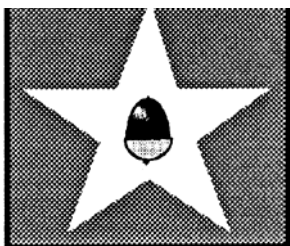


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Russo-Chinese Relations**

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## **The Strategic Context Of Russo-Chinese Relations**

**Stephen Blank**

### **The Prevailing Consensus**

According to the prevailing conventional wisdom we have little to fear from the Russo-Chinese rapprochement. While admittedly both sides often collaborate against us and are difficult partners, we can still expect some sort of continuing strategic partnership with Russia and engagement with China that may eventually lead to such partnership. Therefore Russian arms and technology transfers to China should not unduly alarm us. The arguments used to support this outlook are not weak ones.

The economic relationship has not justified either side's earlier and perhaps exaggerated hopes nor will it do so any time soon. Since the Russian Far East and Russia as a whole will not be major players in or a gateway to Asia's dynamic economies, Russia will remain a marginal player in Asia. Fears concerning the implications of a likely Sinification of the Far East (Primorskiy Kray) will inhibit cooperation and effective Russian policymaking for Asia in general.<sup>1</sup> Earlier hopes for the development of flourishing regional economic networks along the Russo-Chinese frontier to take part in Asia's overall dynamism have faltered due to Russian failures in reform, mafia rule in Primorskiy Kray, mutual bureaucratic slowness, suspicion, and obstruction, and demagogic fears that a Sinification of Primorskiy Kray through illegal and unrestricted immigration and commercial penetration might overturn Russian rule there.<sup>2</sup> Moscow's failures in the region far outweigh China's policy failures and rule out rapid future progress.<sup>3</sup> Moreover both sides' dependence on international financial institutions, Western investment, and trade dwarfs their joint prospects except perhaps in limited areas like oil and gas and atomic energy. China and Russia need Western capital, technology, and investment support more than they do each other's limited ability to provide for their economic needs.<sup>4</sup> Since both states openly proclaim that economic reconstruction is their main task and that foreign policy primary's goal is to create auspicious conditions for such reconstruction, that dependence upon the West will continue for a long time. This dependence also arguably prevents or at least restrains them from forging an excessively intimate anti-American relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Politically too we have little to fear. Both sides proclaim that their increasingly intimate strategic cooperative partnership is not an alliance and will not be one, nor is it directed against any third party.<sup>6</sup> Even though they have publicly attacked US policy in their joint commitment to an anti-hegemonic stance in world politics, matters have essentially stopped there. Certainly there is no sign of a pledge of future military support for each other in case of conflict although there is a nuclear non-aggression pact that completely contradicts Moscow's oft-proclaimed military doctrine of first use of nuclear weapons in the event of a major threat to its vital interests.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, not only does China have a long-standing suspicion of alliances, going back to its earlier unhappy experience with Moscow from 1949-60, the present "strategic convergence" will also probably soon lead again to a parting of the ways. China's rising power and Russia's visible decline in Asia make for nothing more than a marriage of convenience that will end in possibly acrimonious divorce once China's challenge to Russia emerges. That challenge will be

comprehensive in scope, made up of elements of advancing military power, China's demand for greater global political influence, threats to the Russian Far East, and economic superiority.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, prominent figures in the Russian military, politics, and leading institutes who follow foreign and defence affairs worry about rising Chinese power or express deep suspicion and reserve about excessively close ties to China.<sup>9</sup>

Historically grounded enmity is inevitably expected to reassert itself in the future and break up this partnership. Even now there are substantial differences between both governments and undercurrents of suspicion or condescension on Beijing's part towards Russia. For example, Li Jingjie, Deputy director of China's Institute of Eastern Europe, Russia, and the CIS writes that,

*There is reason to suppose that those in Russia who take and implement decisions on matters of foreign policy could not so much as speak about translating into action the country's main foreign policy task, that is provision of favourable international conditions for reform, and above all of peace and stability on the borders, if establishing good-neighbourly relations with China had proved impossible... In international affairs the West often looks on Russia as a state "defeated in the Cold War" and denies it equal status. NATO's expansion to the east and attempts by the West to prevent CIS integration go to aggravate the differences and clash of interests between Russia and the West. In the circumstances, it is most important for Russia to have equitable, trust-based partnership relationships and consolidate cooperation with another great power, China, which stands up for its sovereignty and independence. This is undoubtedly important, if Russia is to act as a stabilizer and exert an influence on international affairs.<sup>10</sup>*

The correctness of this argument does not make it any more palatable.

Through 1998 there were specific important policy differences between both governments on key issues. Russia supported but China opposed Japan's campaign for a Security Council seat. China has done nothing to bring Russia into the four-power Korean peace process. Supporters of this view also observe that while Moscow supported the Japan-USA Mutual Security Treaty and said nothing about its clearly anti-Chinese new guidelines, through 1998 China consistently and arguably with good reason adopted a more sceptical if not antagonistic view of the alliance that it perceives to be clearly targeted against its ambitions.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one can argue that it was precisely the rapprochement with Beijing which created sufficient concern in Tokyo about its military implications, and enough sense of security in Moscow concerning Russia's position in Asia and China's goals, that facilitated the visible but now increasingly limited rapprochement between Japan and Russia after 1997.

Nor should we unduly fear Russian efforts to proclaim a strategic triangle of Russia, China, and India.<sup>12</sup> Indo-Chinese rivalry is too deep and extensive to be overcome by such transparent means. Therefore we need not overestimate the likelihood of such a triangle. Regarding the military side of this bilateral relationship, while the transfer of Russian weapons and technology to China is troubling, Russia allegedly does not generally sell state of the art systems, the supplies of weapons are limited, and hard bargaining has occurred showing the Russian General Staff's suspicion of China.<sup>13</sup> In fact, we can point to strains in what Moscow calls military-technical cooperation, ie arms sales, in 1997-98.<sup>14</sup> In any case the Chinese PLA, PLAN, and PLAAF are so technologically backward that we really have little to fear from them

as a potential peer competitor.<sup>15</sup> The overwhelming consensus of US writing on China's armed forces agrees that China is not now a peer competitor, will not be one anytime soon, and doubts that China can consummate the revolution in military affairs (RMA) to become such a competitor.<sup>16</sup> Especially when Japan's formidable Self-Defence Forces are added to the US side any fear of China based on substantiated force on force models should disappear.<sup>17</sup>

### **A Critique of the Consensus**

This essay argues that this consensus is unduly complacent and that this relationship's current evolution merits much more careful scrutiny. The consensus rests on certain tacit but unproven assumptions that powerfully influence Western thinking about this relationship. Nonetheless many of those assumptions are either of limited or no application to this relationship or are based on a failure to assess closely its ongoing evolution. This intellectual laziness stems from a failure to examine the evidence of that evolution and the dynamic context within which it occurs and from policy elites' unmerited complacency. The dynamic contexts may be seen as the global relationship among those powers and the United States, the fast-moving developments in East Asian security, and fundamental changes in economics and military affairs due to economic-technological progress. Shorthand terms for the last context would be globalization and the RMA. The RMA is mainly about the adaptation of information and telecommunications technology for military purposes.

First of all, there is the prevailing Western belief that economics plays a large, even dominating, role in shaping these governments' foreign policies. An accompanying notion is that governments resemble homo economicus, the rational economic man who rationally calculates his self-interest and follows that calculation. Allegedly Russia and China are rationally calculating the utility of leaning toward or against America in world affairs. Since economics plays so large a determining factor in their foreign policies, both governments will inevitably (even if admittedly after much pulling and hauling) follow their best interests as the West understands them and make deals with Washington and its allies.

This emphasis on the shared economics-driven rationality of both those states also contains the patronizing assumption that not only are we all alike, we also know Russia's and China's needs and interests as well as or better than their governments do. Therefore any deviation from our concept of their interests will inevitably be futile.<sup>18</sup> Of course, the idea that Washington knows best reflects US' insularity and complacency, and its continuing propensity to intervene with insufficient forethought, provoking anger and collaboration against it.

A second powerful assumption is the US' belief that since it is the strongest power around they have no choice, given their manifold problems, but to listen to it and to see things that way, whatever recalcitrance may intervene in the interim. Secretary of State Albright has frequently stated that the United States is "the indispensable nation," "kind of the organizing principle of the international system," and that, "if we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future."<sup>19</sup> Such egotism, self-righteousness, and complacency blind policymakers to the prospect of potentially successful anti-American challenges or alliances abroad. Worse yet, the insistence on US power and righteousness as well as the correctness of its prescriptions for their domestic and foreign policies injects a strong dose of ideological contestation

over international politics in general into the US' relationship with Beijing and Moscow and solidifies their relationship. And as American pressure upon both states grows, eg Kosovo and national missile defences, these ideological approaches and the policies associated with them harden and reduce both governments' inclination and room to manoeuvre at home. Hence their opposition to US policies grows and their rationales for doing so become more elaborate and constricting.

Advocates of the benign view of Russo-Chinese rapprochement ignore entirely this dimension of both states' policies. Alongside the increasingly overt clashes over specific foreign policy issues, we find uniquely national but converging analyses of world affairs among Chinese and Russian scholars and policymakers that substantially diverge from and challenge American assessments. This ideological reaction is clearly a response not only to direct American pressure but also more broadly to globalization and the fact that neither state can escape it. Both China and Russia, as their elites well know, are caught up in powerful currents of global economic-political-military trends from which they cannot escape.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the very fact that both China and Russia are most afraid of internal threats to their relatively weak states makes their dilemma all the more poignant as they confront the challenges of globalization.<sup>21</sup> Since the major threats are internal, their policies and situations reflect the typical security paradigm of Third World states, who must simultaneously enhance the national capacity for governance amidst the "hurricane" of tumultuous and uncontrollable international transformation.<sup>22</sup> Like Peter the Great in Vasily Klyuchevskiy's metaphor, they must build their house from the top down with a shortage of qualified builders and materials amidst a raging storm.

Certainly Russia and China tenaciously defend the primacy of state-centred sovereignty and Realism in international affairs against US liberalism, support for globalization (for everyone else that is) and the denigration of traditional notions of sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> This ideological stance inspires their attacks on US unilateralism and Washington's habit of bypassing them and the UN in the resolution of major security issues where they perceive important national interests. For example, Russia's multipolarity doctrine, largely formulated by Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, duly expresses Russia's need to react to American pressure and desire to have its cake and eat it too. By crafting this "doctrine" Primakov not only gained domestic support for his policies, he also forged a compelling rationale for them that attracted support for its key positions such as rapprochement with China. He also provided a new and more acceptable basis for imparting an ideological dimension to the rivalry with Washington and a suitable cover for regional engagement in Asia. China follows the same process as it holds to its long-established five principles of peaceful coexistence and to a classically Realist and state-oriented doctrine of sovereignty, which it defends with extreme tenacity in order to sustain domestic support around a nationalist project.<sup>24</sup>

We can break Russia's multipolarity doctrine into three guiding concepts following the scheme laid out by R. Craig Nation of the US Army War College: global multipolarity, preservation of Russia's integrity and primacy in the CIS, and regional engagement that cultivates new partners or allies.<sup>25</sup> These three concepts frame Russia's multipolarity policy in reaction to the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic security zone as far as Central Asia and towards Russia's security agenda in Asia.

Multipolarity means that no one state, including the United States, can act unilaterally. Even Washington must coordinate with other states. Since Moscow

believes that NATO will gradually decline in significance in the absence of a common enemy, new ad hoc groupings will form to constrain the US' unilateralist propensities. Thus in Asia multipolarity encourages Moscow to seek agreements with any and all Asian states, enter all available security fora, and create mechanisms to consolidate those accords and restrain America's power. It also means that these formulas of multilateral or even collective security systems can be used to channel the rise of China within an acceptable framework so that it does not become threatening to Russia. Russia's rapprochement with Japan exemplifies the idealized version of how that process should work.

Russia's agreements and accords in Asia, eg Russian membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are intended first of all to gain a secure and legitimate basis for defending Russia's interests and perspectives regarding all major issues of Asian security and to reduce America's ability to proclaim itself a unipolar force or to act in so unconstrained a fashion. However, to fully take part in Asia, Moscow had to win Chinese assent which then became the leverage for broader assent to Russia's participation in formal Asian security mechanisms like APEC. This need reflected Russia's weakness and increasing irrelevance to Asia as it became progressively more marginal an economic player there. Thus, because it failed to put its house in order as an Asian power, Russia had to solicit China's help in doing so, and to embrace China to prevent it from becoming a future threat to Russia and to prevent Asia from simply ignoring Russia.<sup>26</sup> Thus multipolarity and other Primakovian ideas are first of all attempts to minimize the dangers stemming from Russia's visible marginalization in Asia.

As developed by Primakov and his successor at the Foreign Ministry, Igor Ivanov, diplomacy and policy search for leverage by trying to create regional and/or strategic partnerships with states who are willing to some degree to align their goals with Moscow's in different areas of the globe.<sup>27</sup> As an article in the Foreign Ministry's journal, *International Affairs*, stated,

*For Russia, the transition to a multi-polar world will create the possibility of diversifying the directions of foreign policy and of developing constructive strategic relations immediately with some influential partners. This increases the possibility of a manoeuvre necessary for ensuring the country's security under the conditions of a resource deficit and of the transition period in the development of our country which is attended by difficulties.*<sup>28</sup>

Ivanov echoed this sentiment in observing that Russian foreign policy now demanded the skill of seeking compromises, of considering different states' interests, and of seeking allies, "not for life but for a specific given instance."<sup>29</sup>

Multipolarity also denies that there are winners and losers in the Post Cold War world. As such, this concept aims to camouflage the extent of Russia's diminishment and to elevate it to that sphere which elite have claimed for it, ie equality with the United States.<sup>30</sup> America's future decline and the rise of fissures within NATO or among America's Asian allies are taken as long-term givens that Russia must exploit. Much, but not all, Chinese writing expresses the same belief and incentive to exploit these 'contradictions'.<sup>31</sup> Actually multipolarity is a heuristic and rhetorical device for reclaiming the status accruing to Russia under bipolarity, or the semblance of it, by reducing Washington and upgrading Moscow as a power that can leverage different coalitions in Eurasia. Primakov and Ivanov

have explicitly advanced the notion that Russia is a global power whose voice must be heeded across the entire international system despite its lack of the means with which to play this role.<sup>32</sup> Many analysts inside Russia have either advocated or noted that Russia demands a position equal to that of the United States at the “presidium table” of world affairs.<sup>33</sup> Thus Sergei Rogov, the director of the Institute for the USA and Canada (ISKAN) and a prominent advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, argued that to counter NATO’s disdain for Russia’s interests and status,

*The aims of Russian diplomacy should be as follows: First of all, Moscow should seek to preserve the special character of Russian-American relations. Washington should recognize the exceptional status of the Russian Federation in the formation of a new system of international relations, a role different from that which Germany, Japan, China, or any other centre of power plays in the global arena.*<sup>34</sup>

Even Primakov’s 1998 proposal for an Asian triangle can be seen to some degree in this light, for it sought to make Russia, the weakest of these states, the agent of Sino-Indian reconciliation.<sup>35</sup> Russia has assiduously tried to foster this reconciliation for some time. It hopes to create an anti-American bloc in Asia that would counter trends towards national missile defence and an Asian NATO, solidify an anti-Islamic bloc in Central Asia, and draw closer to India and China than either is to each other. This example of Nation’s third principle of regional engagement also has as a goal support for Russia’s defence industry that faces ruin if conflict develops between India and China. Primakov is clearly this lobby’s candidate and extraordinarily supportive of their goals.<sup>36</sup> Although he is now out of power, the state has taken up support for greater defence spending and increased military exports as the sole source of revenue for its armed forces and increased defence spending. Indeed, many, like Primakov, see the defence industry as the locomotive of a general industrial recovery.<sup>37</sup> Just as an Indo-Chinese conflict would force a devastating geopolitical choice upon Moscow, so too its economic ramifications would be disastrous because it would have to choose between combatants, sacrifice one of its defence industry’s largest markets, and risk the collapse of its plans for industrial and military recovery. Hence regional engagement in Asia is driven by both strategic as well as more parochial concerns and interests.

Accordingly, multipolarity as foreign policy doctrine actually represents an effort to maintain a great power concert or duopoly with Washington that simultaneously constrains US and other potential challengers’ policy. As Nation observed, regarding the United States,

*Russian definitions imply a clear preference for cooperative great power management and collective security options as global security models. They demand a rejection of unipolar or hegemonic alternatives however they might be packaged or phrased. They refuse to accept integration with a Western community that is pledged to perpetuate US leadership or partnership models that relegate Russia to the status of junior partner at best. According to the multipolarity scenario, US preeminence is neither a desired nor a sustainable alternative. One of the key challenges for a new Russian foreign policy must therefore be the search for leverage to block or frustrate US pretensions.*<sup>38</sup>

Logically this also entails ensuring Russia’s integrity and securing its role as the undisputed hegemon in the CIS, the second element in this ideological-political programme of multipolarity. Several corollaries flow from this and they all negate cooperative solutions in the CIS in favour of unalloyed hegemonic spheres of

influence and zero-sum games, all within a context of traditional Realpolitik.<sup>39</sup> But they also entail ever closer reliance upon Beijing as an indispensable support for Russia's quasi-imperial project. For Russia to obtain its goals of hegemony and eventual reunification of the CIS, Russia must have amity with China against America. Increasingly it must rely upon China for help in the CIS, eg by having China sell missiles to Armenia, Russia's staunch ally.<sup>40</sup> Both China and Russia now make preservation of the integrity of their states against threats from "Islamism" a major priority and a basis for their cooperation, making more overt what was always a key feature of this relationship.<sup>41</sup> But as the rifts making for crises throughout the southern CIS manifest themselves with increasing force amidst a context of intensifying international rivalry for influence there, Russia and China will cooperate ever more in the CIS, and presumably elsewhere against American efforts to extend its influence.

Since the United States postulates as the goal of its policy the integration of members of the CIS into the Euroatlantic world, Sino-Russian cooperation to prevent NATO from making further inroads into Central Asia will also intensify.<sup>42</sup> While China is probably quite happy to leave the heavy lifting to Russia while it pursues a blend of repression and development in Xinjiang that appears to be beyond Russian officials' ability to imagine, let alone emulate, it also has signalled its increasing support for suppressing the causes of insurgency throughout the CIS.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately this whole dimension of the two states' policies combining coherent ideologies of international relations and actual policy in areas like Central Asia is largely missing from US analyses.

Nor does anyone seem to take seriously the possibility that anti-Islamism (and anti-American tendencies) might also incline India, a strong supporter of measures against "terrorism" towards more overt cooperation with China and Russia in quashing such threats, and not only in Kashmir. China tried to promote such cooperation in 1995 but its initiative was limited and did not lead anywhere.<sup>44</sup> Until now India has not decisively committed itself to support either Russian or Chinese objectives in Central Asia. Some analysts even suspect that there are emerging bases for cooperation with Washington here as part of a broader concern to win Washington away from its preoccupation with China.<sup>45</sup> But if the historic pattern of American lack of interest in Indian perspectives and priorities continues, India may feel obliged to win support for its integrity by turning to Moscow and Beijing. While tensions remain strong with both China and Pakistan, China's ally, an Indo-Chinese strategic dialogue has resumed and both sides say they want to improve their bilateral relations. Certainly rapprochement with Delhi would be a major gain for China against "hegemonism", as Jiang Zemin has stated publicly.<sup>46</sup> Russian diplomacy and media exaggerate chances for the kind of partnership Primakov seems to have envisioned but any major improvement in Sino-Indian relations would be at America's expense. And India's discomfort at many American policies, eg the bypassing of the UN to dismember Serbia, and on nuclear testing and non-proliferation issues could facilitate such a rapprochement with Beijing and Moscow. Again few analysts seem to have taken the evolving possibilities for such developments seriously.

This failure is possibly due to the power of the third major but questionable tacit assumption governing Westerns assessments of the Russo-Chinese relationships, namely that what has been will be. Russo-Chinese history supposedly conclusively shows that the intrinsic hostility between these two states precludes their forming a lasting alliance or something approaching that. And the same goes for Sino-Indian

relationships. The disparity between Russia and China's interests and China's rising power while Russia is declining all but guarantees an unhappy end to this latest marriage, which is anyway little more than a marriage of convenience or a puffed up normalization of the old hostile relationship.<sup>47</sup> This comforting reliance upon history as a determining factor is an oddly static concept compared to the corresponding pervasive official belief that the dynamics of globalization will inevitably push these governments towards liberal democracy. For if revolutionary change is the law of world affairs Russia and China's past relationships logically have little reliability as a guide to a dynamic present and even more dynamic future.

The prevailing view also completely omits any mention of the Asian or global context within which this relationship has evolved and is still evolving, eg the Indian and Central Asian factors. Indeed its adherents do not see any evolutionary dynamic at work here at all. Nevertheless, as many commentators point out, Russo-Chinese partnership has evolved considerably since 1982, when Leonid Brezhnev made the first overtures, through many stages all of which are influenced by trends in Asia and world politics.<sup>48</sup> A mechanical and linear transposition from the past to the future is unwarranted since we can see that this relationship has evolved from intense Cold War rivalry through gradual normalization, friendship, to partnership and is now evolving still further.

Moreover, this evolution cannot be understood outside the context of each state's evolving policies and self-perception in an Asia and a world that are also undergoing profound upheavals. To the extent that major qualitative change occurs in Asia's security equation, for example a major state's breakdown (eg Indonesia), Korean unification, or a Korean war, or the construction of a US-Japanese theatre missile defence (TMD), or further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or China's breakout to the status of a major military power, it is equally likely that all major relationships, including this one, will undergo comparable transformation. Thus analyses of the Sino-Russian relationship are too static and neglectful of the dynamic context wherein the relationship now occurs. These assessments also neglect the third aspect of multipolarity as delineated by Nation and discussed above, ie regional engagement. Moscow seeks to cement partnerships or alliances with key Asian states like India and China to balance American ambitions and to reassert its own independent prerogatives up to the point where a fundamentally competitive relationship with the United States begins. Moscow also seeks to leverage those relationships so that these partners will acquiesce in an acknowledged Russian role as a major player in Asia.

### **Towards Alliance?**

Lastly the prevailing consensus relies upon obsolete or outdated evidence or on a refusal to examine incoming evidence. While undoubtedly the bilateral economic relationship has not developed as planned and will not improve any time soon, nevertheless the overall relationship continues to grow politically and militarily. Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji even told his Russian interlocutors that the best way to proceed was to separate political from economic issues, work to improve the economic relationship but to focus on expanding the political and strategic considerations that drive the two states closer together.<sup>49</sup> Evidently, today, not economics but rather political and military considerations that are increasingly anti-"hegemonic" (ie anti-American) drive this relationship. And those military-political considerations are intensifying in importance and creating a larger community of interest between Moscow and Beijing.<sup>50</sup>

Specifically American intransigence and unilateralism in Iraq, Kosovo and regarding missile defences have vastly strengthened both states' incentives to draw closer to each other politically and militarily and demonstrate an identity of views on world affairs. Even more importantly both governments see America as the source of all the threats to them except for terrorism in Central Asia and the Caucasus. But for Russia's armed forces the possibility of another Kosovo-type operation in the CIS directed against Russia or its interests on behalf of aggrieved minorities represents their nightmare scenario and the template supposedly outlined in NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept.<sup>51</sup> Since both states see myriad common threats to their position and interests, mainly from the United States, these threats have solidified both sides' threat assessment to the point where there really is the identity of views that they constantly invoke. NATO's Kosovo operation, the revelation of US willingness to bypass the UN, Western support for enlarging NATO through the Partnership for Peace right up to China's borders with Central Asia, and the US' clear determination to proceed with TMD with Japan, even if it threatens China and Russia's concepts of strategic stability, their military goals vis-a-vis Taiwan, and the ABM treaty have consolidated and extended those identical shared interests and perspectives on world politics.<sup>52</sup> The coincidence of threats from Muslim nationalists in Central Asia and Chechnya with China's ongoing instability in Xinjiang and the threat of Taiwan's secession has also further strengthened the common threat perception. For China Chechnya appears to resemble Xinjiang and/or Taiwan in the threat posed by those "secessionists." And as this identity of views and policy orientation has taken hold Russia's political leadership, particularly Yeltsin and Primakov, have consistently ratcheted up the relationship's formal status, demanding that the term strategic partnership be inserted into the communiqués of their summits or that a strategic triangle be created.<sup>53</sup>

Since 1998 Russia's government and armed forces have drawn significantly closer to China. Russia is selling China systems and technologies that hitherto it refused to sell. These include several state of the art systems, exposing the falsehood of allegations that such sales do not occur. Moscow has agreed to sell the SU-30, which qualitatively enhances Chinese aerial capabilities by giving China over the horizon capabilities that maximize the potential of its Russian SU-27 fighters.<sup>54</sup> A joint Russian-Israeli program to sell China an AWACS-type system is moving forward despite American objections to Israel.<sup>55</sup> There are also reports that Moscow has agreed as well to facilitate domestic Chinese production of the SU-30 and that China will buy the forthcoming SU-35 and 37 advanced combat fighters.<sup>56</sup> All these programmes significantly expand Chinese capabilities vis-a-vis Taiwan and other Asian militaries as well as the US Navy and Air Force. Pentagon sources also state that Moscow has agreed to transfer or has already transferred missile defence technologies to China that had previously not been available.<sup>57</sup> The sale of nuclear capable SS-N-22 Sunburn (Moskit in Russian) anti-ship missiles and the projected sale of the even more advanced SS-N-35 (Yakhont) also represent a clear strategic coordination against the US Navy. These and other policies are part of China's comprehensive conventional, nuclear, and information warfare buildup to challenge the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, as well as Southeast Asia.<sup>58</sup> The Straits Times in Singapore recently alleged that Russia offered China a military alliance. Beijing reportedly turned this down but won instead an agreement on the transfer of advanced technologies from Russia. This report accords with the statement by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to Jiang Zemin, China's President, that Russia highly appreciates its cooperation with China in all fields, "adding that the Russian government is of the view that under the present international situation, Russia should establish with China a strategic partnership

in all respects and further expand trade and economic cooperation with China.”<sup>59</sup> Certainly China is receiving those technologies; after and due to Kosovo arms and technology transfers will increase. In March 1999, Moscow and Beijing also announced that both governments had been collaborating for several months on their own version of National Missile Defence (NMD) against the United States, a fact that also suggests cooperation in developing and transferring weapons and technologies and deploying offensive missiles to defeat such systems in Asia and beyond.<sup>60</sup>

Admittedly some in Moscow, and presumably Beijing, suspect the other’s aims and capacities.<sup>61</sup> Yet in Russia either these critics are not in power or their objections have been largely overcome due to superseding trends and events. For example, the Russian General Staff was reportedly unwilling to part with their best platforms and weapons lest China one day turn on Russia.<sup>62</sup> However, many things have happened, and are even in the public record, to change that stance to the point where now they are reportedly enthusiastic champions of a deeper Russo-Chinese military connection.<sup>63</sup> They have seen China’s difficulties in assimilating and mastering foreign technologies. Not only does this persuade them that they have little to fear for the next 10-15 years, it has apparently induced in the Russian military elite “a healthy contempt” for China’s military capabilities.<sup>64</sup> This attitude, coupled with arms producers’ urgent demands to sell abroad to obtain cash with which to produce weapons for Russia’s armed forces, strong and enduring governmental support for arms sales to save defence and civilian industry, the absence of other sources of financing for defence spending at a time when it is going up and under pressure to keep climbing, and opportunities for personal enrichment, have softened opposition to upgraded arms sales and technology transfer.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly the view has grown that China is not now or will in the foreseeable future be a threat.<sup>66</sup> In any event, it is more in Russia’s interest to have direct insight into Chinese defence plans and leverage upon them by providing high-tech systems rather than be shut out from understanding Chinese military developments.<sup>67</sup>

We can see this change in the Russian military’s outlook over the last year. In 1999 both navies held joint exercises. Earlier Russia sold China control and guidance systems from the SS-18 and SS-19 series to China for its nuclear Dong Feng missiles (DF-31 and DF-41) and is upgrading many categories of China’s conventional and nuclear submarines, including the Kilos it bought from Russia. In addition whole factories have been transferred to China and are making parts for the Topol-M (SS-27) mobile ICBM. Russia is also helping develop a new generation of Chinese SSNs and SSBNs, the new 093 and 094 attack and missile submarines. Russia is helping China cover the hulls of these submarines with a layer of anechoic tiles to improve their quieting capabilities and help them elude detection. These submarines will conduct missions related to daily activities of US and Japanese warships, compare favourably with Victor III class SSNs, and should become operational in 2007. There are also reports of Russia selling China parts for its mobile SS-24 and 25 TELs (transporter, erector, launchers for nuclear missiles). Russia has also transferred blocking devices to China which facilitate its missiles’ combat readiness. And as Richard Speier and Henry Sokolski noted, Russia has sold China mobile, multiple warhead, high accuracy solid and liquid propellant missile technology to increase the accuracy of China’s ICBMs.<sup>68</sup> There also are reports of plans to build up to 50 nuclear reactors for China.<sup>69</sup> More recently Russia announced that it would intensify and enlarge its programme of teaching Indian and Chinese nuclear physicists (and we may probably expect Iranians too, but Moscow does not admit this).<sup>70</sup>

In October 1998 Defence Minister General Igor Sergeyev committed Russia to help develop China's high-precision weapons systems and to transfer more production licenses to China. Evidently Moscow contemplates China's military rise quite calmly and is ready to assist it as long as China pays in cold cash.<sup>71</sup> This means assisting China's comprehensive military buildup in conventional weapons, nuclear weapons and delivery systems, and a massive investment in the tools and technologies of missile defence, information warfare and space war, mainly against America or its allies.<sup>72</sup>

And China has even greater ambitions. Russian reports recently observed that China's interest in rapprochement with Russia in the military sphere is generated by PRC developments and interests in upgrading ICBM's, improving the combat characteristics of its Air Force and Navy, improving its air defence, building an ABM defence, and preparing for manned space flights. Chinese purchases since 1991 reflect these priorities. China bought several RD-123 engines used for the second stage of the Zenit booster rocket. China's interest in upgrading its booster rocket capability would allow it to cut its lag behind Russia by 3-5 years. China's aerospace sector sought to buy the technology of low-thrust liquid-propellant rocket engines. Instead they are getting the technology for manufacturing solid-propellant rocket engines. In 1995-96 Chinese engineers unsuccessfully sought to purchase drawings of the R-36 (SS-18 Satan) a MIRVed missile with high-performance characteristics and specifications. A modification of the R-36 MU "Tsiklon" booster rocket is being used to insert heavy cargoes into orbit.

China also seeks high-precision technologies for the adaptation of missile and radar complexes. Reportedly Russia gave China technology enabling it to reduce the signature of cruise missiles and aircraft. Chinese astronauts are also training at Russian complexes and China is discussing joint work on space missions and orbital stations. Finally there are unconfirmed reports that China seeks to build an automated command and control system for its nuclear forces based on Russian-developed technology, but those reports cannot yet be verified.<sup>73</sup> The revelation of joint cooperation on a response to the US NMD and TMD programs can only accelerate and intensify military cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. Thus Russia and China also sent a resolution to the UN General Assembly to block nullification of the ABM treaty. And Putin called for regular consultations between Russia's Security council and China's Central Military Council.<sup>74</sup>

There can also be no doubt at whom most of these weapons and technologies are targeted. China's nuclear and conventional buildup threatens US civilian countervalue targets, displays an interest in nuclear warfighting scenarios, and a rethinking of no first use as it moves towards deterrence, limited nuclear war ideas, etc based on a thorough modernization and expansion of its nuclear forces.<sup>75</sup> American analysts have also identified China's interest in acquiring laser satellite and ASAT capability clearly intended to take out American systems.<sup>76</sup> The Clinton Administration recently and somewhat ruefully had to admit that China's small but growing ICBM forces are both targeted on and capable of hitting most of America's major cities. As China upgrades its capabilities, eg developing a neutron bomb and enhanced capabilities for ICBM strikes on the continental United States, Moscow wittingly aids these processes. Moscow clearly knows that the systems it sells China, whether conventional or nuclear, are mainly intended to deter or hold US forces and targets at risk. Furthermore the complacency with which America has watched the military aspect of this relationship will receive greater shocks in the

future since “military-technical cooperation” will grow, and undoubtedly encompass China’s comprehensive three-sided military modernization cited above. Moscow and China have already agreed that they will jointly produce missiles, submarines and high-tech weapon systems, and develop high technology systems, eg lasers.<sup>77</sup>

Politically as well Sino-Russian statements indicate an identity, not just a convergence, of their assessments of the situation arising out of the Kosovo campaign. There are also some signs of partial success in Moscow’s efforts to forge a “strategic triangle” with India and China.<sup>78</sup> After Secretary of Defence William Cohen announced that the US might leave the ABM treaty to pursue NMD and that it would do so in alliance with Japan, Moscow for the first time began attacking the US-Japanese defence guidelines of 1997.<sup>79</sup> Specifically, Russian media started contending that those guidelines might permit Japan to operate in and around Russian territorial waters and Russia proper and called on Japan, just as China has done, to clarify its “real intentions”. This reversal of past policy was clearly a gesture to China but the pro-China policy has intensified since the Kosovo operation began. Moreover it reflects both the halting of Russo-Japanese rapprochement as the intractable issue of the Kurile Islands again rises to prominence and the truly tense relationship between China and Japan.<sup>80</sup>

This new and evolving identity of views consists of both governments’ belief or hope that the world is naturally, or should naturally be, evolving towards a multipolarity (more precisely a great power dictation through the UN or other venues) where all the great powers will be equal to each other.<sup>81</sup> Yet the United States, by refusing to submit to international organizations, by using alliances and strong arm methods of coercive diplomacy, is trying to cement and extend its hegemony and put both Moscow and Beijing under constant pressure. Depending on what issue is under discussion this pressure can be military-political or economic in nature.

NATO enlargement, for example, did not evoke in China the passion it aroused in Moscow. China actually sympathized with Central Europeans’ demands for security.<sup>82</sup> Whereas Moscow saw enlargement as excluding it from Europe, dividing Europe with it on the wrong side, relying on outmoded blocs rather than collective security under a great power concert, and a military threat by an alliance that was essentially an old-fashioned anti-Russian military bloc, NATO enlargement had little resonance for China. But when the Kosovo operation commenced in apparent defiance of or evasion of UN mandates both sides felt themselves threatened because they both realized three critical things about Kosovo and enlargement.

They both saw Kosovo as signifying Washington’s unpredictability. It might go to war on behalf of secessionist minorities in their own lands, Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, Chechnya, rather than for any clear concept of national interest in Realpolitik terms. Second, they saw that such war could break out despite the UN and that nothing could seemingly stand in the way of Washington’s determination to assert its prerogatives globally even without approval from the UN or other agencies. Thus, in the crunch, their own vital interests could be nullified or negated by virtue of US determination to prevail through the use of coercion. Kosovo now presents to both militaries the template of a high-tech conventional attack to which they can only reply by nuclear deterrence. Therefore they see the United States as threatening their integrity, vital interests, and self-perception as great powers through its military-political alliances in Europe and Asia. Nor do military threats end there.

The issue of national missile defence (NMD) against long-range ballistic missile

threats has also assumed particular salience for both governments, particularly as it has become a decisive consideration in an increasingly weaponized Asia. North Korean and Indo-Pakistani missile tests and the latter states' nuclearization, not to mention Chinese missile programmes and sabre-rattling vis-a-vis Taiwan have heightened the dangers of missile attacks against rival governments throughout Asia and enhanced the regional dynamics of the bilateral Russo-Chinese relationship. This issue alone could unhinge much of Asia's status quo and deserves its own thorough analysis. But such an analysis will show that the way the US has approached NMD and related issues is fraught with dangers to the United States and its allies.

## Conclusions

The prevailing consensus on the Sino-Russian relationship is too complacent and wedded to static analyses of world affairs and Asian security agendas. Indeed, it overlooks the fact that recent Asian crises have exposed the inability of Asian security organizations and fora to deal with them. No organization resolved the 1995-96 Taiwan crisis or the 1997-98 financial crisis. Indonesia is on the verge of falling apart and ASEAN has been unable to forge a consensus on that, the financial crisis, or other issues, including an effective response to Chinese threats in the Spratly Islands. If Indonesia does disintegrate ASEAN will probably be neutered as an effective security organization.<sup>83</sup> Korea is being dealt with on a largely bilateral US-DPRK agenda. And no Asian organization has successfully dealt with insurgency in Central Asia, Indo-Pakistani proliferation and lower-level conflicts. Russo-Chinese rapprochement takes place against this regionally dynamic and unstable background that includes Russia's decline and China's rise.

However Moscow will not accept this diagnosis. Thus it continually tries to revise the status quo to enlarge its role. China too is a revisionist power and both see the enemy of their objectives in US policy. The common threats that they see and shared interests that they have are increasingly propelling their partnership into a condition that transcends cooperation and approaches coordination, especially as NMD becomes a salient issue. We see joint Sino-Russian policies in Iraq, the CIS, the UN, Kosovo, and now on vital issues of their national defence. To pretend that this trend towards greater strategic coordination will simply dissolve before our superior strength or wisdom or because in the past China and Russia have been unable to forge an enduring partnership is to abdicate the requirements of statesmanship. Complacency about Sino-Russian partnership and the easy assumption that because Russia is basically irrelevant to Asia we need not worry about it and that China will not be a threat because it cannot threaten us militarily are misplaced.

Although probably neither Russian nor Chinese objectives envisage attacking the continental United States except to deter Washington, Asia from Kazakhstan to Japan still depends on the wisdom, strength, and resolution of the United States. Therefore complacency must give way to concern given the dynamic trends in technology, economics, military policies, Asian and international affairs. But in the end understanding is not enough. It can only serve as a prelude to what hopefully will be better policy. In the last few years Asian crises have rocked Asia and the world but not overturned it. But in a dynamic and uncontrolled context of massive fundamental change along many dimensions, how long can we be so complacent as to think that future crises will end without lasting damage to the security of Asia and the world?

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