

Eurasia Rising: The Partnership that Changes the World | Yevgeny Pavlov

China and Russia describe their partnership as “better than an alliance”—but what does that mean in practice? Russian journalist Yevgeny Pavlov joins Pascal Lottaz from Beijing to examine the interests driving their cooperation, China’s cautious diplomacy, and the limits of support for partners such as Iran. They also discuss Russia–Japan tensions, Ukraine peace talks, Nord Stream, and Europe’s deepening strategic crisis. As Washington shifts its priorities, the conversation explores how Moscow and Beijing navigate an increasingly unstable international order. Links: Yevgeny Pavlov’s English-language Substack: https://substack.com/@beetureen?r=6mzip&utm_medium=ios&utm_source=stories&shareImageVariant=image

Opinion Mate on Telegram: <https://t.me/opinionmate> The Guardian report on the Nord Stream suspect and film consultant: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/aug/20/man-arrested-nord-stream-volodymyr-zhuravlev-consultant-film-sean-penn-snake-island>

Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com>

Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop>

Timestamps: 00:00 Meet Yevgeny Pavlov: A Russian journalist in Beijing 04:28 China and Russia: Better than an alliance 13:54 Russia–Japan tensions and the WWII monument 21:40 Ukraine peace talks and Europe’s war rhetoric 32:41 Iran and the limits of Chinese and Russian support 42:17 Trump, Ukraine and Europe’s strategic crisis 48:00 Nord Stream and Europe’s energy dilemma 51:08 US overstretch, China’s concerns and the road ahead

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, today for the first time with Yevgeny Pavlov, a Russian journalist in Beijing, China. Yevgeny, welcome.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Thank you, Oskar. Glad to be here.

#Pascal

Glad having you. It’s the first time I can speak to a Russian in China who’s also covering Russian–Chinese politics and can actually then explain all of that to an English-speaking audience. So I really want to pick your brain on this one. But let’s maybe start a little bit with you. Can you give us, very briefly, your background and how it came that you ended up in Beijing for the last already 10 years, you told me?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

It's been the last three years, but I've been coming and going back. Yeah, but consecutively, like three years, I've been working here as a correspondent with one of the major Russian international broadcasting brands. Overall, my educational and research background is in Oriental studies. So China kind of has been a part of my life for the last decade, 15 years almost. So I did study Chinese language, and so obviously it's kind of natural that I ended up in China, at least for a period of time. Professionally speaking, I've been mostly working in the media, in the Russian media, and mostly in this very niche field of international broadcasting. So here, yeah, working with a media brand which broadcasts in Chinese. So that doesn't mean that I always write my own stuff in Chinese, but it does require me to communicate with people a lot. And of course, it's been a very interesting experience staying in China during this very shaky and unstable period in international politics.

#Pascal

So you're mostly covering, at the moment, kind of—are you covering Russian topics for a Chinese-speaking audience, or are you covering, like, international events for a Chinese-speaking audience? What is the focus?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, we function as an international news agency. And so here, basically, my objective is—I work here. We do cover a lot of topics related to Russia and Russo-Chinese relations, but my job basically requires me to go wherever something interesting is going on. So forums, exhibitions, expert meetings, wherever I can find myself useful and be able to talk to people, take some comments, interviews, and maybe film some interesting videos. So it's very versatile. I've been in very different situations, different angles, which makes me probably not a very deep expert in one particular field, but I've seen a lot of different things and covered a lot of different topics.

#Pascal

So what is currently going on, actually, in Russian-Chinese relations? I mean, of course, we've just had the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting a week or 10 days ago, and that was not a purely bilateral affair, of course, since there are 10 countries, but you must have covered that. What else is going on?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, pretty much everything is stable. I wouldn't say we are at the moment at some point where something is changing. I think it's a steady development of the relationship, which I think is actually rather healthy because it stands on very pragmatic foundations. And so there is no rush. The two sides, they like to talk about trade a lot, like the trade turnover and how we're progressing on that front. But obviously, the economic relationship is very important. It's very strategic. And there are

obviously a lot of other things that the heads of state no doubt discuss. The framework of SCO is quite important as this anchor of stability in Eurasia, where China and Russia play the leading, the key role, although it's about equality, obviously, in the organization.

So I would say it's steady. I wouldn't say that there is anything important going on that I could single out, because it's multi-track and things are basically staying steady. Now, there's been some discussion about the possible breakthrough with this energy project, Power of Siberia 2, but as far as I understand, the negotiations still continue. We still haven't heard any big announcements, although the Russian president implied that something is maybe coming soon. So we probably could look at that and see what happens. How do you view this, that on the one hand the

#Pascal

Western media has now, for the last four years, been saying that Russia has become a junior partner of the Chinese, and the Chinese are calling the shots. And, you know, if it wasn't for China, then Russia would already have collapsed like five times over. At the same time, the Russian-Chinese relationship did, in fact, grow closer. And the kind of exports and imports on both sides are flourishing. The oil that goes to China, I think, has significantly increased. So has it with India. But where do you see this partnership going? And do you see it as a partnership? Because a couple of other analysts, also the ones that I respect very much, talk about an alliance in effect. How do you frame the bilateral relationship at the moment? Well, it's a very good question.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

With regard to what the Western media writes, well, it's obvious that they would say such things because, well, they're not particularly friendly to either side, and so they want to present it as this axis of evil or whatever. It is quite natural that the trade relationship is developing faster now. So the whole idea of Russia engaging more actively economically with Asia, it's not a new idea anymore. So it is no wonder that the economic engagement intensified in the last years because obviously Russia lost some contacts and some lanes of cooperation with other countries, and obviously the economic restrictions. But the trend was already there, with China becoming a dominant industrial manufacturing power, Russia being one of the major exporters of natural resources and energy in particular.

So we can only say that there was an intensification of this relationship due to these economic restrictions that were imposed on Russia. On the other hand, with regard to China supporting Russia, or whatever, that Russia would collapse, well, again, I think it's a ridiculous point. And there is no charity in this relationship. So everything is traded, everything is discussed. I see absolutely no evidence of any support in this sense. So it's mutually beneficial in all senses. With regard to what is it—is it an alliance or is it a partnership? Well, I think it's a strategic partnership, as it is being defined. I think this is the case when official rhetoric actually reflects what is going on.

If you look at what the diplomats on both sides stress, they always stress that the two sides, they do not support bloc mentality, and that this is basically what we have here. It's so special. It is better than an alliance. And so the idea is, we have each other's trust, we have each other's backs, but we don't have to really interfere with what we do on the international stage. So there is trust, but it is not a military alliance, which some people imply. And so each side wants to leave itself some space. But on the other hand, I also talked to different experts, including some very good Russian experts on China, who say that, well, in fact, of course, this relationship is very strategic and it can grow into an alliance at some point. But so far, the two sides, they still call it a partnership.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

See you there.

#Pascal

Yeah, I think this is a very good point, and not one that's just semantics, right? Calling it a partnership or calling it an alliance. It also helps us to clarify a little bit how it compares to what the West is doing, you know, NATO. And since you have so many NATO countries in Europe that now show the willingness to completely give up their economies, give up their interests, give up their populations, send their populations into a slaughterfield in Ukraine, right? Since that is their definition of what a good partnership looks like, they then go and look down on what others have.

But what you're saying is that China and Russia, they very much put their interests center, but then they cooperate wherever it makes sense, which is a different understanding of how cooperation works. But maybe if you compare it, especially this military angle, if you compare the Russian-Chinese relationship with the Russian-North Korean relationship, it has developed somehow in a different way, right? North Korea actually sent troops, and there are military exercises together, even in and around Ukraine. With China, it's a different ballgame, isn't it?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, it is, absolutely. I mean, China doesn't want to be directly involved. They stress their neutral status, that they are not involved in any of this, in any confrontation. They, of course—the relationship with the West is very important to them economically, because China does rely a lot on their exports. I mean, if you look at net export figures, so including what they imported, you know, that being subtracted, it's not that much in the GDP growth. But actually, if you look at the gross, it

is very important. So the European market, the American market—China has become very much intertwined in the global economy. So, of course, they don't want any unnecessary complications, or they don't want that to happen faster than it happens naturally. Well, North Korea—well, basically there's nothing new in there, but North Korea basically resumed the treaty that it used to have with Russia. It also, for North Korea, it's not just about the military. It's a Soviet treaty, you mean?

#Pascal

Sorry, there was a treaty between the Soviet Union and North Korea for mutual—not just cooperation, but military assistance, right? So you're thinking of that continuation? Yes.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, that's what the officials mentioned, that it's not really something new. We're just going back to what we had. And then, again, for North Korea, the angle is also economic, because North Korea has historically found itself in a very isolated situation. And so this is, of course, a very nice opportunity for them to get some additional activity. And, well, it does seem—I have seen a bunch of reports that say that the economic situation in North Korea has been improving quite a lot recently. So, of course, North Korea does benefit from this relationship with Russia. It does benefit from the relationship with China, and they want to keep this going.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, this makes very good sense. It's also a really interesting point that, you know, since North Korea has been so much ostracized over the last 30 years and so much isolated, that they basically, like, going and practicing with Russia and actually pissing off the West even more doesn't really matter to them at all, right? It's like all—uh, yeah, all bets are off when it comes to North Korea and Russian relations. But China actually—and some Chinese scholars that I talked to actually also make that point—you know, the Chinese, they do try to balance these different interests that they have, also, for instance, with Iran, trying to support it as much as they can, but they do not want to alienate the Gulf states either, because they have a good relationship with them too. So China is in a bit more of an actually neutral position in terms of trying to balance their different relationships. And that, you would say, is also true toward Russia, which is an important partner, but not the only linchpin of their foreign relations thinking.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Yes, exactly. I think that, yeah, you're right that North Koreans, they kind of have nothing to lose here. But if anything, them engaging more actively with Russia, they balance against maybe too much of a dependency on China. So it's kind of also a balancing act for North Korea. With regard to

China, yes, I totally agree. Since I think, well, really, the core of Chinese politics, it's pragmatism. So they see Russia—the relationship with Russia has a very high strategic importance. But of course, economically speaking, their priorities, they lie in different directions.

Of course, the Western markets are very important for their exports. Russia is important for energy, but they try to really balance everything. And now it kind of pays off because you see the situation in the Middle East, how it develops. So having some energy coming from Russia is actually quite good in such a situation. So yeah, of course, China finds itself in a more complicated position. But basically, we are talking about everybody trying to engage with everybody, have stable relationships in this region. So yeah, there's nothing particularly fishy about it. It's just normal realpolitik.

#Pascal

Realpolitik. Yeah. And maybe this is a very, very current topic, so I don't know if you had time to actually look it up. But, you know, Russia actually unveiling a statue where Russian soldiers are defeating basically the Japanese Empire and shattering the Japanese emblem—that stirred up a lot of emotions over here in Japan, where I'm back at now. That was, I believe, on Saturday, Friday or Saturday. Did you see that one at all? And how do you—what's your assessment of Russian-Japanese relations at the moment? They're not going particularly well, are they?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, actually, I've been at the opening of the monument. It's funny that you mention that. I've just been to Khabarovsk.

#Pascal

I just got back from Khabarovsk.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Yeah, so it's a very imposing monument. It's very tall. It's like 15 meters tall. The first thing I actually noticed was the flower that is getting cracked by the rifle. I did hear about the Japanese reaction actually from the local media because I was so busy that I didn't read the news, but the local reporters told me. Yeah, it's very telling. I can see where this reaction comes from. But the Japanese side did act in a rather hostile way towards Russia. I think it's interesting that the current prime minister is often mentioned as the disciple of the former prime minister, Shinzo Abe, who really, really tried to have a working relationship with Russia.

And here we see, basically, I think, the Japanese politicians exploiting these issues of contradictions. You know, like, from their perspective, they have a territorial dispute with Russia. So I think they're just rallying support this way, like, look, we have an enemy. I think that in Russia, there are no such

intense feelings about Japan, not at all. The Russians don't care. Some people do mention, of course, World War II, and this is in the memory of the Russian people. But overall, I think the image of Japan has been, likely, most of all about Japanese culture, very intense economic trade relations between Japan and especially the Russian Far Eastern regions. So if you go to the Russian Far East, you still see a lot of Japanese cars, for example.

So this has been like an omnipresent thing. But this relationship did also gradually slow down, sort of, because, again, Japan, from the manufacturing perspective, kind of has been slowing down. So these basic factors of this cooperation, it did mean that Russia would not increase its exports to Japan very much because Japan is basically in a stagnant or very slow-growth situation, aging population, et cetera. So the conditions for growth, economically speaking, they were not there. I think the relationship was already very intense, but then with this situation, like, Japan absolutely didn't have to act the way they did, but kind of citing, like, loyalty to the United States and their course, they did what they did.

They basically cut off a lot of these economic links with Russia, which, by the way, the South Koreans, they weren't that radical in that direction. They left a lot of doors slightly open. And from what I know, they really don't want to lose this Russian market. The Japanese, they went at it in a way more radical mode. So honestly, I think it's a situation where the two sides don't have much to lose. And unfortunately, like, in Russia, I don't see any of these contradictions with Japan being used politically. I think that this particular monument was... I don't think it was meant to say anything or to provoke the Japanese, honestly. But in Japan, you do see them exploiting these contradictions that they have with Russia from their perspective for political goals.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, one of the issues here, and I just want to mention that, is that the emblem that the rifle crushes is not actually the usual wartime emblem of Japan, which is the Hinomaru, you know, the red ball with the rays going out. That's the usual one that people use in order to symbolize Japanese imperialism and nationalism. But the emblem, the flower, is actually the personal emblem of the emperor. And the emperor, of course, was part and parcel of the war, yes, but this kind of holds a whole different status inside Japan.

And on the other hand, you know, since I wrote my dissertation about the Second World War in Japan, I am very aware of just how much the Japanese believed that the treaty that they had with Russia, the neutrality treaty, would hold for one more year. It was supposed to go into a fifth year, and they really believed in it. They really, really, really did. It was at the core of the only kind of foreign policy strategy they still had back in 1945. And when the Russians declared war on the day the second atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki, on the 8th or 9th of August, they were actually super shocked.

So this whole issue of Japan and Russia during the, or Japan and the Soviet Union during the Second World War is something that, for historical reasons and current reasons, is something that just is very ambivalent to the Japanese. I was wondering whether or not it wouldn't be possible to actually have better relations with Russia because, on the one hand, the Japanese never exported weapons to Ukraine. They also didn't completely eradicate the Sakhalin project, you know, the joint oil and gas project. But at the moment, it seems relations are rather going down, although my assessment would be that it's not as bad as the relationship with the European states. If you compare it to that one, where would you put it?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

I certainly agree with you. As far as Japan is concerned, I've met a lot of Japanese, including some people in business that went to Russia. And it's kind of like with Germany. So you have a lot of people that engage directly, that go to your country, and they're nice and they're adequate. But then it's a typical situation with both Germany and Japan that you have the economic circles, business people, maybe some academics that are totally reasonable, and you kind of think that, well, these people are so normal, you can have a decent relationship with this country. Like, it has so many people that are interested in cooperation.

But then you have politics, which is a totally different dimension, and you don't really understand how these correlate together. But obviously, the level of contradictions with Europe is far, far higher than between Russia and Japan. I do think that a better relationship is possible, but I think we just have this coincidence of there being a more nationalist government in Japan at the moment, and that also coinciding with increased tensions between Russia and Europe, Russia and the West in general. So it's just a lot of it is coincidence. I don't think it has to be necessarily this radical. Yeah, so basically I do agree with most of your points.

#Pascal

Okay, then let's shift back maybe again to China and Russia because... One thing I wanted to get your opinion on is the, well, again, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting. There was a bit of chatter in our part of the internet about the fact that, you know, Modi and Tokayev, and there was a third leader, descended on Vladimir Putin and actually told him, look, you should wind down the war with Ukraine. And right now, we're in a phase, a very interesting one, where it seems that the United States is reaching out to its different partners to tell them to somehow get the Russians to agree to a ceasefire.

I mean, we've had the CIA Director Ratcliffe in Moscow. We now had Kushner and Witkoff again in Moscow, talking about somehow getting to a ceasefire. And then recently we had India and

Kazakhstan. And who was the third one who told Vladimir Putin officially that it's important to somehow move toward peace? How did you interpret that? And how did you interpret Vladimir Putin's unofficial Russian response to all of these approaches?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, it's a typical, you know, sort of Global South thing. You know, let's make peace, not war. They are in a good position to say these things because they don't have any immediate pressing issues. I think it's a bit rich to say that, but they are in a position to say that. And, of course, for example, Kazakhstan is affected by the conflict somehow because, for example, Ukraine has been bombing some of the infrastructure that is connected. It is actually quite interesting because they've been bombing some objects where there is also a lot of American and other Western companies' investment. So it does get quite a bit messy for some of these countries. Further in the South, you often see people, for example, from Africa or from the Pacific, like island nations, say that we're concerned about the food and fertilizer problem. Doesn't seem to have affected anybody too much, but some people say they do.

So I'm not sure if they should really address Moscow here, because it's not that, you know, Moscow doesn't want to talk, really. So I think that people in Moscow, they actually have been quite open to these negotiations always. But there's kind of been this—there's been a lot of narrative that it is Russia that doesn't want to end it. I think that in Moscow there is a lot of readiness for negotiations, and I think that it is the other side really that should be convinced to be a little bit more flexible, because I don't see any flexibility in Europe, in Kyiv, obviously. There's just too many people that are deeply invested in this situation and that are not ready for compromise.

#Pascal

I mean, and I'm just coming from Europe, right? I just arrived back in Japan a day ago, and right now in Europe, like, all the talk the last week was about the Leipzig drone incident, which is actually more than a month old. The incident itself happened on the 4th of August, when a bus driver managed to wrestle down a drone at the airport, and then a month later it was revealed that this was an attack on Leipzig and that this is, you know, basically a declaration of war by Russia toward Germany. It's absolutely, totally, and utterly bizarre. But it is dogma right now in Europe. Even in Swiss media, it's basically like, well, it's another proof that we are being attacked. How is this looked at, and also in your circles, maybe in China? Do you have any indications how the Chinese journalists and so on look at this?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

In my experience, the Chinese, they look at all of this soberly, but not very emotionally. This topic hasn't been covered as much as it was initially during the starting phase of the conflict. So I think that people who are interested in international relations and these angles, they have a very clear

understanding of what is going on. But I wouldn't say that they react too much. It's kind of too far away for them from their perspective, I think. Now, with regard to... what was the second part of your question? Sorry.

#Pascal

The first part was, like, what is your interpretation of that, or how is it being covered now also in Russia? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

So, well, my interpretation, it does look awfully like a false flag, to be honest. As far as I remember, there were like three drones, and none of them worked. It does sound very fishy. And then you also have the reaction. So, reaction is also very important, how people interpret something. So in such a tense period, there may be multiple episodes like that. And even if there is actually the other side responsible for something, you don't necessarily have to react in a certain way. So I think picking up on this story, which is likely BS, to be honest, from my perspective, that is my guess, it indicates that they needed some kind of pretext to go in a certain direction. So this is my interpretation. Yeah.

#Pascal

Okay, so, but overall, I mean, all of this war rhetoric that's coming from Europe, is it something that you perceive as something that has increased now over the last couple of months? Or is it still on the same level as what you saw over the last three years or so when you were in Beijing, like being a bit removed from this?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

No, no, it's getting insane, really. And I had multiple occasions actually talking to Europeans here in China. So, first of all, like, for example, when I watch a lot of YouTube and, you know, social media, you know, what all these agencies post, I go through a lot of stuff, and I'm amazed by the amount of really, really hawkish reporting and articles and videos coming from, like, very mainstream European agencies. Like, for example, Deutsche Welle recently made a story about how Finland would cut Russian access to its northwestern territories in the case of a conflict, and how, like, being part of NATO, it is so efficient, and how they killed Russians during the Soviet-Finnish War and all of that. Like, very hostile, very bragging, like as if they really want this to happen, you know.

As for the Europeans, I was amazed, really. I had a conversation when Donald Trump had just become officially president, and you suddenly had this very intense situation where the Americans were really pushing for, you know, we need to talk to the Russians about that. And then Witkoff and Kushner for the first time came to Moscow, and there was a lot of activity about it. And so a lot of people wondered. Nobody was ready for this amount of activity, which eventually went south. There

was a lot of discussion about that. And so at some point in Beijing, I had a conversation. It was off the record, so I'm not going to mention the name, but it was an EU diplomat, rather senior diplomat, that was historically involved in both, like, Russia and China and, you know, the Minsk Accords.

He was there for all these things, so a very knowledgeable person. And I also asked—a lot of people referred to him as an adequate person, so he's not some acolyte of a cult. But I was really impressed because I asked him at the time what his reading was of these efforts by the Trump administration. And I felt him being very, very sour about it and kind of wishing that it all failed. And he said that, you know what, we tried and we failed. Well, let's see what they're going to have here. So kind of like, I hope this fails. And I was really impressed by this attitude, as if they really wanted any kind of effort to fail. I think they were very offended that Europe was not included at that moment. So, very weird perception of this process with the Europeans. So I'm actually really concerned.

#Pascal

Yeah, you know, I mean, we've seen that a year ago during Anchorage and so on, how desperately the Europeans tried to insert themselves, especially Emmanuel Macron, but others as well, insert themselves into the process and demand a seat at the table in order to prevent the Americans from giving away anything very important. And again, like, this is what also my critique of the commentariat always criticizes as the pro-war stance, right? Making sure that a realistic peace agreement cannot manifest, right? Because the European idea of peace is Russia giving back everything, including Crimea, and Vladimir Putin in The Hague, and Russia maybe, you know, split up into bits and pieces. That is their idea of a peace agreement. So it is kind of bizarre. But then you also would say, do the Chinese perceive it also as a bizarre episode, or do your Chinese colleagues actually sometimes ask you, why does Russia not make peace?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

I don't think that they... No, they don't ask me about why Russia doesn't make peace. I think they look at this very realistically, very pragmatically, so pretty much understanding the situation and how complex it is. They, of course, do see irrationality on the Western side and in Ukraine. I've read some really, really clear analysis. So no, on the Chinese side, you have pretty much the understanding of what's going on. The other thing is that I think that they have this observer stance, so that they don't want to be involved. So they're just observing the situation, the way it evolves. I don't see any rush from their side to jump into any action or to make any judgments. They prefer to just stay aside and kind of no comments, but at the same time learning about the situation and looking at how it evolves. Yeah.

#Pascal

And the same question now about Iran, because this is kind of a place where both Russia and China can just look at, and on the one hand, they could just take out the popcorn and just see what happens. On the other hand, you would have possibilities to engage, and a lot of people are guessing: what does the trade with Iran look like, like the military-military cooperation across the Caspian maybe, or what does the Chinese-Iranian military cooperation look like, if there is any at all? What's your observation there?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, I remember the Chinese Foreign Ministry briefing on the first day after the attack. The attack, I think, was on Saturday, and so obviously the briefing was on Monday. And so the most experienced Chinese Foreign Ministry speaker, Mao Ning, was there. And she was being crucified by the journalists, both from the West, from the Global South, a lot of questions thrown at her. I was really sorry for her. It was so much pressure. But China, official Beijing, they don't want to go beyond their very formalist rhetoric that, you know, make peace, don't make war. You need dialogue, you need diplomacy, you need cooperation. War is not a solution to anything. And basically they reiterate this over and over and over again. So this is the official political stance on this.

With regard to what is happening in practice, well, I cannot confirm any of that. I heard, of course, some people talking that, of course, there is engagement. Of course, there is some economic activity. And, of course, historically, there has been a lot of military cooperation between countries—China and Iran, Russia and China to some extent also. So we can only guess as to whether China or Russia provided any support to Iran. But I can say for sure that China is being very, very cautious. So with regard to, for example, that first press briefing, I remember one of the questions was about China supplying some anti-ship missiles to Iran, and they utterly rejected this. It's like, "No, no, no, no, this is like... what's the word?" So basically, how could you even say that?

Why would we do that? So they were kind of offended by this being implied. So yeah, China just wants to stay aside politically in terms of official rhetoric. But as far as practical cooperation, of course, China is a massive support for Iran, with Iran being able to export things historically. So we can only guess as to how intense this is. But overall, China is kind of providing some diplomatic shielding. They have been engaged in this shuttle diplomacy, talking to everybody in the region. They always stress that they have a partnership with everybody. They have the partnership with Iranians, with Saudis. They talk to everybody. So I've heard the Chinese being rather critical of Israel, but not in the context of this particular issue.

#Pascal

One of the interesting things about Western media and also Western analysis is that it works so much in this Western concept of good versus evil, us against them. It's all Manichaeism in a large sense. And then they use that in order to think about the other one. So because they think that it's

all about good against evil, us against them, the others must do the same. So if China is actually anti-democracy, anti-Europe, and anti-America, it must be pro-Iran and so on. But that's a pretty dumb way of looking at things, right? I mean, from my perspective, it's rather China putting its own core interests into the center and then having circles around it, and all of them are kind of important. And in this sense, Iran is in a similar place as, let's say, Europe. You want them for some things, but not necessarily for everything. How do you think that the Chinese try to make sense of their own position in the world?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Oh, the Chinese, their own position in the world. I think that China's take on all of this, on international relations, it has its strong sides and it has its weak sides. So on one hand, them being very cautious, always stressing neutrality, always stressing their own interests and mutual benefits in these relationships with whoever they have a relationship with, it has its own appeal. And I think a lot of it is in the spirit of, for example, the SCO and the BRICS Club. So we are having a relationship. We have a framework here where we don't have any obligations, like hard obligations. We can talk to whoever we want to talk to. We can deal with whoever we want to deal with. And we don't have to agree on anything, but we can have trade.

We can have business discussions. We can always talk about things. We don't go to war immediately if we have some tensions. We always try to mediate if we are not a part of this. So it's kind of very appealing. I think it's very much in the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement and the concept of neutrality and all of that, and this responsible statecraft, no-bloc mentality. All of these words, you find them in the key documents of SCO, for example, and in the rhetoric. So that's what people agree on. So it is very appealing. And, you know, the Chinese money, for example, Chinese investments coming to a country under less, way less, way less strings attached as to, for example, the American or European investments, and no ideology.

So it is very good for governments or for people. But on the other hand, the weak side of China's way of engagement with the world is the lack of commitment. So we've seen multiple occasions when the Chinese come to a region, they invest a lot, and then, for example, NATO, when they attacked Libya, or here in Venezuela. So people see that China is not ready to commit. They're ready to lose their investment and their standing in some place. They're not going to protect any country far away. They're not going to stand in the way of the Americans kidnapping Maduro. So it has two sides to it, really.

#Pascal

That's a very interesting observation. Would you say that this is also where, then, the Russian approach differs? Would you say Russia then has more commitment to these places into which it makes investments and would also risk international disputes over things, whereas the Chinese then would rather back out and just redirect their investments?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, with Russia, I think it depends on the situation. It depends on the proximity, so geography. It depends on the current situation where, of course, Russia doesn't have infinite resources. So, for example, we saw Syria collapsing.

#Pascal

I was about to mention that. Syria is an interesting case.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Yeah. Syria is an interesting case. But I know some people who know Syria very well, who were war correspondents in Syria. A lot of it is really the government's making. So there's very little that Russia could do. They couldn't, like, support this thing forever. There were a lot of things that were just impossible to sustain. But here, of course, Russia being unable to commit simultaneously to different theaters, you actually see that it's quite interesting. So with regard to all these crises involving places with Russian involvement, there was a document, I think, in 2018 by RAND Corporation. It was called, um, "Extending Russia." A very interesting paper. It's quite long. It did mention all these places where you have the crisis. It didn't mention Ukraine, by the way. What Russia did eventually in 2022, in that document four years prior, it was called Russian counter-escalation.

It wasn't called an unprovoked invasion. Very interesting. But they did mention Syria, they did mention Central Asia, and remember the 2022 Kazakhstan situation. So it is interesting. Of course, I would say that Russia is more bold with regard to protecting allies and its own interests, but of course there are also situations where your opportunities are really limited. For example, Russia did supply air defense systems to Venezuela. So if they were used, all these American helicopters, they wouldn't be able to fly into Caracas and kidnap Maduro. But the problem is that you just had local elites betraying Maduro, making a deal with the Americans. What can you do in this situation if these things are not being fired? So I guess Russia also has this very pragmatic approach to these things. In some cases, it is ready to commit. In some cases, you just have to let go.

#Pascal

No, no, absolutely. It's just interesting to compare the different approaches and actually do a cost-benefit analysis of both of them, right? Because one of the problems the Americans, of course, are running is that if they do this overcommitment, you run into this problem that if Ukraine loses the war, actually the United States loses the war, right?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Because you're so wedded to this entire project and

#Pascal

In my opinion, you can see right now how the Americans are working overtime to dump it on Europe, to make Europe lose the war and not the Americans. I don't know where you see that one going.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Donald Trump is amazing. I think that it is very interesting about cause and effect because, on one hand, you could say that, well, Donald Trump doing what he did with regard to Ukraine, saying, like, this is not our war and all of that. On one hand, it's kind of dishonest because you also have different figures in his administration, such as Marco Rubio, saying, like, we made our choice. We're not really impartial here. And it is quite certainly true because, you know, you have, for example, Elon Musk's Starlink being used, and a lot of support from American corporations and, of course, Deep State. And, of course, still selling weapons to Ukraine. It's just that they don't want to use taxpayer money anymore. But it would be silly to say that the Americans are not involved.

But at the same time, them wanting to shift more and more of the weight on the Europeans, and at the same time making threats about quitting NATO and making threats against Denmark and Greenland and all of that, it just creates a situation where Europe becomes more and more hysterical and paranoid because the world that Europe formed as the EU, the world they lived in, it's really collapsing on them. At the same time, they have the challenge of China with manufacturing and just Europe losing their economic competitive advantages. So Europe, I kind of understand why these, well, quite frankly, very weak leaders that have a lot of problems domestically, and also all of these crises falling on their heads, it actually creates a far, far more dangerous situation, arguably, than if America actually remained more committed to the European case.

#Pascal

Can I ask you about this? Because this is one of the things I don't understand, or so far didn't understand very well, but maybe it has to do with exactly what you just said. Russia's almost, to me, incomprehensible willingness to agree to the United States portraying itself as a neutral actor, just trying to mediate—you know, we want to be the good guys, we want to help you somehow come to an understanding. Is all of this connected to Russia's fear that if the United States properly disengages and if the United States is out of the picture, then the Europeans are basically, you know, a wild card that maybe you cannot deal with? And this desire also by Russia to not have a war with the Europeans also being staked upon the Americans remaining somehow committed to the entire affair. Is that a valid interpretation, or would you see it differently?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, I'd say that at the very least, it is the opportunity to have any dialogue with the West, even through a very unconventional Trump administration. But I think, because there was no dialogue whatsoever when Biden was president, and here you have people that say, "We want to talk to Russia," isn't that great? I mean, even if they don't deliver on anything, it's better to talk than not to talk. So that's, I think, at the very minimum, that's the case. But what you said, I think, well, at least to some extent, it is true. I mean, people, analysts, people in Putin's administration, they may have different ideas, maybe different perspectives of these things.

And I'm pretty sure that what you mentioned with, you know, Europe kind of being a very unstable and unpredictable factor without the Americans, it is definitely a part of the thinking to some extent. I think it is a part of it, certainly. But I also think there were a lot of indicators that Moscow kind of gave up on the Europeans. I think they were very disappointed with all the engagements, and then previously Minsk and the role of France and Germany in that, like all the impotence of this leadership and also kind of, frankly, being dishonest on many occasions. So I think that in Moscow, they just see no sense in talking to places like France and Germany, and seeing America as still kind of a responsible actor or something like that. Although it's kind of difficult now with this administration.

#Pascal

Yeah, but maybe with the Americans, you can at least pinpoint a direct, you know, own interest there. There are things that are in the interest of the United States, even if that means it is the very opposite of the interest of Russia. But at least you can make sense of them as an actor acting in their own best interest. Well, for the Europeans, what they want is not clear anymore. The Europeans do stuff that makes no sense under a national framework, right? But in a very weird sense, Russia has the same problem as Europe, which is the other one will not just go away, right? The Europeans need to figure out a way to deal with Russia, and the Russians to deal with the Europeans, because geography.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Exactly, exactly. I totally agree with you. It's just so difficult with Europe. You see Germany... Germany admits that it was Ukraine's political state that ordered the attacks on the Nord Stream pipeline, which had a lot of German investment and was very crucial for the German economy. Now you have the AfD winning in one of the German lands, and it is directly connected to that because it was a heavily manufacturing-dependent region, and therefore a lot of unrest and a lot of people disappointed, having a grudge because the energy prices and all that are affecting them directly. So you have these domestic German problems.

A lot of it is really being affected by these energy links with Russia being severed. And then the German prosecutors say that it was the Ukrainian state that ordered this. And then they place an order, and the Croatians arrest the person who executed this attack in Croatia, in Zagreb, I think,

who was at the time a consultant in a movie about the attack on Nord Stream 2 featuring Sean Penn and Adrien Brody. I wonder how they identified him. Is that real? I haven't even heard of that yet. Is there a movie in the making about it? Apparently, yeah. And the guy who executed the attack on the Nord Stream pipeline, he was the consultant in the movie about the attack on the Nord Stream pipeline.

#Pascal

I'm sorry, this sounds like a weird joke, but okay, we'll find out whether it's true or not. But that would be so rich. But then again, I would actually believe that they would do that. Okay, and then, so the interpretation then is the Russians just don't know what to do with this. If you're fine with your own infrastructure being bombed by the ally that you're sending weapons to? So you say, like, the Russians just don't know what to make of this anymore if the Europeans are willing to back people who sabotage their own infrastructure projects.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Exactly. How can you deal with these people? I mean, they don't have a coherent understanding of their own interests, and they do seem to be quite irrational and delusional, and at the same time very committed to a cause of, you know, destroying this relationship and further escalating and bringing us to the edge of a direct conflict between Russia and NATO. And also, you're looking at the media and things that, you know, because this projection is very important. I heard, I think, one of the good modern American war analysts, she had a very interesting thought: projections, preparations for war, and also preparing your population that the war is inevitable—it doesn't prevent war, as you know, as history informs us, but it actually brings the war closer.

#Pascal

Yeah. It creates a so-called self-fulfilling prophecy. Exactly. What you're preparing for is then what you're going to get because you're preparing for it. But for you and for other Russian analysts that are outside of the immediate European theater, do you think that the other things that are going on, like especially the Iran war, but also what happened in Venezuela, also how the United States is engaging with its other theaters—do you think that overall this will rather increase the pressure for a Russia-European war or rather work to the opposite because the United States just obviously is overstretching itself right now?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Well, it's difficult to say. We already mentioned that, on one hand, the situation as it was seen previously, a lot of people in Russia might have seen the United States as a malign presence in Europe back at the time when Europe had some better, basically, politicians. Because there was a time when there were French and German leaders that wanted a closer relationship with Russia, you

know, in the early 2000s, and so on and so forth. And, you know, for example, this very infrastructure, the Nord Stream pipelines and all that, there was very intense economic cooperation between Russia and Germany.

And there was a very serious wing of industrialists and, you know, businesspeople in Germany that wanted this relationship to intensify. Now, there was always talk about Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok. So at that time, America was seen as a malign presence, that they wanted to keep these tensions, and it was the United States that didn't want this energy link to happen between Russia and Germany, and they threatened that it would go away, and, well, it did. You know, these things can be executed by a few and enabled by other people, or many other people. But at this time, I think things that John Mearsheimer, for example, Professor John Mearsheimer mentions, that America also serves as a pacifier in Europe, that also you kind of see the truth in this statement.

And so America being distracted in other theaters—well, to be honest, I don't see any value for the Russian situation in there. I mean, like immediate strategic value, because, of course, like, for example, in terms of weapon supplies, yes, for example, they cannot provide certain types of weaponry to Kyiv at the moment. But at the same time, Trump administration being this destabilizing factor for this whole system, it is also quite dangerous from the responsible state point of view. Because, for example, what the Chinese are talking about a lot now is that this is a very dangerous time because we have to manage this radical American decline.

So the Chinese, they're not really happy about the situation, how it evolves. They would rather prefer—they always prefer stability or predictability. And what really threatens them, what they really fear, I think, is how unpredictable the situation is becoming, how fast things change. Like, there were also reports that there was a point when the Chinese in Washington, they didn't know who they really had to talk to in the Trump administration, because, like, there was so much personalism and a very narrow circle of people who Trump trusted. You don't understand how to communicate with them.

So, of course, from the Chinese perspective, and also from the Russian perspective, there's this problem: how do you really deal with these people? Who decides? And always this problem, of course, that you may have an agreement with these people, your immediate, you know, counterparts, but then none of it really happens. And we see that, you know, Trump administration is just being really, really bizarre. It's a very interesting case in American political history. But he also had these, for example, transcripts of conversations between Putin and George Bush Jr. published relatively recently, I think maybe half a year ago or something like that.

And you see that conversation after conversation, year by year, you have... And also, I read some articles, you know, Russian former politicians or, you know, bureaucrats remembering some of these conversations with NATO officials. What really strikes you is that there was always understanding. So, for example, the Russian side, they deliver their position on NATO expansion, et cetera. And the other side, you would think that they would say, given the current situation, no, no, no, this is

unacceptable, blah, blah, blah, blah, because, you know, free choice or whatever. But they always, you know, if you look at these transcripts, if you look at people's sort of memoirs of how these things happened, total understanding: we totally get you. Sure, we'll look into this. And then it just doesn't happen. You know, things keep going.

#Pascal

That's how it is. Yeah, that's why it makes sense that back in 2008, Bill Burns wrote that memo back saying, like, no, we know the Russians will not accept that, right? This is absolutely clear. It is understood. And then it was still done, just ignoring that, right? And that was this idea, this hubris of like, we don't need to care what they think about because they are a second- or third-rate power anyhow. So, you know, but in official communication, you still communicated that you understand the other one, and then you just steamroll over them anyhow, right?

But then, in a weird sense, what you're saying is that the Russian approach now is that they understand that this is what happened, and that the Americans successfully put the wrench between Russian-European relations—very successfully, to the point of a war successfully. But based upon that, you cannot formulate future policy. Future policy needs to be determined by current events, not by so much how you were wronged in the past, but what you can do potentially in the future, and that this is maybe now the approach, saying like, okay, you screwed us over, but it could get much worse if we do not have a relationship with you. Exactly, exactly.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

That's why I think they also keep all these negotiations, whenever it's possible, in Moscow. I think they're also very much concerned about what may come out of this escalation and all of this rhetoric. So I'm very much concerned about the situation personally. But I'm not concerned in this situation—I'm not really concerned about Moscow objectively being an irrational partner. I pretty much look at them as very pragmatic people, very sober. But I'm very much concerned about the other side of the situation.

#Pascal

No, me too, me too. And, you know, the interesting thing at the moment is, of course, that in both Moscow and Beijing, we have people in the top leadership that have seen all of this. They've been around for the last 25 years. Whereas on the other side, you have people who come in and go out within a two- or three-year cycle. And the turnaround is massive. And there's now a complete lack of experience of what the relationship used to be like, right? And therefore, much more of a projection of the belief of what it was.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

And also you have another concerning thing, and I think it's also concerning for the domestic, for the European populations, is that it's basically copy-paste. You have faces changing, but nothing really changes with regard to policy. Even if people have certain rhetoric during this running for office, running for elections, they say one thing, then they come to power and they do other things.

#Pascal

Yeah, pull a Maloney.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Yeah.

#Pascal

Okay, well, that's not a very happy picture, but I think it's a pretty accurate one. Yevgeny, is there anything that we didn't cover yet that we should still talk about, or shall we tell people where to find you and your work?

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Yeah, I think we might have not talked enough about China and the Chinese perspective, so if you ever want to talk to me again, we could cover more on that. But it's a totally separate topic. We can go deeper into that. With regard to where you can find me, I do plan to start an English-language Substack. So far, it's basically empty. There's just one article published, but whoever wants to find me there and read what I have to say... I think you maybe will have a link in the description. And also, for the Russian speakers or whoever is ready to read Russian with translation, a Telegram channel that my old friend and I have, it's called Opinion Mate. You can also mention it in the description. And thank you. Thank you for that. Thank you for this opportunity.

#Pascal

I will certainly do that. The links that you will send me in an email, I will copy-paste them into the description box below. For everybody's information, Yevgeny Pavlov—his name, what you're reading here, is like a Romanization. He usually has his name in Cyrillic or in Chinese out there. I will post those as well. And we will certainly have you back on for more analysis from China. Yevgeny, thank you so much for your time today.

#Yevgeny Pavlov

Thank you, Pascal. It was a pleasure.