

# STRATEGIC DISCOURSES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF XI JINPING'S AND VLADIMIR PUTIN'S SPEECHES ON CENTRAL ASIA

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**Abstract.** The foreign policy strategies and rhetoric of global powers, particularly neighboring China and Russia, significantly influence the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia. This study aims to identify and compare key themes and rhetorical strategies in the speeches of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding their policies towards Central Asia. Using quantitative content analysis of three key speeches by each leader over the past two years, speeches were analyzed using the R programming language to determine the most frequently mentioned words and themes. The analysis focused on various categories such as Prestige/Leadership, Security Issues, Global Threats, Terms and Issues of Cooperation, the role of International Organizations, rhetoric on Foreign Policy issues, and Relations with Friends and Rivals. The analysis of the speeches of the two presidents revealed that both leaders prioritize cooperation, economic development, and security. Xi Jinping's rhetoric is more inclusive and future-oriented, whereas Putin's speeches emphasize immediate regional stability and strategic partnerships. The results of the quantitative content analysis demonstrate that while Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin share common themes in their speeches, their approaches reflect their respective strategic priorities and geopolitical contexts. Xi Jinping's emphasis on global cooperation contrasts with Putin's focus on regional security and economic integration. This comparative analysis deepens our understanding of the distinct yet intersecting narratives that shape the geopolitics of Central Asia.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, China, Russia, Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, content analysis, foreign policy rhetoric.

**Аңдатпа.** Әлемдік державалардың, әсіресе көрші Қытай мен Ресейдің сыртқы саясат стратегиялары мен риторикасы Орталық Азияның геосаяси ландшафтына айтарлықтай әсер етеді. Бұл зерттеу Қытай Төрағасы Си Цзиньпин мен Ресей Президенті Владимир Путиннің Орталық Азияға қатысты саясаты жөніндегі негізгі тақырыптары мен риторикалық стратегияларын анықтауға және салыстыруға бағытталған. Сандық контент-талдау әдісі арқылы әрбір көшбасшының соңғы екі жылда жасаған үш маңызды сөзі зерттелді. Талдау R бағдарламалау тілі көмегімен ең жиі айтылған сөздер мен тақырыптарды анықтау үшін жүргізілді. Зерттеу барысында бедел/көшбасшылық, қауіпсіздік мәселелері, жаһандық қауіп-қатерлер, ынтымақтастықтың негізгі ұғымдары мен мәселелері, халықаралық ұйымдардың рөлі, сыртқы саясатқа қатысты риторика, сондай-ақ одақтастармен және бәсекелестермен қарым-қатынастар сияқты санаттарға ерекше назар аударылды. Екі көшбасшының сөздерін талдау олардың ынтымақтастық, экономикалық даму және қауіпсіздік мәселелеріне басымдық беретінін көрсетті. Си Цзиньпиннің риторикасы барынша инклюзивті және болашаққа бағытталған болса, Путиннің сөздері аймақтық тұрақтылық пен стратегиялық әріптестікті өзектілікке қояды. Сандық контент-талдау нәтижелері Си Цзиньпин мен Владимир Путиннің сөздерінде ортақ тақырыптар болғанымен, олардың тәсілдері стратегиялық басымдықтары мен геосаяси контекстеріне сәйкес ерекшеленетінін көрсетеді. Си Цзиньпиннің жаһандық ынтымақтастыққа баса назар аударуы Путиннің аймақтық қауіпсіздік пен экономикалық интеграцияға бағытталған саясатына қарама-қайшы келеді. Бұл салыстырмалы талдау Орталық Азия геосаясатын қалыптастыратын әртүрлі, бірақ қиылысатын баяндауларды тереңірек түсінуге мүмкіндік береді.

**Түйінді сөздер:** Орталық Азия, Қытай, Ресей, Си Цзиньпин, Владимир Путин, контент-талдау, сыртқы саясат риторикасы.

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**Аннотация.** Стратегии внешней политики и риторика мировых держав, особенно соседних Китая и России, существенно влияют на геополитический ландшафт Центральной Азии. Данное исследование направлено на выявление и сравнение ключевых тем и риторических стратегий в речах председателя КНР Си Цзиньпина и президента России Владимира Путина, касающихся их политики в отношении Центральной Азии. С использованием количественного контент-анализа были изучены три ключевые речи каждого лидера за последние два года. Анализ проводился с применением языка программирования R для выявления наиболее часто упоминаемых слов и тем. Основное внимание уделялось различным категориям, таким как престиж/лидерство, вопросы безопасности, глобальные угрозы, термины и аспекты сотрудничества, роль международных организаций, риторика по вопросам внешней политики, а также отношения с союзниками и конкурентами. Анализ речей двух лидеров показал, что оба придают первостепенное значение сотрудничеству, экономическому развитию и безопасности. Риторика Си Цзиньпина носит более инклюзивный и ориентированный на будущее характер, тогда как выступления Путина делают акцент на актуальной региональной стабильности и стратегических партнерствах. Результаты количественного контент-анализа демонстрируют, что, несмотря на общие темы в речах Си Цзиньпина и Владимира Путина, их подходы отражают их стратегические приоритеты и геополитические контексты. Акцент Си Цзиньпина на глобальном сотрудничестве контрастирует с фокусом Путина на региональной безопасности и экономической интеграции. Данный сравнительный анализ углубляет понимание различных, но пересекающихся нарративов, формирующих геополитику Центральной Азии.

**Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, Китай, Россия, Си Цзиньпин, Владимир Путин, контент-анализ, риторика внешней политики.

## Introduction

Events of the past decades have once again demonstrated the close interconnection of all elements within the system of international relations. The political, social, and economic development of Central Asia over the past 30 years stands out as one of the most remarkable and intriguing achievements in regional development of the 21st century. This is notable due to the rapid growth within Central Asian countries and intriguing because of the vast fluctuations and persistent disparities throughout the region. In modern global geopolitics, Central Asia holds the status of a strategic transit corridor, connecting not only the West and East but also the North and South. Various forces, represented by global and regional players along with different international organizations, are striving to establish new relationships and form a favorable balance in their relations with the countries of the region, where the groundwork is set for both broader cooperation and intensified competition. In our previous work, we identified that the growing strategic importance of Central Asia in global politics is reinforced by factors such as the military conflict in Ukraine and China's rising global ambitions [1]. Although virtually all major powers consider the region a zone of strategic interest, Russia and China, due to their geographical proximity and historical legacy, continue to play key roles in shaping and

developing the political and economic contours of this region. Both states are actively involved in Central Asian policy, interacting with the countries of the region on a bilateral level and through various regional platforms often initiated by these powers themselves (Russia-Central Asia Summits, China-Central Asia Summits). While Russia relies significantly on the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to promote and protect its economic interests in the region, the driving force of China's economic engagement is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the realm of security, these countries cooperate with the region within the frameworks of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for China. Recently, various experts have noted that the SCO is transforming into an organization that ensures not only security cooperation but also economic cooperation [2]. Considering that Central Asia has found itself at the center of a completely new geopolitical dynamic, the trends of cooperation between the countries of the region and their key partners are also undergoing significant changes. In the current dynamic geopolitical landscape, virtually all major countries of the world are compelled to rethink their strategies on the international stage and make certain adjustments to their foreign policy priorities.

A noticeable trend in post-Cold War geopolitics has been the rise of personalist regimes in almost all parts of the world. The decline of democracy in countries with presidential systems often leads to the emergence of personalist regimes [3]. Personalist regimes are autocracies where all “discretion over policy and personnel” is concentrated in the hands of one person [4]. In the context of the two countries examined in this article, the political regimes of Vladimir Putin in Russia and Xi Jinping in China are characterized by a strong centralization of power around these two leaders. Both presidents, during their presidency, have succeeded in consolidating and continue to consolidate their personal authority, while expanding and extending their rule through constitutional changes. This process is also reflected in the weakening of institutional checks on power, accompanied by the suppression of opposition movements and forces, further strengthening the personalized system of governance in these countries.

In the study of modern political communication, content analysis of political leaders' speeches plays a crucial role. The personalist nature of the regimes in the countries under study is particularly significant in our case. The concentration of all power in Russia in the hands of Putin is not new to the academic world. However, the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017 confirmed, and the 20th Congress in 2022 reinforced, the fact that Xi Jinping has consolidated his personal power in the country. A deep and detailed content analysis of the speeches of these two political leaders will help to understand and capture the rhetorical strategies of state leaders and how they shape and present their foreign policy strategies. Speech, defined as “the process of communication through public speaking aimed at expressing opinions, statements, instructions, and other content”, plays a crucial role in political communication by facilitating the delivery of messages to the other party, whether directly or indirectly [5, 6]. Language not only reflects but also actively shapes perception, identity, and reality, emphasizing

the strong interconnection and mutual reliance between language, culture, and politics [7].

The relevance of the topic is due to the importance of Central Asia as a strategic region for both countries. The novelty of the work is determined by the results of this study, obtained through the disclosure of the topic. The conclusions of this article can contribute to the study of the relationships between Central Asian countries and their closest partners, namely the Russian Federation and China, as well as contribute to the study of their approaches and strategies in the Central Asian direction. Therefore, this article is dedicated to conducting a comparative content analysis of speeches by the leaders of two countries (Russia and China) concerning foreign policy in Central Asia. The aim of the study is to identify and compare the main themes, rhetorical strategies, and changes in these speeches over time. The main research question is: What are the main themes and rhetorical strategies used by the presidents of Russia and China in their speeches concerning relations with Central Asian countries, and how have these strategies evolved over time?

## Literature review

The third decade of the current century has marked an active study of Eurasian geopolitics, with a notable focus on the relations of global and regional powers with the countries of Central Asia. However, much of the existing scholarly literature is concentrated on the role of other factors such as political institutions, regional initiatives, and historical and cultural ties, rather than on the role of the political leaders of these powers. The study of the rhetoric of the leaders of China and Russia regarding Central Asia is a crucial aspect of understanding the foreign policy strategies of these countries, allowing for the identification of key directions, priorities, and focal points. This issue is particularly relevant given that, in the context of transformations over the past few decades, the political regimes in these countries have become more personalized. As a result, analyzing the speeches of their leaders offers a unique opportunity to examine

their countries' foreign policy strategies in the region. In this regard, the fact that the leaders of the two key partners and largest neighbors of Central Asia have managed to significantly reduce system resistance and personalize their regimes opens new avenues for further research on this issue.

A review of the existing academic literature related to the study of China's interactions with Central Asian countries and the region as a whole reveals a clear predominance of attention to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), thereby shifting the main focus towards the economic and infrastructural aspects of China's policy in the region. Despite the still-limited representation and the lack of extensive qualitative and quantitative research on China's engagement with Central Asia, this topic is rapidly gaining popularity. Many authors have concentrated on various aspects of this interaction, primarily addressing regional initiatives, economic cooperation, and security issues [8, 9, 10, 11, 12]. In addition, recent years have seen an increase in analytical materials and studies on China's soft power in the region [13, 14, 1]. This is unsurprising, as the BRI encompasses not only economic cooperation through infrastructure projects, developing trade and economic ties, and expanding China's economic influence in the region, but also serves as one of the key instruments of China's soft power in Central Asia. However, the rhetorical dimension of this process remains underexplored and underrepresented, despite the potential of such studies to reveal additional nuances in China's strategic approach to the region.

On the other hand, a review of the academic literature on Russia's relations with Central Asia shows that much of the existing research focuses on security issues, energy diplomacy, cultural and historical ties, and interactions within regional organizations and initiatives, reinforcing the discourse that views the region as a traditional sphere of Russian influence [15, 16, 17, 18]. Moreover, recent years have seen a growing body of research on the implementation of Russia's soft power tools and strategies in its interactions with Central Asian countries [19, 1]. Nevertheless,

despite the fact that Vladimir Putin's speeches play a key role in understanding Russia's foreign policy towards Central Asia, the rhetorical analysis of his speeches has not received sufficient attention in the academic literature. This lack of research naturally creates gaps in understanding how the leaders of the two countries use rhetoric to shape the regional agenda. A content analysis of the rhetoric of both leaders could provide valuable insights into the messages directed not only at external audiences but also at internal elites, offering an opportunity to study the processes of domestic interactions within these countries. Thus, the goal of this article is to address this gap by focusing on identifying and comparing the key themes, rhetorical strategies, and emphases in the speeches of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin regarding their policies towards Central Asia.

## Methodology

To address the research question, this article relies on the method of content analysis of the speeches of the presidents of two countries concerning their relations with Central Asian countries. In contemporary science, political communication is a complex and dynamic field of knowledge, and the most widely used method in this field is content analysis [20, 21]. Providing a quantitative assessment of content is applied in various fields of science, including the analysis of foreign policy. The use of this method allows for an in-depth analysis of the content, style, and rhetoric of political leaders' speeches, thereby enabling us to identify and compare the main themes, rhetorical strategies, and changes over time in the speeches of the leaders of neighboring countries regarding Central Asian states. The appeal of content analysis lies in its ability to uncover what might be overlooked in a superficial examination [22]. The primary logic of implementing this method is to obtain a quantitative structure of the content of the speeches of the presidents of Russia and China.

Various researchers use different approaches and structures in the process of content analysis, but the most widely used and



preferred method remains quantitative content analysis [23]. However, in recent years, critical discourse analysis, linguistic analysis, and qualitative content analysis have also been strongly represented in contemporary science [24, 25, 26]. Often, content analysis is used in combination with other methods, allowing for the integration of different approaches to achieve the desired result. Overall, quantitative content analysis provides a reliable foundation for analyzing and understanding various aspects of the foreign policy dynamics of the two countries in the third decade of the current century.

In this article, the authors selected a number of key speeches by the presidents of Russia and China over the past two years, concerning their countries' foreign policy towards Central Asia. The selection of speeches for analysis was guided by the relevance of the content to the research question, which focuses on the foreign policy rhetoric of the presidents of Russia and China regarding Central Asian countries. The following criteria were used:

1. **Timeframe:** Speeches delivered within the last two years were selected to ensure a focus on recent foreign policy developments and engagements.

2. **Context:** Only speeches delivered at major regional summits where Central Asia was a key topic of discussion were chosen. Specifically, the following were analyzed:

- ✓ 22nd and 24th Meetings of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO): These are platforms where Central Asian countries play a prominent role, and both Russia and China have made significant foreign policy statements regarding the region.
- ✓ Russia-Central Asia and China-Central Asia Summits: These summits were selected as they focus exclusively on the relationship between the two powers and Central Asian states.

3. **Availability:** Full, unabridged texts of the speeches had to be available in

Russian (for President Putin) and English (for Chairman Xi Jinping). These were obtained from official government sources, ensuring accuracy and authenticity.

For the content analysis, we selected three speeches from each president, specifically their speeches at the 22nd and 24th meetings of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and their speeches at the Russia-Central Asia and China-Central Asia summits, respectively. The results are presented in the tables below to show the proportion and frequency of words most often repeated in the speeches. Full texts of President Putin's speeches in Russian were obtained from the website of the President of Russia (kremlin.ru), and the texts of Chairman Xi Jinping's speeches in English were obtained from the Xinhua website (english.news.cn).

The R programming language was employed for content analysis in this article. R is a powerful programming language and environment widely used for statistical computing and data analysis. Its versatility and extensive package ecosystem make it particularly valuable for content analysis, a method used to systematically analyze text data. Content analysis involves various tasks such as text preprocessing, extraction of key themes, and quantitative analysis of word frequencies, all of which can be efficiently performed using R.

The coding process involved several stages:

1. **Data Collection:** Speeches were collected from official websites (President of Russia's website and Xinhua).

2. **Preprocessing:** The speech text was prepared by converting it to lowercase, removing punctuation, numbers, common stopwords, and excess whitespace to focus on meaningful content.

3. **Corpus Creation:** The preprocessed texts were transformed into a corpus (a structured collection of text documents).

4. **Document-Term Matrix (DTM):** A DTM was created to quantify the frequency of words across the speeches.

### 5. *Word Frequency Analysis:*

The DTM was processed to calculate the most frequently used words, highlighting key themes and rhetoric.

The code used to process the content analysis focuses on preprocessing the text and analyzing word frequencies. Initially, it ensures the necessary packages (tm, SnowballC, wordcloud) are installed and then loads these libraries. The speech text file is read into a variable `speech_text` with UTF-8 encoding to handle text properly. The text is then converted into a corpus, which is a collection of text documents, with this corpus containing just one document (the speech text). The text undergoes preprocessing to prepare it for analysis. This preprocessing includes converting all text to lowercase, removing punctuation, removing numbers, eliminating common English stopwords, and stripping excess whitespace. Following this, a Document-Term Matrix (DTM) is created, where each row represents a word and each column represents a document. The matrix is converted to a regular matrix, and word frequencies are calculated by summing the occurrences of each word. The words are then sorted in descending order of frequency. A data frame `word_freqs_df` is created with two columns: `word` and `freq`, containing the words and their respective frequencies. Finally, the most frequent words are printed to the console, providing insight into the most commonly used words in the speech. This

approach is useful for analyzing the themes and rhetoric in political speeches, offering a quantitative foundation for understanding the content and style of political leaders' communications. By employing quantitative content analysis through R, we provide a clear, data-driven understanding of the speeches, enabling a comprehensive comparison of how Russia and China articulate their foreign policy strategies toward Central Asia.

### **Shifting Focus: Key Themes in Xi Jinping's International Speeches**

To identify the main themes and rhetorical strategies in the speeches of the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, a quantitative content analysis of three key speeches from the past two years (as deemed by the authors) was conducted. These speeches include President Xi's address at the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO on September 16, 2022, the keynote speech at the "China-Central Asia" Summit on May 19, 2023, and his address at the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus" Meeting in Astana on July 4, 2024. The quantitative content analysis, conducted using the R programming language, identified the most frequently mentioned words in the Chinese leader's speeches (see Table 1). This analysis highlights key themes and shifts in emphasis in his recent addresses.

**Table 1 - Most frequently mentioned words in President Xi's speeches**

Word	SCO Samarkand Summit 2022	China-Central Asia Summit 2023	SCO+ Meeting 2024
development	32	17	10
cooperation	23	16	10
china	14	24	11
security	12	6	9
international	11	-	4
peace	9	-	4
support	7	6	-
common	7	-	7

regional	7	-	4
shared	6	-	5
friendship	5	6	4
changes	-	-	5
spirit	-	-	4
solidarity	-	-	4
governance	-	-	4
road	-	9	-
together	-	8	-
silk	-	7	-
cultural	-	7	-
community	-	6	-
energy	-	6	-
trade/economic	5	6	-
future	5	5	-

*Source: Table created by authors.*

As seen in Table 1, development and cooperation consistently emerge as high-priority topics in the analysis of all three of the Chinese leader's speeches, indicating a strong emphasis on economic growth and collaborative efforts. The frequent mention of these terms suggests that China prioritizes fostering partnerships and promoting development through multilateral cooperation. The frequent reference to China itself is prominent in all events, especially at the China-Central Asia Summit, where it is most often mentioned, primarily due to the summit's name. This underscores China's active role in these regions and its efforts to position itself as a central player in regional and global affairs.

Another recurring theme is security, highlighting that maintaining regional stability and addressing security issues remain ongoing priorities in China's global agenda. The pronounced emphasis on "peace" and "international" became more noticeable in the speech at the SCO Samarkand Summit in 2022 compared to later events, reflecting a broader focus on global harmony and multilateralism earlier, with a slight shift in subsequent summits. Words such as "common," "shared," and "community" are consistently mentioned, underscoring the importance China places on collective efforts and shared goals within international communities.

The mention of friendship in all speeches indicates the growing importance of soft power for China, while the emphasis on cultural ties, particularly during the 2023 China-Central Asia Summit, shows China's desire to build strong interpersonal and cultural connections alongside economic and political relationships. Terms such as trade and economic, road, and energy are more frequently encountered at the China-Central Asia Summit, reflecting a particular focus on infrastructure projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and energy cooperation with Central Asian countries. The word "future" appears notably during the speeches at the Samarkand SCO Summit in 2022 and the China-Central Asia Summit in 2023, indicating a forward-looking approach and emphasis on long-term planning and innovation. New themes, such as governance and solidarity, changes and spirit, also emerge, suggesting a focus on political unity and effective governance structures within the SCO framework.

Overall, all three analyzed speeches by Xi Jinping reflect a consistent emphasis on development, cooperation, and China's active role in international affairs, with a clear focus on security, peace, and fostering common values across different countries (See Figure 1). There have been slight shifts in focus, with later events showing more attention to

economic initiatives, trade, and infrastructure projects, particularly with Central Asian countries. The recurring mention of cultural ties and friendship underscores China's strategy to enhance its soft power alongside

hard power initiatives, indicating a multifaceted approach to international relations that balances economic growth, security concerns, cultural diplomacy, and regional stability.

Figure 1 - Word Cloud from President Xi's Speeches



Source: Figure created by authors.

### Strategic Narratives: Key Themes in Vladimir Putin's International Speeches

For a detailed analysis of the important themes and key points in President Putin's speeches, we selected his addresses at the 2022 Samarkand SCO Summit, the 2022 Russia-Central Asia Summit, and the 2024 SCO+ meeting (See Table 2). The detailed content in Table 2 provides context and supports the thematic analysis based on word frequency data.

Table 2 - Most frequently mentioned words in President Putin's speeches

Word	SCO Samarkand Summit 2022	Russia-Central Asia Summit 2022	SCO+ Meeting 2024
cooperation	11	7	10
European Commission/Union	5	-	-
fertilizers	5	-	-
selfishness	4	-	-
economic/trade	7	14	4
sanctions	4	-	-
decision	4	-	-
role	3	-	3
security	3	5	7
solving	3	-	-
politics	3	-	-
principles	3	-	-
humanitarian	3	-	-
food	3	-	-



youth	-	-	6
development	-	6	4
business	-	-	4
eurasian	-	6	-
joint	-	5	-
energy	-	4	-
transportation	-	4	-
taliban	-	4	-

*Source: Table created by authors.*

As with the Chinese leader, cooperation is the primary theme in all of President Putin's speeches. He emphasizes the importance of collaboration within the SCO and with Central Asian countries. Putin underscores the significance of joint efforts in addressing international and regional issues, strengthening economic ties, and enhancing security and stability. This frequent mention of cooperation highlights Russia's strategic aim to foster strong, interdependent relationships with its regional partners.

The critical importance of economic and trade interactions with regional countries for Russia is demonstrated by their frequent mention in all three speeches. In his addresses at the 2022 SCO Samarkand Summit and the 2024 SCO+ meeting, President Putin frequently discussed increasing trade and investment exchanges, expanding the use of national currencies, and developing joint projects in various sectors. Additionally, in his speech at the Russia-Central Asia Summit, he detailed efforts to build new supply chains, create alternative logistics schemes, and improve financial settlement mechanisms. This focus on economic cooperation aligns with Russia's broader goal of enhancing economic resilience and reducing dependence on Western economies.

Content analysis of all three speeches shows that President Putin frequently mentions security issues, reflecting Russia's consistent focus on maintaining regional stability. In his addresses at the 2022 Samarkand SCO Summit and the 2024 SCO+ meeting, Putin discusses efforts to combat terrorism, extremism, and organized crime, as well as the importance of political and diplomatic conflict resolution. Additionally,

during his speech at the Russia-Central Asia Summit, he delved into specific security challenges, such as the situation in Afghanistan and the influence of external intelligence services. This persistent emphasis on security underscores Russia's priority to protect its borders and maintain a stable geopolitical environment.

In his speech at the 2022 Samarkand SCO Summit, the Russian leader focuses on European relations and sanctions, highlighting the geopolitical tension between Russia and the West amidst the military conflict in Ukraine. Putin criticizes the selective lifting of sanctions on Russian fertilizers, pointing to discrimination against developing countries. He also underscores the role of fertilizer and grain exports, linking agricultural issues to global food security and portraying Russia as a key player in addressing these concerns. Humanitarian principles and aid efforts are also central to his discourse, demonstrating his attempts to position Russia as a benevolent actor on the global stage.

In his speech at the SCO+ platform in July 2024 in Astana, President Putin dedicated significant attention to youth, reflecting a strategic focus on involving the younger generation in the structure and activities of the SCO. Initiatives such as the SCO Youth Council and various youth conferences aim to foster intercultural dialogue and cooperation among young people. The speech also outlined plans for the development strategy up to 2035, with particular emphasis on high technology, innovation, and sustainable development, as well as a forward-looking approach to economic and social progress within the SCO framework. Additionally, Putin underscored the importance of establishing a

multipolar world order, positioning the SCO and BRICS as central elements of this transformation, reflecting Russia's broader geopolitical narrative aimed at challenging Western dominance and promoting a more balanced global power structure.

Efforts to strengthen ties within the Eurasian Economic Union and other regional structures were highlighted during Putin's speech at the Russia-Central Asia Summit in 2022. During this address, President Putin discussed practical steps to enhance economic integration and build resilient supply chains, reflecting a strategic focus on regional self-sufficiency. The text analysis of this speech reveals a detailed discussion of cooperation in energy security, transport corridors, and digital technologies, emphasizing the importance of infrastructure development and energy partnerships in Russia's regional strategy. The speech also addressed the complex situation in Afghanistan, highlighting the risks posed by extremist groups and the role of external intelligence services, emphasizing critical security concerns in Russia's southern neighborhood.

Overall, the analysis of President Putin's speeches demonstrates his multifaceted approach to international

relations, consistently addressing themes of cooperation, economic development, and security (See Figure 2). These themes are tailored to the specific context of each event, reflecting both Russia's strategic priorities and its adaptive approach to international diplomacy. For instance, detailed discussions on economic issues and trade partnerships underscore Russia's strategic goal of establishing robust economic ties and reducing dependence on Western economies, particularly evident in the speech at the Russia-Central Asia Summit, which outlines specific steps towards regional economic integration and resilience.

The consistent focus on security in all three speeches highlights Russia's priority of maintaining regional stability and countering external threats. The detailed consideration of specific security challenges, such as the situation in Afghanistan, underscores the complexity of the security environment facing Russia and its proactive approach to mitigating these threats. The emphasis on youth engagement, technological innovation, and sustainable development in the SCO+ speech in Astana demonstrates a forward-looking approach to international cooperation, reflecting Russia's strategic vision for creating a sustainable and prosperous regional order.

Figure 2 - Word Cloud from President Putin's Speeches



Source: Figure created by authors.

### A Comparative Analysis of Rhetoric in Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin's Speeches

Based on the analysis of the most frequently mentioned words in the speeches of both leaders, the most prioritized themes promoted by the leaders to deepen

cooperation with Central Asian countries within the SCO and C5+ formats were identified. This section examines the content of the leaders' speeches through the lens of several categories and the arguments they used to support their positions. Key themes and categories were identified to structure the analysis. These categories were based on the most frequently recurring themes in the speeches, including Prestige/Leadership, Security Issues, Global Threats, Terms and Issues of Cooperation, the role of International Organizations, rhetoric on Foreign Policy issues, and Relations with Friends and Rivals.

A detailed reading of each speech was conducted to highlight and note key phrases, sentences, and paragraphs relevant to each category. Mentions were quantified where applicable, such as counting the number of times specific themes were referenced. The content was then examined in context to understand its implications. This involved comparing how each president addressed similar themes, noting differences in emphasis, rhetoric, and political positions. The results obtained from the analysis were compared across all categories, identifying similarities and differences in their approaches. Key points of comparison were summarized, focusing on the strategic priorities and rhetorical styles of each leader.

Based on the previously identified categories, the following analysis can be made:

**Prestige and Leadership:** Xi Jinping frequently emphasizes China's historical and cultural significance, highlighting the revival and modernization of the Silk Road. His speeches consistently reference China's economic resilience and long-term development goals. In contrast, Vladimir Putin stresses the importance of the SCO as a major regional organization, highlighting Russia's leadership and contributions to regional stability and development. Putin emphasizes the strength of Russia's partnerships and strategic alliances.

Both leaders underscore their countries' historical significance and leadership within the region, but Xi Jinping focuses more on China's long-term vision and

historical legacy, while Putin emphasizes Russia's role in maintaining stability and fostering economic growth. Xi's invocation of the Silk Road, beyond cultural symbolism, positions China as the key driver of regional development, thereby subtly asserting China's economic leadership in Central Asia. Putin, on the other hand, presents Russia as the guarantor of security and stability in the region, signaling the maintenance of traditional influence amidst growing Chinese engagement.

**Security Issues:** Xi Jinping prioritizes comprehensive security measures, emphasizing regional stability and the fight against terrorism. He advocates for the Global Security Initiative to address broader security challenges. Putin focuses on maintaining security within member states and along external borders, highlighting the fight against terrorism, extremism, and organized crime. He stresses the importance of transforming and expanding security cooperation structures within the SCO.

Both leaders prioritize security and stability, with Xi Jinping framing security within a broader global context, while Putin emphasizes specific regional security measures and the transformation of existing structures. Xi's broader framing suggests that China aims to incorporate Central Asia into a larger security framework, reinforcing its global rise. Putin, meanwhile, focuses on ensuring that Russia remains central to regional security through existing structures, thereby protecting Russia's traditional sphere of influence in the region.

**Global Threats:** Xi Jinping addresses global instability, regional conflicts, and non-traditional security threats, highlighting the importance of a stable Central Asia for global economic recovery. Putin discusses global and regional instability, including the situation in Ukraine and Afghanistan, and criticizes external interference and protectionist policies from Western countries.

Both leaders recognize the presence of global and regional threats, but Xi Jinping frames these threats within the context of global economic recovery and regional stability, while Putin is more critical of external

interference and specific geopolitical conflicts. Xi positions Central Asia as key to global stability, framing China as a stabilizing force in an uncertain world, while Putin's more defensive rhetoric centers on resisting Western influence in regional conflicts. This divergence reflects their broader geopolitical strategies, with Xi promoting China as a rising global power and Putin defending Russia's regional dominance.

**Terms and Issues of Cooperation:** Xi Jinping emphasizes cooperation through initiatives like the Belt and Road, highlighting the importance of economic, technological, and cultural cooperation. He advocates for mutual development and shared growth. Meanwhile, Putin stresses the importance of economic cooperation, including trade and investment, highlighting the development of new supply chains and logistics schemes. He emphasizes the importance of multilateral cooperation within the Eurasian Economic Union and other regional structures.

Both leaders emphasize economic and technological cooperation, but Xi Jinping focuses on broad, long-term initiatives like the Belt and Road, while Putin highlights specific projects and the importance of reconfiguring existing economic frameworks. Xi's Belt and Road Initiative aims to anchor Central Asia firmly within China's economic network, suggesting a long-term strategy for regional integration. Putin, on the other hand, focuses on reconfiguring existing economic structures like the Eurasian Economic Union, underscoring Russia's desire to maintain economic influence in the face of growing Chinese involvement.

**Role of International Organizations:** Xi Jinping strongly advocates for multilateralism and the role of international organizations like the SCO and BRICS, emphasizing the need for a fair and just global governance system. Putin emphasizes the central role of the United Nations and the importance of a multipolar world order, highlighting the significance of regional organizations like the SCO and BRICS in shaping the new world order.

Both leaders support multilateralism and the role of international organizations, but

Xi Jinping focuses more on global governance and fair development, while Putin stresses the importance of a multipolar world order and the roles of specific regional organizations. Xi's rhetoric suggests that China seeks to reshape global governance to better reflect its rise, advocating for fairer systems of international cooperation. Putin's emphasis on a multipolar order, meanwhile, reflects Russia's resistance to Western dominance and positions regional organizations as key players in this rebalanced world system.

**Rhetoric on Foreign Policy Issues:** Xi Jinping promotes peaceful development and mutual respect in international relations, advocating for comprehensive development initiatives and global partnerships. Putin stresses the need for peaceful resolution of conflicts, particularly in Ukraine and Afghanistan, and criticizes the policies of Western countries, emphasizing the importance of sovereignty and non-interference.

Xi Jinping's rhetoric is centered around peaceful development and global cooperation, while Putin focuses on conflict resolution and sovereignty, often criticizing Western policies. Xi's emphasis on peaceful development aligns with China's broader strategy of presenting itself as a non-threatening global partner, while Putin's focus on sovereignty reflects Russia's concerns about external interference, particularly from the West. These contrasting approaches highlight the differences in how each leader seeks to engage with the global order—Xi through cooperation, and Putin through resistance to perceived threats to sovereignty.

**Relations with Friends and Rivals:** Xi Jinping emphasizes friendly relations and partnerships with all countries, highlighting the importance of mutual respect and non-hegemonic behavior. Putin stresses strategic partnerships with specific countries and regional allies, highlighting the importance of equal dialogue and cooperation with both member and non-member states.

Both leaders emphasize the importance of friendly relations and strategic partnerships, with Xi Jinping taking a more inclusive and global approach, while Putin



focuses on specific strategic alliances and regional cooperation. Xi's approach to partnerships reflects China's ambition to build broad-based, non-hegemonic relationships across the globe, while Putin's focus on strategic alliances is more regional in nature, emphasizing the need to secure and strengthen Russia's influence through targeted cooperation.

Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin share many common themes in their speeches, including a focus on security, economic cooperation, and the role of international organizations. However, their approaches and emphases differ, with Xi Jinping leaning towards broad, global initiatives and peaceful development, while Putin emphasizes specific regional strategies, conflict resolution, and criticism of Western policies. These differences reflect their respective countries' strategic priorities and geopolitical contexts. The broader geopolitical implications reveal a subtle competition between the two powers, with Central Asia serving as a critical region for both China's global ambitions and Russia's regional influence. While their rhetoric promotes cooperation, their underlying strategies may lead to tensions as both seek to assert dominance in a rapidly evolving multipolar world.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was designed to conduct a comparative analysis of the speeches of two key leaders – Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, and Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation – focusing on their foreign policy strategies toward Central Asia. This research has demonstrated how the leaders of China and Russia utilize their speeches to advance their countries' strategic interests in the region. One of the most significant findings of this study is that the speeches of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin illustrate distinct approaches of their respective countries towards Central Asia. The results indicate that Xi Jinping emphasizes global initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, whereas Putin focuses more on specific regional strategies, conflict

resolution, and criticism of Western policies. Thus, Xi places a strong emphasis on fostering friendly relations and partnerships with all countries, highlighting the importance of mutual respect and non-hegemony, while underscoring China's role as a leading player in international relations. Conversely, Putin largely emphasizes practical aspects of economic cooperation and the importance of a multipolar world, criticizing Western influence and emphasizing the need to deepen strategic partnerships with specific countries and regional blocs. The findings of this study suggest that there are differences in the rhetoric of the two presidents, reflecting broader strategic and geopolitical priorities of each country, as they strive to strengthen their positions in Central Asia.

In our view, the results of this study make a valuable contribution and complement the growing body of contemporary literature on Central Asia, raising numerous questions that warrant further research. Clearly, future research could employ similar quantitative content analysis methodologies using various statistical tools and programming languages. It would be intriguing to analyze the speeches of other key leaders from interested regional and global powers, such as the United States, France, India, and others.



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**СТРАТЕГИЯЛЫҚ ДИСКУРСТАР: СИ ЦЗИНЬПИН МЕН ВЛАДИМИР ПУТИННІҢ ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ ТУРАЛЫ БАЯНДАМАЛАРЫНА КОНТЕНТ ТАЛДАУ**

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**СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ ДИСКУРСЫ: КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛИЗ ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЙ СИ ЦЗИНЬПИНА И ВЛАДИМИРА ПУТИНА ПО ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ**

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