas showcases how Russian allies could benefit from its protection, it simultaneously underlines the fears of the Baltic NATO states through Russia's power projection close to their borders. Only a relatively small strip of land in Poland's north-east

connects the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the rest of NATO. On the other hand, Russia and Belarus make up the majority of Baltic land-connections. Power projection would therefore theoretically be easier for Russia than it would for NATO, since the ability to project power declines with distance. The Baltic states are all EU members, and thus the EU would also perceive this as a threat. While it cannot be argued with certainty whether Russian ambition extends into the Baltic, it underlines the potential of proximate power in understanding the degree to which Russia might pose a threat towards its neighbours. This systemic perspectives from both sides will be analysed in more detail in sections 5.4 and 6.1.

### *Natural resources*

Moving away from the military dimension of proximate power, another important aspect in the case of Russia is the reliance upon its natural resources that many of its neighbouring states have, a relationship dating back to Soviet times and Russia's conscious efforts at making Russian energy indispensable throughout Europe (Newnham, 2011). As already explained in the analysis of Aggregate Power, Russia is today the main energy supplier to the European Union, albeit its share of the total energy supply has fallen somewhat in recent years (Eurostat, 2017). Many states thus still depend heavily on the Russian flow of energy, such as the natural gas flowing from several Russian pipelines to mainland Europe (Collins, 2017). While this does not directly amount to anything resembling imperial relations between Russia and its energy-importing neighbours, it does allow for Russia to potentially make use of its geographical advantage and its vast natural resources (aggregate power) to put pressure on all those who depend on Russian energy to meet their domestic needs. During the Soviet Union, this was a normal practice used to strengthen its political grip on other nations by subsidising prices for those who aligned their politics to suit Russian interest, while on the other hand being able to limit the flow of resources into nations that did not. This pattern arguably continues today, perhaps as an attempt to increase Russian bandwagoning power.

Russia seems to have realised that its natural resources could be as valuable as its military power in reaching its political goals. It has therefore been looking increasingly towards geographical areas in which natural resources could potentially be found. One geographical area with such a potential is the Arctic, which figures prominently in the new version of Russia's maritime doctrine signed by Putin in 2015. Operating out of a new Arctic joint command with headquarters in Murmansk, much new military infrastructure is being built, including a number of airfields (Cooper, 2016). What seems clear is that the Arctic is becoming an increasingly important region for Russia,

in terms of both economic development and national security. Melting ice in the Northernmost area of Russia allows for a potential trade route between Europe and Asia that could, in the future, be faster than the current widely used Suez Canal route (Russia Today, 2018).

The Arctic brings much potential for increasing Russian aggregate power, particularly economically, but would necessitate an increased military spending and presence in the region. This could arguably provide Russia with a potential tool in the future on par with its oil and gas pipes, because European shipping would come to rely heavily on good Russia relations to be able to use this route along the coast of Russia. It therefore would become a question of whether Russia could project power along such a long stretch of Arctic waters.

What has so far been established is thus that Russia not only has the aggregate power that makes energy cuts and military incursions into the rest of Europe possible, but it has used this power before to either directly or indirectly affect nearby countries. Since it is landlocked with so many different nations, most of whom are significantly less powerful than itself, there are no obvious obstacles to Russian power projection in its immediate neighbourhood. Its size alone means that it has proximity to both European and Asian nations (and even the United States in the shape of Alaska), as well as the potential to build and sustain military bases across the continent. The melting Arctic ice is both an opportunity and a potential threat for Russian security. While it can provide economic and political opportunities for Russia, it would also drastically increase the amount of border that the Russian military would have to patrol and safeguard, further spreading out Russian proximity concerns by opening up Russia's Northernmost borders to foreign ships on a larger scale than previously.

### 5.2.2 China

In 2013, President Xi Jinping announced a strategy of how to boost regional integration within China's vicinity. The strategy, which have been given the official name 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), is a highly complex infrastructural development initiative drawing on inspiration from the ancient silk road trading routes which spanned across several continents from China to Europe (Grieger, 2016). The BRI consists of two different components; the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (the Road) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (the Belt). Whereas the Road is an ocean-based project mainly concerned with the development of port-infrastructure projects, the Belt is land-based and set to mainly revolve around the construction of roads as well as gas and oil pipelines; hence the two

components highly emphasise development within the sectors of energy and transportation. The initiative is set to connect about 65 countries in Asia, Africa and Europe (Tang, Li, Li & Chen, 2017). This essentially means that Chinese and EU infrastructure will be directly linked.

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has released an overall action plan for the BRI, emphasising the importance of the projects to be carried out within the old tradition of the Silk Road trading route spirit of ‘...*peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit.*’ (2015), hence implying that projects within the framework of the BRI will be of a mutually beneficial character for the countries involved. With the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, China has taken interest in several ports across Asia, Africa and Europe. However, it has been argued that Chinese plans resemble a ‘debt trap’ due the nature of the recipients of Chinese loans, who, more often than not, appear unable to repay the debt created by Chinese infrastructure projects, such as the ambitious port projects. This can be seen in the case of both Pakistan and Sri Lanka, whose inability to repay China ended in a deal to turn debt into equity, in this case handing over ownership of ports to China on long-term agreements, spanning upwards of 99 years in some cases (Grieger, 2018).

#### *Naval build-up*

The Chinese naval infrastructure build-up should also be seen in light of its dependence of energy sourced through West Asia and Africa, energy that needs to be transported through the Indian Ocean (See Khurana, 2008). With its increase in economic ties and high dependency both on exporting goods to and from Europe, as well as a need to import energy to fuel its economy and military, it has become increasingly concerned about the security it can provide for its most important shipping routes. To this extent, in relation to its ports it has been argued that it should not rule out an overseas supply base because it has interests beyond its borders and it has become a necessity to protect these (Marantidou, 2014). However, due to this development of Chinese naval capability, and thus increased power projection capabilities, there has long been a concern among nearby nations of what is perceived as increased Chinese efforts to build ‘nodes’ of influence across the ocean, often referred to as the ‘string of pearls’ (Khurana, 2008). This feeds a growing concern about the nature of China’s maritime ambitions, both within its own territorial waters and in neighbouring oceans (Dixon, 2014).

One of these military oriented port constructions said to be part of the Chinese ‘string of pearls’ is the Djibouti port at the coast of Tanzania. While the project was officially said to serve the purpose of a logistics facility for resupplying Chinese vessels on humanitarian and peacekeeping

missions (Zheng, 2017), this has increasingly been challenged by satellite images allegedly showing that the port contains a large amount of military infrastructural measures, such as barracks and docking facilities, which could potentially allow China to harbour its army as well as a naval fleet. What seems to further validate these claims is that there, from a humanitarian and peacekeeping perspective, arguably is more military infrastructure than would be necessary to achieve these goals (Zheng, 2017). Hence, several sources (see Zheng, 2017; Blanchard & Tait, 2017) now refer to the Djibouti outpost as China's first overseas military base. Further evidence that points towards an increased militarisation of the area is that President Xi Jinping, upon a visit to the base, officially instructed the forces stationed there to '*...improve their combat capability and readiness for war.*' (Blanchard & Tait, 2017).

Analysts have argued that the strategic placement of the Djibouti outpost further enhances China's ability to project its power into the Northernmost parts of Africa, as well as strengthen the Chinese position within the Indian Ocean; this because the deployments of ships from Djibouti into the Indian Ocean would be able to patrol for longer periods than if deployed from China (Zheng, 2017). Thus, one could argue that Chinese proximate power appears to be moving, or is at the very least attempted moved by the Chinese government. This could be seen as an attempt to improve power projection over distances, and perhaps trying to avoid traditional notions of water as stopping power.

The span of the BRI port projects has also reached Europe, albeit mostly in terms of container terminals in ports as well as a railway system. Among the most prominent cases is the Piraeus port in Greece, which is now partly controlled by China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO). According to Le Corre (2017), the idea behind a Chinese controlled port in Greece is simple: '*...China will be able to reach the Mediterranean Sea and will use Piraeus as a platform for Chinese companies and goods.*'. Thus, it can be argued that China, through the Piraeus port, will be able to further move its proximity closer to the EU.

The ambitious Silk Road projects can be seen as an attempt to turn China's economic muscles into political strength and soft power (Sun, 2013); in other words, to turn aggregate power into political power. The main question here is perhaps whether China's goals are economic or geopolitical. From a regional perspective, making its poorer neighbours increasingly dependent on China could be seen as an attempt to achieve regional hegemon status. While Chinese involvement in nearby states arguably boosts the local economies it also allows China to gain leverage that it can use to extract resources. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that China acts out of self-interest, despite of the argument that it is done as a mutually beneficial project where all nations are welcome.

Choosing nations that have strategic value for China, such as those with natural resources or those that have a geo-strategic advantage, in addition to targeting weaker states with little or no means of repaying their foreign debts, can be seen as an effective tool for power maximisation because China's relative power increases while theirs decrease.

China is moving closer to the EU, not just in political and economic terms, but also in real terms. While the national borders of China remain the same, its focus on increasing its physical presence at key points along the most common shipping routes from Europe to China puts Chinese naval power closer to Europe than ever before. If militarisation of the string of pearls route is indeed one of China's goals, it will theoretically increase its potential for power projection to and near European coasts. On land, Chinese railroads will be physically connected to European infrastructure grids, thus directly linking China with Europe. Perhaps of most theoretical concern is how the EU's immediate neighbourhood will react to the growing Chinese influence and presence in the region. Although China is likely located too far away from Europe to be of any direct military threat, being limited by both the stopping power of water and geopolitical obstacles, it could potentially sway a number of countries close to the EU into siding with Chinese foreign policy in the future, threatening cohesion with the EU. This will be analysed further in section 5.4, that is, Offensive Intentions.

### 5.2.3 Summarising discussion

Russia and China have both seen an increase in their proximate power in recent years. While Russia appears to mainly focus on its historical, regional sphere of influence, China has widened its global reach through a series of both planned and already materialised sea and land infrastructure projects with both military and civil capacity. Both nations have energy supply at the very core of their proximate power relationships, albeit operating in different ways. Russia, on one hand, is a net energy-exporter operating a large part of the supply of resources flowing towards the EU; China, on the other, is a net-importer of energy with a strong self-interest in protecting a continuous flow of, and access to, these resources. In China's case, one can therefore make the argument that increased military capacity is a natural result of its increasingly global interests. As its economy and interests become more global, as perfectly illustrated by its trading-routes spanning from Eastern China to Europe, it makes sense that its military presence also becomes more global, something which is arguably already happening via its naval bases.

It terms of power projection, it should theoretically be more difficult to project power over water than on land. However, if successfully constructing its 'string of pearls', China's navy can

move relatively freely along a meticulously planned route with ample opportunity for resupplies along the way, something which would have been more difficult on land in this case. Thus, it could serve to explain why it makes sense for China to focus heavily on naval bases, while serving to explain why Russia is more oriented towards its immediate borders due to its focus on regional power projection. Despite the issues rising from of an alleged Chinese naval militarisation along the ‘string of pearls’, the military dimension is most obvious in the case of Russia because it is geographically situated in proximity to Europe and has openly conducted exercises near its borders and more aggressively militarised. However, China’s potential militarisation is moving closer to EU and NATO and should not be underestimated regardless of its expressed intent. One thing seems certain, though - both Russia and China, in different ways, could potentially start to encroach on European territory. It cannot, as of yet, be concluded what the likelihood of this happening is because it depends largely on the intentions of these two nations, thus it will have to be explored via the Offensive Intentions variable.

### 5.3 Offensive capabilities

As previously stated, states with a high amount of offensive capabilities are more likely to be perceived as a threat than states who are militarily weak. With this in mind, the following chapter will focus on the military capacities of Russia and China - the most important traditional means for waging war such as naval power, air power, technological level (low or high technology). Other aspects such as nuclear power will also be briefly discussed and accounted for as far as it is relevant to each nation.

#### 5.3.1 Russia

As has so far been established, the Russian Armed Forces have undergone many changes in recent years and is increasingly moving towards a more professional and modern army. Russia plans to keep the number of personnel enlisted fixed around roughly 1 million, going forward (Persson, 2016). While this would theoretically keep Russian offensive capabilities at roughly the same level in years to come, its offensive capabilities should increase if its army becomes fully modernised. However, so far it would appear that Russia’s offensive capabilities are not where they should have been with SAP-2020. Russia has currently initiated a new SAP going forward to 2027. This programme was regarded as a lifeline for SAP-2020. Due to the economic situation in Russia, as explored in section 5.1, the new programme has had to lower a number of key targets, and as a result, a number of the

most ambitious and expensive projects, which includes new designs for aircraft carriers, destroyers, strategic bombers and fighter-interceptor combat aircraft have all been postponed (Gorenburg, 2017). In spite of the apparent shortcomings of Russian SAP programmes, however, Russia has shown that it has the offensive capabilities to conduct military operations outside of the former Soviet Union area, so called ‘out-of-area operations’, as exemplified with its intervention in Syria (Persson, 2016). Similarly, large scale exercises and the Ukraine conflict seemingly testify towards Russia’s ability for power projection in its near-abroad.

Despite having to cut back on a number of key targets, Vladimir Putin has nonetheless argued that ‘*The Army, the Aerospace Forces and the Navy have grown significant [SIC] stronger*’ (Kremlin, 2018). If this is true, it highlights how the Russian forces have managed to improve significantly, even in the light of an economic crisis. It also serves as a testament to the executive power, that they have been able to convert aggregate power into offensive capabilities even when the national economy is weak. This also serves as an argument as to why executive power is relevant to analyse when accounting for changes in nations’ Offensive Capabilities, which will be done in the section 5.5, that is, the analysis of Executive Power.

### *Nuclear forces*

One area that continues to enjoy full support from the political elite of Russia is its nuclear forces. Despite the economic situation in the country, the development priorities of Russian nuclear forces through to 2027 are largely clear (Gorenburg, 2017), and, in general, defence spending has not been substantially affected by sanctions (Blank, 2015), but has been prioritised ahead of other domestic areas and thus kept at a high level. In addition to improving its Armed Forces, Russia has focussed on building a viable arsenal of ballistic missiles able to carry both nuclear and conventional warheads, designed to evade any ballistic missile defence systems, as well as a number of methods for swift deployment covering both land, sea and air, silos, submarines etc. (Bartles, 2017).

Russia possesses a growing arsenal of offensive nuclear weapons, one that has seen an increase of 50 per cent since 2012 (Persson, 2016). As of early 2017 it has been estimated that Russia has a stockpile of roughly 4,350 nuclear warheads assigned for use by both long-range strategic launchers and shorter-range tactical nuclear forces, of which 1600 nuclear warheads are actively deployed at various locations. To put this in perspective, the United States has an estimated 3800 nuclear warheads stockpiled, of which 1750 are deployed, while Europe’s largest nuclear power, France, sits at a mere 300, all of which are deployed (Kristensen & Norris, 2018). Russia’s focus on

expanding and modernising its nuclear arsenal can therefore be seen in light of the notion that in a conventional war against forces with superior technology and manpower, nuclear weapons could be used strategically to avert aggression (Bartles, 2017). However, *‘There is no certainty on the precise nature of Russian nuclear policy, known fully only to the few “privileged persons,”’* (Cimbala & McDermott, 2015, p. 100). Such ‘privileged persons’ are likely to be understood in terms of Executive Power, an aspect which will be explored in section 5.5.

Maintaining Russia’s position as a nuclear superpower has historically always had much political importance attached to it. Specifically, this has meant that the defence industry maintained significant research and development and production capabilities in the field of strategic missiles, even during the 1990’s and early 2000’s when defence procurement spending was at a historically low level (Connolly & Sendstad, 2016). However, despite the significant developments made over the last years, Russian defence modernisation is still lagging behind its peer competitors, as exemplified in 2015 when Deputy Defence Minister Dmitry Rogozin publically characterised Russia as lacking the capacity to compete with advanced Western high-technology linked defence systems (Cimbala & McDermott, 2015). While Russia was willing to invest heavily in advanced defence technology, it did not appear to have the domestic foundation completely in place to supply such technology. This was made clear in the loosening of restrictions on buying small batches of such equipment from abroad, breaking with Russian military tradition from the Cold War by incorporating foreign technology and equipment into their Armed Forces (Giles, 2014).

The importance of nuclear arms has been embedded in Russia’s 2015 National Security Strategy (Bartles, 2017). Russia would not be able to challenge NATO as a whole on a conventional and linear battlefield (Andzans, 2016), and it is partly this realisation, it has been argued, which has spurred the development of nonstrategic nuclear weapons in use in ballistic missile defence systems, air and coastal defence, land-based aviation, naval units and ground-based theatre ballistic and cruise missiles (Bartles, 2017).

#### *Natural resources as a capability*

An additional aspect of Russian offensive capabilities can arguably be found its abundance of natural resources, more specifically in terms of its energy supplies to other nations. Although this would not theoretically be seen as an offensive capability in the neorealist sense of the word, Russia’s power position in relation to a large part of its neighbour states could enable it to cause harm by shutting off vital energy supplies. It can therefore be seen not only as a domestic tool to improve its industry and

economy, but as an offensive capability, a political tool that Russia could use to coerce or weaken other states, shifting the relative power balance them even more in Russia's favour. This potential has been highlighted in recent years by Russian threats to shut off the flow of gas to Europe, most prominently during the Ukraine crisis (Withnall, 2015). It has been described as an 'energy weapon' by Collins (2017), who highlights its potential severity by arguing that the reliance on Russian energy could be used as a tool against European nations to '*...undermine their resolve to stand up to Russian revanchism in and near Europe, and, ultimately, divide and weaken the EU and NATO.*' (p. 6). This underlines that a potential threat to Europe is not only found by measuring its military capabilities, but is more complex, such as exemplified with Russian 'petro power'.

### 5.3.2 China

As previously mentioned, China has emphasised quality over quantity, particularly the development of its technological capabilities. '*One of the goals [...] is to transform the PLA into a force capable of winning of [SIC] what they called the "local wars under high-tech conditions" rather than a massive, numbers-dominated ground-type war*' (Abas, 2015, p. 144). This can be illustrated by looking at the size of China's Armed Forces, which, as mentioned, fell from 3 million active personnel in 1992 to 2.3 in 2016 (see section 5.1). Even as its population grew during that period, the military was gradually reduced in size and the military personnel-to-population ratio fell. While the current 2.3 million is a large number in absolute terms, it is low relative to the 1.4 billion population of China.

The PLA thus appears to have shifted its primary focus towards its supportive elements. One such new element is the creation the Strategic Support Force (SSF), which works as a supporting unit for the traditional forces of the PLA and is responsible for high technological support for the PLA (Hwang, 2017). It is difficult to tell exactly what the SSF does since it does not leave a 'footprint' and cannot be observed by outsiders in the same way a military operation can, for example. However, it does illustrate that China recognises that to win high-tech wars, one must support traditional military capabilities with live information, satellite images and other capabilities 'external' to the battlefield itself, which can be equally as important in deciding the outcome of a potential conflict.

Similar to its ground forces the size of its navy and air force of China is not increasing, but they are becoming more modern and with a more global reach. China's naval bases can be seen as a way to deal with the essential issue of the stopping power over water. For example, it is currently constructing several aircraft carriers to allegedly boost military power abroad. To refuel and repair such a global fleet, China thus logically needs to establish bases around the world (Tweed & Leung,

2018). In a 2016 report to the United States Congress, it was highlighted how China is building a modern and regionally powerful military with a limited but growing capability for conducting operations away from China's immediate periphery (Rinehart, 2016). To this extent, it has long been clear that there are growing concerns about China's largely inevitable increase in power projection which follows in the wake of its economic and military growth. Aircraft carriers are a great example of such growing power because they have both the mobility that the navy provides, but also have power projection capabilities over land and in the air, thus significantly increasing China's potential to wage war. This, of course, increases the proximate power of China, but creates concern among countries along the route (see The Ministry of External Affairs, 2017; Janesar & Kumar, 2017). While the naval bases should not necessarily be seen as an offensive capability in their own right, they would arguably allow for more rapid and sustained Chinese military operations. Although they are not officially acknowledged by China as having a military purpose, they still have the potential to increase its offensive capabilities and power projection in proximity to these bases. Since they stretch all the way from China and almost all the way to Europe, it thus seems logical to conclude from these observations that there is, at the very least, a potential threat to be found in the observation that China could conduct military operations in or near Europe in the near future.

It is important to note, however, that China's aircraft carrier program is still in its infancy; as of 2018, China has only one active carrier, while two others are currently under construction, and the construction of five more has been planned (Tweed & Leung, 2018). Similarly, although the PLA accounts for a large force and weaponry in most categories of conventional systems, it remains constrained by a number of technological factors. To this extent, there is still a gap with other powers to be closed (Abas, 2015). A European arms embargo is still in effect as a direct result of the Tiananmen square crackdown on civilian demonstrators in 1989; because China relies heavily on European military exports, particularly in the technology sector, this embargo has limited its technological development. The embargo is not total, however, and can be relatively loosely interpreted by European states (Agence France-Presse, 2014). This has been argued to make its domestic arms industries '*...crucial in assembling a modern military force as it continues to pursue the status of being a major power*' (Abas, 2015, p. 142).

### *Nuclear power*

China does not appear to attach any specific significance to nuclear weapons as potential offensive capability. Compared to Russia and the United States, China's arsenal of nuclear weapons remains

low, at an estimated 270 active warheads (Kristensen & Norris, 2018). There is little evidence to suggest that China plans on expanding its capabilities in this regard. Its military has significantly improved in the last few decades but is still not a 'first class military'. Its nuclear forces are merely one small component of China's broader 'Active Defence' which will be explored later in section 5.4.2.

### 5.3.3 Summarising discussion

Russia and China have large militaries with a strong potential for power projection. However, they are both lacking behind their Western counterparts in relation to their technological capabilities. They have been limited to a degree by European embargoes or sanctions, and thus appear to increasingly focus on improving their indigenous capabilities. It therefore makes sense to prioritise developing the capacity to produce as much of its defence needs as possible domestically. In a self-help world, one can argue that

*'The ability to produce weapons indigenously constitutes one of the main assets of military power. States which can afford to establish high-tech weapons locally are able to influence international systems according to their interests or to pursue their national interests without relying on other actors in the international system.'* (Abas, 2015, p. 157).

With defence industries being closely linked to self-interest and national security, Russia and China's thus both have a similar interest in developing more modern defence industries, but they have significantly different starting points. As shown in the section of Aggregate Power (see section 5.1), Russia has an abundance of natural resources that could be used to fuel an extensive upgrade of its offensive capabilities but is constrained by its weak economic growth and limited relationships with the outside world, and thus appears unable to aggressively pursue this goal in the long run. China has the economic muscles to fund extensive developments but is dependent on external resources to uphold its current and future level of production.

In terms of power projection, neither Russia nor China have a global reach on par with the United States. Russia seems to focus primarily on internal militarisation, especially along its Western borders. It has a large army that has shown its ability to operate effectively in its near-abroad, an army that makes it the most powerful state in its geographical neighbourhood. In addition, Russia can

exploit its powerful position as an ‘energy weapon’, although the costs of such actions would likely put its economy under even more stress.

China, on the other hand, also has a powerful army, but has been increasingly focussed on global power projection efforts. So far, however, China’s ability to conduct military operations outside of its borders has not yet been substantially tested or documented, and thus it is difficult to make any conclusive assessment of its offensive capabilities. Theoretically, however, each new military base symbolises a potential extension of Chinese power projection. Its offensive capabilities also have a larger potential than Russia’s going forward because it still has a large amount of aggregate power that is yet to be utilised. With a lower percentage of GDP spent on its military, as well as a lower military personnel-to-population ratio, in addition to a much larger population, China’s military could realistically ramp up significantly.

A more difficult task in relation to the two is to analyse their nuclear weapons as offensive capabilities. Neither Russia nor China have ever used them before in an offensive capacity and little is known about the specific technological details of these weapons, but Russia seems to attach more importance to its nuclear arsenal than China. What cannot be denied in either case is that they both have a potential to cause destruction on a massive scale and thus are a potential threat to anyone against whom their nuclear weapons might see use. Their presence alone warrants an enquiry into the current state of both nations’ nuclear forces.

## 5.4 Offensive intentions

As explored, states depend largely on subjective interpretations of the intentions behind each other’s actions by looking at the development of their capabilities. Since intentions depend largely on interpretation rather than pure observation, this section will be based on observations of Russia and China, analysing their patterns of behaviour as well as interpreting information from previous variables. This will include official statements, doctrines and/or other relevant and available documents.

### 5.4.1 Russia

In recent years, especially following the Ukraine crisis of 2014, there has been a growing focus on figuring out what Russia’s intentions towards Europe are, particularly among NATO members, and thus also whether or not its developments are a threat to the EU. Often, these involve references to

Russia's historic position as a regional power. For example, some argue that Russian elites see Russia as the natural hegemon of Europe based on its history, economic power and contemporary power relations - that its objective is to recover its past hegemonic position and power, which entails the goal of Russian domination of the former Soviet bloc (Payne & Foster, 2017). Increased defence spending would be one way to achieve such goal, as a way to reassert itself geopolitically, which has been shown thus far that it has.

### *Systemic perspectives*

In general, the Russian Federation has always been highly critical of the United States' role in the global order and has often challenged the United States through various multilateral and unilateral means (See Bartles, 2017). Russia has made no attempt to hide the fact that it does not consider NATO as a partner, and to this extent neither is the existence of a European Security architecture with NATO a principal element. The threats arising from NATO have been reiterated both in its Military Doctrine and its National Security Strategy (Andzans, 2016):

*'The buildup of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security'* (Edict of the Russian Federation President, 2015, Provision 15)

The national security strategy thus highlights Russian uncertainties regarding NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe, as well as a perceived threat to Russian national security. The increased military presence of NATO forces is seen as a something which requires a military response from Russia, as further illustrated by President Putin:

*'we have repeatedly told our American and European partners who are NATO members: we will make the necessary efforts to neutralise the threats posed by the deployment of the US global missile defence system.'* (Kremlin, 2018).

As previously mentioned, neorealism finds the system to be anarchic, meaning that there is not higher authority to turn to, should a state feel threatened. This means that states operate in a self-help system and thus, theoretically, Russia has to act to protect its own interests and security. This is indeed highlighted as Russia sees NATO as violating international law, however without any 'upper government' which can intervene. Furthermore, it is not only expansion of NATO which worries Russia, but also the location of military infrastructure close to its borders. Following the neorealist idea, it would therefore make sense that Russia also increases its military presence in this region because they cannot be certain of NATO's intentions. Perhaps it is therefore not necessarily to be seen as offensive intentions that Russian forces get nearer to NATO borders, but as a way for Russia to balance against current NATO and US developments in its proximity. Putin himself has addressed these concerns, arguing that *'Everything we do is just a response to the threats emerging against us.'* and similarly stating that *'As for some countries' concerns about Russia's possible aggressive actions, I think that only an insane person and only in a dream can imagine that Russia would suddenly attack NATO.'* (Corriere della Sera, 2015). This highlights what seems to be a defensive Russian mindset towards its militarisation.

However, NATO is likely to perceive the Russian build-up as a threat. Herein lies the danger. There are signs that the Russian army modernisation is based on a security dilemma which occurs as a result of the increased military presence from both sides. In 2015, Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov stressed the importance of its military build-up, stating that Russia could not afford to be 'outclassed' by the US and NATO (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2015). One can thus argue that there is a potential arms race building in Eastern Europe as a direct result of recent events. Russia sees Europe and NATO's developments, missile shield and exercises as a provocation. They will not allow the US and NATO to 'outclass' their armed forces, and thus it is portrayed as imperative that Russian military development continues.

NATO, the EU and the United States thus appear to have failed to sufficiently convince Russia that its deployment of soldiers and missile defence systems in Eastern Europe is not oriented against Russia (Cimbala & McDermott, 2015). This is further stressed in the Russian National Security Strategy, stating that:

*'A determining factor in relations with NATO is still the unacceptability for the Russian Federation of the alliance's increased military activity and the approach of its military infrastructure toward Russia's borders, the building of a missile-defense system, and attempts*

*to endow the bloc with global functions executed in violation of the provisions of international law.*’ (Edict of the Russian Federation President, 2015, Provision 106).

Thus, it becomes clear that Russia perceives itself to be the victim of aggression, which has been heightened by military developments to its West. As states can never be certain of other states intentions, and with the knowledge that all states possess some degree of offensive capabilities, it would make sense for Russia to try and counter further developments, in order to protect their interests as well as their position in the international system. This is achieved through the upgrading of the nation’s nuclear capabilities as well as enhancing the central coordination of its armed forces, as previously explained in the analysis of ‘Offensive Capabilities’. This secures a more rapid, concerted, response in the event of armed conflict (Cooper, 2016).

Russia does not rule out potential cooperation with NATO in the future, however, but see NATO in its current state as a threat:

*‘The Russian Federation is prepared for the development of relations with NATO based on equality for the purpose of strengthening general security in the Euro-Atlantic region. The depth and content of such relations will be determined by the readiness of the alliance to take account of the interests of the Russian Federation when conducting military-political planning, and to respect the provisions of international law.’* (Edict of the Russian Federation President, 2015, Provision 107).

For example, Russia has previously proposed a ‘sectoral’ missile defense plan for Europe in which shared responsibility between NATO and Russia for launch detection, threat assessment and response was emphasised, including possible shoot-downs of attacking missiles or warheads (Cimbala & McDermott, 2015). This would fit well with the idea of external balancing through some sort of cooperation between ‘enemies’ to ensure that the international system is kept in balance. This plan was not accepted by NATO and the US. This has not eased tension with Russia, and hence this has further created ‘...an enhanced sense of vulnerability to potentially hostile acts’ (Cooper, 2016, p. 139).

It is not possible to conclude with absolute certainty, however, what will characterise the NATO - Russia relationship going forward as a result of these developments, but right now it can be observed that both actors have an interest in maintaining the primary goal of any state/coalition of

states - national security - and both see each other as a potential source of danger. For example, the US Strategic Command leadership, having watched developments in Russia, admits concern about its emerging strategic military capabilities (Blank, 2015), which fits relatively well with what has so far been established - that Russia does not shy away from explicit threats against other states, nor in the use of other means of asserting control in its near abroad. This has been highlighted by both the situation in Ukraine and Russia's somewhat strained energy relationship with its neighbours. While the Russian leadership has not indicated any desire to use force against NATO members, it has shown that Russia is capable of projecting military strength. As illustrated by Andzans (2016), *'Russia's armed conflict with Georgia and its military intervention in Ukraine have demonstrated not only its capability but also willingness to use military force'* (p. 13).

What can be observed, however, is that Russia's near-abroad is where it has been most active because this is both an area where it has a historical interest as well as an area in which its has proximity concerns due to NATO expansion. Simultaneously, there appears to be a perceived responsibility among Russian leaders towards what is explained as 'greater Russia'. That is, ethnic Russians living outside the Russian federation, for whom the Russian government sees itself as representing in spite of internationally recognised borders (Kuzio, 2016). This makes clashes with nearby nations more likely to occur when there are a significant number of ethnic Russians to be found therein, as was the case with Crimea. Here, President Putin noted the importance of maintaining the balance of forces in the Black Sea area, and stressed that the outside world had long been warned about possible Russian military action, should the encroachment of NATO continue:

*'I would like to make it clear to all: our country will continue to actively defend the rights of Russians, our compatriots abroad, using the entire range of available means – from political and economic to operations under international humanitarian law and the right of self-defence.'* (Kremlin, 2014b).

President Putin's remarks arguably seem to underline that Russia does not intend to refrain from influencing its near-abroad in the future. This could be interpreted by European observers as an aggressive statement of Russian Offensive Intentions, although it from a Russian perspective is perceived as self-defence. What Russia has demonstrated with its actions, one might argue, is that offensive action is considered a viable option in balancing efforts with NATO.

### *Nuclear power*

Russia's focus on balancing against NATO is also evident in its broad modernisation of its nuclear forces, which arguably reflects the conviction of Putin's government that nuclear forces are indispensable for Russia's security and status as a great power (Kristensen & Norris, 2017). However, strategic nuclear weapons are not necessarily to be seen as a means for harming other nations, but rather as both deterrence and a tool to minimise NATO and US influence in Russia and its surroundings:

*'Russia does not fear the United States and NATO rolling across its borders; Russia fears a United States, with an admittedly much more powerful conventional military, that is not constrained by the threat of Russian nuclear capabilities'* (Bartles, 2017, p. 168).

Russia is still investing heavily in renewing its strategic nuclear arsenal because it believes that the most important means of resisting a perceived US hegemony is through *'...the strategic deterrence and strategic stability that [...] nuclear weapons provide.'* (Bartles, 2017, p. 153). But, however, this focus on its nuclear weapons perhaps also emphasises that Russian capacity for conventional warfare is weak and that it has recognised nuclear weapons as a central source of political relevance and military power (Goure, 2014). Although nuclear weapons are seen by most as solely a strategic deterrent, the following is stated in The Military doctrine of the Russian Federation (2015):

*'The Russian Federation shall reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy. The decision to use nuclear weapons shall be taken by the President of the Russian Federation.'* (Provision 27).

It is difficult to establish the extent to which Russia can deploy its nuclear weapons. While it is maintained that it is for deterrent purposes and last resort use only, it can be argued that it is theoretically possible that limited deployment of strategic nuclear weapons could be used to throw NATO off balance (Blank, 2015). For example, Russia has been accused of holding so called 'mock exercises' in which strategic nuclear strikes were simulated against neighbouring states, such as

Sweden and Poland, as part of its broader military exercises (Oliker, 2016). Russia, however, denies such exercises having a nuclear dimension (see Nevett, 2017; Oliphant, 2017). Even though it is not possible to account for the full extent of Russian nuclear policy, it seems realistic to assume that Russia and other nuclear powers for that matter, at the very least have considered ways to deploy their nuclear weapons strategically as offensive weapons. However, such exercises can also be seen more in balancing terms, perhaps as a way to show the continued relevance of its nuclear capacity and capability - that it is able to strike targets outside of the Russian Federation - to boost its deterrence capability against its peer competitors.

#### 5.4.2 China

Chinese authorities have long been downplaying the potential use of its offensive capabilities. In its most recent military white papers from 2015, emphasis lies on explaining what is referred to as guidelines for an 'Active Defence'. The papers underline that "*We [China] will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked.*" (Xinhua, 2015a). According to these white papers, its offensive capabilities should therefore be seen as deterrence. However, this does not exclude pro-active use of offensive capabilities as a means of protecting Chinese interests at home or abroad. Chinese leaders have thus described its 'Active Defense' as being 'on the whole', thus as strategically defensive but operationally offensive, which means that offensive actions such as pre-emptive strikes are justified if they are deemed vital to protecting strategic interests (Rinehart, 2016).

President Xi Jinping has emphasised China's defensive nature by stating that '*We Chinese love peace. No matter how much stronger it may become, China will never seek hegemony or expansion.*' (Xinhua, 2015b). It is difficult to tell whether or not this is an accurate reflection of China's intentions. As stated in the chapter of theory, states will at a minimum try to ensure their own security and at a maximum seek domination. As elaborated, states will be unsure of how much power is enough and will thus likely strive for regional hegemony. If guided by this mindset, China is likely to convert its military superiority into as much regional power as possible since the pursuit of power would thus not stop after reaching national security goals. This fits well with what has already been described in the previous three chapters, that China is expanding via a network of naval bases across the ocean while creating new infrastructure on land as well.

In military terms, President Xi's statement above might be true - but, as shown, China could instead use its economic power to achieve such hegemony through its so called 'debt traps', thus achieving hegemony through economic rather than military means. It is difficult to separate such

economic interests from any potential military presence, however, since its active defence policy could also be interpreted as applying to its economic and political interests abroad. For example, some experts have suggested the possibility that ‘...*China might carry out a military first strike in response to foreign non-military actions, such as those in the political domain, if Beijing sees those actions as an attack on China at the strategic level.*’ (Rinehart, 2016, p. 8). Hence, if China’s interests are increasingly connected to economic infrastructure abroad and naval bases spread across the ocean, its defence might not be limited to the Chinese mainland. This is already showing in its more aggressive nature in the South China Sea, among other things turning away Australian navy warships in international waters (See Greene, 2018) and its long-term dispute with Japan and Korea over islands such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu island chain (Liao, 2017). Whether or not this behaviour is going to span the whole of BRI and beyond remains to be seen.

#### *Divisive efforts*

In Europe, concerns have been raised about China’s intentions with BRI, but also heavily focussed on what is seen as deliberately divisive efforts through its 16+1 format, an initiative which creates a forum between 16 Eastern and Central European nations and China - of which 11 are EU members - to discuss connectivity in areas such as policy, infrastructure, trade and financing (Xinhua, 2017). These plans have excluded Western European nations, and as such the 16+1 format has been met by strong criticism in Western Europe. Among other things, it has been argued to be an attempt to divide the EU, undermine consensus between its member states and using its soft power to influence political decisions (Poggetti, 2017). This has

*‘...created unease among the EU institutions and other member states. They are concerned that the format could be used by Beijing to ‘divide and rule’ the EU, and that the cooperation of some CEE [Central and Eastern Europe] countries with China could undermine their relations with the EU institutions.’* (Kratz & Stanzel, 2016, p. 2).

Such an approach arguably has both political and economic implications. For example, it appears that some states who receive significant amounts of foreign investment from China, such as Hungary and Greece, have become more unwilling to criticise China’s actions in for example the South China Sea, but also Beijing overall (Kratz & Stanzel, 2016). This increased soft power on European politics is perhaps best illustrated by specific cases, such as the EU’s statement on China’s legal defeat over the

South China Sea, which, due to objections of some member states, avoided direct reference to China (Kratz & Stanzel, 2016). Although it is difficult to tell the exact extent of Chinese influence in Europe, its decision to focus primarily on influencing the economically weaker parts of Europe seems to apply a similar approach to that of BRI.

It makes sense for China to attempt to convert its relative power into what can be described as balancing efforts. The EU is, of course, not a nation in its own right and its power is not at a federal level, yet European integration has become close enough for the EU to be a global actor. The improving frameworks and potential future centralisation of European defence capabilities as well as the increasing cooperation in key security areas highlighted by developments of the CSDP might be perceived as something which China needs to balance against. An EU as a powerful global military player can be seen as a threat to China's security and interests, and thus will need to be contained somehow, for example by using soft power to slow integration developments and complicate political decision-making within the EU. If states always seek to increase their relative power, weakening the European cooperation is an obvious tool for China towards power maximisation which has, arguably, the lowest risk of military conflict. What China has arguably done with the 16+1 framework is therefore attempting to increase its relative power in relation to the EU.

From what has so far been explored in the analysis, it might be a more realistic, for the time being, to treat Chinese economic and political expansion as the best indication of Chinese intentions towards the EU, rather than its military dimension. Looking at Chinese proximity developments through its BRI (see section 5.2.2), Chinese interests are becoming increasingly global in nature, which should occur naturally as its relative power increases. It has yet to flex its military muscles, so to speak, and economic development seems to remain a higher priority for the Chinese government in the short term. At first glance, one might be tempted to describe China's current developments as intentions to 'divide and rule' by economic means. While China is indeed modernising its offensive capabilities, it has yet to become a global military actor on par with the United States, and hence concrete actions of specific strategic, military importance and proximity to Europe are yet to be seen. While the potential is there, it has thus far been explored throughout the analysis how the official agenda towards the EU does not appear to have a military component.

### *Nuclear power*

Chinese nuclear power seems to have few potential implications for European security. China's white papers from 2015 (Xinhua, 2015a) have emphasised that nuclear forces constitute a strategic

cornerstone of safeguarding national sovereignty but is solely defensive in nature. These papers underline that China does not see nuclear weapons as offensive weapons, but as deterrence against other nuclear powers. It is stressed that China will not participate in any nuclear arms races with other nations - likely referring to the United States and Russia. Chinese doctrines operate on the principles of 'no first-use' - that it will only use nuclear force as a response if struck first. It is argued that there are indications that Chinese leaders are sincere in promoting this policy (Rinehart, 2016). The white papers note that

*'China will optimize its nuclear force structure, improve strategic early warning, command and control, missile penetration, rapid reaction, and survivability and protection, and deter other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China.'* (Xinhua, 2015a).

Whether or not Chinese commitment to nuclear weapons solely as deterrent is true, there is no way to decisively conclude. One can never be completely sure of states' intentions, and to this extent, China's nuclear policy might be subject to change in the future depending on global and regional developments.

#### 5.4.3 Summarising discussion

As have been established, states that appear aggressive are more likely to provoke other states into acts of balancing. To this extent, in terms of Russia and China the former inevitably comes off as the most aggressive due to its openly aggressive behaviour and public stance towards Europe and NATO. While Russia does not appear to translate its military power into global intentions of domination, it does however, appear determined to increase its military power and political influence in its near-abroad.

Russia has become increasingly aggressive in its near-abroad following its militarisation. Thus, much focus has been directed at the more traditional aspects of warfare, the size and capabilities of its Armed Forces. It appears that its relatively weak economy and low population relative to the EU has encouraged developments in the military sector, since this can be seen as the most realistic way to achieve power maximisation. From the outside, Russia's growing ambitions of regional power combined with explicit statements from key political figures and powerful rhetoric in its military

doctrine regarding NATO will inevitably be seen as a threat through European eyes, even if they are expressed in defensive terms. It is likely that Russia will continue with its militarisation policies until it feels that a distinct military advantage has been achieved in relation to NATO. However, it might continue well past such point - realistically achievable or not, considering the state of Russia's economy - since more power is seen as more national security, and thus states are always encouraged to seek more of it. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that Russia will also seek to increase its relative power at the expense of the EU by challenging it in key geopolitical areas to minimise EU and NATO influence, particularly in its near-abroad.

China, on the other hand, does not seem to be a military threat to the EU in its current state. However, due to its more global outlook, growing international influence and interests it might behave more aggressively in the future. Currently, the major concern is its increased efforts at influencing European politics and its alleged economic strategy of 'divide and rule', which is highlighted, among other things, by bilateral agreements with certain member states of the EU. This arguably increases Chinese soft-power in the region and might threaten the cohesion of EU politics and development. It makes sense to make these assumptions if one sees the EU in a global perspective as a potential obstacle to Chinese power projection, just as it makes sense for China to attempt to shape its external environment to protect its interests through initiatives such as BRI, which increasingly touches the EU and is portrayed as a vital national interest for China. Hence, with its interests moving to the EU, there is potential for conflicts between China and the EU.

## 5.5 Executive power

As explained in the chapter of theory, the fifth and last variable analysed will be that of executive power. This variable stands out from the previous four as it is derived from the thought that the systemic dimension might not be sufficient to understand international politics, as intervening variables, such as domestic policies, also have a say in the shaping of foreign policy. Therefore, it is necessary to consider state structure of Russia and China and the power and motives of political decision makers. This will allow for analysis of policy choices that are relevant in relation to the EU, as well as attempting to outline, in broad terms, what motivates the key-executives.

### 5.5.1 Russia

Russia has a long history of authoritarian rule dating back to the age of the Tsars and continuing all the way up until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Albeit showing signs of democratic development during the 1990s, economic recession and hardships has changed the way in which democracy works in Russia (Kuzio, 2016). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has transformed from a decentralised federal republic into a highly centralised system (Slider, 2014). Thus, Russia's current political system has transformed into what one can describe as a 'consolidated authoritarian regime', where power has been increasingly more centralised towards the federal level (Kuzio, 2016). The current political system in Russia is therefore far less transparent than its Western, democratic counterparts (Freudenstein 2014), and is difficult to fully understand for outsiders. Such centralisation would theoretically increase state power because political decisions for the entire nation can be made by relatively few executives rather than being separated into local governments. One can therefore argue that this, ideally, should decrease bureaucracy and increase the speed at which national power could be translated into state power.

In 2007, the deputy head of the president's chancellery, Vladislav Surkov, used the term 'sovereign democracy' to explain Russia's more authoritarian take on democracy. Herein, it was argued that in order for Russia to be fully competitive in a globalised world, the Russian government must first have full state sovereignty, and full sovereignty over its borders and territory as well as over the price of oil and the use of its natural resources (Ruutu, 2017). These ideas are based around centralisation of all core functions, a consolidation of power, with the president as the personification of political institutions.

#### *Putin's executive power*

There is, from what has so far been described, evidence of a strong, hierarchical federal structure. This can be illustrated further by looking at how much responsibility and power the president officially has:

*'As the head of state, the Commander in Chief and the Chairman of the Security Council, the President has the right to preside over meetings of the Government and to give orders to the Government and to federal bodies of executive power in charge of defense, security, domestic and foreign policy, preventing emergency situations and providing disaster relief. The*

*President shall also present annual messages on the budget to the Government.* ' (Presidential Executive Office, 2018)

What this outline is that the president, currently Vladimir Putin, is, by far, the most powerful executive in Russian politics. The president is not only able to appoint other key executives in all areas of Russian politics but is also largely responsible for shaping and enforcing policies in all matters of state and civil affairs. In relation to Russia's behaviour within the international system, this is also the case; it is stated that *'It is the head of state who largely determines Russia's position in international affairs.'* (Presidential Executive Office, 2018). Therefore, Russian security policy will also be directly affected by Putin's place within the Russian political system.

There appears to be little to no real opposition to the power of Vladimir Putin in parliament either. His political party, United Russia, has dominated Russian politics since 1999 (Russell, 2014). Similarly, media coverage is biased in favour of Putin and it has been shown that the Kremlin is active in the support and construction of political parties and movement who support its narrative (Russell, 2014). The Kremlin has thereby solidified its positions while introducing a hierarchy of political power (Greene, 2015). Hence, traditional multiparty democracy as known in the West is not working in Russia. This is arguably a direct consequence of the 1993 constitution, in which powers of the president became greatly enhanced and widened to the point where he can appoint prime ministers and dissolve parliament, while on the other hand, the parliament needs a two-third majority in both houses to impeach the president, which effectively renders it impossible to do in practice (Russell, 2014). Russian politics have therefore often been explained by a 'Power Vertical' concept in the West. This approach defines the regime of Russia as a system of faithfulness, loyalty and complete subordination to one person, extending out into a downward extending pyramid where the mission is to carry whatever directions are given from the top - a system which in Russia translates into President Putin bringing his close friends and allies into power to ensure the functioning of this structure (Laurinavičius, 2016). However, others have argued that the system is instead a clan-based system of constant inner fighting because there have been several struggles for power within Putin's inner circle, although so far without any real challenge to Putin's de-facto grip on power (Laurinavičius, 2016). It is noted how president Putin himself, both as the decision-maker and in his physical capacity, is seen as the one who guarantees and embodies Russia's sovereignty; to this extent he is also referred to as 'the sovereign' when talking about executive decision making (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2014). What

can be argued, however, is that no matter if the system is characterised as a power vertical or a clan-based system, it does not change the fact the Putin is the key executive within Russian politics.

In terms of Russian defence spending and build-up, it is President Putin who is ultimately responsible for approving the budget - and while the accountability function should be performed by parliament, the Audit Chamber, and the judicial branch, the reality seems to be that public oversight and control over the budgetary process is weak; to this extent, in today's Russia, these institutions can hardly be described as politically independent from the key executive himself (Hakvåg, 2017). Starting from 2008, military procurement has been decided within the Military-Industrial Commission. Formally, the Military-Industrial Commission settles procurement plans for Russia's national defence through a type of bureaucratic decision-making model, but in reality, it is known for holding smaller, informal meetings between the main actors, which have often played a decisive role (Hakvåg, 2017). At first, the Commission was part of the governmental structure and reporting directly to the prime minister. However, following Putin and Medvedev's swap of presidential positions in 2014, the commission was moved from the formal control of the government and directly subjected to the President, Putin, who also replaced the deputy prime minister as head of the commission. Hence, the Military-Industrial Commission is now under Putin's direct supervision, accountable only to the president himself (Hakvåg, 2017).

To this extent, one can seemingly draw a direct line between Russian aggregate power, its offensive capabilities and Russian foreign policy. As the key executive, President Putin is the one who is largely responsible for interpreting how Russia needs to act within the global system to ensure the survival of the state and the maximisation of its influence and power. He is granted such freedom by a strong, centralised federal state structure and substantial presidential powers. This can help explain, perhaps, why Russian military spending has been prioritised above other sectors in society, as explained in section 5.1 of *Aggregate Power*; if Putin and his closest allies see defence spending as the optimal way of achieving these overall goals, they have the power to channel resources into whatever purpose they see fit, largely without having to convince local governments and the public of their ideas first.

So far, Russia's great power ambitions have been explained - how it sees itself as a unique civilisation which has no interest in integrating with the West. To this type of state, there are not, and cannot realistically be, any real opposition from other political parties (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2014). Hence, press freedom and the public sphere in general are both severely restrained (Cunningham,

2010). It is therefore difficult to find data that is not in some way related to the government or one of its many supporting elements:

*'In Russia's managed democracy, the executive creates and manipulates parties, excluding as far as possible those which it cannot control. The function of Russian political parties is apparently to legitimise the system by providing the appearance of democracy without challenging the Kremlin's exercise of power.'* (Russell, 2014, p. 2)

It is therefore difficult to assess just how far Putin's power goes and what is done in the interest of the state and what is done in the interest of a few, powerful individuals because much of Russian decision-making process is shrouded in secrecy and corruption. The state corporations through which most of the state defence orders are channelled have a legal status that makes them less transparent and ideal for hiding corruption (Hakvåg, 2017), and the majority of Russian politics seem to occur in the informal dimension, regulated by Vladimir Putin's United Russia in accordance with powerful business interests and aided by a judiciary system that operates as an extension of government rather than a check against it (Cunningham, 2010). It can therefore be argued that the key to Russian foreign policy, its strategy and its set of motivations and interests all comes from one particular person in the form of Vladimir Putin (Piontkovsky, 2015). Hence, if one seeks to further understand all aspects of the Russian state, its aggregate power, offensive capabilities and intentions, one must thus try to understand the executive position and motives of Vladimir Putin because the majority of decision making capabilities lies with him.

### *Russian foreign policy*

Vladimir Putin has so far portrayed Russia's foreign policy in defensive terms. He has previously emphasised strategic stability and the need to uphold at balance in the region. In relation to the annexation of Crimea, for example, he noted that

*'...the events provoked in Ukraine are the concentrated outcome of the notorious deterrence policy [...] we could not allow our access to the Black Sea to be significantly limited; we could not allow NATO forces to eventually come to the land of Crimea and Sevastopol, the land of*

*Russian military glory, and cardinally change the balance of forces in the Black Sea area.'*  
(Kremlin, 2014b).

The proximity developments explored in section 5.2 are therefore explained in very different terms by Vladimir Putin than they are likely to be perceived by the EU and NATO. It reflects his personal defensive stance; he sees as external threat which needs to be balanced out against. Thus, it fits a narrative that Russia has been forced into balancing, and thereby also saying the goal was not power maximisation. It is also made clear by looking at other speeches by Putin, that his focus is indeed on balancing and creating stability in the region:

*'Like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades. After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability. Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading. Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun.'* (Kremlin, 2014a).

What Putin's remarks reflect is a clear systemic approach to international relations. The system is portrayed as being in imbalance, with the key institutions merely representing tools for power maximisation for the strongest state within them, the US. It therefore is portrayed more or less as an inevitable result, a law of the nature of anarchy, that Russia cannot expect any of the Western powers to help balance the system and thus is forced to take matters into its own hands - in this case, taking actions in Ukraine. Similarly, Putin voiced concerns several times about the perceived NATO and US aggression against Russia and its negative effects on Russian national security, and how the systemic developments dictated what eventually happened in Ukraine:

*'I would like to stress that what happened in Ukraine was the climax of the negative tendencies in international affairs that had been building up for years. We have long been warning about this, and unfortunately, our predictions came true.'* (Kremlin, 2014b).

In other words, Putin argues that Russia will only use force if made to by developments in the international system. Therefore, he states that:

*'Russia's growing military strength is not a threat to anyone; we have never had any plans to use this potential for offensive, let alone aggressive goals. [...] We are not threatening anyone, not going to attack anyone or take away anything from anyone with the threat of weapons. We do not need anything. Just the opposite. I deem it necessary to emphasise (and it is very important) that Russia's growing military power is a solid guarantee of global peace as this power preserves and will preserve strategic parity and the balance of forces in the world.'* (Kremlin, 2018).

Therefore, questions can be raised as to whether or not Russian military developments is a threat to the EU and reflect offensive intentions. While it is impossible to know the degree of sincerity behind Vladimir Putin's words, it is still possible to outline a tendency throughout his speeches. The balance of power is of great concern to him personally and he mentions that the shifts currently take place are not of his doing but is actively instigated by the US and its allies in Europe. It thus represents a staunch warning that any further expansion into the Russian near-abroad, anything that can be perceived as developments which can change the balance of power in the region, will be met with force if need be. Hence, it seems more about self-preservation and guaranteeing national security than power maximisation.

### *Ambition*

There is plenty to advocate for a defensive realist approach. One can say, however, that Putin's true ambitions are, for all intents and purposes, still unknown. In light of recent events one can observe what would appear to suggest that he has both the means and the will to cause harm to neighbouring countries and disrupt the international order, should he see fit. To this extent, the defensive considerations officially expressed might not constitute the entirety of Vladimir Putin's plans for Russian militarisation or interference in the near-abroad. Some describe Putin's end goal in more offensive terms as the re-establishing of Russian dominance in Central and Eastern Europe (see Payne & Foster, 2017).

The surprised reaction of world leaders caused by the events surrounding the Crimea incident, and the fact that Putin was willing to go against current international norms and face tough sanctions and widespread opposition to achieve his goals, goes to show that neither the power of the Russian Armed Forces nor that of Putin as the national de-facto leader should be underestimated as potential security threats towards the EU. Few people, admittedly also the average Russian citizen, knows for sure what the true purpose of Putin's regime is. If Putin continuously pushes forward a military-oriented agenda, however, in spite of the rising costs for the public as well as Russia's economic elites, they might reach a breaking point. If too heavy a burden is forced upon the Russian people, the question is '*...not whether things will get worse, but how quickly.*' (Greene, 2015, p. 258). It seems clear that Putin's power to wage war, despite his powerful status as the de-facto national leader of an authoritarian Russia, is not unrestricted but has its limits. These limits are, however, for the time being unknown. He might be limited by Russian aggregate power but he nonetheless has the executive power to control a majority of the offensive capabilities that Russia already possesses. To this extent, the proximity of Russia in its current state can be seen as a threat to the EU because it so clearly considers NATO as its enemy and therefore militarises close to the borders of the EU.

### 5.5.2 China

#### *State structure*

Officially, China is a socialist market economy with a political multi-party system led by the Communist Party of China (CPC), also known as the Chinese Communist Party, which was founded in 1921. Whereas in western minded politics, a multi-party system is one in which multiple different parties have the possibility to gain government control, this can be considered of a different character in China where

*'The system means that the CPC is the only party in power in the People's Republic of China while under the precondition of accepting the leadership of the CPC, the eight other political parties participate in the discussion and management of state affairs, in cooperation with the CPC.'* (China Internet Information Center, n.d.).

Hence, even though eight other legally permitted political parties exist, the only party with the possibility to form a government is the CPC. Combined, the CPC and the eight parties are known as

‘The United Front’. However, it could be argued, that China in reality could be categorised as a one-party system or a political monopoly led by the CPC, since a precondition for the other parties to participate in state affairs is to accept the leadership of the CPC, while in reality not having the possibility to gain government control (China Internet Information Center, n.d).

The CPC has a distinct power structure: The National Party Congress (NPC) is considered the highest body within the PRC and is convened every five years in order to choose the Central Committee and decide major policies as well as elect the President of China (Albert & Xu, 2018). The Central Committee is the second highest body and consists of around 370 of the highest members of the CPC, including ministers, military officers as well as provincial leaders. The Central Committee furthermore selects the Politburo, consisting of twenty-five members, which in turn selects what is referred to as the ‘epicenter’ of the CPC’s power and leadership: the Politburo Standing Committee, which, today, consists of only seven members (Albert & Xu, 2018).

#### *Xi Jinping’s executive power*

Since 1993, the three most powerful positions in the country - General Secretary of the CPC, President of the PRC and Chairman of the Military Commission - have been assigned to the same person, referred to as a ‘three-in-one leadership’ (Buckley & Wu, 2018). Xi Jinping’s position within the CPC is thus not limited to his presidential role but covers a wide array of different duties and responsibilities, and therefore also grants him a large amount of personal power. Out of all of his executive positions, however, it is his position as General Secretary of the CPC that the majority of his political power is derived from (Buckley & Wu, 2018). The other positions supplement this power, such as his chairman of the Military Commission. His many positions of power have earned him the popular, but unofficial, description as ‘the chairman of everything’ (The Economist, 2016), which underlines the broad political power that he has.

As leader of the CPC, Xi Jinping is one of the exclusive members in the current seven-man Standing Committee. However, there seems to be little doubt that it is Xi Jinping alone who dominates the committee (Tsang, 2018). The titles of President and General Secretary of the CPC are the most politically prominent and sets Xi Jinping as the highest-ranking member of the Standing Committee. Furthermore, the title of Chairman of the Central Military Commission puts Xi Jinping as the front figure of the country’s armed forces, the People’s Liberation Army.

Since the early 1980’s, there has been tradition for the President of the PRC to serve a maximum of two five-year terms. However, as of March 2018, the Chinese constitution was amended,

bringing the possibility for the country's president to remain officially at power indefinitely (Albert & Xu, 2018). It did not take long for this thought to become a concrete decision. The proposal for removing the term limit was thus presented in the media on February 25<sup>th</sup>, that is, only a month before it being passed in the NPC (NDTV, 2018; Al Jazeera, 2018), while the same sources report that the first mentioning of the amendment was laid out by Xi Jinping at a meeting with the Politburo in September 2017. These developments and the speed with which they have been implemented arguably show that he can relatively quickly convert his power into policy changes. Hence, it is likely to expect that he would be able to translate aggregate power into state power too at a fairly quick pace.

Even though it, in theory, is the NPC which functions as the country's legislative body, speculations have been made in recent years as to whether the organisation in reality merely functions as a 'rubber stamp' for the CPC (Saich, 2015), meaning that it only votes on legislation that has already been decided elsewhere within the leadership of the CPC. While the NPC, on paper, is the most powerful institution in China, the CPC maintains tight control over it by dictating its members (Truex, 2018). When Xi Jinping was firstly elected as President of the PRC in 2013, the NPC thus voted in his favour with 2,952 for, 3 abstentions, and only 1 vote against him – speculations have however been made, if the one vote against was by Xi Jinping himself (Coonan, 2013).

Although the above is not enough to fully understand the power of Xi Jinping, there are indications to suggest that he is the undisputed key-executive in Chinese politics, even if it officially is the CPC as a whole which dictates policy creation. In the modified constitution, he is uplifted to a status that had previously only been reserved for the two most prominent historical leaders of the PRC, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping: (Constitution of the communist party of china, 2017):

*'The Communist Party of China uses Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, [...] and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as its guides to action.'* (Constitution of the communist party of china, 2017, p. 1)

It is made clear that Xi Jinping is paramount to China's current developments, and as such it is elaborated that

*‘...all Party members must keep firmly in mind the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, uphold the leadership core, and keep in alignment, and firmly uphold the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core, so as to ensure the solidarity, unity, and concerted action of the whole Party and guarantee the prompt and effective implementation of the Party’s decisions’*  
(Constitution of the communist party of china, 2017, p. 9)

This illustrates how he is now officially the de-facto leader of China. Xi Jinping sits at the core of a centralised system, and his vision for China is the foundation for its future development. This also extends to the PLA, which is to

*‘...implement Xi Jinping’s thinking on strengthening the military; strengthen the development of the People’s Liberation Army by enhancing its political loyalty, strengthening it through reform and technology [...] [and] build people’s forces that obey the Party’s command’*  
(Constitution of the communist party of china, 2017, p. 7)

Xi Jinping, with these changes, thus appears to have few to no checks and balances to his exercise of power. From what has so far been described, ‘obeying the party’s command’ is thus indirectly understood as obeying Xi Jinping’s command, since it is his vision that is to be followed. These changes have seen him described in terms such as ‘emperor of China’ (Racanelli, 2018), on par with, or even above Mao Zedong (Tsang, 2018), or by others as ‘the great commander in chief’ (Gan, 2017). These are only a few examples among many, but serve to underline the significance of his rise to power in a historical context where his power is almost unmatched by previous leaders.

Although his power is undeniable as it is a part of the modified Chinese constitution, Xi Jinping has been busy cementing his power further over the media as well as putting away more than an estimated 1.34 million officials on charges of corruption (BBC News, 2017). His anti-corruption campaign is the largest in Chinese history, but it has been viewed by some as nothing more than a ploy to put away any remnants of opposition to him (see Lim & Rajagopalan, 2014). He has created a new National Supervision Commission (NSC), which oversees all public servants exercising public power, and not just party members (BBC, 2018). The new constitution makes it clear in relation to Xi Jinping *‘...that anyone who opposes him will henceforth be deemed an enemy of the party* (Tsang,

2018, p. 20). With this move, he appears to have tightened his grip on power even further, by using the NSC as a tool to dispose of any opposition to his politics. Similarly, media censorship has made sure that any mentions of him or the CPC in a critical light has been removed from Chinese social media and other websites (see Racanelli, 2018).

### *Xi Jinping's vision*

Due to the unique nature of the current Chinese political system, it will be Xi Jinping's vision for China that is going to define its foreign policy for years to come. To this extent, Chinese society and media coverage has increasingly been focussed on the '*...personalization of power around Xi Jinping, centralization of authority, expansion of CCP control, and a turn against the West.*' (Jaros & Pan, 2018, p. 112). His idea for China's future is outlined in his speech delivered at the 19th National Congress of China, in October 2017. Herein, he speaks of what he sees as 'the Chinese Dream' and the need for China to take centre stage in world politics:

*'It will be an era for all of us, the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, to strive with one heart to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. It will be an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to mankind.'* (Xi, 2017, p. 9).

If national rejuvenation is indeed his long-term goal, one way to find out is to look at what can already be observed. The overall goals so far described have been to improve on all aspects of China's society, its economy and global status, and thereby becoming a global manufacturing leader by 2049. To achieve these goals, the CM2025 and BRI are essential projects that Xi Jinping himself has invested a lot of time and effort in, highlighting their importance for China's future. Similarly, he wishes to modernise and improve all aspects of the PLA to create a completely modernised, world class army by 2050, stating that '*...by the mid-21st century our people's armed forces have been fully transformed into world-class forces.*' (Xi, 2017, p. 48). This transition is already showing, with new generations of military equipment, fighter jets, ships and cyber-technologies. The most recent addition to these power projection efforts is China's first of a kind aircraft carrier, which is arguably sits at the pinnacle of this modernisation (Gady, 2018). Such a carrier would mark a massive step forward for Chinese regional and global power projection capabilities, even if one can deduct from Xi Jinping's speech at the 19th national congress that it is not yet world class. What recent

developments highlight, however, is that an increase in such power projection capabilities is not only part of a long-term plan and commitment of resources but are already starting to take shape.

### *Implications*

To achieve his ‘dream’ for China, Xi Jinping will have to make key executive decisions about its future behaviour. As have already been established thus far, China will need to secure imports of vital resources and technology to continue developing at the desired pace. Other states will inevitably become vary of the behaviour this will lead to. How this will translate into foreign policy choices is difficult to predict, yet there are some indications as to how it might play out. What can be observed already is the targeting of strategically important nations with weak economies through alleged ‘debt traps’ as a way to gain access to geostrategic assets. In Eastern Europe, the 16+1 framework takes a different approach but is nonetheless still a way to gain a foothold, however weak it may be, on European soil. So far, however, the only physical presence is found in Greece, but fear inevitably arise about Xi Jinping's intentions to spread his soft power further in and around the EU.

At this point, there can be no doubt about who is the key executive in China. There seems to be a clear link between Xi Jinping’s rise to power and China’s more aggressive development policies and patterns of foreign investment. Although the creation of CM2025, BRI and China’s military modernisation plans can hardly be attributed to Xi Jinping alone, they do evidently follow in his wake. As is most clearly illustrated by the recent changes to the Chinese constitution, all policies are to align with his vision for China, and the ambitious plans all came about after his rise to power. After taking the reins of the CPC in March 2013, BRI was announced only about 6 months later (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). Similarly, as his presidency continued, CM2025 and military modernisation plans both commenced in 2015 (European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, 2017; Stratfor, 2017). Although he was not yet written into the Chinese constitution at this point in time, it seems likely to conclude that he has played an integral role in the creation of such plans while he fought to tighten his grip on power. As this grip tightens further, understanding his motives and executive power will continue to be important for political decision-makers in the EU, because with this type of centralisation it should be possible for China to translate aggregate power into foreign policy choices. Similarly, a stronger and more assertive China is likely to follow as state power and relative power increases, hence it should be more ambitious, which will have implications for the global security climate.

### 5.5.3 Summarising discussion

Russia and China, on paper, have two completely different state structures. One is a democracy, the other is not. However, as have been shown, reality is a bit more blurred. Both states are highly centralised and a few, core executives decide on most matters of state policy. United Russia is democratically elected, but its tight grip on power and little real opposition begs the question if Russia is in fact merely a consolidated authoritarian state. In China, the CPC does not try to hide the fact that other parties in its so called 'multi-party system' merely play the role of supporting parties to the one party in power. What is similar for both countries, however, is that they seem to use their centralised state-structures to quickly translate aggregate power into state power and make use of their capabilities to either influence their near abroad militarily, in the case of Russia, or use economic power to strengthen soft power on a global scale, in the case of China. Since weak states would take longer translating relative power into foreign policy, the logical conclusion to make here is that Russia and China are both strong states, although they make use of their relative power in different ways.

Such difference in behaviour is closely linked to the key executives of both states - Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Of these two, Vladimir Putin has more restrictions to his exercise of power. The many sanctions against Russia, its weak economy and aggregate power in all areas but natural resources, does not come anywhere near China's in either absolute terms nor potential. While there can be no doubt that both are very powerful executives in their own right, Xi Jinping has a stronger political foundation for his power, most notably through his inclusion by name in the modified Chinese constitution. At the same time, China's booming economy allows for a less painful modernisation of the country's Armed Forces. This creates a strong foundation to build upon in the future, while it is difficult to assess what Vladimir Putin has to build upon for Russia. China appears to be more focussed on addressing its shortcomings in terms of aggregate power than Russia is, and Xi Jinping's plans are more focussed on the long term than Vladimir Putin's are, who sees rapid militarisation, a short-term approach, as more important than Russia's long-term development.

The analysis thus far illustrates the importance of accounting for executive power when trying to understand potential threats. While neorealists logic would dictate that a state would never instigate conflict unless it had a firm belief that it would be costlier for its opponent than itself, states are made up of executives who have different ideas about the relative power between them and the potential cost/benefits of conflict. Simultaneously, as state structures differ, so does their capacity for war; while weak states, for example, take long to translate relative power into changes in foreign policy,

strong states can do so more easily. Thus, in this case with China and Russia, they will likely act differently from weak states, even if they share the same overall goals.

## 6.0 Threat-perspective of the EU

When the five theoretical variables are combined it is possible to analyse Russia and China in broad terms towards the EU and relate this to the systemic perspective. This chapter will thus try to analyse both nations from an EU perspective based on the accumulated knowledge from previous chapters of analysis.

### 6.1 EU and Russia

Thus far there has been much cause for concern in Europe due to the recent behaviour of Russia in its proximity. Russia has good power projection capabilities when it comes to potential military operations on European soil. Coupled with its increasingly aggressive behaviour against neighbouring states as its Armed Forces have modernised is inevitably seen as a threat by many, and as such has strained the relationship between Russia and the EU. With its military exercises coming close to EU and NATO territory, neo-realist logic dictates that the EU should be worried and keep a close eye on future developments in Russian foreign policy and behaviour. There is no clear elements of stopping power between Russia and the EU, and hence an increased military presence by NATO near Russian borders seems logical from a European perspective.

What has been explored so far highlights, however, that Russia has similar concerns to that of the EU, namely that NATO's borders have come much closer to Russian territory in recent years. Thus, the EU and NATO enlargement seems to have created a regional security dilemma. As NATO enhances its military presence in or close to Eastern Europe, so does Russia, seemingly confirming the notion shared by Kenneth Waltz and many other realists, that when one state is enhancing its security measures, other states are likely to respond by adopting similar measures, which could create tensions and conflict. The geographical area which is almost unanimously seen as having the greatest potential for any direct confrontation between Russia and NATO is the Baltic states, particularly Estonia and Latvia, which are, as explored in the section of Proximate Power (see section 5.2), the easiest targets for Russian aggression and the hardest to defend for NATO. They are also among only three NATO members whose borders connect to Russia directly (Norway being the third). This seemingly intensifies proximity concerns for both parties because it means that there is, theoretically, no stopping power against Russian aggression against NATO, and vice versa. Because neither party is certain about the intentions of the other, there is an ever-present threat of violence, and all parties must be prepared to use force if necessary.

As explained in the chapter Offensive Capabilities, the majority of Russian offensive capabilities are placed in its Western region, in close proximity to Europe. This can be seen as a threat to the EU, even if Russia's Armed Forces do not yet possess the same technological capacity as their European and NATO counterparts. Russia's large number of nuclear weapons balances the account to some degree, although it is difficult to tell whether Vladimir Putin would ever deploy these directly in any conflict. What Russian behaviour has shown, and to that extent the pattern that one can largely analyse its offensive capabilities based upon, is that it has a military of sufficient strength to obtain its geopolitical objectives in its near abroad, which it both can and has used effectively. Most prominently, this was highlighted in the case of Ukraine, as was analysed in sections 5.2 and 5.4, which was seen as vital for Russian national security in light of its balancing efforts in the region. The campaign made it clear that Russia can and will defend its national interest if it feels threatened by the NATO and the EU. That Russia did not react earlier could therefore be interpreted as NATO and the EU having reached or gone beyond Russia's national security threshold. As is the case with unipolarity - which has until recently characterised the European security climate - other, weaker states will eventually start being concerned about the behaviour of the hegemon. In this case, one can interpret NATO and EU enlargements, representing the regional security hegemon in Europe, as having forced Russia to act, which is also to a large degree what Vladimir Putin himself stated in his speech following the annexation of Crimea; in other words, that the EU and NATO's provoked Russia into an act of balancing (as analysed in section 5.5.1) It is, however, impossible to tell for sure whether this is merely an excuse for power maximisation.

As the EU has expanded East, Russia appears to behave more aggressively. Evidence has so far suggested that Russia seeks to return to its former status as a regional hegemon within Europe. This seems to be the 'positional picture' that Vladimir Putin has of Russia, that of a nation belonging to Europe's great powers. There seems to be little interest in becoming a global superpower, although what has been explored herein is not enough to warrant any final conclusion on this subject. What can be observed, however, is that on basis of Russian aspirations of regional dominance, its offensive actions have all taken place within its historical sphere of influence. It therefore seems inevitable that a clash of interest will occur between the EU and Russia because both are stakeholders in the region and both see the other as a threat. Russia will seek to obtain more influence the region, which would come at the cost of lost EU influence. So far, of course, Russia has not acted offensively against any member states of either the EU or NATO, but it has stated that NATO, and the EU defence framework

by extension, is a threat to Russian national security and that it must be kept away from the near-abroad (see section 5.4.1)

Therefore, it does not ease the mind of European observers when the American president, Donald Trump has recently threatened to pull US support from NATO states if they cannot live up to the preferred standard of 2% of national GDP to be spent on defence (see Dempsey, 2016). If Russia is driven only by self-interest and hard calculations of relative power, such statements might create doubt about the willingness of NATO as a whole to contribute to the security of Eastern Europe, particularly the Baltic states. This is worrisome, considering Russia mainly appears to fear the offensive capabilities of NATO, and not the EU.

Russia's aggressive behaviour is arguably to be understood as coming from a position of relative weakness. Compared to the EU, its population is small; recent numbers put the combined population of the European Union at 511.81 million, sitting at a growth rate of 0,35% in 2016 (Statista, 2018b). Russia, with its 143 million people, has a population which not only appears to be shrinking (see figure 1), but which is also less than one-third of the EU's. The EU therefore has substantially more aggregate power in terms of potential available manpower. Similarly, the Russian economy is struggling through its militarisation in light of international sanctions. In 2016, the combined GDP of the EU was more than 12 times larger than that of Russia - 16,49 trillion dollars (World Bank, 2018b), compared to Russia's 1,28 trillion (Statista, 2018c). This is combined with a stronger industry and technological sector. In terms of aggregate power, the EU thus pulls ahead of Russia in most regards. It does, however, become more difficult to analyse when assessing military power. The EU is not a fully-fledged defence union; most of the cooperation revolves around individual contributions to the common defence of the Union, but there is no standing army for the EU as a whole. It is therefore a good idea to take into account the most powerful nations within the EU. These are by most accounts, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. These three have historically been the military engine of the EU if one will, those who have consistently been pushing for defence cooperation (See Dyson, 2008). However, with the UK leaving the EU, France and Germany are arguably the two main powers. It is therefore noteworthy that these two alone have a combined higher defence spending than Russia (Daily Star, 2018). At the same time, European defence cooperation still largely integrates with NATO, and hence the United States is still a security provider for the EU. As long as this is the case, the United States will also be part of any calculations Russia might make about the military strength of the EU. In these calculation, Russia's relative power is no match for the combined strength of NATO, whose military spending was 900 billion dollars in

2017, which accounted for 52 per cent of world spending (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018). Russian executives therefore theoretically have less aggregate power that it can extract for any offensive purposes than the EU.

### *Combining variables*

As has been stated earlier, however, there are many different variables which come together to form an overall level of threat. As a result of the hostilities between Russia and the EU, the Russian energy supply is one area where the EU appears less powerful. While sanctions do weaken the relative power of Russia, the EU is still dependent on Russian energy. Although some initiatives have been considered to minimise European dependence on foreign energy, the Russian ‘energy weapon’ or ‘petro power’ is still a capability with a potential for causing harm to Europe, which it has done before (see section 5.2.1 and 5.2.3). Should the relationship between the EU and Russia deteriorate further, to the point of conflict, Russia might at best increase the price on energy, and at worst turn off the energy supply completely. The threat in this case lies perhaps not only in Russia’s possession of such ‘weapon’, but also depends on how the EU acts against Russia. It can therefore be characterised as a cause and effect relationship. What it illustrates is that the EU cannot realistically engage in an approach of complete containment of Russia because it still needs Russian energy for the time being. It therefore has both a systemic as well as a causal explanation. Actions taken by the EU will therefore be partly responsible for how Russia will make use of its relative power in the future. If the EU appears aggressive, Russia is likely to adopt similar aggressive countermeasures, and vice versa.

It appears that proximity concerns are by far the most prevalent when it comes to exploring a potential Russian threat in an EU context. Many countries in Russia’s near-abroad can be a source of conflict with Russia. Of course, the Baltic states are part of most of these calculations, but there are other sources that can be identified from what has been explored so far. It seems especially relevant to consider the Arctic region here. Sweden and Finland are two European Arctic powers who have yet to join NATO, and both are in the Russian proximity. Both of these nations have already explored the possibility of joining NATO, although nothing has yet materialised; for example, they have participated in several NATO military exercises, and NATO appears to be keen on their inclusion because it could make the potential defence of the Baltic states easier, as well as simplifying a number of other issues related to a Russia which is seen as being led by an unpredictable Vladimir Putin (see NATO Review, n.d.). The Nordic countries, in general, have been increasingly more worried about Russia’s behaviour due to its exercises as well as its air incursions into Nordic territory (Milne, 2017),

hence the idea of either Finland or Sweden joining NATO in the near future might not be a far fetched idea. Should these two nations join NATO, though, Russia would likely see it as an offensive move because it shares borders with Finland. Similarly, Swedish waters are right next to Russia's Kaliningrad enclave, which theoretically opens it up to NATO aggression. Executive power - the decision of Swedish and Finnish politicians to either join NATO or not - can therefore potentially cause Russia to act aggressively.

Finding out whether or not Russia is in fact unpredictable, as suggested by NATO review (n.d.), is most realistically to be done by observing what Vladimir Putin has said, in relation to what Russia has done. Putin has made clear on several occasions that NATO and the EU should back off (see section 5.4). It should therefore come as no surprise that Russia has gone to great lengths trying to minimise EU and NATO influence in its near-abroad. While Russia is objectively weaker than the EU and NATO measured in raw aggregate power and offensive capabilities, as has been discussed earlier, it is still a strong state which is willing to go against the global order to achieve its goals. Russia's, and thus Vladimir Putin's, actions can be analysed using applying two different theoretical logics.

An offensive logic would explain Russian intentions as a power-hungry state which wishes to achieve regional hegemony, maximising power at the cost of its neighbours, and this way ensuring its own security. It therefore wants to gain ground on NATO, so to speak, waiting for an opportunity for taking control - directly or indirectly - of some of the members of NATO, such as the Baltic states. Power, in this scenario, is a tool to achieve security for Russia.

A defensive logic would explain NATO and the EU as regional threats to the balance of power and thereby a threat to Russia's position within the system. In order to maintain its position, it is thus forced to balance internally by making sure its Armed Forces are on par with its adversaries by pushing for modernisation, even at a great cost to its economy. This could be seen in relation to the Crimea annexation, for example, where Vladimir Putin himself noted how Russia had more or less been forced to act because Crimea could not be allowed to fall into the hands of NATO or the EU because it would drastically alter the balance of power in the Black Sea region (see section 5.4).

No matter which of the two logics one applies, it seems clear that Russia's behaviour is shaped by systemic factors to a large degree. Its actions suggest that these systemic concerns are influencing the decisions made by the de-facto leader of Russia, Vladimir Putin; after all, it is him who will ultimately decide whether Russia will follow an offensive or defensive approach to its foreign policy choices. So far, Russian statements have had a defensive narrative, but it is impossible to know how

closely related to Russian intentions these really are because of the inherent uncertainty towards the motives of states that any neorealist has. What can almost certainly be concluded from this analysis, however, is that (1) Russia will continue to be interested in its near abroad and attempt to spread its influence in this area, (2) It will continue to behave aggressively in the light of further NATO and EU expansion, and (3) It seems unlikely that it will seek to confront the EU or NATO, in their current state, directly unless explicitly under threat because its relative power is not realistically enough to threaten these by conventional means.

## 6.2 EU and China

This thesis has shown that EU-China relations do not yet carry any distinct military implications for either side. So far, China is still limited by the stopping power of water, with no military bases in the EU's proximity. What so far constitutes the main concern is the lack of transparency of China's plans for Europe. One of the most difficult aspects to analyse is the planned sea route to China, with its developments lacking transparency. One of these developments, as noted in the Proximate Power chapter, is taking place in the Greek port of Piraeus. It seems too farfetched to argue that a Chinese militarisation could ever realistically take place here because Greece is a member of NATO. However, it does represent a Chinese foothold on the European continent which could serve as a starting point for further economic and political developments into Europe, such as the 16+1 framework. What can be analysed right now, then, is China's plans for developments in the EU and/or its partner countries.

China is already politically and economically active both within the EU as well as a number of countries in its proximity. So far, the developments seem to reflect neoclassical realist ideas that China's ambition should increase as a result of its increase in relative power. From what has so far been presented, then, it would be counter-intuitive to assume that China's presence in Europe would diminish in the future. Chinese soft power is already having an effect within the EU, most prominently seen in the 16+1 framework, which many EU leaders have already expressed their suspicions about (Heide, Hoppe, Scheuer & Stratmann, 2018). Many of these fears have arguably been amplified by China's decision to target the weaker and perhaps more easily manipulated states, exploiting the current political and economic situations herein to potentially create chaos within the EU itself. While the current developments might appear relatively harmless, they could potentially have a divisive effect on Europe, symbolised best perhaps by China's alleged global plans for 'divide and rule' as has been explored in section 5.4.2. China's exclusion of Western European nations shows that China

has little interest in dealing with the EU as a whole, something which has been illustrated by its rejection to acknowledge the one-Europe policy on the political and economic grounds that they see the EU as a regional organisation composed of sovereign states and not a sovereign country in itself (see Walsh, 2018).

The potential of its soft-power approach has already been illustrated by objections by some EU nations to criticise China's actions in areas such as the South China Sea as well as the actions of the country overall (see section 5.4.2). Spreading its influence in Europe could therefore be a way for China to improve the global environment for its power projection by persuading nations to support Chinese hard power and foreign policies. Thus, it to a large degree reflects an opportunity for power maximisation which could be achieved by using its soft power to either dominate or weaken global and regional institutions and other actors, such as the EU. No matter if the first or the latter could be achieved in an EU context or not, China would still theoretically come out on top since the EU's relative power would be weakened either way. This fits well with the notion that states are always better off with more rather than less power. It can be a way for China to obtain future guarantees for its interests in Europe, because it would need the support of EU nations to complete its BRI. No matter how one puts it, it can only be seen as provocative by the EU since the EU will be weakened if it is allowed to happen on Chinese terms.

China is increasingly becoming a global actor. While its foreign policy choices do not yet project hard power, it is economically and politically gaining more influence and power. By analysing and accounting for its changes in aggregate power and its militarisation, it seems realistic to argue that China has a very real potential for becoming militarily stronger than the EU at some point. It has been established that the aggregate power is there for future developments of power projection, which is supported by Xi Jinping's executive power. China has a large amount of untapped potential. With its 1.4 billion people, it is almost 3 times the size of the EU's 511 million. Only a few million of its population is currently employed by its Armed Forces, which could realistically be set substantially higher in the future. This has not yet happened, it seems, and thus other factors might be more important to analyse in the short term. Similarly, it has a large economy - roughly 11 trillion in 2016 (World Bank, 2018a), which even at an all-time low growth rate of 6,7% in 2016 is growing at a much faster pace than the EU's roughly 2% in the same year (Statista, 2018b). For the time being, the combined economy of the EU is larger. However, China is one nation while the EU is made up of a number of countries with different economic situations. Thus, Chinese executives would more

easily be able to extract from its economy to increase state power than the EU would. This will be briefly discussed at the end of the analysis.

### *Executive plans*

Xi Jinping's ambitious plans for Chinese development is to make China a highly competitive nation and a global leader in virtually every aspect imaginable. This has implications for the EU because China will be a global competitor for both money and resources. It also begs the question of how much military power China can and will deploy around the globe to safeguard such growing interests abroad. It is hard to tell at this point in time how many of Xi Jinping's plans pose a threat to the EU. However, the whole basis of discussions about rising powers is that their rise will imply the fall or weakening of current powers, one of which the EU arguably is in many areas.

Even when accounting for what has so far been analysed, it is still difficult to make an exact estimate of a Chinese threat to the EU. China might not necessarily seek expansion into the EU, but it nonetheless appears to be developing a global power projection platform by increasing its offensive capabilities, political and economic power. All of these things can be seen as a potential threat. What makes a compelling case in terms of arguing for an offensive Chinese approach to foreign politics is the amount of doubt and obscurity surrounding China's plans, such as the BRI. The geo-strategic dimension clearly comes to mind here, such as its choice to focus on nations that can improve China's capabilities going forward. Xi Jinping clearly states that China does not want to expand and does not seek to increase its power at the expense of others (see section 5.4.2) Its 'debt traps' and increasing militarisation paints a different systemic picture, however. From this perspective, one can argue that the BRI can be seen merely as a tool for power maximisation, a way for China to obtain the resources it needs to fuel its development towards being the most powerful state in the system.

Hence, what has so far been analysed points in the direction of a self-help approach. Self-help is, of course, one of the most obvious ways for China to achieve prosperity and obtain the resources it needs to achieve the global dominance its 2049 plan emphasises. It is unlikely that it would ever have spent the massive amounts of money that it did out of generosity, but more likely that it would have made calculations as to what would further its own best interest. Short term, this would be economic growth to fuel its CM2025 plan, while the long-term plan would be an increase of offensive- and power projection capabilities. The ultimate goal here would be regional or global hegemonic status - the former perhaps most realistic - ultimately ensuring both China's survival in the long run and a place as a global superpower. One could ask if all of this instead constitutes a

defensive approach; however, it seems that the way in which China attempts to gain power at the expense of other nations' reflects an offensive approach. A BRI built and run solely on Chinese terms would shift the balance of power substantially in China's favour in relation to most countries along the route, rather than balance out against any developments made in the EU or by other major powers. This is of course up for debate, but from what has so far been explored, it makes a more compelling case towards power maximisation than of anything resembling a balancing effort. Therefore, one can say that it is a combination of the variables that makes China look increasingly like a threat to the EU, seen from a systemic perspective. By analysing all of the variables it is shown that (1) China has the aggregate power to increase its offensive- and power projection capabilities, (2) It also uses its aggregate power to increase its proximate power and political power towards the EU, (3) It has an executive power structure which enables it to make use of these increased power capabilities, should it have the offensive intentions to do so. However, at the moment there is little evidence to suggest that China has any offensive intentions towards the EU, but it is nonetheless an important aspect to consider going forward.

### 6.3 Executive similarities

What has been observed in this thesis is that Russia and China have many common characteristics in terms of executive power. Both are strong, centralised states that are focussed on modernisation of its Armed Forces. It is difficult to compare these states to the EU in terms of power, since the EU is a decentralised entity, which would theoretically make it a weak state if it was categorised as a sovereign nation in its own right. It is unlikely that an EU army would be able to react to threats as fast and effectively as strong centralised states such as Russia and China, which in itself might pose a threat to the EU if it was to enter into a conflict with either of the two. The complex and relatively slow decision-making process in the EU means that there is a long way between making a political decision and its execution.

The question is therefore whether the EU would be able to operate as effectively in conflicts. This is of course one of the major points for analysis of executive power; states vary in their ability to extract and mobilise resources from domestic society because of unit-level variables. In this case, the primary unit-level variable for Russia and China is arguably their state-structure, which allows for a level of executive power that politicians within the EU do not have.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This thesis has explored Russia and China as potential systemic threats to the EU. What has been explored is how Russia and China are two strong states with similar power structures and strong executives in the shape of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, respectively. Both nations have large and powerful armies that have been undergoing a long process of modernisation in recent years. Similarly, they both focus on quality rather than quantity, emphasising technological development as an essential component towards maximising their relative power. Such developments have naturally caught the attention of other states in the system, and neorealist logic dictates that the EU should keep a close eye on future developments in their foreign policy and behaviour.

Russia has less aggregate power than the EU and China, but its behaviour is more aggressive, particularly in its near-abroad. If one was to look only at how it acts and expresses itself, the EU should perceive it as having offensive intentions. However, what was found by looking more closely and combining several different variables was that there is also a clearly expressed defensive dimension to Russia's behaviour. The security threats in Eastern Europe are going both ways, and it has been shown how a security dilemma is happening as both sides see the other as a potential aggressor. This was highlighted from a Russian perspective by Vladimir Putin in relation to the annexation of Crimea, which was portrayed as a Russian balancing move rather than power maximisation. Similarly, there seems to be no plans for European domination, but rather the purpose of militarisation is portrayed as having been forced upon the Russian people due to the changes in the international system which has dictated Russian efforts at restoring a balance. Russia's developments have therefore been set in motion even at a time where Russian aggregate power, in terms of its economy, is low. This highlights a short-term approach by the Russian key executive, Vladimir Putin. Hence, the systemic approach this thesis has employed has shown that the security dilemma in Eastern Europe is where the most pressing issue in EU-Russia relations seems to be.

In the case of China, there is plenty of aggregate power to fuel the plans of an ambitious national leader, Xi Jinping. Having been written into the Chinese constitution, his vision is now what largely guides Chinese foreign policy. It was found that, at first glance, China does not appear aggressive towards the EU in the same way as Russia does. However, as explored throughout the thesis, the obscurity of China's development plans, symbolised by BRI and the 16+1 framework, could be a cause for concern for the EU. China's has gradually been moving closer to the EU by developing a number of naval bases and offensive capabilities which could allow for improved Chinese power projection in and around Europe, but it does not appear to have any offensive

intentions towards Europe. Xi Jinping and other officials have not expressed a desire to expand Chinese power abroad; their approach is long-term political and economic developments. What is a cause for concern, though, is how Chinese capabilities is increasing at a pace that is likely going to make it more powerful than the EU in the future. This power has already been shown in cases where China managed to divide opinion within the EU, but as of now is more of a political tool rather than offensive capabilities.

By using a theoretical framework based on neorealist ideas supplemented by neoclassical realism, the thesis has shown that many of Russia and China's developments can be explained in systemic terms. The five variables, the stepping stones of the analysis, serve to outline the threats posed by Russia and China to the EU as a whole. The results of the thesis have therefore been two-fold. First, it has accounted for Russia and China in relation to the five variables. Secondly it has served as a test of a new theoretical framework combining Walt's four original neorealist variables with a neoclassical realist variable in the shape of Executive Power. What the variables combined has allowed this thesis to do is to account for Russia and China's behaviour in the international system as well as the internal dimensions of their power, without rendering the systemic perspective invalid or irrelevant. Executive power was shown to be guided by systemic constraints and incentives, and as such complements the other four variables well. While it has proven to be successful in outlining threats in broad terms, however, there is still a need for researchers to look further into the subject from within the EU - that is, how the EU can and is dealing with threats.

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