

China and Russia's burgeoning yet hesitant relationship

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G7 leaders meeting in Hiroshima in May 2023

Jacob Sagers – Last week's G7 summit in Japan led to China and Russia holding [visits](#) amid growing unity and criticism from the West. China has received a lot of leeway in the past year as the West has focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and ensuing sanctions. However, the G7 summit highlighted not only Western democracies' responses to Russia but also how to counteract China. Statements affirming unified support against Chinese claims in the South China Sea have made the Chinese government uneasy and pose questions about power in the region.

[Relational power](#) or looking at a how country's actions and material strength play together within relations, helps us understand the G7's actions. China's rapidly growing economy and influence have challenged US global hegemony over the past decade with the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative and a more assertive foreign policy. China has now become a growing center of attention in US foreign policy and throughout the West with military drills held in the south China Sea and former US President Donald's Trumps trade war for example. Furthermore, recent unified Western actions in response to Russia have made the West greater relational power due to putting their larger economies, advanced technologies, and militaries into use within the invasion in Ukraine. China fears they could act similarly in the region, or a worst-case scenario, use their influence to form pacts similar to NATO

but in the Pacific: significantly increasing their influence through relational power. These actions would severely limit China's power and potential for growth. This is partly why Russia and China have increased meetings to offset Western actors.

Relational power will ultimately force all countries to take into account the current situation with future goals, ultimately altering their actions and [geopolitical codes](#). Geopolitical codes are how a country positions itself within the global community and help explain China's actions to reaffirm its presence in the region. Maintaining relevance in East Asia while growing its influence at the expense of other countries has guided Chinese foreign affairs for years. If China fails to offset threats from the West, the question is, can the West stay unified to capitalize on the opportunity and maintain its global influence?

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