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ASIA PROGRAM



Woodrow Wilson
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Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: A Threat to American Interests?

STEVEN I. LEVINE • ALEXEI D. VOSKRESSENSKI •
JEANNE L. WILSON

Introduction

Gang Lin

A decade after the end of the Cold War, the United States faces the prospect of a potential Sino-Russian strategic realignment, a possibility that rekindles memories of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s. The development of this renewed Sino-Russian partnership has been facilitated by the delineation of the long-disputed border between the two countries, their common interests in economic and military exchanges, and their shared opposition to a "uni-polar" world order dominated by the United States. Left unanswered, however, is the degree to which China's economic potential and Russian arms sales to China will enhance the two countries' strategic partnership. What will be the political impact on the two countries' bilateral relations of increasing Chinese migration into the Russian Far East? To what degree will U.S. national missile defense proposals promote the further development of a Sino-Russian strategic relationship?

Four China and Russia experts explored the prospects for a Sino-Russian strategic partnership as well as its implications for U.S. foreign policy interests during a April 11, 2001 seminar on "Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: A Threat to American Interests?" co-hosted by the Woodrow Wilson Center's Asia Program and the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. Panelists agreed that the emergence of a



Russian-Chinese strategic partnership reveals the two countries' uneasiness with the uni-polar post-Cold War world order, but differed as to whether such a partnership will develop into an anti-Western alliance. Containing three essays contributed by seminar speakers, this special report explores the possibility of a Russian-Chinese strategic alliance and its implications for the United States.

In the first essay, **Steven I. Levine** of the University of Montana argues that the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership emerged as an expression of the two countries' unhappiness with the post-Cold War world order dominated by the United States, but emphasizes that this new grouping cannot offer a concrete alternate paradigm to the present international system. The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership, as a "second-tier" relationship, can serve to exert pressure against the West in order to reinforce the "first-tier" relations that Moscow and Beijing must develop with the West. Russian and Chinese leaders therefore need to strengthen their strategic partnership, primarily by focusing on areas of bilateral concern, without jeopardizing their links with the United States. The disparity in power and wealth between

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Russia and China provides both opportunity and danger for their bilateral relations. In order to enjoy a strategic partnership with China, Russians must swallow their pride and be willing to play second fiddle to the Chinese virtuoso, at least temporarily. While both countries pledge to respect each other's territorial integrity, it is not certain whether the Russian Far East will be an arena of cooperation or conflict between Russia and China over the next half century, Levine cautions.

In the second essay, **Alexei D. Voskressenski** of the Moscow-based MGIMO-University agrees with Levine that Russian-Chinese relations cannot be an alternative to their relations with the United States and do not constitute an anti-Western bloc. Partnership with China is important for Russia in the intermediate term, as it provides markets and labor resources for Russia and psychologically compensates for Russia's vulnerability in Eurasia. For China, partnership with Russia is the major factor bolstering its efforts to transform itself into a global power. Voskressenski observes that the Kosovo crisis had a profound impact on the development of the Russian-Chinese partnership. As a result of the crisis, it has become clear that the world is far from moving towards multi-polarity. The swift enlargement of NATO towards the East or the acceleration of American missile defense programs, however, may push the Russian-Chinese relationship toward an anti-Western alliance, Voskressenski warns.

The third essay by **Jeanne L. Wilson** of Wheaton College contends that both Russia and China are motivated to develop a strategic partnership based on independent assessments of their convergent mutual interests. These include the maintenance of peaceful, stable and secure relations along the Russian-Chinese border, the Russian sale of weaponry and related technologies to China

impelled by a commercial imperative, and the hope to influence the foreign policy behavior of the United States. Wilson lists several constraints on the development of a Russian-Chinese strategic partnership, including Russian fear of the "sinification" of the Russian Far East and the marginal development of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. Like Levine and Voskressenski, Wilson believes both Russia and China are more concerned with their relationships with the United States than their relationship with each other, but she joins with Voskressenski in arguing that the presence of the United States as the predominant actor in the world serves as a powerful stimulus impelling Russia and China toward the development of a strategic partnership.

In commentary delivered during the seminar, **Alexander Lukin** of the Brookings Institution emphasized the geopolitical dimension of Russian and Chinese strategic partnership. According to Lukin, Russian-Chinese partnership is not based on their marginal economic exchanges, but is driven by their shared desire to maintain the status quo in world politics. Such a view was enhanced by NATO's 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia without the endorsement of the United Nations. The prospect for a Sino-Russian strategic partnership is contingent upon each's relations with the United States. The more the United States acts unilaterally, the more likely Russia and China will be drawn together to check this uni-polar trend, Lukin concluded.

This special report explores the possibility of a Sino-Russian strategic realignment, which is driven, among other things, by their shared desire to exert pressure against the United States. Such a partnership could threaten U.S. interests around the world, although this is not preordained. While both Moscow and Beijing at present still focus less on their mutual relationship than each's relationship with the United States, no one can guarantee that the two countries' strategic priorities will remain the same under all circumstances. The signing of a Sino-Russian treaty of friendship and cooperation in July 2001 was an important milestone in the development of a Sino-Russian strategic partnership that deserves America's attention.

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Some Reflections on the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership

STEVEN I. LEVINE

During the past decade in which Russian-Chinese relations have undergone a sea change, Americans concerned with international politics have paid scant heed to a subject in which we used to take an almost obsessive interest. Instead, we have viewed China's rise and Russia's fall as separate dramas, worthy of attention only insofar as they individually influence America's paramount position in the international system. This neglect is unfortunate. First, the history of the past century suggests that the state of relations between Russia and China, two of the great nations of the world, has an important impact upon regional stability in the Asia Pacific region and upon the world as a whole. Second, the interest that Russians and Chinese take in, and the lessons they draw from, each other's affairs will influence the trajectory of development in both countries.

Our insouciance concerning the state of Russian-Chinese relations is in marked contrast to the era of the Cold War, when the subject of Soviet-Chinese relations commanded the attention of battalions of U.S. government and academic analysts. Much of their writing focused on relations within the so-called US-USSR-PRC strategic triangle. The popularity in American academic and policy circles of that seductive concept derived, I believe, from its facile reduction of the complexities of Cold War international relations to a three-person game. As seen from Washington, the object of the game was to ensure that the United States enjoyed better relations with one or both of the communist giants than they enjoyed with each other. Success would deter revolutionary challenges to an international order dominated by the United States. Failure might lead to the revitalization of the Sino-Soviet alliance which, during the scant decade it operated (1950-1959), haunted the dreams of U.S. policymakers and analysts. Following this logic, in the 1970s U.S. global strate-

gists forged an anti-Soviet alignment with the PRC that undergirded Sino-American relations until the end of the Cold War.

Many observers were so invested in the Sino-Soviet conflict which, they mistakenly asserted, was rooted in immutable historic enmities, that they failed to notice signs of Sino-Soviet rapprochement until the process was almost complete. Fortunately, by that time, Soviet-American relations had improved to the point that Washington was able to accept the reality of Sino-Soviet normalization with equanimity. Unfortunately, it turned out that the imposing edifice of Sino-American relations had been constructed on a sandy foundation. Seen in this light, the architects of Sino-American normalization in the 1970s, including Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, deserve far less credit for their achievement than they are commonly accorded. Mine, as usual, is a minority view.

The point of this exercise is not to inflict a history lesson upon a captive audience, even though that may be an historian's prerogative, but rather to emphasize our predilection for viewing Russian-Chinese relations through the lens of real or imagined American interests. There is nothing wrong with that perspective providing it does not inhibit our ability to understand the Sino-Russian relationship on its own terms as well. The idea of a Russian-Chinese strategic partnership that Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin first proclaimed five years ago, in April 1996, evokes memories of the Sino-Soviet alliance of half a century ago, but it is actually nothing of the sort. Why it came about, what it is, and in what directions it might evolve are questions that this essay addresses. In approaching this subject, it is imperative that we not allow our memories of the Cold War to deform our understanding of the present or distort our attempt to consider the future. The circumstances that engendered American con-

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cerns a generation ago have passed into history. To anticipate a conclusion, most analyses of contemporary Russian–Chinese relations point to a combination of objective and subjective factors that serve to limit the scope and efficacy of the strategic partnership. Yet, if the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership is unlikely to shift the regional and global balance of power, it is nevertheless true that U.S. policies toward Russia and China individually as well as toward their partnership will have a significant influence on how that partnership develops and what role it plays in the coming decade.

THE BIG PICTURE

In one respect, the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership is the logical outcome of developments in the bilateral relationship going back to the twilight years of the Soviet Union. I shall briefly touch upon this point below. But the partnership also emerged as an expression of Moscow's and Beijing's unhappiness with the shape of the world system. The leaders of Russia and China repeatedly proclaim their support for a multipolar world in place of the post–Cold War world order dominated by a single hegemonic power, namely, the United States. Yet, invocations of multipolarity have no more efficacy than did incantations of proletarian internationalism in the salad days of world communism. Movement in the direction of genuine multipolarity will occur, if and when it does, through changes in the actual distribution of hard and soft power—military, economic, cultural, and ideological—among major world actors, not through rhetorical proclamations. For better or worse, then, the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership cannot offer a concrete alternate paradigm to that of the present U.S.-dominated international system. Although they may prefer it were otherwise, both Russia and China confront the necessity of working out a satisfactory relationship with the existing international system. Neither singly nor together can Beijing and Moscow form the core of an alternate international system such as international communism represented after World War II. In the unlikely event that Chinese and Russian leaders should mistake hopes for reality, the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership could actually impede, rather than advance, their core foreign policy objectives.

For this reason, the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership is self-limiting. If it veers in the direction

of an exclusive and confrontational relationship vis-à-vis the West, particularly the United States, it risks losing its principal international *raison d'être*. In essence, that is to exert pressure against the West in order to improve the terms on which Russia and China relate to the West. Its utility, in other words, consists in its potential rather than its actualization. If its potential were to be realized, namely, if Moscow and Beijing actually tried to organize an alternate international system, say, on the model of President Sukarno's phantasmagoric New Emerging Forces of the 1960s, they would isolate themselves and be doomed to failure. Not that I think there is even the remotest possibility of this happening.

Russian and Chinese leaders need to strengthen their strategic partnership, primarily by focusing on areas of bilateral concern, without jeopardizing their links with the United States and the West. The partnership may serve to remind Washington that Moscow and Beijing must be taken seriously. To the extent that the two countries are able to identify overlapping interests and coordinate their policies, they can be stronger in tandem than individually. The inherent risk, however, is that the rhetoric even more than the practice of Russian–Chinese cooperation may stimulate U.S. paranoia. Unfortunately, Moscow and Beijing cannot count on Washington not to overreact. On the contrary, the history of the past fifty years suggests that the United States, as a global power, is hypersensitive to perceived threats and quite prone to such behavior. Therefore, maintaining a proper balance between Russian–Chinese relations on the one hand and relations with the United States, on the other, is no easy task. It may help to think of the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership as a **second-tier** relationship which, if successfully managed, can reinforce the **first-tier** relations that Moscow and Beijing must develop with the West (the United States), but which cannot substitute for those first-tier relations.

ROLE REVERSAL

Ironically, it is Russia's weakness rather than its strength that gives hope the task may be managed successfully. For nearly 150 years, from the time of Nikolai Muraviev through Mikhail Gorbachev, Russia/the USSR enjoyed a wide advantage over China in military and economic power. The subordi-



nate position that Mao's China occupied vis-à-vis the Soviet *lao da ge* (elder brother) accurately reflected the distribution of power within the Sino-Soviet alliance, a situation the Chinese naturally resented. When the process of Sino-Soviet rapprochement began in the early 1980s, China had just begun its period of rapid growth and the inner weakness of Soviet power was only beginning to be exposed. The disparity of power remained. A scant decade later the relative position of the two powers reversed itself. Now China is strong; Russia weak. This provides both opportunity and danger.

In order to enjoy a strategic partnership with China, Russians must swallow their pride and be willing to play second fiddle, at least temporarily, but perhaps for a very long time, to the Chinese virtuoso. Even leaving aside the "Yellow Peril" (*zheltaya opasnost'*) demagogues, there are naturally a variety of opinions within Russia about the wisdom of casting in with China. A key question, of course, is whether China itself poses a mid- to long-term threat to Russian interests and security.

For their part, Chinese policymakers, confident in China's continued ascent to global power status, must weigh the costs and benefits of embracing such a weak partner. China no longer needs Russia to gain access to the world as it did half a century ago. Moreover, as an Asian power, Russia has never come close to realizing the potential that advocates of eastward expansion promised beginning in the mid-19th century. Gorbachev's hopes of transforming Russia's Far East into an active player in the booming Asia-Pacific regional economy of the late 1980s seem almost as distant as the Russo-Japanese War. For Beijing, an alternate option to the strategic partnership is to treat Russia pragmatically as the paraplegic power it became with the collapse of the USSR, making bilateral arrangements to deal with concrete issues such as border security, trade, immigration, etc., but without humoring the vanity of a country that is no longer a great power.

In his short time in office, Vladimir Putin, who inherited the Russian presidency through a kind of dynastic succession, has tried very hard to recentralize domestic authority and revitalize Russia's role as a great power via presidential diplomacy and other means. This effort contains a large element of calculated make-believe. Even though, apart from its nuclear weapons capacity, Russia no longer possesses

the requisite attributes, by acting as if he were the leader of a great power, Putin seeks to assert Russia's global role more successfully than were he to "seek truth from facts," as China did in the post-Mao era. But there is certainly no novelty in middle powers masquerading as great ones. Maoist China did this brilliantly and postwar Britain and France provide additional examples. To succeed in the pretense, a diminished Russia must act the part of a great power, and constantly remind itself and others of its vast potential. Incidentally, the great power charade has considerable domestic political utility, too, in that it satisfies the nationalist cravings of all but the extreme chauvinists, thereby allowing Moscow to focus more easily on Russia's internal problems including the bloody suppression of the national struggle in Chechnya. In short, the simulacrum of a great power may suffice when the real thing is unavailable much like the realistically-painted cardboard tanks and planes that were used during World War II to deceive enemy intelligence.

A final way of emphasizing the limits of the current relationship that Russia and China have entered into is to present a brief, two-point comparison between the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance of February 14, 1950, and the contemporary Russian-Chinese strategic partnership. The treaty was a military pact that obligated Moscow and Beijing to cooperate in resisting aggression on the part of Japan or any country collaborating with Japan, meaning the United States. It became the basis for all-around Sino-Soviet military cooperation including the assignment of thousands of Soviet advisers to Chinese military units, large-scale transfer of advanced Soviet military technology to the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the training of Chinese officers in Soviet military academies, and the deployment of Soviet pilots and aircraft in support of Chinese involvement in the Korean War. The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership contains no binding commitments to joint action. It merely proclaims a commonality of outlook with respect to global politics and certain regional issues. By most accounts, the sale of Russian high tech weapons systems to China over the past decade, including high performance jet fighters, naval vessels, production licensing agreements and so forth, has been motivated by commercial and economic considerations much more than strategic calculations. Russia's military-

industrial complex, which dominated the economy in the Far East and Maritime Province, was particularly hard hit in the 1990s, and China provided a partial answer to keeping a crippled economy going.

Second, the thirty year term of the Treaty indicated that its signatories, Stalin and Mao, intended the treaty to outlast their own rule, and expected it to become a core structural feature of the international system. And so it did for a decade. Because the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership lacks any binding commitments, it would be meaningless to assign it an expiration date. Nevertheless, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov recently stated that in advance of Jiang Zemin's July 2001 visit to Moscow a document incorporating a ten-year term to the strategic partnership was being drafted.¹ To borrow a Chinese expression, this is like adding legs to a snake, a superfluous gesture. Whatever term is arbitrarily assigned it, the strategic partnership is inherently provisional pending clarification of whether Russia can reconstitute itself as a great power and China can master the huge problems of integration and development it faces. If the prospects for the latter are at best uncertain, those of the former, as already suggested, are worse. By comparison, ten years after its defeat in World War II, Japan had already stabilized its political system and was well along the path to economic greatness. Ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is again veering toward authoritarianism while the economy stagnates. It seems that the U.S. occupation of Japan under the American shogun Douglas MacArthur was considerably more effective than the pseudo-occupation of Russia under the economic tsar Jeffrey Sachs.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

I have left too little space to deal with what is perhaps the essence of contemporary Russian-Chinese relations, namely, the bilateral arena. Here I can do no more than list a few areas for discussion.

The interests of both Russia and China as well as the security of Central Asia and the Asia Pacific region are best served by a cordial relationship between Moscow and Beijing. The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership is the culmination of a process of rapprochement that began some twenty years ago, after Mao Zedong and Leonid Brezhnev succeeded

in bringing Sino-Soviet relations to the brink of war, a conflict that could have been avoided entirely.

The benefits of Russian-Chinese cooperation include:

- A settlement of the supposedly intractable border problem.
- Modest levels of Russian-Chinese trade, including border trade.
- A modus vivendi between Russia and China with respect to the new states of Central Asia.
- Demilitarization of the Russian-China and China-Central Asian border zones and reduction of military forces.
- The institutionalization of a border immigration regime that has reduced the extent of unregulated immigration and partially allayed fears among Russians in the Far East and Maritime provinces concerning China's so-called demographic challenge.

Each of these items, of course, deserves extended discussion, and they are listed here simply as a kind of aide memoire. The main point, however, is that positive relations between Russia and China, whether they are labeled a strategic partnership or anything else, are conducive to the efforts of both Moscow and Beijing to concentrate on their domestic problems without having to waste massive resources in preparation for conflict as the USSR and PRC did during the period of the Sino-Soviet conflict. It would be naïve, of course, to project the amicable Russian-Chinese relationship into the future just as it was foolish to suppose that the Sino-Soviet conflict would persist indefinitely. The disparity in power and wealth between the two countries is a continuing source of tension. A great weakness of the current Russian-Chinese relationship is the virtual absence of the multidimensional societal connections that, for example, connect China and the United States even during periods of great stress. Prior to the Soviet era, Chinese lived and worked throughout Russia in larger numbers than they do at present. If the Russian-Chinese partnership is to endure, it will have to be rooted in the social fabric of each society, something which does not exist presently.

Let me conclude on an explosive note, to provoke discussion, if for no other reason. Presently China supports Russia's efforts to suppress the Chechen rebels and Russia gives unqualified verbal support to China's claims over Taiwan. Both countries, which



face the prospect of internal fragmentation, pledge to respect each other's territorial integrity. This would seem to guarantee Russia's tenuous hold over its Far Eastern and Maritime provinces. Yet, taking the long view, Russia's hold over these territories may be as tenuous as its hold over Alaska proved to be in the 19th century. The Trans-Baikal region has never been effectively integrated into Russia. Its promise has always been deferred rather than fulfilled. It has been more often a net drain on the financial, human, military, and other resources of the Russian state than a source of benefit. Yet, it is difficult to conceive of any Russian leader operating in a quasi-democratic system ever abandoning these withered fruits of tsarist expansion. Nevertheless, Russia survives without Ukraine and Byelorussia, areas whose connection to

Moscow long antedated the colonization of the Trans-Baikal region. It may be that a Russia relieved of the burden of this thinly populated and still largely undeveloped region would be better able to focus on its primary tasks. Russia and China first encountered each other several centuries ago along the frontier of empire. Empires expand and contract. Whether the Russian Far East will be an arena of cooperation or conflict between Russia and China over the next half century is one of the many questions that deserve our continued attention.

ENDNOTE

1. "Russian Diplomat Worried Over Chinese Plane Spat," <http://europeaninternet.com/russia/news.php?id=329952>, 4/4/2001.

Russian-Chinese Partnership in a “New” Global Context

ALEXEI D. VOSKRESSENSKI

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In a new global context, relations between the United States, Russia and China need not be adversarial as the three countries search for areas of cooperation in economic and security matters. The United States, European Union, Japan, Russia and China can, by working together, forge a future world order that is beneficial to all states seeking peaceful and just developments.

The Russian-Chinese partnership generally, and Russian-Chinese military and technological cooperation especially, cause concern in the West. American analysts point to the impact of the Russian-Chinese partnership on the regional strategic balances that comprise the global international system. They are not happy with the similarity of the Russian and Chinese official views on East Asia and the Taiwan Strait—i.e., in regions where the interests of the United States are considered vital.

It must be clearly understood that although there are some signs that Russian-Chinese partnership consolidates both domestic and international elements that oppose liberalization and democratization and impose strains on Russian and Chinese relations with the West, this must not be seen as the main purpose of Russian-Chinese partnership. Instead, it is a by-product of a necessary strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries. Russian-Chinese relations are not an alternative to the relations of each with the United States and do not constitute an “anti-Western bloc.” The main rationale of the partnership is to construct a new type of relationship aimed at promoting a new and just world community of equals rather than of leaders and followers, where the legitimate interests of all states are taken into consideration, and where all states, notwithstanding their position in the international system, can develop peacefully without being afraid that their internal policies will be reviewed by strategically biased organizations that have dubious status under international law. It would be a pity if this major trend was misperceived and Russian-

Chinese relations were interpreted simply as a malicious conspiracy to undermine American dominance. In constructing a new world order, interaction between the United States, Russia and China need not be purely competitive and adversarial. All three countries can and must find areas of cooperation, especially in the spheres of economic development and security. Otherwise, the world may sooner or later return to a bi-polar structure with new opposing poles—the United States and the PRC.

Regardless of how Russian-Chinese relations develop, and regardless of America’s attitude toward the partnership, the United States will be compelled to watch closely the dynamics of tactical coordination between Russia and China in international relations (especially concerning Iran, Iraq, NATO, and in the UN Security Council). Washington will also want to pay attention to Russian-Chinese cooperation in the fields of military technology, energy, and transportation, development of a new sub-regional system of security, and the demographic shifts on both sides of the Russian-Chinese border. In the intermediate term a negative attitude by the United States and the West toward the Russian-Chinese partnership may well prevail.

A NEW GLOBAL CONTEXT

“Vital” national interests of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region include the management of change in the region, minimization of instability in the PRC and Russia, and management of the process of integration of the PRC into the global community. It is in the U.S. interest for the latter to occur smoothly, without fundamental change in the balance of international relations. Thus, China should not be too weak or too strong. In addition, the United States seeks to strengthen a global regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, to cover itself and its allies with a National Missile Defense (NMD) system, and to keep intact mecha-

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nisms of direct and indirect monitoring of power shifts in Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific.

The new global context at the beginning of the 21st century is largely dominated by the United States as the world's pre-eminent power by an unexpectedly wide margin. The European Union (EU) is still not a coherent unit in terms of foreign and military policy. Russia is neither an integral part of the European system nor a coherent part of an anti-Western coalition. China is only accumulating potential. Accordingly, there is simply no rival to the United States across all dimensions of power (economic, financial, military and even cultural). As the leading beneficiary of the post-Cold War period, the United States has tried to shape the international system in ways that will perpetuate American pre-eminence well into the future. At the same time the United States cannot shape the world alone, cannot and does not want to be a world policeman, and will need strong allies to build a world based on democratic values.

The PRC aspires to become a global power and to ensure conditions where China's wishes will be decisive in the future. China would like to present an authoritarian alternative to democratic values, but also wants to ensure external conditions for helping its economic transformation, modernizing its armed forces, and maintaining stable supplies of badly-needed oil. In addition, China aspires to accumulate forces to become a "first tier" state.

From the point of view of the Russian Federation, its relations with Europe in the political context are of crucial importance to Russia's entry into the economic space of the EU. Geopolitical and geostrategic contradictions may grow between Russia and the United States as the weak economic relationship between the two countries and Russia's financial dependence on the international lending institutions, which are supervised by Washington, exacerbate differences between Russian and American security interests. In contrast, the strong economic ties between the PRC and the United States enhance their mutual interests. Because of difficulties related to alleged money laundering and spying activities, U.S.-Russian relations are at one of their lowest ebbs since the Cold War. The main achievement of Russian diplomacy after the collapse of the Soviet Union—to enjoy close relationships with the United States, Europe and China simulta-

neously—has been eroding, as has been the possibility of making Russia an unshakable and important part of the Western coalition. This most benefits China, which has worked to construct strong economic, security and personal ties with all major centers in the current international system. While the West and Japan closely watch Russian-Chinese relations, especially in the field of military technology cooperation, American-Chinese negotiations about NMD are seen by Russia as "separate negotiations" shaking China's partnership with Russia. There is only one beneficiary of this situation—the PRC.

Because of the misperceptions inherited from the Cold War period, there are doubts whether either the West (led by the United States) or Russia can propose a positive economic agenda that could help construct a just and safe world that gives all states room for independent development notwithstanding their position in the international system.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RUSSIAN-CHINESE PARTNERSHIP

Relations with the PRC are very important for Russia, as China is Russia's largest Asian neighbor. This is and will be for a foreseeable future the main geostrategic rationale for Russian foreign policy, notwithstanding the current stage of Russian-Chinese relations. Friendly strategic relations with China guarantee Russia stable borders in the East and simultaneously a reliable rear in its relations with the West, just as friendly relations with Russia give China similar benefits. The Yeltsin government took a positive approach to China by pursuing relations that gave concrete benefits to Russia—strategic stability on the Russian-Chinese border, large-scale interstate trade, and promotion of Russian and Chinese small businesses. In recent years relations between the two states have grown even closer. Russia and China have a common interest in preventing military-political domination, especially in the Asia-Pacific, by any sole power (the PRC has yet to transform itself into the regional hegemon) and in stimulating a multi-polar international system, as this provides each the opportunity to ensure a place in the international system adequate to its potential.

Russia does understand that it will not be a superpower in the international system anymore. Globalization has changed the nature of power in

such a way that the relative importance of military power has considerably declined as fewer goals can be advanced through physically seizing and holding new territories. Another by-product of globalization is the stratification of states into two groups: one receives more benefits out of globalization and the other receives either negative consequences or a mixture of problems and benefits. Globalization naturally brings big countries with mixed (China), transitional (Russia) or developing (India) economies together in attempts to elaborate strategies to adapt to the new world and not to become mired in the periphery of the global economy.

In this situation there is no other way for Russia to remain an important actor in the international system than to take part in the global game. Unfortunately the Russian political elite does not understand that to do this, the country needs to avoid unintentionally uniting international and domestic elements that oppose Russia's liberalization and domestic reform. There are elements in the Western political elite as well that still believe that it is worth thinking how to weaken Russia further in order to bring it close to the West in a subordinate role or to break it into pieces.

Russian-Chinese relations today can be described as a "confidential partnership aimed at constructing strategic interaction in the 21 century." American analysts call this partnership "limited," since they believe that Russia and China can not fully overcome the obstacles to a genuine or full-fledged partnership. A full-scale strategic partnership between Russia and China is only a possibility. However, if such a possibility were realized, Russia could well reap all the fruits of such a new alignment of the international system. One possible outcome would be that China, by virtue of its future superpower status, would continue to attract investments for modernizing and strengthening its economy both domestically (using already accumulated capital and redistributing internal reserves) and internationally (relying on the Chinese diaspora). Russia would then confront restrictions on external investments and would be compelled to choose between the West and China—that would be the worst-case scenario for Russia in view of its geopolitical position between the West and Asia.

Partnership with China is important for Russia in the intermediate term, as it psychologically com-

pensates for Russia's vulnerability in Eurasia and the relative weakness of its foreign policy positions in comparison with that of the former USSR. With the help of China, it is possible to stabilize or even to strengthen Russia's Asian "underbelly" (especially in Central Asia). Any Russian conflict with the West because of NATO enlargement or because of NMD would tie down Russian strategic attention in the West and weaken it in Central Asia. In this situation it is logical for Russia to rely on Chinese support in Central Asia, where Russia and China in the short run enjoy generally close strategic understanding, even if this would mean for Russia a strengthened China in Central Asia.

Simultaneously China acts for Russia as an attractive prospective market for industrial and high-tech (including military) exports. Russian goods face discrimination in the markets controlled by the United States and the European countries, and the money earned by Russia must go to repay restructured Russian debts, especially to Germany. For Russia Chinese labor resources are also important, since some estimates project that Russia's working-age population will shrink by one million between 2006 and 2010. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will decrease in importance as a source of migration to Russia, and in the intermediate and long term Russia will need a new source to supply labor-intensive industries. That source may be China, due to its demographic resources and high rate of unemployment.

For China, partnership with Russia is the major factor bolstering its efforts to transform itself into a global power, as it provides political, military-technical, and technological support to China. For China, the formation of a real multi-polar global system is extraordinary important. Without the active role of Russia, and Russia's anti-Western (soft or rigid) policies, it is hardly possible to hinder the formation of an international coalition that could prevent the progress of China to the status of a first tier state.

It is necessary to understand that though China is not strongly emphasizing the Chinese-Russian partnership internationally, the prospect of this partnership in the short and intermediate term is just as important for China as for Russia—if not more so. With the help of Russia, China can make significant progress in modernizing its armed forces, remove



areas of possible tension with Russia on terms acceptable to China, and gain access to the energy markets that are not controlled by the Western states.

The Russian market is important for maintaining the growth rates of the Chinese economy. The export growth potential for Chinese production in Western markets is no longer great, since China has already captured a lion's share of the international market in labor-intensive and low-price products. Without wide access to the enormous Russian market, the probability of a crisis in the Chinese economy is increased. At the same time, China can buy relatively cheap raw materials on the Russian market, thereby saving transportation costs.

It is not a secret that Russian-Chinese relations also have "hot buttons." These include the change of strategic roles in their partnership, the polar opposite character of demographic problems in China and the Russian Far East, different understandings of the trade potential between their economies, and the regional status quo in Central Asia (where NATO's influence has increased, and Russia's has decreased). Political elites in Russia as well as possibly in the Western core nations underestimate Chinese ability to indirectly project its strategic-economic assets both to the north (northwest and northeast) and to the south.

However, it was a gain for all that, as a result of their strategic partnership, Russia and China signed a Russian-Chinese treaty that resolved old boundary questions and greatly opened Chinese markets for Russian industrial products and financial activity. Some Russian politicians believe that this result justifies even the partial and temporary alienation of Russian relations with the West.

In this connection it is clear that, during the Yeltsin presidency, the long-term Russian strategy of maintaining equal distance from the various centers of the international system was correct. The Western coalition defines the general structure and climate of the international system. From these countries, Russia can receive technologies and investments necessary for re-structuring its economy, increasing the standard of living of its population, and, what is probably more important, supporting economic reforms. However ignoring relations with other countries (including even countries of an anti-Western alignment), especially with China (with its huge economic and future superpower potential),

India, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, or Australia, can be a miscalculation.

THE IMPACT OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS ON RUSSIAN-CHINESE PARTNERSHIP

The Kosovo crisis had a profound impact on the development of the Russian-Chinese partnership and on the formation of a Russian-Chinese tandem. The events that Moscow and Beijing had feared most and were trying to prevent had actually happened. The global superpower, the United States, used military force, employing the powerful military machine of NATO, to resolve an urgent international problem according to its own dictates, without the sanction of the world community represented by the United Nations. In this way, the United States acted as a world policeman, without the wisdom of a world leader.

As a result of the Kosovo crises, it became clear that the world was far from moving toward multipolarity. Moscow and Beijing arrived at the obvious conclusion that for the sake of the higher priority of opposing the United States and NATO, both countries had to increase efforts to expand their cooperation in all directions, including the military sphere, and at the same time to downgrade existing or potential frictions between them.

The positions held by Russia and China during the Kosovo crisis were similar but motivated by different circumstances. First, while not agreeing with the policy of Milosevic, they considered NATO's methods for resolving this international crisis dangerous to the maintenance of international stability. Secondly, being multi-national states and having ethnic problems resembling those of Yugoslavia, Russia and China were gravely concerned that the precedent for "resolving" such a crisis, set by the United States and NATO, would pose a direct threat to their own sovereignty and security in the future. Thirdly, Russia and China had no other choice but to insist on respect for the role and prerogatives of the United Nations. A failure to do so would mean moving international relations to uni-polarity, while also intensifying domestic political struggles in both countries at a moment when both need consolidation of all political forces to reform their economies.

As the result of the Kosovo crisis both China and Russia arrived at one other important conclusion.

Their worst fears about the new, expanded NATO as the key element of the European security scene after the Cold War had come true. During the Kosovo crisis, NATO acted not as a structure that synthesized multipartite interests and employed evolutionary, political methods of resolving complex problems in Europe. NATO instead acted in a unilateral and biased manner as a Cold War military machine, obviously dominated by the interests and perceptions of the United States.

In the period since Kosovo, Russian and Chinese representatives have repeatedly stated their inclination to progress to a new and more advanced stage of the “strategic partnership” between the two countries. This advance may take place in both political and military-technical spheres, and would certainly be accelerated by the implementation of a NMD system or NATO enlargement.

One obvious consequence of the Kosovo events is China’s apparent growing anxiety over the potential advance of NATO through Central Asia to Chinese borders. The majority of the Central Asian countries are participants in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program, and some of them, Azerbaijan in particular, have already shown a strong desire to become full members of NATO. China is seriously concerned over the possibility that in addition to deteriorating military relations with the United States, it will eventually have to deal with NATO in close proximity to its borders. To counter such a prospect, China recently demonstrated its strong interest in developing relations with the members of the so-called “Shanghai five states” (Russia, China and the Central Asian states that signed the Shanghai Communiqué). It is almost certain that possible NATO membership of one of the Central Asian states will radicalize Chinese foreign policy, and strengthen the overall evolution (including further enlargement) of the Shanghai Forum (Shanghai Organization of Cooperation) in an anti-Western direction (with a security and military dimension) that would be a step toward a destabilizing polarization of the international system.

In July 1999 president of Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui, stated that the relations between Taiwan and China should be treated as “the special relations between two states.” This statement was interpreted in Beijing as a deviation from the principle of “one China” and as a policy aimed at stimulating sepa-

ratism and tension. President Lee most obviously took his cue from the Kosovo crisis. Due to the Kosovo crisis, Beijing’s relations with the United States and NATO and Moscow’s relations with NATO reached their lowest point in the last several years. For China the Kosovo events and deterioration of the situation in the Taiwan Strait were obviously linked to each other. This indirectly increased the importance of Beijing’s ties with Moscow. Given the strained relations with the United States, Russian support is extremely valuable in Beijing’s eyes. Russia can provide a reliable military and strategic “rear” in the north of China in case of an unpredictable aggravation of the situation in the Taiwan Strait and possible military conflict between China and the West over the future of Taiwan. At the same time, Russia can exert a unique geopolitical influence on China in such a way that Chinese military deployments and political influence elsewhere will be severely constrained.

The Kosovo crisis presents two paths for possible international development. Under one scenario, the United States and NATO will cement and expand the uni-polar international system (including bringing the Baltic and the Central Asian states into NATO), and divide spheres of influence in Eurasia among NATO, China and Russia, mostly in NATO and China’s favour. Russia in this situation has two options—either join EU and NATO (such a development seems very problematic and is viewed suspiciously by EU and NATO); or isolate itself from the West and initiate alliances with marginal (if not rogue) states—Byelorussia, Moldova, Pakistan, Libya, Iran, Iraq, or other states in direct or indirect opposition to the Western coalition. Such alliances, though very disturbing because of Russia’s military (especially nuclear) potential, represent a bigger long-term strategic danger for Russia itself than for the West. Such a development would hinder the economic and political modernization of Russia and solidify its status as a weakened and anti-Western state. From the military point of view such alliances do not represent a serious threat, as NATO simply cannot “swallow” more than the former Warsaw bloc and still pursue a strategic union with Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia and with states of the former Soviet Union in Central Asia. However this development would exclude Russia from Europe, bring it close to China, polarize international rela-



tions, and set back an evolving world order beneficial to all states—not only to the Western coalition.

Under the second scenario, a neutral buffer zone consisting of pro-NATO but not anti-Russian states would be formed in the European and Asian parts of Eurasia (the Baltic states, Ukraine, some Central Asian states). They will not have more formal relations with NATO beyond the existing “Partnership for Peace” framework and, for security and economic reasons, would also have stable relations with Russia. In Central Asia stabilization would be achieved by equally balancing the interests of NATO, Russia and China, where Russia in the intermediate term could receive support from China as well as NATO in order to strengthen its position in Central Asia.

At the same time, relations between United States, NATO and Japan are growing stronger in the Asia-Pacific. The unification of Korea is being pursued. A unified Korea may become tied to NATO and become a buffer between China and Japan. China aspires to the status of a “deciding power” in the global system, but its progress to superpower status may be

balanced by Japanese-American security arrangements, the status quo on the Korean peninsula, or by direct or indirect participation of a unified Korea in NATO (or preferably a new bloc not even symbolically a remnant of the Cold War) and the peaceful democratic resolution of the Taiwan question.

Such developments, while perhaps not so favorable for Russia, would raise its status in the international system. Radical enlargement of NATO towards the East (inclusion of the Baltic states plus one of the Central Asian states), or the establishment of American or joint American-Japanese NMD/TMD would radicalize the anti-western direction of Chinese foreign policy and might forge a broad Russo-Chinese anti-Western alliance. That is why the equally-balanced status of Russia, with close informal ties with both the West and China, is the sole safety valve in the new international environment with a possibly rising adversarial relationship between the United States and the PRC.

Prospects for Russian-Chinese Relations: Whither the Strategic Partnership

JEANNE L. WILSON

In the past decade, bilateral interactions between Russia and China have undergone a remarkable transformation. Relations between the two states were at best lukewarm with the emergence of the Russian Federation in January 1992. The collapse of communism at its original source constituted an immeasurable blow to the Chinese leadership, which regarded the ascendance of Boris Yeltsin with fear and dismay. For its part, the Russian leadership oriented its foreign policy toward cultivating relations with the West, making few attempts to hide its distaste for China as the remaining large communist power. Nonetheless, by September 1994, the two states had established a “constructive partnership,” a relationship that was subsequently upgraded to its current format as a “strategic partnership” in April 1996. At the present time, moreover, the two states are working on the drafting of a formal document, characterized as a “comprehensive political treaty,” reportedly to be signed in July 2001. Is this a case of history repeating itself? Are the Russians and the Chinese out to resurrect in some updated format the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 as a formal alliance? This paper argues that the parameters of the Russian-Chinese relationship will be more constricted, falling far short of an outright military alliance, but that in the short run, both states are motivated to develop a strategic partnership based on independent assessments of their convergent mutual interests.

SHARED INTERESTS I: STABILITY IN THE BORDER AREAS

The maintenance of peaceful, stable, and secure relations along the Russian-Chinese border is a matter of mutual concern to both regimes. During the 1990s, Russia and China worked to complete the interrelated tasks, initiated in the Gorbachev era, of demarcating and demilitarizing the border. By the late 1990s, the border conflict that had once threat-

ened to engulf the Soviet Union and China in outright war had essentially been resolved as an issue. In particular, the military component of Russian-Chinese border relations has diminished almost to the point of insignificance. The build-up of troops along the border had imposed an enormous financial burden that neither state is willing to maintain. A resurrection of the border conflict is simply untenable.

Russian and Chinese interests also converge in their shared commitment to maintaining political stability in the regions along the former Sino-Soviet border. Since 1996, the five states originally christened as the Shanghai Five (now renamed the Shanghai Forum with the addition of Uzbekistan as an observer in 2000), which signed the 1996 and 1997 military force reduction agreements, have continued to meet on a yearly basis, with an expanded agenda that has moved away from traditional indicators of military prowess to embrace a broad based conception of regional security. Both Russia and China are concerned with the preservation of stability and the constriction of separatist tendencies and religious extremism in the area. They also seek to exclude the United States as a major actor in the region. The Chinese motivation in promoting the development of the Shanghai Forum appears to be driven in part by a fear of the perils of ethnic separatism and the threat it poses to continued Chinese hegemony over politically restive Muslim—primarily Uighur—ethnic groups in Xinjiang province. In this quest, however, China needs Russian support. Russian influence in the region may be greatly diminished, but it is still substantial.

SHARED INTERESTS II: THE MILITARY-TECHNICAL RELATIONSHIP

Since the establishment of the Russian Federation, the Russian and Chinese military establishments have steadily expanded and deepened their contacts.

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Geopolitical and strategic considerations do not loom large as a factor to explain the expansion of military linkages between the two states. Rather, the development of contacts between the Russian and the Chinese militaries has been impelled by a starkly commercial imperative. What the Russians and the Chinese prefer to label as the development of military-technical cooperation in essence refers, less euphemistically, to the Russian sale of weaponry and its related technologies to China.

During the 1990s, Russia sold a number of weapons to China, involving some of its most technologically sophisticated armaments, including Kilo-Class submarines, Sovremenny destroyers, and Su-27 and Su-30MKK fighter planes, as well as a variety of surface-to-air missiles and radar systems. As Russia was not able to retain a number of Soviet era recipients of weaponry and encountered difficulties penetrating new markets, China and India emerged in the late 1990s as its major customers. By one estimate, in the year 2000, 70 percent of Russia's external arms sales were to China, with another 20 percent destined for India.¹ This is a reciprocal relationship inasmuch as China also relies on Russia as its major source of arms purchased abroad.

The motives that have shaped this bilateral relationship involving arms transfers are not complex for either side, although they are impelled by different aims. China is seeking to modernize a largely obsolescent military, and the Western arms embargo ensures that Russia is almost the only available source of advanced arms and technology. For Russia, the development of military-technical linkages with China is simply a matter of self-preservation. In the words of Pavel Felgenhauer, Russia's pre-eminent military analyst, on the sale of Russian arms and their related technologies to China: "First of all, it's money. Second of all, it's money, and third of all, also money."² With the former Soviet military industrial complex in shambles and limited prospects for orders from the Russian Ministry of Defense, arms sales abroad have provided a vital means for a segment of Russia's defense industry to remain operational. While Russian military personnel have on a number of occasions voiced discomfort with the long-term implications of arms sales to China, the issue has not figured as a top priority to the beleaguered Russian military establishment, whose attention has typically been directed to other

more pressing concerns. The Russian military, moreover, also realizes certain financial advantages from the arms trade.

The future evolution of Russian-Chinese military-technical relations is dependent on a number of factors, amongst which Russian economic recovery stands out as a central consideration. In the 1990s, Russian enterprises continued to draw upon the technological legacy of weapons prototypes developed during the Soviet era. Monies generated from arms sales abroad have been a major source of revenue for those few enterprises seeking to upgrade weapons systems.³ Russian-Chinese negotiations on military-technical issues in the late 1990s increasingly emphasized the initiation of cooperative projects, which are reportedly a component of the forthcoming Russian-Chinese treaty.

SHARED INTERESTS III: STRATEGIC PARTNERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The Russian-Chinese political relationship is thoroughly rooted in classical precepts of political realism, reflecting geostrategic calculations characteristic of balance of power politics. The Russian-Chinese "strategic relationship" has been crafted, to a large extent, with the intent of seeking to influence the foreign policy behavior of the United States. In fact, both Russia and China are more concerned with their respective relationships with the United States than their relationship with each other. Russia and China, however, share a mutual interest in seeking to curb the hegemonic influence of the United States in the post-Cold War era. Their 1997 Joint Statement, in which they pledged to promote a new multipolar world order, is a primary example. By the late 1990s, Russian-Chinese joint communiqués stressed their consensual appraisal of the international situation. These assessments included disapproval of NATO enlargement and NATO actions in Yugoslavia, and opposition to U.S. efforts to construct a national missile defense (NMD) system or to deploy a regional anti-missile defense system (theater missile defense, or TMD) in the Asia Pacific region.

Generally speaking, the presence of the United States as a global hegemon dominating the contemporary international system is a factor that impels Russia and China toward cooperative behavior, but

this relationship is by no means devoid of its own internal contradictions. Despite a thoroughgoing opposition to NATO expansion, China has not perceived the alliance's enlargement as a serious threat to its own security interests. Former Ministry of Defense Pavel Grachev's impulsive threat made in February 1996 that "if NATO goes East, we will go East too" was simply empty rhetoric. China remained unmoved as well by former Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov's suggestion in December 1998 that Russia, China and India form a strategic triangle to counterbalance the influence of the United States. But the current U.S. proposals to construct NMD or TMD systems are a considerable concern to China, which impels it toward the development of a collaborative counterstrategy with Russia.

While the original U.S. proposals to construct a missile defense system posited its employment against attack by so-called "rogue states"—most often identified as North Korea, Iraq, and Libya—such a system could also be designed to counter China's small stock of intercontinental ballistic missiles. U.S. proposals for the construction of a TMD system, explicitly projected to be deployed in Asia, present another headache for China, insofar as such a system they could be used to construct a shield to protect Taiwan from potential Chinese attack. In contrast, Russia's circumstances are quite different. Although Russia has been a vehement opponent of NMD, it is not seriously threatened by its deployment, since the prospect that the United States could construct a defense system capable of stopping an attack from Russia's still formidable nuclear forces seems unlikely, at least in the short term. Russia could even potentially benefit from the U.S. development of missile defense systems, not only because the issue has served to undermine ties within the cohort of NATO states, but also because the Russian military-industrial complex might reap increased profits if deployment leads to the renewal of an arms race on a global scale, and the development of new international markets in countermeasure technologies. Chinese leaders are acutely aware of Russian propensities to seek a separate accommodation with the United States on the missile defense issue. In the last several months, President Vladimir Putin has taken a considerably more conciliatory stance on the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile

Treaty, acknowledging that Russia may eventually agree to its modification. A February 2001 article in *Renmin Ribao* noted that Russia "might seek a compromise on the question of U.S. NMD deployment, and even give way and acquiesce in the U.S. scheme."⁴

CONSTRAINTS I: DEMOGRAPHIC IMBALANCE

Historically, Chinese residents constituted a significant presence within the population of the Russian Far East. Chinese (and also North Koreans) once again began to enter the Russian Far East in notable numbers during the Gorbachev era. By the 1990s, the influx of Chinese into the Russian Far East had emerged as a significant political issue in Russia at both the regional and the national level, with a consequent impact on Russian-Chinese relations. The demographic situation, in fact, does lend credence to Russian concerns regarding Chinese immigration. The population of the Russian Far East in 1998 was 7.25 million, and in decline, with up to a million people estimated to have fled the region in the 1990s. Meanwhile, Heilongjiang province alone across the Russian-Chinese border had a population of almost 38 million in 1998. Russian antipathy to the entrance of Chinese into Russia is rooted in the fear that this will lead to the Sinification of the Russian Far East, and the eventual loss of Russian sovereignty over the area.

In fact, the extent of Chinese immigration into Russia is not known with any precision. Typically, Russian sources, including those well established within reform circles, suggest a Chinese presence of well over one million persons. Few empirical studies of the scope of Chinese immigration into Russia exist, but those that have been conducted present far lower estimates of the Chinese presence. The most comprehensive investigation of Chinese immigration into Russia has been undertaken by the Moscow Center of the Carnegie Foundation under the auspices of a project on migration and citizenship: its conclusions indicated that a more realistic assessment of the Chinese presence in Russia as of 1999 numbered in the hundred of thousands.⁵

The issue of Chinese immigration to Russia has become a source of some tension in Russian-Chinese relations. A number of Russian politicians, including Governor Ishaev of Khabarovsk Krai and



former Governor Nazdratenko of Primorski Krai, have made a number of inflammatory, even xenophobic comments on the Chinese presence in Russia that have portrayed the influx of Chinese into Russia as a planned official program of the Chinese government. The Chinese government unsurprisingly denies these allegations, which indeed are not credible, and flatly disputes Russian assessments of the extent of the illegal immigration of Chinese into Russia. Bilateral consultations between the two states routinely discuss immigration as an issue. However, the border is easily penetrated, while the Russia Far East and the Siberian regions face a severe labor shortage. Recently, a small number of Russian analysts have begun to articulate a revisionist—by Russian standards—position that, like it or not, Russia must adapt to changing circumstances and accept as necessary a sizable influx of immigrants, primarily Chinese, into the Russian Far East.⁶

CONSTRAINTS II: TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

As both Russia and China readily acknowledge, the development of bilateral economic relations constitutes the weakest aspect of their bilateral relationship. China is a rising power, the second largest economy in the world in 2000 (by some estimates) with a growth rate of approximately seven percent. In contrast, Russian GDP has declined by an estimated 45 percent since 1991.⁷ Bilateral trade between China and Russia increased by 39 percent in 2000 to achieve its highest ever-recorded levels, reaching \$8 billion (Chinese imports from Russia totaled \$5.77 billion, with exports registered at \$2.23 billion). Nonetheless, this only comprised 1.7 percent of China's total trade volume for the year 2000, and was dwarfed by China's bilateral trade with the United States (\$74.47 billion) and Japan (\$83.17 billion), its two largest trading partners.⁸

Russian prospects for developing economic collaborative linkages with China are highly skewed on the technological scale: China is interested in a few select advanced industries, specifically aerospace and the nuclear industry, as well as joint projects in the exploitation of natural resources. China has made it clear to Russia that its vision of the parameters of the strategic relationship does not extend into the granting of special concessions in the economic

realm. Russia suffered a bitter disappointment in August 1997 when its bid to provide generators and turbines for China's massive Three Gorges hydroelectric dam project was rejected in favor of tenders from several Western European firms. The Chinese are well aware of the perils of doing business with Russia. In civilian markets that are exempt from the constraints imposed by the arms embargo, Russia faces difficult and in some cases seemingly insurmountable competition from Western firms.

In the long run, the most promising venue for the development of bilateral economic links between Russia and China lies in the realm of energy transfers. Proposed Russian-Chinese energy initiatives include collaborative projects in gas and oil exploitation, the construction of gas and oil pipelines, and the export of electrical energy to China through construction of power transmission lines. However, the obstacles to the realization of Russian-Chinese energy collaboration are also formidable. So far, the Western energy companies, which have invested in the Russian energy market, have found it to be difficult beyond their expectations, with their goals of profit still a distant dream. The unhappy experience of Western investors has been a cautionary lesson for Chinese leaders and Chinese energy firms, which are reluctant to make a large financial commitment in the face of considerable uncertainty.

GLOBALIZATION: TWO SHIPS PASSING.....

To date, the role of external processes of globalization as a factor in Russian-Chinese foreign policy relations has been limited. Both states have sought integration into the global market economy, but have done so on an independent trajectory, absent of mutual consultations seeking to coordinate their efforts. Russia and China, in fact, share few common characteristics as participants in global economic transactions. Since embarking on economic reforms in the late 1970s, China has emerged as one of the world's premier trading nations. The failure of Russian economic reforms in the 1990s has positioned Russia, in contrast, at the periphery of global market transactions. While the Chinese economy still displays considerable divergence from market indicators of the neo-liberal mode, China has progressed considerably farther down the capitalist road

than Russia. Russia's initial incorporation into the global economy is most notable in the Russian Far East, which has been cut off from the extensive subsidies it received in the Soviet era and largely left to shift for itself. As Viktor Ishaev, the Governor of Khabarovsk Krai and often a vehement critic of China, has noted: "our region is getting integrated into the Asia-Pacific, there is no alternative to that process.... We are not choosing our neighbors and we have to maintain friendly relations with China."⁹

CONCLUSION

The attempt to detail the prospects for a Russian-Chinese strategic partnership is complicated not only by its contradictory tensions, but also by the difficulty in distinguishing between rhetoric and reality in pinpointing its motive factors. Russian leaders, loath to abandon an image of Russia as a superpower, have tended to present an inflated portrayal of Russian capabilities as a global actor. It has sometimes been difficult for Russian politicians to embrace the idea of equal partnership with China, long regarded as a lesser power, but the reality is even harsher. By most conventional measures, save a quantitative count of nuclear armaments, Russia is weaker than China, occupying the role of the junior partner within the relationship. Pragmatism dictates that Russia cultivate cordial ties with its increasingly powerful neighbor to the south.

Not all the factors that contribute to the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership are strategic in the geopolitical sense of the term. Both states desire, for somewhat different reasons, amicable relations along the 4300-kilometer Russian-Chinese border, as well as the maintenance of stability and security in the border regions, more broadly defined, extending into Central Asia. The development of projects in the realm of military-technical cooperation promise tangible benefits to both states as a short-term venture, although the long term implications for Russia are more nebulous. Bilateral initiatives in energy exploitation are potentially mutually beneficial. In the final analysis, however, geopolitical considerations continue to loom large in defining the strategic partnership. The forthcoming Russian-Chinese treaty, an unexpected and in many ways surprising development, appears to have been initiated at China's behest, a move that might

be explained as an attempt to commit Russia to a series of contractual agreements that conform to China's security interests.¹⁰ China might not be able to prevent Russia from cutting its own deal with the United States in the deployment of missile defense systems, but the Chinese reportedly entertain the hope that the Russian-Chinese treaty will provide for Russian assistance in the development of early warning systems and related countermeasures.¹¹

The relevance of the strategic triangle might be diminished with the demise of the Soviet Union, but the recent experience of Russian-Chinese relations indicates that the Moscow-Beijing side of the triangle cannot be entirely dismissed. The presence of the United States as the predominant actor on the world stage, a situation that seems assured for the next several decades, serves as a powerful stimulus impelling Russia and China toward the development of a strategic partnership.

ENDNOTES

1. Interview with Konstantin Makienko, Deputy Director, Centre for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), Moscow, Russia, January 29, 2001.

2. Leslie Shepherd, "Russian Arms Sales Earn Needed Cash," *AP*, July 4, 1998. See also Pavel Felgenhauer, "An Uneasy Partnership: Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation and Arms Sales," in Andrew J. Pierre and Dmitri V. Trenin, Eds., *Russia in the World Arms Trade* (Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 87-103.

3. The development of the Su-37, Russia's most advanced prototype of the Sukhoi series, was financed with the aid of the sale of Su-27's to China and Vietnam, and the sale of the Su-27 production license to China. Sukhoi also received funding from the Indian government to develop more advanced variants of the Su-27 series, including the Su-30MKI tailored especially to Indian specifications. However, to date, it appears that Sukhoi has not been able to begin serial production of the Su-30MKI.

4. Yan Zheng and Ma Jian, "Russia's All-Round Countering of NMD," *Renmin Ribao*, February 1, 2001, in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0223*.

5. Many of the publications of the Carnegie Moscow Center dealing with Chinese immigration



can be found on the website of the Moscow Carnegie Center at <http://pubs.carnegie.ru>. For a similar assessment, see Emil Pain, “*Nelegaly Na Beregakh Amura*,” (Illegals on the Banks of the Amur,” *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, May 6, 1997, 3.

6. See for example, Dmitri Trenin, “The China Factor,” in Sherman W. Garnett, Ed., *Rapprochement or Rivalry* (Carnegie, 2000), 60–62.

7. *CIA World Factbook*, 2000, at <http://www.cia.gov>

8. *Xinhua*, March 13, 2001.

9. *Inter Press Service*, Moscow, April 2, 1999.

10. Interview with Dmitri Trenin, Deputy Director, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow,

Russia, January 26, 2001. Also see Saradzhyan, “Mending Ties.” According to Saradzhyan, the Chinese first approached the Russians after the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999.

11. Russia, for example, has been trying for some time to convince China to join in a bilateral partnership making use of its GLONASS space satellite system. U.S. deployment of missile defense shields would presumably make this prospect more attractive to the Chinese.

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