

CONTEMPORARY SINO- RUSSIAN SECURITY PARTNERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UNITED STATES

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CONTEMPORARY SINO-RUSSIAN SECURITY PARTNERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UNITED STATES

Paul J. Bolt and Sharyl N. Cross*

The Sino-Russian relationship is a complex one involving a complicated historical background and cultural differences. However, ties between the two countries have been improving over the past few decades and the Sino-Russian relationship is arguably better now than it has been at any time in recent history. There are important reasons for both Russia and China to maintain their current good relations. There are also compelling reasons for both Russia and China to maintain positive relations with the United States.

The status of the Sino-Russian relationship has important implications for the United States. Cordial relations between Russian and China can benefit US interests, however an alliance between the two countries aimed against the US in particular or the West in general would constitute a significant threat. It is in the interest of the United States to foster regional stability throughout the globe and given the shared transnational security challenges of the emerging twenty-first century, Russian, China and the United States would benefit by seeking means for strengthening security cooperation among all three major powers.

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIP

The Sino-Russian relationship is a delicate dance which at first glance appears to be smooth and well-choreographed. However, on closer observation, it becomes clear that neither side quite trusts its partner. The steps of the dance are not completely agreed upon, nor is there certainty regarding which of the partners should lead. Moreover, each partner is looking over its shoulder at potentially more attractive mates. Assessing this dynamic and complex dance presents a fascinating analytical challenge with important policy ramifications.

Complicating this dance is the historical background of the Sino-Russian relationship. During the nineteenth century, a time of profound weakness for China's Qing Dynasty, Russia forced China to cede approximately 665,000 square miles of territory to the Czarist regime, while early in the twentieth century it worked to ensure the independence of Outer Mongolia.¹ After the 1917 Russian revolution and the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, Stalin gave much uninformed advice to the CCP resulting in the deaths of countless party members. A new era seemed to dawn in 1949, but even the

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signing of the *Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance* in 1950 did not entirely end suspicion, and Mao felt as if Stalin had not treated him as an equal during the negotiations.² The effort to sustain good relations broke down in 1960 when the Soviet Union withdrew all technical advisors from China. The relationship went downhill until it reached a nadir in 1969, with fierce fighting along the Wusuli/Ussuri River. At the same time, even given the strains in the relationship, it should be noted that Russia had experienced fewer conflicts with China than with several other European powers, and both countries shared fundamental ideological inspiration and affinity during the decades of the Soviet era. Ties began to improve under Gorbachev, and have reached new heights since the fall of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the earlier unhappy days are always a not-so-distant historical memory.

Today many aspects of the Sino-Russian relationship are positive. In 1996 the two countries proclaimed a strategic cooperative partnership. In 2008 both countries ratified an action plan to implement the *China-Russia Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness, and Cooperation*, which had been signed in 2001. Also in 2008 Wen Jiabao, China's premier, stated that the relationship is characterized by "strategic mutual trust."³ There are regular meetings between high level officials, often accompanied by the signing of agreements. In fact, in 2006 the Chinese and Russian heads of state met five times. China and Russia further have common positions on many international issues. The leadership of both nations claims that the border issues traditionally straining the Russo-Chinese bilateral relationship have been resolved, and both sides publicly encourage accelerating people-to-people relations. Thus 2006 was proclaimed the *Year of Russia in China*, while 2007 was designated as the *Year of China in Russia*. The Chinese State Council's Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations ranks Russia as having the friendliest relations with China of all the great powers.⁴

Nevertheless, there are also differences between the two nations. The economic foundation of trade and investment is relatively weak. Energy cooperation has not reached its potential, and the two states have competing interests in Central Asia. There are also structural issues that serve as an impediment to closer ties. Russia likes to act and be treated like a great power in the world, while China, for the most part, still continues to follow Deng Xiaoping's dictum of maintaining a modest foreign policy of a "developing nation" and not taking the lead on major international issues. Moreover, both China and Russia need the West more than they need each other.

The complexity of Russo-Chinese ties has led to numerous characterizations of the relationship. Mark Levine foresees a Sino-Russian alliance against the United States that may lead to war. Bobo Lo, on the other hand, refers to the relationship as an "axis of convenience," characterized by ambiguities and contradictions. Yong Deng believes that neither Russia nor China values their relationship primarily for its own sake, but rather each side sees ties as useful in creating the conditions for a better relationship

with the West. Peter Ferdinand puts the relationship in a constructivist light, arguing that national elites in both states are attempting to change the mindsets of their societies in order to create better relations.⁵

This paper argues that the Sino-Russian relationship is better now than it has been at any time in recent history. There are important reasons for both sides to maintain good relations. For instance, when both countries want to focus on building their economies through trade and investment, the lack of military tension along their extended border is of vital significance. Moreover, closer economic ties would benefit both states, particularly the border regions. Nevertheless, China and Russia also have close links with the West that sometimes interfere in the relationship they have with each other. Moreover, the legacy of history and differing cultural perspectives always remains in the background of the relationship. Finally, Russia's demographic decline, combined with China's economic growth, creates serious questions for Russians regarding their long term security vis-à-vis China.

The United States clearly has an interest in the character of the Sino-Russian relationship. The US faces a decline in its relative power. This is due in part to factors resulting from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. More fundamental, however, is the continued rise of regional powers such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and to some extent, Russia, as well as the continued relevance of Al Qaeda and other violent non-state actors. These factors raise the probability of regional tensions and conflicts.⁶ It is in the interests of the United States to foster regional stability throughout the globe. Cordial relations between Russia and China can benefit US interests, although an alliance aimed against the US in particular or the West in general would certainly constitute a threat.

AFTERMATH OF THE COLD WAR, SHIFTING STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE AND MOTIVATIONS

The foundation for the progress in the contemporary Sino-Russian relationship was laid before the collapse of the Soviet Union when President Mikhail Gorbachev introduced his "new thinking" foreign policy concept in Vladivostok in 1986, issuing an appeal for improving the relationship between the world's "two largest socialist nations."⁷ Before that time, China insisted that "three obstacles" be addressed before normalizing relations with the Soviet Union: the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Soviet forces along the Chinese border, and the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea. However, the ruthless suppression of demonstrators in 1989 and unraveling of the Soviet Union impeded further progress in the Russo-China relationship at the end of Gorbachev's tenure. Boris Yeltsin visited China shortly after assuming the presidency in Russia in 1992, and the Russian and Chinese leadership began to characterize their bilateral relationship as a "strategic partnership" in 1996 following considerable progress in resolving border differences. However, at the same time, especially early in the Yeltsin period, the Russian leadership was overwhelmingly focused on the United States and Europe. Thus Moscow's behavior toward China is significantly influenced by Russia's relationship with the West, and the struggle

for Russia's post-Soviet identity.

Initially after Yeltsin became president, dramatic transformations throughout the former Soviet bloc ushered in a period of euphoric expectations with respect to Russia and the West. The first foreign minister of the new Russian Federation, Andrei Kozyrev, spoke in terms of developing a "strategic partnership and alliance based on common values with the United States."⁸ Russia's first *Foreign Policy Concept* issued in 1993 referred to Western countries as the "dynamic factor in the progress of world civilization in the foreseeable future."⁹ However, pledges of "partnership" and even "friendship" were not matched by substantive progress in the US-Russian relationship through the decade of the 1990s.

From Moscow's perspective, two developments were most significant in explaining the sobering reassessment that took place over the decade of the 1990s regarding the potential for security partnership with the United States/Western nations.¹⁰ First, despite US/NATO attempts to downplay Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement, every Russian president has expressed sustained objections to expanding the Alliance. As early as 1994, Russia's President Boris Yeltsin warned of a "Cold Peace" falling over Europe, stating that "plans for expanding NATO" would "create new divisions" and "sow seeds of distrust."¹¹ The US/NATO air war in Kosovo also delivered a major blow that deflated high expectations for cooperation with the West. Following the Kosovo war, Russian official foreign and security documents reflected reassessment of the potential for cooperation with Western nations. For example, Russia's *Foreign Policy Concept* of 2000 warned of the "establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with economic and power domination of the United States," while Russia's *National Security Concept* issued in 2000 notes that "NATO's transition to the practice of using military force outside its zone of responsibility and without UN Security Council sanction could destabilize the entire global strategic situation."¹² Russians tended to conclude that NATO enlargement and the US/NATO Kosovo air war demonstrated that Western countries would take advantage of Russia's transitional weakness.

Russia's strains with the West in the early post-Soviet period created an opening for greater influence on the part of those associated with the variants of the traditional Eurasianist schools within foreign policy circles. Leading orientalist Evgeni Primakov, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996-1998) and Prime Minister (1998-1999), contributed to prompting the shift from a primarily Atlanticist focused foreign policy during the early Yeltsin period toward placing greater emphasis on advancing Russia's interests in Asia and the Middle East. Primakov went so far as to argue for promoting the development of a Russia-China-India strategic bloc to counter the influence of the United States. Alexander Yakovlev, senior research scholar at the Institute of the Far East in the Russian Academy of Sciences, wrote in 1997 that Russia, China, and perhaps India "can act as inspirers and organizers of a new anti-hegemonic, anti-Western international front."¹³ The continuation of NATO enlargement and

other tensions with Western countries led to greater receptivity to those arguing that Moscow must turn toward the East and South to create a bloc against perceived US unilateralism.

The debate between those who would look to the West and those who would look to Eurasia has a long history in Russia. Marlene Laruelle, leading specialist on the Eurasianist tradition in Russian society, traces contemporary Eurasianism to the early Slavophiles' association of "Europeanness" as "the main problem for Russia's nationhood."¹⁴ Laruelle argues that the sense of separation from Europe contributed to Russians turning toward Asia and other regions where they would "be recognized as the dominant power."¹⁵ Laruelle states that the Eurasianist concept "rejects the view that Russia is on the periphery of Europe," and contends that Russia's unique geographic location suggests that the nation might choose a "messianic third way."¹⁶ The Eurasianist concept holds that Russia's identity and culture has been shaped not only by influences originating in Europe, but also from Asia where two-thirds of Russia's land mass is encompassed. This orientation is often associated with Russia's national symbol, the double headed eagle, turning toward both the continents of Europe and Asia. Given Russia's unique location and cultural heritage, many have argued that historically and in the contemporary period Asia would play a critical role in the development of Russia's identity and destiny.

Bobo Lo downplays the influence of Asian culture in the Russian experience. Lo argues that the Slavophiles were hostile toward all outside influence, not just European cultures and traditions.¹⁷ He contends that Russia's Far East is not so much a part of Asia as an extension of Europe.¹⁸ Both Laruelle and Lo attribute Russia's recent heightened interest in China/Asia as being motivated by the pursuit of national interests, rather than identification with Asian culture.

Vladimir Putin made quite clear from the outset of his presidency in the annual address to the Federal Assembly in April 2001 that Russia's foreign policy should be built on "pragmatism" and "economic efficiency."¹⁹ Putin further stated that Russians must clearly understand Russia's national interests and "fight for them."²⁰ Putin confronted the tasks of having to bring Russia out of the societal disorder and economic turmoil that had characterized the Yeltsin era, in an environment where Russians were seeking a leader that could restore pride and respect for Russia's great power status in the world, and would resist compromising fundamental interests in relationships with the West. In order to achieve this, Putin sought to diversify Russia's international ties, turning away from near exclusive reliance on the West.

Putin referred to Russia as a "Euro-Asia" country to reflect both geographic reality and national interests. As Putin stated in 2001, "Russia has always felt herself to be a Eurasian country. Never have we forgotten that the greatest part of Russian territory is in Asia. But it must be said in all honesty that we have not always made use of this advantage...the time has come to mate words with deeds together with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and build up economic, political, and other links."²¹ Both

Russia and China found common ground in objecting to bombings during the Kosovo war, and this shared view was solidified following the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. Shortly after Putin assumed the presidency, Russia and China signed a *Treaty for Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation* in 2001 pledging a ten year commitment and elevating Russian-Chinese strategic cooperation.²² While making quite clear that the agreement was not directed against the US/West, the treaty expressed the commitment of the Russian and Chinese leadership to the “multi-polar” world order.

In considering Russia’s policy toward Asia and China in particular, there are several priorities for the Russian leadership that will continue to be critical for policy.²³ Above all, the early post-Soviet period left Russian society and Yeltsin’s successors with a strong desire to restore Russia’s respect and prestige in the world community. From a national psychological perspective, Russia’s leadership and society will never be able to come to terms with diminished status following the collapse of the Soviet empire. The Russian national identity is largely based on a perpetual “great power” image and a “special destiny” for Russia in world society. Moscow officials have frequently complained that they could not accept a “junior partner” status in NATO or other Western forums. Russians will often claim that the United States affords China greater respect than Russia, even though China and the United States are sharply divided ideologically. References to the need to “reassert” a “strong” and “self confident” Russia contained in the *Review of Foreign Policy* of the Russian Federation released in 2007 reflect this priority/motivation.²⁴

Russia’s relationship with China, and Asia more broadly, contributes to projecting the image of global presence and interests that Moscow desires. Reflecting the enthusiasm in official policy, writing in *International Affairs* in 2006 in an article entitled “Russians, Chinese - Brothers Forever,” Konstantin Vnukov of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that while the two countries possessed “such different civilizations,” the “main trend” in the “almost four-century old” history has been characterized by “peace and good neighborliness” with “periods of confrontation” being “short-lived.”²⁵ Vnukov described Russian-Chinese relations during the Putin era as reaching the “highest point in history...dynamic, encompassing all, even the most sensitive spheres.”²⁶

China also has important strategic reasons for seeking to maintain good relations with Russia. From an overall foreign policy perspective, China pursues what it defines as a multidirectional foreign policy that nurtures China’s own peaceful development. Economic growth continues to be a top priority, which requires a secure international environment. Good relations with Russia are necessary to carry out China’s development strategy. The relationship with Russia also has a broader aspect. Both countries have an incentive to hinder American policies that seek to expand international enforcement of human

rights and encouragement of democratization. Similarly, both countries desire a reduction in US influence in Central Asia, although China and Russia have competing interests there as well.

Chinese analysts have stated in interviews that the most important aspect of China's relationship with Russia is security, both on the border and in a broader sense. This is particularly so in light of history. During the Qing Dynasty, China ceded 665,000 square miles of territory to Russia in the *Treaty of Aigun* (1858), the *Treaty of Peking* (1860), and the *Treaty of Tarbagatai* (1864), territory on both the eastern and western sections of the border.²⁷ Nevertheless, these treaties did not clearly delineate the border. After the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, the border saw military tension in 1964. Armed clashes began in 1968, with the most serious occurring on Zhenbao/Damanskii Island on March 2 and March 15, 1969. The Soviets responded to these battles with an attack across the border in Xinjiang that wiped out a Chinese patrol squadron. These border confrontations led the Chinese leadership to fear escalation to general all-out war with the Soviet Union. As precautions, China's leadership dispersed across the country, government archives were moved out of Beijing, and China's military forces were put on their highest stage of readiness and moved to forward positions.²⁸

The situation today is much different. After the fall of the Soviet Union, China's border with Russia covers 3,605 kilometers in the northeast, and 40 kilometers in the northwest.²⁹ In 2008 China and Russia signed an agreement on the demarcation of the last remaining disputed territory. The border region has been demilitarized. Any remaining tensions focus on smuggling, illegal immigration, and customs procedures rather than militarized disputes. The Chinese side values this relaxed security environment, which enables it to focus on higher priority issues in its grand strategy.

While the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is not an alliance against the United States, China and Russia do often find themselves taking similar positions on international issues. For instance, both countries claim to support the core interests of the other country regarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Thus Russia rhetorically supports China's policies towards Taiwan and Tibet, while China has refrained from criticizing Russia's policies in Chechnya and among neighboring successor nations of the former Soviet Union.³⁰ In a similar vein, Beijing values its relationship with Russia in that it provides a counterweight to the United States and the advance of liberalism. Thus in January 2007, China and Russia vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning human rights violations in Burma, while in 2008 they vetoed a Security Council resolution that would have imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. Both sides emphasize that only diplomacy can resolve Iran's nuclear issues, although China and Russia did approve tougher sanctions on North Korea in 2009. China and Russia also call for a multipolar world order, in other words, one not dominated by the United States, where the U.N. Security Council plays a greater role. Thus in a speech in Moscow on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Sino-

Russian Ties, Chinese President Hu Jintao lauded both countries for their “unremitting efforts in facilitating world multipolarization and democratization of international relations.”³¹

Military cooperation is another important strategic aspect of the relationship that has been demonstrated by port visits by naval vessels and talks between high ranking officers. Most notable, however, are joint military exercises. The most prominent of these, conducted under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), were *Peace Mission* 2005, 2007, and 2009. The 2005 and 2009 exercises were held in China, while the 2007 exercises were carried out in Russia. The exercises are described as combating terrorism, but have included combat aircraft and naval vessels. While these maneuvers have been valuable for China in developing its capabilities, China has been embarrassed in front of the Russians when its forces did not perform up to expectations. In the 2009 exercise, for instance, a Chinese fighter bomber crashed. There have also been disputes with the Russians over where these exercises should be held, as their locations have political significance, and whether the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) should be involved.³²

ISSUES IN SINO-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC RELATIONS: SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION/EURASIA, ECONOMICS, ARMS SALES, ENERGY

Another important factor in Russian foreign policy is Russia’s relationship with post-Soviet nations. Elements within Russia’s foreign and security apparatus are threatened by limited capacity to exert influence among neighboring nations that previously constituted part of the Soviet empire, while at the same time these new nations are forging stronger associations with the United States, Europe, and China. Dmitri Medvedev has continued with the tradition established by his predecessor, suggesting that Russia enjoys a “zone of privileged interests” in the post-Soviet space. The Russian leadership displays a sense of entitlement in relationship with its neighbors, which derives from a combination of factors including history, shared cultural ties, and security and economic dependencies.

China does not contest Russia’s claims to exert influence in its near abroad. Nevertheless, Sino-Russian ties were strained during the Georgia crisis in August 2008. China refused to support Russia’s military action in Georgia or its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Similarly, the SCO took a neutral position on the issue. While Russia saw the issue as a core interest, China did as well. It feared that the recognition of the breakaway regions would set a precedent for Taiwan, Tibet, or other regions of China. Nevertheless, due to the closeness of relations, China did not publicly condemn Russia either, in spite of encouragement from the US.³³

Moreover, Central Asia is an arena of both cooperation and competition between Russia and China.³⁴ Both countries have important common interests in the region. Perhaps their greatest interest, especially since the initiation of the US/NATO war in Afghanistan, is to limit American influence in Central Asia. Other goals include stability, which US democratization efforts are seen as undermining,

and combating the “three evils” of separatism, terrorism, and extremism. However, there is competition between the two sides as well. While Russia is trying to rebuild its influence in the region, China’s economic and political power is growing. Energy is also an area of contention. While China wants to make deals with regional governments for oil, in part to stabilize Xinjiang province, Russia seeks to monopolize the area’s oil resources through its pipeline networks. Sun Yongxiang notes this explicitly when he states “China and Russia also have a competition for interests in Central Asia, directly involving energy.”³⁵ China has had some success with agreements that bring energy to China from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The SCO, established in 2001, provides a mechanism for Russia and China to work through issues in Central Asia. The SCO is a unique organization for China, in that China helped to institute the SCO and considers itself a leader of the organization. Pan Guang, Director of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies Center in Shanghai and the Institute of European and Asian Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, argues that China has provided theoretical guidance for the SCO. He also notes that China has been a key force in pushing for greater institutionalization of the SCO, and has been a strong supporter of SCO projects. Furthermore, Pan and other Chinese analysts see the SCO as demonstrating a new concept or model for Chinese diplomacy. This model embraces multinationalism, takes a cooperative approach to regional security, and clearly demonstrates regional cooperation. This model, often referred to as the “Shanghai spirit,” is explicitly contrasted with the approach of the United States, which is seen as unilateral and centered around military alliances.³⁶

China hopes to use the SCO to enhance energy cooperation across Central Asia, as well as move into other areas such as education, transportation, and tourism. In other words, China sees no necessary limits on functional areas of cooperation. In particular, China seeks greater development of economic cooperation in the SCO. This is important for the development of China’s western region and hence, in China’s eyes, is critical for dealing with the Uighur problem. Feng Yujun, Research Professor and Director of the Institute of Russian Studies, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, complains that the SCO “has not made substantial progress in the field of economic cooperation.”³⁷ The development of an “energy community” is one particular feature that the Chinese would like to see. Multilateral efforts in Central Asia have the practical effect of diluting Russian influence. Russia, therefore, seems to prefer to limit the organization to security issues.

Moscow is wary of both United States and Chinese competition in Central Asia. Several Moscow specialists see China’s influence in the SCO as an area of considerable concern. Dr. Dmitri Trenin of the Carnegie Center in Moscow contends that China is clearly more influential than Russia in the SCO.³⁸ Conversely, Dr. Victor Sumsky of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) acknowledges that while China and Russia compete in the SCO, the “Soviet heritage” left an established

network of associations giving Moscow an advantage in Central Asia.³⁹ Russian specialists also differ considerably with respect to the SCO's broader role. Both Dmitri Trenin and Viktor Kremenyuk argue that the SCO will never serve as a counterweight to NATO.⁴⁰ Kremenyuk describes the SCO as useful only as a mechanism for dialogue.⁴¹ Dr. Vassily V. Mikheev of IMEMO argues that regional organizations such as the CSTO are more effective for Russia, and concludes that the SCO is "almost useless" because the organization lacks a clear conceptual purpose and resources.⁴² He argues further that China would never support measures to move the SCO in the direction of countering NATO/West. Sumsky, by contrast, believes that the future of the SCO can't be predicted with certainty.⁴³ He argues that ten years ago no one could have predicted that the SCO would emerge to address military issues, and therefore one should exercise caution in making predictions about the future of the organization. Some Russian specialists are quite optimistic about the potential of SCO cooperation with the United States. Gennady Chufrin, Deputy Director of IMEMO, notes that cooperation between China and SCO member nations is strengthened by regular military exchanges, mentioning anti-terrorist exercises such as "Peace Mission 2007" held in Chelyabinsk in 2007, and noting that the SCO would welcome deeper cooperation with the West in promoting peace and stability in Central Asia and countering threats emanating from Afghanistan.⁴⁴

Stimulating economic growth and improving living standards are among the highest priorities for China's and Russia's leadership. Nevertheless, economic ties ultimately are linked to strategic and Eurasian issues as well, and thus are seldom simple. Russians must overcome the industrial and infrastructure obsolescence resulting from the decades of the inefficient Soviet centralized economic management. Burgeoning capacity in the energy sector fueled Russia's renewed influence on the world stage, and the society seeks to achieve a level of economic opportunity and living standards approximating that of the leading European nations. The bulk of foreign direct investment in Russia comes from the European Union, with Germany being Russia's most important trading partner. US-Russian economic ties are quite less significant than US-Chinese economic interdependence. However, China's economic growth makes the nation an important player when considering Russia's long term economic development. Many Russians believe that China in some sense owes Russia economic support because of the assistance the Soviets offered to the PRC in fueling China's post-1949 industrialization and modernization. As Russia's society suffers the adverse repercussions of the world financial downturn, it has become more obvious than ever to Russia's leadership, financial community, and society that Russia's fate is linked to stabilization of the world economy, and that overcoming the crisis will require unprecedented levels of cooperation among nations to include China as a major player in the international financial arena.

From the Chinese perspective, trade and investment with Russia have been disappointing. According to the International Monetary Fund (based on Chinese statistics), in 2007 China exported to Russia \$28.5 billion worth of goods, while importing \$19.6 billion.⁴⁵ Three things are noteworthy. First, Chinese exports to Russia jumped 80% over the previous year's total. Second, imports climbed at a much slower rate, giving China its first trade surplus with Russia. Third, this trade is relatively insignificant compared to China's total trade. Both exports to Russia and imports from Russia account for only 2 percent of China's total exports and imports.⁴⁶ These trade numbers reflect the fact that Russia has little to export to China besides weapons, oil, and raw materials such as timber.

Utilized foreign direct investment by Russia into China in 2007 was only \$52 million, less than .07 percent of China's total, and less than half of Russia's 2004 total.⁴⁷ On a brighter note, the number of Russian visitors to China (measured in person-times) rose from just over one million in 2000 to over three million in 2007, comprising 11.5 percent of China's total number of overseas visitors.⁴⁸ Evidence from interviews suggests that the world economic crisis that struck in 2008 is taking a strong toll on Sino-Russian border trade.

One area where China would like to see further economic cooperation with Russia is in the development of its three northeastern provinces. There are clear areas of potential cooperation for northeastern China and the Russian Far East (RFE). The RFE needs labor and consumer goods, while China requires Russian resources and technology. However, barriers to cooperation from the Chinese perspective include the imbalanced trade structure, undeveloped infrastructure in the region, the small size of firms in the region, Russian customs procedures, Russian neglect of Siberia, and Russian fears of Chinese involvement in the RFE.⁴⁹

Russia has taken several steps recently that have proven to be an irritant in economic relations from the Chinese perspective. For instance, because Russia wants to increase timber processing, it has raised export tariffs on unprocessed lumber, much of which goes to China. China has long complained of the difficulties Chinese merchants have clearing Russian customs. In June of 2009, Russia closed down the Cherkizovsky Market in Moscow, where approximately 50,000 Chinese migrants had worked. Many sustained heavy losses after their goods were seized. China, unhappy with the way its citizens were treated, sent Vice-Minister of Commerce Gao Hucheng to Moscow.⁵⁰ In 2008 Russia raised vehicle emission standards to Euro III levels, slowing Chinese auto exports to Russia.⁵¹

A commercial dispute turned deadly in February 2009. Although the details are sketchy, a vessel owned by a Hong Kong company, the *New Star (Xinxing)*, and manned by Chinese and Indonesian sailors, was sunk by a Russian warship that fired 500 rounds at the vessel. Russia said eight sailors were lost. One explanation for the incident is that the Chinese vessel brought poor quality rice to Russia. The Russian purchaser brought the issue to court and the court ordered the Chinese vessel to remain in port.

Eventually the Chinese vessel attempted to flee. Others suggested the ship may have been involved in smuggling. From the Chinese perspective, the Russians greatly overreacted. China's deputy foreign minister, Li Hui, criticized the way Russia handled the incident and strongly protested to the Russian ambassador to China. Some Chinese analysts commented that this demonstrated Russian indiscipline or a harmful nationalism. Clearly this struck a nerve in China. Nevertheless, the issue died down quickly. The Chinese protested the attack, but handled it in a way so as not to damage long-term relations with Russia.⁵²

A relatively successful area of Sino-Russian economic (as well as strategic) cooperation has been Russian arms sales. China is engaged in a long-term effort to modernize the People's Liberation Army, including its air and naval components. One of the chief ways it has sought to accomplish this is through arms purchases from Russia, particularly due to the American and European arms embargoes against China in place since 1989. China has purchased advanced fighters, anti-ship cruise missiles, anti-radiation missiles, guided missile destroyers, submarines, surface-to-air missiles, and various military technologies and production rights from Russia.⁵³ From 1990-2007, Russia sold China \$25 billion in weapons.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, from China's perspective there have been problems with arms sales as well. China complains that Russia has been unwilling to sell it Russia's highest technology, including weapons that Russia sells to India, and that Russia has charged too much. There have been production problems and price disputes, and Russia has also accused China of stealing intellectual property regarding weapon designs. In 2007, Russian arms sales to China plummeted. It is not certain if this is due to commercial issues or a change in policy by Russia or China.⁵⁵ In addition, there have been attempts to smuggle weapons from Russia to China, including an effort to smuggle \$18 million in bombs and missiles to China through Tajikistan in 2009.⁵⁶

The area for greatest potential economic cooperation between China and Russia is in energy. On the surface, there seem to be complementary interests between China and Russia in the energy trade. Russia has abundant gas and oil resources, and China is an energy importer. Diversifying its customer base would seem to make good business sense for Russia, while China seeks secure energy sources not threatened by the volatility of the Middle East or sea blockade. However, energy is about much more than trade. It is also about national power. Thus the energy relationship between China and Russia is a touchstone of their overall relationship.

There have been numerous plans for specific energy projects between Russia and China. For instance, in 1999 China and Russia began negotiations on an oil pipeline from Russia into northeast China. In March 2006 the two countries signed a *Memorandum of Understanding on Russia Supplying Natural Gas to China*. Reporting in June 2009, the *China Daily* optimistically announced plans to build

power transmission lines across the Chinese-Russian border.⁵⁷ However, much of the promise remains unfulfilled.

For example, the Chinese section of the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline has not been completed. This is due, in part, to competition between China and Japan for Russian oil. The pipeline is slated to run from Taishet in the Irkutsk region to the Pacific port of Kozmino. Oil can be shipped to Japan from Kozmino. A spur of the pipeline is to run from the Russian city of Skovorodino to the Chinese city of Daqing. China is supposed to receive 15 million tons of oil annually by 2011, although there are questions as to whether Russia can complete the pipeline and produce the promised oil. The pipeline deal was finalized after the offer of a \$25 billion Chinese loan to Russia's oil and pipeline companies Rosneft and Transneft. Currently 14-15 million tons of oil is shipped to China every year via railroad, although even here Russia has insisted on raising the initial contract price.⁵⁸ Russian gas sales to China have not materialized, due to environmental issues, the difficulty of terrain, and price issues. However, Russia has opened a liquefied natural gas plant on Sakhalin Island to supply gas to Japan.⁵⁹

Chinese analysts express frustration with Russia. For example, Sun Yongxiang refers to the "tortuous course of Sino-Russian energy cooperation over the past ten and more years." Zhao Jialin states that "it seems...that Russia always keeps China in suspense on energy-related issues." Wang Huiyun suggests that Russia is engaged in a destructive "unilateral pursuit of interest maximization."⁶⁰ In a remarkably candid piece in *Guoji maoyi (International Trade)*, Han Lihua states that the biggest obstacle to Russian-Chinese energy cooperation is Russian national interests rooted in geopolitics and economics. Han states that "Russia proceeds more from national security interest considerations on the issue of supplying oil to China. Selling oil to China will help China's rapid rise, posing a challenge to Russian national security and forming a threat; unless it is curbed, Russian interests will suffer. Under this premise, Russia regards energy sources as a lever for prying open relations with China."⁶¹

THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE

Perhaps most importantly, the shadow of the future is influential in Sino-Russian relations. It seems likely that the future will bring continued growth in Chinese power. The future of Russia is more uncertain. Currently there seems to be a consensus among Chinese elites that Russia should be treated as an important partner, although there is some question about how a new generation of elites, without experience in Russia and focused on the West, might change its orientation. In the longer term, however, as power differentials change, it is uncertain if China will maintain its current policies.

At the same time, one can see clear differences among Russia's leading specialists on China/Asia. For example, Dr. Vassily V. Mikheev of IMEMO would be among the optimists, stressing the positive benefits of US-Russia-China cooperation, and the likelihood that common interests will bring these

countries together in the future.⁶² Dr. Victor Sumsky, also of IMEMO, takes a more cautious position with respect to the potential for US-Russia-China cooperation.⁶³ While Mikheev contends that all border issues with China have been resolved, Sumsky argues that there are still unsettled differences with respect to Russia's borders. Sumsky suggests that Russia has several concerns or fears with respect to China, to include China's rapid economic growth, intrusions and other challenges in the Siberian Far East, Russia's disadvantages with respect to demographic projections, and potential domestic political turmoil/upheaval in China in the future that could threaten security in the border areas and beyond. Sumsky emphasizes that Russia should focus on accelerating economic growth in order to be in a position to manage potential challenges from emerging China.

Other analysts in Russia express concerns regarding relative diminished capability with respect to China. For example, Dr. Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Center in Moscow, argues that in any US-Russia-China security relationship, Russia would always be apprehensive because Moscow would be the weakest among the three powers, and therefore lack confidence that Russia's interests would be served.⁶⁴ Similarly, Mikhail Troitsky of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) argues that above all Russia can no longer sacrifice core interests, and such a danger would exist in relationship to China and the United States given Russia's more limited military and economic capacity.⁶⁵

In addition to the rational or traditional national interests and Eurasianist-oriented elements influencing recent Russian posture toward China, democratic/liberalizing elements in post-Soviet Russia express concerns regarding the appeal of the Chinese model. Russia undoubtedly experienced reversals in the democratization process during the Putin period in terms of political party development, imposing restrictions on the media and non-governmental organizations. Many Russians committed to democratization believe that the economic success of the Chinese experience could lead over time to greater tolerance in Russian society for an authoritarian system of governance. Some express concerns that building closer economic and security ties with China could further erode support for democratization and integration with Western economic and security structures.

Russia's demographic challenges and the vast population differences between Siberia/the Far East and northeastern China also generate apprehension throughout various levels of Russian society. For example, speaking in Blagoveshchensk in July 2000, Vladimir Putin stated that if "in the short term we do not undertake real efforts to develop the Russian Far East, then in a few decades the Russian population will be speaking Japanese, Chinese, and Korean."⁶⁶ Economist Mikhail Delyagin recently noted in an interview on *Radio Komosomolskaya Pravda* that Russians should not fear China "because it wants to do something bad" to Russia, but because "there is a law of nature," which "abhors a vacuum," referencing the vulnerabilities for Russia resulting from the influx of Chinese migrants into Siberia and the Far East.⁶⁷

Migration challenges can often take xenophobic, racist or exaggerated alarmist tones. Alexander

Lukin has documented the fears of Chinese intrusions into Russia reflected in the so-called “yellow peril” appearing in discourse as early as the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in the writings of Dmitri Merezhkovskii, General Aleksei Kuropatkin, and others.⁶⁸ Alexander Lukin captures the perspective offered by General Kuropatkin writing in 1913 in his book entitled *The Russo-Chinese Question*, arguing that “the influx of the ethnic Chinese population into the formerly sparsely populated territories of Manchuria and Mongolia at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century was the beginning of a new offensive of the ‘yellow peril’ in modern times.”⁶⁹ In modern history, the 1969 Sino-Russian border clashes evoked images of the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century and the “yellow peril.” Today these concerns are still frequently expressed in particularly alarmist terms in the Siberian and Far Eastern territories (Khabarovskii Krai, Primorskii Krai) with references to “Chinese infiltration” and “Sinification” (kitaizatsiia).⁷⁰ The influx of Chinese migrants is often overblown by local politicians and in local/national media coverage. While commentators frequently offer flippant references to border crossings of “millions,” the entire Chinese population in Russia is estimated between 200,000-400,000 people. Such sentiments are not unlike the xenophobic trumpeting of threats expressed with respect to transfers of migrant workers throughout Europe or from Mexico into the United States. While these workers fulfill requirements needed to ensure continued economic growth, there is a common resistance and fear among local populations that culture and security are threatened by the presence of these migrating populations. Increasing Chinese investment in Russia has contributed to mitigating these sentiments, but the burgeoning Chinese population is still perceived as a significant challenge for ensuring future territorial integrity and cohesive governance throughout the vast Russian nation, especially in Siberia and the Far East regions.

Chinese analysts are not unanimous in their views on Russia, but there are fewer differences of opinion than one finds among Russia’s China-watchers. This is because China is in the ascendance. It still adheres to a policy of not taking the lead, and analysts see time as on China’s side. One debate that does exist regards the progress that Russia will make in regaining great power capabilities. For example, Yan Yaping, lecturer at Beijing’s University of International Relations, suggests that in order to be a global power, Russia must deal with three contradictions. These include the contradiction between strong central government and democratic liberties that serve to restrain government; the economic contradiction, as Russia unsuccessfully struggles to broaden its export base beyond energy; and the diplomatic contradiction, as Russia veers between taking a low international profile and directly challenging the United States.⁷¹ Other scholars have asserted in interviews that China has always regarded Russia as a great power and will continue to do so.

On the whole, Chinese analyses of relations with Russia are very practical. China values its relations with Russia first because of the security it provides China’s northern border, as well the ensuing

cooperation against extremism.⁷² This not only gives China greater flexibility regarding Taiwan, but also allows China to focus on its number one goal of continuing domestic development. Russia provides a useful partner in global disputes regarding a liberal world order, although China also works hard to ensure that it maintains good relations with the United States. China's other goals with Russia are related to economic growth: increased trade, development of the northeast, and enhanced energy supplies. In the end though, one can argue that Russia needs China more than China needs Russia. In attempting to prevent becoming a junior partner to NATO, Russia may in fact become a junior partner to China.

China recognizes Russian fears and the potential for future conflict. As one Chinese scholar warns, "With both superpowers rising simultaneously in the narrow space of Asia, all the questions of whether there is an adequate 'runway' and the degree of involvement of manpower, markets, resources, and the international environment should be looked into." In addition, the same source warns China and Russia must both work hard to "avoid a state of polarization – be it alliance or hostility."⁷³ It is arguably in the interests of China, Russia, and the United States to avoid such polarization.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICAN POLICY

While the Russo-Chinese relationship has improved over the past decade, it is important to consider that both Russia and China still place a greater value on their respective bilateral relationships with the United States. Both the Russian and Chinese foreign policy communities recognize that neither country would be served by an alliance against the United States. In addition, given the shared transnational security challenges of the emerging twenty-first century environment, Russia, China, and the United States would benefit by seeking means for strengthening security cooperation among all three major powers.

The United States would be well served to enlist increasing support from partner nations throughout the world in shouldering more of the burden for managing the global security challenges. The need for major powers and clusters of nations sharing resources and working in collaboration through multilateral organizations and networks will only become increasingly important. Terrorism/militant extremist ideologies, arms control and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, migration, energy, human trafficking, crime, piracy, and environmental decay will be successfully addressed only by strong partnerships among diverse nations of the world community. Any nation that would attempt to assume a disproportionate share of the burden for managing these security challenges risks significant dissipation of resources.

There is no question that Russia and China must devote considerable resources toward continued modernization, economic growth, infrastructure development, and improving conditions for so many citizens that still suffer in poverty and lack access to adequate health care and education within their

countries. Russia will face serious demographic constraints as a result of a declining population, while China must manage a variety of human and environmental challenges. Essential domestic needs notwithstanding, given current growth rates, projections indicate that China is likely to possess the world's largest economy within the next two decades. Although China has focused resources on economic modernization and elects to assume a modest orientation toward the world, the enormous growth of China's economic and military capacity must inevitably be accompanied by a more assertive and engaged role in global affairs. In spite of Russia's diminished status following the collapse of the Soviet empire, Russia remains a huge nation straddling two continents and is emboldened by its role as a major world energy power. As permanent members of the UN Security Council and possessing significant presence in regional diplomatic, security, and economic groupings of nations, both Russia and China will contribute to setting the global agenda. United States interests would be well served by stronger partnerships with both Russia and China in cooperative efforts for meeting the challenges of the coming decades.

At least for the foreseeable future, the United States will encounter significant obstacles attempting to build a relationship with the Russian Federation or China on the basis of common values. Some believe that Vladimir Putin's successor, Dmitri Medvedev, will be more inclined to seek democratic liberalization. However, Medvedev still enjoys the backing of the same group that surrounded Putin, supporters who reject most features of Western democracy. Contemporary Russia and the West are no longer divided by ideological conflict, but there are undeniable differences in culture and values. Western criticism of Putin's restrictions on political parties, media, and NGOs was dismissed by Moscow's leadership and much of the broader society as nothing more than inappropriate intrusive interference in Russia's domestic affairs. China and the West have divisions as well. While China has made tremendous strides in economic growth over the past several years, any significant democratization of the regime is resisted by the CCP. Placing undue emphasis on the obvious shortcomings of Russia's domestic political development or the lack of democratic liberalization in China is likely to be counterproductive and damaging to cooperation at this juncture.

With continued engagement and integration, over a period of decades rather than years, transference of values or greater openness on the part of Russian and Chinese societies toward adopting Western-oriented democratic values could take place. Both Russia and China need the West to fuel further economic growth and development. In the meantime, building a relationship based on patient long term engagement in areas of shared interests is the most viable option for achieving long-term democratic transition. Greater exposure and openness is inevitable in the information age, which should work in favor of democratization. We should promote cooperation in areas of common interests, and offer a unified voice with other Western nations in seeking to resolve differences on issues where serious

conflicts of values and interests emerge. The United States and European nations are more likely to contribute to a positive end state for Russia and China with an approach based on setting a desirable example and partnership.

In addition, involving Russia increasingly in Asian security issues could yield advantages. Historically, while Russia always assumed the role of the “older brother” in the Sino-Soviet relationship, today the relative power differential has been reversed. Engaging Moscow in Asian security issues could help to offset a potentially dangerous perception of diminished status or fear of being threatened by a US-China alliance. In discussing the US-China-Russia relationship, Russian specialists frequently express concerns about possibly being marginalized vis-à-vis the two other powers possessing greater military and economic capability. At the same time, Russia’s influence in Asia makes for a potentially valuable contribution in managing regional conflicts and transnational security challenges. The United States and China would most benefit by a relationship of constructive engagement with the Russian Federation, rather than Moscow being prompted by a self perceived sense of weakness to act as a spoiler for American or Chinese interests.

One can debate whether NATO has sufficiently transformed to the post-Cold War security environment. While it may be difficult to adjust the structure and mission of the NATO alliance, it should remain as a strong foundation for contributing to stability and security in the emerging twenty-first century international community. Almost two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, NATO nations are still working to re-define the objectives, structures, and mechanisms suited to the realities of the contemporary and future security environments. US President Barrack Obama has emphasized the importance of the nations of the transatlantic community in reaching out to Russia, China, and other nations of the world community to address shared security challenges.

The NATO-Russia Council (NRC) has provided a forum for facilitating dialogue and practical cooperation between NATO and the Russian Federation. However, the NRC has yet to yield results commensurate with the full potential for NATO-Russia security cooperation. Dmitri Medvedev’s proposal for a new European Security architecture introduced in 2008 suggests that Moscow is entirely dissatisfied with current security relationships in Europe, and believes that the existing structures do not serve Russia’s national interests.⁷⁴ Recognizing common threats, NATO and China have had some discussions with respect to cooperation. At a NATO anti-terrorist exercise held off the coast of Taranto, Italy in 2007 with invited observers from China attending, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated that “China is an important nation, we do not neglect China and China does not neglect NATO.”⁷⁵ However, China’s out of area status would always pose greater limitations for NATO-China cooperation than in the case of Russia. In March 2009, the SCO convened a conference in Moscow inviting participants from NATO to discuss counter terrorism and the security situation in Afghanistan.

The meeting yielded a *Joint Action Plan* calling for supporting “practical interaction” between Afghanistan and its neighboring states in combating terrorism, drug trafficking, and organized crime.⁷⁶ In the future, given the increasing transnational nature of NATO’s security challenges, it seems the NATO-SCO cooperation should be explored, notwithstanding the fact that these organizations are based upon different values and missions. The SCO is not likely to emerge as an anti-Western bloc, not the least as a result of Russian-Chinese competition within the organization, and cooperation among Europe and Asia might be encouraged where it makes sense and helps to diffuse divisions.

The United States, Russia, and China are ambivalent regarding each others’ future intentions. The policy communities in Washington, Moscow, and Beijing remain skeptical that a triangular relationship characterized by a benign posture among the three countries is likely for the future. Furthermore, there are concerns that allying too closely with one or the other nation could result in being drawn into disputes with the third country. Since the collapse of the Soviet empire and particularly in response to the 9-11 attacks, US policymakers have been consumed with counter terrorism and preoccupied with Iraq, Afghanistan and instability resulting from the implosion of smaller failed states. It would behoove the American policy community to focus greater attention on the major power centers, particularly Moscow and Beijing, where the consequences of policy decisions will be so significant for the nature and stability of the entire world community.

The current US administration might seize the opportunity for proposing a bold new initiative for opening security dialogue among these three major powers. This might include establishing a basis for routine three country consultations with a broad ranging security agenda to include arms transfers/arms control, regional conflict resolution/management, climate, energy, counter-terrorism, and migration. The world has changed drastically since President Richard Nixon opened the path for easing Russia/China tensions when he traveled to Moscow and Beijing to initiate the “strategic triangle” relationship based upon advancing the national objectives of each country. The United States might assume a productive role as a “balancing” influence among the three players. Rather than fueling existing perceptions of US attempts to assert influence as a global hegemon or imposing unilateralist solutions, a constructive balancing force that would further mitigate any tendency toward Russo-Chinese alliance or opposition to US interests seems most advantageous. The need for greater levels of trust, better communication, and cultural understanding among nations cannot be underestimated for governing the complex and interdependent security environment of the world community. The relationships among the United States, Russia, and China - three nations possessing vastly differing historical experiences and cultural traditions - will be pivotal for regulating world politics well into the twenty-first century.

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- ⁶¹ "PRC Scholar Views Problems."
- ⁶² Author's interview with Mikheev, June 25, 2009.
- ⁶³ Author's interview with Sumsky, June 26, 2009.
- ⁶⁴ Author's interview with Trenin, June 26, 2009.
- ⁶⁵ Author's interview with Mikhail Troitsky, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGMO), Moscow, Russia June 26, 2009.
- ⁶⁶ www.kremlin.ru/text/appear/2000/07/28796.shtml, cited in Lo, *Axis of Convenience*, 58.
- ⁶⁷ Radio interview with Mikhail Delyagin, *Radio Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Moscow, June 8, 2009.
- ⁶⁸ Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk, London: M.E. Sharpe 2003).
- ⁶⁹ A. H. Kuropatkin, *Russko-Kitaiskii vopros [The Russian-Chinese Question]* (St. Petersburg: tipografia tovarishchestva A.S. Smirnova, 1913), cited in Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon*, 53-56.
- ⁷⁰ For excellent analysis of contemporary Sino-Russian migration challenges, see Mihhail A. Alexseev and C. Richard Hofstetter, "Russia, China, and the Immigration Security Dilemma," *Political Science Quarterly* 121, no. 1 (2006).
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- ⁷² See Pan Guang, "A Chinese Perspective," 45-46.
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