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Crouching Tiger, Hidden Jargon

The Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership

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Since the normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in May 1989, Sino-Soviet (and shortly thereafter Sino-Russian) relations have taken off with remarkable velocity. As Russia turned resolutely to the West in the early days of reform and democratization following the 1991 coup, China had grounds to fear stagnation in the evolving Sino-Russian relationship. Yet, by 1993 Russia had, to a large degree, become disillusioned with the West because of what it perceived as broken promises of aid and poor economic advice. Moscow then turned eastward and commenced an unprecedented process of cooperation with its great Asian neighbor. Rather than deteriorating, Sino-Russian relations blossomed.

A fundamental question I seek to examine is whether the Sino-Russian relationship constitutes a long-term strategic partnership, or simply a temporary relationship of convenience. In this article, I will explore the significant arguments regarding political, economic, and military issues that attest to the development of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, as well as the shortcomings of these arguments. I will then examine the social and strategic issues which will likely limit the degree to which the relationship can develop. This will be followed by a discussion of the effects of the war in Kosovo on Sino-Russian interaction, and developments in the relationship since then. Finally, I will assess the prospects of Sino-Russian relations in the future and their ramifications on United States foreign policy.

AREAS OF CURRENT AND POTENTIAL COOPERATION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, major achievements in the relationship between Beijing and Moscow have been exemplified by a series of presidential summits and talks between dignitaries. The sheer volume of contacts between the two sides in the last ten years suggests the warming ties between Russia and China.

Political Cooperation

The most important result of the rapprochement between Russia and China in the 1990s has been the development of what both sides call a strategic partnership. Interestingly, in the Sino-Russian joint statement issued at a September 1994 summit, the sides pledged to develop "long-term, stable, good neighborly, friendly, and mutually beneficial relations."1 There is no mention of a strategic partnership. However, in the joint statement released during the April 1996 summit, the nations announced their "resolve to develop a strategic partnership of equality, mutual confidence and mutual coordination towards the 21st century."[2] In each of the joint statements issued since then, Russia and China have reaffirmed and expanded their strategic partnership. In response to accusations that the relationship was merely a short-term one of convenience, Boris Yeltsin stated in a 1997 interview that "it is of a long-term and strategic nature and is not subject to temporary political influence."[3] In July of 2000, President Putin reaffirmed the importance of China, calling it one of the main priorities of Russian foreign policy and declaring that the developing strategic partnership "will become one of the most important factors in maintaining global stability and world peace."[4] The prospect of such a close partnership has raised alarm among some Western analysts and politicians.[5] Thus, a closer look at the relationship is needed in order to assess accurately the nature of the strategic partnership.

The driving force behind the new strategic partnership between Russia and China is the unipolar international system that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Although each of the joint statements released explicitly states that the cooperation is not directed against any third party, it is apparent that the partnership attempts to balance U.S. hegemony. Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov stated in 1999 that "Russia and China are not seeking to set up a military-political alliance against anyone"; however, it is not hard to understand that charges of "hegemonism" are aimed directly at the United States.[6] Both Russia and China perceive the United States' unmatched power with apprehension. As Russia deals with the idea that it is no longer a global superpower as was the Soviet Union, its protest against the hegemonic role that the United States plays in the international system is quite understandable. Russia has seen its prestige and influence plummet throughout the world in the 1990s while the United States has spread its influence across the globe, even into the former Soviet sphere of influence. The recent expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as prospective expansion into the Baltic states, has alienated Russia from the West. Thus, Russia yearns for the power to defend and promote its national interest?power which it finds in a strategic partnership with China.

At the same time, China itself is a rising power that wants to become not only the major regional power in Asia, but a global power as well.[7] The United States' pronounced military presence throughout Asia as well as its close relations with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan make the Chinese goal of regional hegemony nearly impossible. If China were to ever become a true global power, it would have to first overcome this obstacle as well as many others in the foreseeable future. The United States seems intent on blocking this ascendancy, causing significant resentment among the Chinese. Given such strong sentiments against the U.S., a disgruntled China is an ideal partner for a disgruntled Russia. As a result, the two have joined in an effort to maximize policy leverage against the United States.[8] Such leverage is the driving force behind their calls for a multipolar world that includes both Russia and China as major powers.

Other factors that seems to be pushing Russia and China together are their individual territorial disputes coupled with the human rights issues that stem from them. China resents the western reaction to the 1989 massacre in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, a crackdown for which it is still paying (in the form of Western bans on arms sales to China). Russia also supports China on the issue of Tibet, firmly believing that Tibet is and should remain a part of China.[9] What is most important for the Chinese, however, is Russia's support of the PRC on the Taiwan issue. Since April 1996, joint statements released have mentioned Russia's view that China is indivisible and that Taiwan is subject to Chinese rule. In accordance with this position, "Russia will not establish official relations nor enter into official contacts with Taiwan."[10] The Chinese have returned the favor, consistently declaring that Chechnya is a part of Russia and should remain as such.[11] Concerning China's position on Russia's military operations in Chechnya, the Chinese foreign minister declared in February 2000 that "China firmly supports Russia's policy concerning Chechnya."[12] Furthermore, while the West has been vocal in its criticism of alleged Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya, China has refrained from any such criticism. Russia greatly resents this criticism from the West, making China's silence especially appreciated. Thus, each side finds in the other a partner who will not only refrain from criticism on these 'pesky' territorial and human rights issues, but will even go so far as to support the other in its attempts to hold down renegade regions.

Another interesting political factor which seems to be uniting Russia and China (or at least has the potential to do so) is the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.[13] For Russia, the greatest fear is that the growth of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia will further destabilize Russia's 'soft underbelly,' possibly drawing Russia into an armed conflict which it cannot support. Secondly, there exists the threat of the direct spread of political and social instability through Islam to Russian territory itself. Finally, there are concerns that such fundamentalism would further alienate the Central Asian states from Russia, jeopardizing Moscow's desired position as a 'privileged partner' in the Near Abroad.[14] China has its own concerns about Islamic fundamentalism in its Xinjiang province, where Muslim minorities have been pushing for greater autonomy in recent years.[15] While this shared concern about Islamic fundamentalism will not necessarily strengthen the strategic partnership per se, it is certainly a point of mutual understanding for Russia and China.

Finally, success in resolving outstanding border disputes has played a large role in the recent rapprochement between Russia and China. During Soviet times, the Sino-Russian border was fraught with conflict and instability, in some cases leading to outright armed clashes.[16] The first agreement, signed in 1991, began the process of resolving disputes along the eastern sections of the Sino-Soviet border.[17] September 1994 brought about the signing of an agreement on the western section of the border, further laying the foundation for good-neighbor relations.[18] That same year both sides agreed to begin demilitarization to further reduce border tensions.[19] In a

November 1997 joint statement, the two countries declared that "all points of contention regarding surveying and demarcating the eastern section of the Chinese-Russian border have been resolved according to the [original] agreement signed on May 16, 1991." By 1998 it was apparent that with the exception of three islands in the Amur river, the entire Sino-Russian border had been successfully demarcated.[20] Following a long history of controversial border agreements beginning in the 19th century, it seems the border issue has finally been resolved. This forms a cornerstone of stability for the entire Sino-Russian relationship because it brings significant practical benefits to both nations.[21] Namely, it means that Russia need no longer worry about defending its southern border, and China need not be concerned about defending its northern border. This has allowed each side to focus its military forces in other areas of greater importance?Chechnya for the Russians and Taiwan for the Chinese.

Political Difficulties

As I have demonstrated, there are areas in which there is significant political cooperation and development towards a true strategic partnership. However, it would be unwise to stop at this point without identifying the political factors which hinder the further development of this partnership. The first consideration is that in fact, Russia's and China's interests are parallel, not identical.[22] Indeed, while Beijing has supported Russia with its vocal opposition against the expansion of NATO, it is hard to imagine that in the event of a serious conflict Beijing would ever take an active role on Russia's behalf.[23] Likewise, it is unlikely that Russia would take an active role on China's behalf in the event of an armed conflict with Taiwan (especially if the United States were involved). Thus, while Moscow and Beijing like to "display" their partnership, their commitment to each other is questionable.

As the above discussion has demonstrated, external factors have had the greatest effect in pushing Russia and China together.[24] In other words, the relationship is not internalized by either country, and is therefore easily breakable . Such an argument would predict that in the absence of an internalization which truly draws the people and governments of China and Russia together (as the United States is drawn to its British allies through shared democratic ideals, for example), the relationship will not achieve a significant depth, nor will it survive in the event of the removal of the external threat.

Another notable factor which might ultimately prevent a significant Sino-Russian strategic partnership is the fact that both China and Russia still place a high value on their relations with the United States. Many scholars and statesmen agree that China and Russia ultimately would not break their ties with the U.S. for each other's sake. As former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski stated in an interview, "both realize that more is at stake in their relationship with the U.S. than in their relationship with each other."[25] China is actively seeking greater economic ties with the West and the United States, including entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Ultimately, though China might oppose U.S. policies in the world, many doubt that it would allow a severance of economic ties with the U.S., especially not for the sake of Russia.[26] A strategic partnership aimed against the United States, in which neither partner is willing to break ties with the U.S. for the sake of the other, will have a hard time convincing the world of its strength and durability.

It should also be noted that China may have other interests and agendas outside the scope of the Sino-Russian partnership, calling into question the ability of the relationship to endure a conflict of interest. As the Chinese ambassador to Russia stated, "the Chinese-Russian strategic partnership . . . does not rule out relations or partnership between other countries."[27] Indeed, Russia's role as a power in the East Asian security framework is an issue on which Russia and China run the risk of disagreeing. It must be noted that China is aspiring to become the regional hegemon of East Asia, gradually playing a larger and larger role in the area.[28] At the same time, Russia seeks to become a major power in the region, inherently putting the two nations at odds. Evidence of the conflicting interests is seen in the exclusion of Russia in the quadripartite talks (China, the U.S., and the two Koreas) on Korea, an exclusion which China does not seem anxious to rectify.[29] Similarly, recent efforts by Putin to restore Soviet-era relationships with countries like Vietnam and North Korea threaten to damage Moscow's ties with Beijing.[30] Thus, it is apparent that within the region of East Asia, there is potential for undermining the strategic partnership forged in the two capitals.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Bilateral and Cross-Border Trade

In the economic arena, I will first consider the support and expansion of bilateral trade which has been implemented in the 1990s. 1993 saw a record level of trade between Russia and China, ringing in at 7.67 billion

United States dollars (USD). However, the following year trade came to only 5.08 billion USD, a decrease of 36.5%.[31] This significant drop is generally attributed to a crackdown on border crossings and by extension, cross-border trade.[32] Since then, trade has not reached 1993 levels, remaining in the 5-6 billion USD range. After a November 1996 meeting between the foreign ministers of China and Russia, it was announced that the two countries' targeted level of trade was 20 billion USD by 2000.[33] Needless to say, they have fallen short of this optimistic goal. As Sherman Garnett, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has pointed out, even if they were to reach the 20 billion level, China's trade with Russia would remain only a small part of its overall foreign trade.[34] Similarly, Russia's main trading partners remain the Ukraine, Germany, the United States, and Belarus. Thus, while both sides desire greater trade and seek measures to achieve this goal, the situation remains problematic.

One of the main problems that has prevented widespread bilateral trade is the basic incongruity between the Russian and Chinese economies. Many experts in the early 1990s looked at the two economies and predicted that in fact they were complementary to each other, and that a flourishing partnership could develop. This was because the Russian economy was based on heavy industrial products which China lacked, while the Chinese economy was dominated by the consumer goods which were scarce in Soviet times. As time passed, it became apparent that the two economies were less complementary than previously thought for a number of reasons. First, neither side produced the high quality products that the other was seeking.[35] Better consumer goods could be obtained from the West, and the same was true for industrial products. Also, neither side could provide the other with what it really needed most?investments, new technologies, and know-how.[36] It is also important to note that since the flood of cross-border trade in 1993, Chinese consumer goods have earned a reputation in Russia as being inferior in quality. Thus, all but the most poverty stricken Russians avoid the Chinese goods, preferring Russian or western goods.[37] As cross-border trade constitutes a major part Sino-Russian trade, such perceptions go a long way in adversely affecting trade levels.

The Energy Sector

One area of economic cooperation between Russia and China that seems to hold great promise lies in the energy sector. In the past 10 years, Russia's oil and gas companies have been seeking outlets for these commodities not only in the West, but in the East as well. The prospects for the development of close economic ties (and subsequent stability in the overall relationship) through trade of gas and oil appear to be quite high.

Interestingly, the situation can be considered more beneficial for Russia, which has a considerable amount to gain in the development of the energy trade with China. Such cooperation could conceivably have two major implications for Russia. First, it would help Russia in supporting and developing the depressed regions of East Siberia and the Russian Far East, a step which some observers see as crucial if Russia is to maintain its Eurasian empire.[38] Second, Russian dominance in the supply of oil and gas to China would likely create the foundation for greater Russian integration into the Asian economy and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). If Russia is to become an Asian power as it wishes to do, such integration is absolutely necessary. The development of energy exports to China (and other Asian countries) serves to achieve this goal.

The relationship is ideal for China as well. As China's economy continues its rapid expansion, it will invariably need greater amounts of energy.[39] In other words, China needs Russian energy just as much as Russia needs China's energy market. A number of significant projects have come about in the energy sphere as a result of the mutually beneficial relationship. In June 1997, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin signed an agreement promising gas exploration in the Irkutsk region, as well as an agreement to build a pipeline going from Irkutsk to China. The pipeline would supply China with 20 billion cubic meters of gas annually for 25-30 years.[40] At the same time plans were developed for a pipeline that would run from Western Siberia to Shanghai, thereby supplying China's burgeoning Southeast with the necessary energy.[41] As the decade progressed, cooperation branched into other areas of the energy sphere as well. In June 2000, Russia announced that it would build an enterprise in Xinjiang to produce electricity generating equipment.[42] Thus, it seems that there is a wide base of cooperation in the energy sector which supports the already established political partnership.

Nonetheless, even this area has a few points of contention. The first is that Russia's near monopoly on China's energy markets is not guaranteed in the long term. On the contrary, Russia faces competition from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia which also have considerable oil and gas reserves. Oil pipeline projects have already been negotiated between China and Kazakhstan, and oil is already being shipped by rail to China from

Kazakhstan.[43] Such developments present direct competition with Russia and may eventually undermine the Sino-Russian partnership. Furthermore, some scholars have speculated that this economic competition and tension could one day lead to serious conflict as Russia tries to maintain its historical domination of Central Asia in the face of growing Chinese influence.[44]

An incident which has highlighted the weak points in the energy relationship relates to China's Three Gorges dam project. In 1996, China had declared its intent to purchase from Russia several turbo generators for its massive Three Gorges hydroelectric dam. Not only would such a sale have provided a welcome infusion of cash into the Russian economy, it would also have proven the global competitiveness of Russia's generators. Furthermore, the project would have shown that the developing political ties between the two countries were starting to provide tangible economic results. However, in 1997 China unexpectedly announced that it would seek the needed generators on the world market, forcing Russia to compete with western firms. The Russians were not pleased with the new development.[45]

Weapons Sales

No discussion of the economic relationship between Russia and China would be complete without a discussion of Russian weapons sales to China in the 1990s, as this constitutes the largest area of Sino-Russian trade. China was cut off from western weapons markets after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. Moreover, the overwhelming American military success of the 1991 Gulf War showed the Chinese just how advanced western militaries had become, highlighting the relatively primitive technology of the People's Liberation Army.[46] Because China is technologically incapable of producing its own high-tech weaponry at present (most of China's technology is based on the Soviet technology of the 1950s-60s), China must find another source of weapons. Russia's massive military-industrial complex, struggling to survive in the face of reduced post-Cold War defense spending, is an ideal fit for both parties. Today, Russia is China's largest arms supplier, providing nearly 70% of China's arms purchases in 1996.[47]

Since weapons trade began in 1992, China has begun to acquire some of the most advanced weaponry in the world, causing considerable concern in western political circles. In terms of naval armaments, Russia has sold China four Kilo Class diesel-powered submarines, two of which are advanced versions which will "rival the best U.S. nuclear-powered attack submarines," according to Andrew Kuchins of Stanford University.[48] Submarines like these may one day challenge the United States' naval power in Asia (this is a vague clause, and the last sentence in the paragraph already makes that argument). Of comparable concern is China's purchase of two Russian Sovromenny class destroyers for $800 million, the second of which was delivered to China in November 2000, a month ahead of schedule.[49] These destroyers are equipped with the world's only anti-ship missile, the Mosquito (SS-N-22 Sunburn) supersonic missile.[50] Because of its supersonic shock waves, the missile is able to travel in a "gutter" below sea level, rendering enemy ships unable to detect it and therefore defenseless. This weapons system, which most observers consider to be part of preparations for a possible armed conflict with Taiwan, has the potential of seriously challenging American power and security commitments in the region.

China has bought a number of advanced fighter planes as well, including [70] Sukhoi Su-27 aircraft (comparable to the F-15). In July 1996, Russia and China signed a deal that would allow China to produce up to 200 more of the Su-27.[51] There have been discussions of sales of various types of aircraft and missile systems. What is perhaps most frightening to the West is the fact that in 1998-1999 China received technology from Russia for the DF-31/41 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).[52] China has also acquired significant assistance from Russia in the area of communications technology. Most notable is Russian Vice-Premier Ilya Klebanov's proposal to make China a joint partner in the utilization of Russia's navigational satellite system GLONASS. While this system provides opportunities for commercial use by China, most doubt that this is the true motivation behind the deal. When the GLONASS system is combined with the Russia's state-of-the-art Topol-M missile, it becomes a powerful and imposing attack system. As one scholar put it, "if these state-of-the-art technologies are passed on to China even partially, they would give a tremendous boost to China's war-fighting capability both in conventional and non-conventional warfare".[53] Amidst this discussion of weapons sales, I should emphasize that China ultimately seeks to acquire not merely the weapons from Russia, but also the technology needed to produce the weapons itself, as it is anxious to avoid becoming dependent on any one supplier for its defense needs.[54] While Russia has been reluctant to transfer such technology in recent years, this attitude is shifting.

At the same time, Russia is interested in more than just weapons sales. For both strategic and economic reasons,

Russia is seeking greater contact between the defense industries of the two countries and military to military cooperation. It is estimated that some 3,000 Russian scientists are currently working in China, largely on military-related projects.[55] Furthermore, there have been increasing numbers of military exchanges and joint training exercises between the two sides as the relationship has developed.[56] The sale of weapons and other military technology to China, combined with military-industrial cooperation, constitutes one of the strongest links in the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, at least in the short term.

AREAS OF CURRENT AND POTENTIAL CONFLICT

Demographics

The first area for consideration is one of demographics. Let us begin by addressing Russia's demographic crisis. Few will doubt that Russia is experiencing a demographic crisis today as its population declines steadily with each passing year. What is most troubling is the fact that there seems to be no end in sight for the decline. The problem is especially acute in Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East, which is populated by only 7.5 million out of the 146 million in the Russian Federation as a whole. According to Garnett, the rate of Russians leaving Siberia in 1991 was 12 per 10,000, while in 1992 that rate jumped to 56 per 10,000. Overall, 225,000 left the area in 1990-1992 as the economic situation and standards of living plummeted in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet state.[57] This demographic crisis has the potential to cause serious political instability in the region. Somewhat pessimistically, Trenin writes that "Russians must realize that if they cannot ensure development of the Far East and Siberia, Russia will lose those territories one way or another and somebody else will then develop them".[58] When one looks across the border, it is easy to see where Trenin's concern stems from: the Heilongjiang province on the other side is home to nearly 120 million Chinese. Furthermore, while Primorskiy Krai is home to 2.3 million Russian citizens, its neighboring region in China has a population of 70 million.[59]

As a result of these demographic realities, Chinese immigration to Russia has exploded in the 1990s. In the early 1990s, visa requirements were relaxed, allowing Chinese ease of passage across the eastern border. However, the massive influx of immigrants seeking to work or simply peddle their goods compelled the Russian government to tighten its control of the border, issuing stricter regulations for Chinese citizens. Still, many Chinese found ways to break the new laws, finding alternative illegal means of entering the country. Estimates for the number of Chinese who have illegally immigrated to Russia range from 200,000 to two million.[60] Many have taken advantage of an arrangement whereby Chinese can join tour groups to Russia without a visa. Having entered Russia, they simply abandon the tour group and continue to live there illegally. According to some estimates, by the mid 21st century, the number of Chinese living in Russia will total seven to ten million, making them the second largest ethnic group in Russia, following only ethnic Russians themselves.[61]

This remarkable influx of Chinese to Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East has some important consequences for the long-term stability of the strategic partnership. As would be predicted by Samuel Huntington's famous "Clash of Civilizations," the large number of Chinese in the region has once again sparked fears of the "yellow peril" which has haunted certain strata of Russian society for hundreds of years. In a country that is prone to nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments in certain segments of society, it is no wonder that "mistrust and disdain toward the Chinese are taking root in various strata of society."[62] Unfortunately, these sentiments do not simply apply to the typical "red-brown" types (ultra-communist and ultra-nationalist), but are spread throughout Siberian society in the form of an exceptionally low tolerance for Chinese immigrants.[63] The situation is not improved when Russians see Chinese engaging in illegal economic activities on Russian territory or breaking fishing laws in Russian rivers.[64] Thus, many Russians see the Chinese as a potential modern day 'Golden Horde,' with the endless Asiatic masses waiting to pour across the border and conquer Russia. While such an idea is objectively ridiculous, the growing presence and influence of Chinese in Siberia is a reality with which Russia will eventually have to deal.

Sadly, many regional leaders and governors of Eastern Siberia and the Far East have capitalized on both the changing realities and the subsequent xenophobia for the sake of their own political objectives. Most notable were Khabarovskiy Krai governor Viktor Ishayev and Primorskiy Krai governor Yevgeny Nazdratenko, both of whom fiercely opposed the border settlements with China, even going so far as to refuse to cooperate with Moscow's directives.[65] In the midst of the ongoing economic crisis in the region, these leaders have found a convenient scapegoat in the Chinese. Reports indicate that Chinese immigrants and traders are subject to increasing harassment and racism at the hands of local leaders who see the Chinese as the short term cause of the region's

economic problems. This issue is an important reminder of the growing distance between Moscow and other Russian regions in terms of China policy.

Simply stated, there is an ever expanding Chinese diaspora in Russia which is a possible source for social conflict in the coming years. Aside from the instability that this may cause in Russia, we should consider the instability that could arise within the framework of bilateral Sino-Russian relations. It is unknown to what degree China would one day defend the interests of the Chinese diaspora in Russia, though this is certainly an issue which Moscow will have to take into consideration to an ever greater degree as time goes on.[66] While outright armed conflict over the diaspora is unlikely in the near future, a souring of relations on this issue is certainly within the range of possibilities.

China as a Threat to Russia?

The second and most significant factor which threatens to undermine and even tear apart the partnership is the rising power of China itself. At the end of the 20th century, few doubt the prediction that China is the world's next major power, with some going so far as calling China a potential global superpower that will rival the United States. As such, "for China, relations with Russia are part of its overarching effort to emerge . . . as a world power" according to Garnett.[67] In today's world where economic power is just as important as, if not more important, than traditional military power, China's ascension into the ranks of great powers seems practically guaranteed: the Chinese economy has grown at an average rate of 9.1 percent a year for the past 25 years.[68] Considering that the average growth rate for the U.S. economy for the same period is approximately 2.5%, the Chinese feat is indeed impressive.[69] While it is unclear whether China will be able to maintain its astronomical economic growth as reforms deepen, for the time being, it appears that China is on its way to becoming a force to be reckoned with in global politics.

At the same time that China's power is rising, Russia's power is clearly declining. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has not carried the power and influence it once possessed in the international system. This is apparent in Russia's inability to prevent NATO expansion and American plans for a National Missile Defense. The economic decline of Russia can be seen within its borders as well. It can hardly afford to maintain its once massive military, as soldiers go unpaid and ships sit rusting at port for lack of money to buy fuel. In addition, the painful (and arguably botched) transition to a market economy has left the Russian state unable to pay for the huge social safety net inherited from the Soviet Union (including pensions).

When we combine Russia's decline with China's ascent and look at them in the context of the developing Sino-Russian strategic partnership, an interesting problem arises. In a long-term strategic partnership, it is likely that Russia will be forced to be the 'junior partner' in the relationship.70 As Garnett stated in a 1997 interview, "Russia is likely to discover that it can no longer manage an equal partnership with China."[71] What Russia's reaction to this realization will be, however, is far from clear. Some observers believe that Russia will simply have to accept this reality, and will do so without much trouble.[72] On the other hand, many point to Russia's historical sense of superiority over the Chinese (evident in Moscow's dealings with Mao in the early days of the Sino-Soviet relationship), and question whether Russia will ever be willing to play second fiddle to a more powerful China. This phenomenon does not bode well for the partnership when Russia and China are left to their own devices. However, under pressure and threats from outside forces, it is possible that Russia will be able to swallow its pride and accept a lesser role in the relationship.

Behind the question of Russia's willingness to take a 'junior' position in the relationship looms a much more serious question, that of China as an eventual security threat to Russia. This view is not limited to academics or fringe groups, as evidenced by former Russian Defense Minister Rodionov's accidental remark in 1996 that China was a 'potential threat' to Russia.[73] Ironically, it is Russia itself that is creating this potential security threat by selling advanced weaponry to China. Thus, pessimists advise against the sale of weapons to China, especially the transfer of technology which will allow the Chinese to produce the weapons themselves.[74] Nonetheless, just because Russia is arming a China that is rapidly expanding in power does not automatically make the latter a future threat. There is no reason to believe that either China or Russia will turn on one another unexpectedly or without cause. However, as has been pointed out throughout the course of this discussion, there are numerous issues lurking beneath the surface which threaten to complicate or even upset the relationship. Naturally, in the event that one of these issues erupts and leads to an escalation of tensions, Russia will then have a serious security threat on its hands. Apparently, the Russian government has chosen to gamble against the probability of this

happening. The wisdom of such a gamble is debatable.

Assuming that Russia's gamble turns out to be correct?that relations won't erupt in conflict in the distant future?we must still question the long-term viability of the strategic partnership. The question to ask in this case is 'will China still need Russia as a strategic partner in 20 years?' Will an economically strong China that has the power to defend itself still look to Russia for support? Andrei Fedorov, President of Russia's Political Research Foundation writes that "we should bear in mind that China is a self-sufficient state that seeks no allies, Russia included."[75] Trenin echoes Fedorov's reminder, stating that "China feels no need for alliances, especially with a weak and unpredictable Russia."[76] While these predictions still depend on a number of factors (namely continued Chinese growth and integration into the international system), if the current trends continue, it is questionable whether China will need Russia in 20 years. The maintenance of a strategic partnership in the long-term will be a challenge.

THE SCENE SINCE KOSOVO

As I have already argued, the main impetus for the Sino-Russian strategic partnership comes from external forces such as NATO expansion and U.S. support for Taiwan. Thus, it should come as no surprise that NATO's 1999 bombing of Serbia played a significant role in accelerating the development of relations between Russia and China.[77] When the bombing commenced, Beijing was not overly upset by the United States' actions despite Russia's outrage at the apparently unilateral action taken against Serbia by NATO without the support of the UN.[78] This situation changed drastically on May 8 when NATO forces accidentally bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Anti-American sentiments were unleashed across China and throughout the world as a result of the accident. This bitter opposition to America's actions bolstered the Sino-Russian partnership as it drove the two outraged powers closer together. Since May 1999, it has become apparent that the development of closer ties has been accelerated, and there are even signs of policy coordination between the two sides.

The most notable improvement in the relationship is in Russia's expansion of weapons sales to China. As mentioned above, Russia has been reluctant to sell China its most advanced technology, reserving these sales for India instead. For example, in the past Russia would only supply China with the Su-27 fighter instead of the more advanced Su-30 fighter jet. However, August 1999 brought Russian Vice Premier Ilya Klebanov to Beijing to finalize the details for China's purchase of 50 Su-30 jets.[79] In his article "The Kosovo War: A New Impetus for a Sino-Russian Alliance?", Yuri Tsyganov writes that "Russia seems to be losing its last prejudice against arms manufacturers," citing recent willingness on the part of Russia to sell a wide variety of aircraft, missile systems, tanks, and other weapons which were previously withheld from the Chinese. At the same time, it was reported that talks had begun on granting China the license to produce an additional 250 Su-30s, indicating that Russian concerns over the transfer of the technology needed to produce weapons are falling by the wayside.[80] Cooperation in the energy sphere was accelerated as well, leading to the delivery of power-generating equipment, as well as Russian plans to build the Lianyungang nuclear power plant in China.[81]

US National Missile Defense

Perhaps the most significant factor in improving Sino-Russian relations since Kosovo has been the United States' intent to build a National Missile Defense (NMD) system, thereby abrogating the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. The joint statement of December 1999 stated that both Russia and China "hold that establishment of a national missile defense system by any signatory state in violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty will have a destructive impact upon a series of international agreements concerning strategic stability, the reduction and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their carriers, and upon the possibility for progress in these regards."[82] Lest there be any doubt as to what this statement means for the United States, the two nations declared that "full responsibility for the consequences of any possible harm to strategic stability and international security will be placed on any country which undermines the disarmament framework." During Putin's visit to Beijing in July 2000, the leaders signed a separate joint statement on missile defense which specifically named the United States as the aggressor who is "seeking unilateral military and security superiority."[83] On November 20, 2000 the UN General Assembly approved a resolution sponsored by Russia, China, and Belarus calling for the preservation of and compliance with the ABM treaty. Eighty-eight countries approved the measure. According to a statement by the official spokesman of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "only five countries voted against [the resolution], including the United States, which, paradoxical as this may sound, is itself a party to this operating, cornerstone treaty."[84] Needless to say, neither Russia nor China are pleased with the pending unilateral actions of the United States, finding yet another issue on which they support each other.

It is not a surprise that both Russia and China would oppose the American NMD plans. Both reject unilateral, hegemonic actions by the United States that fail to take into consideration the interests of other countries. For Russia the issue is particularly painful, as it is direct evidence of Moscow's plummeting influence on U.S. policy and international affairs. Furthermore, Moscow sees the ABM treaty as the foundation of all other arms agreements and as a symbol of U.S.-Russian cooperation. Thus, the abrogation of the treaty would be seen through Russian eyes as both a strategic and moral blow. The Chinese have cause for opposition as well, for although American NMD would be unable to defend against a Russian nuclear attack, China's small arsenal could conceivably be countered with relative success. In the eyes of the Chinese, this upsets the entire strategic balance of nuclear deterrence, thereby threatening some of Beijing's most basic security interests. Thus, Russia and China are well-matched partners in opposition to U.S. NMD. What is most interesting about the ABM issue, though, is the fact that for the first time Russia and China are pushed together by an external political issue that affects both countries. As was stated earlier, NATO expansion does not directly affect China, nor does Taiwanese reunification directly affect Russia. Even agreement over the Kosovo crisis stemmed from different causes: Russia's from its lack of influence in Europe and China's from the embassy bombing. However, with American NMD, Russia and China's interests are not merely parallel as before, but rather identical. It remains to be seen whether this close congruence of interests on the NMD issue will greatly accelerate the progress of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. At the same time, it is hard to predict what the effects of an eventual U.S.-Russian agreement over the ABM treaty would mean for the Sino-Russian partnership, though it would almost certainly weaken the relationship to some degree.

TOMORROW AND BEYOND

The main engines driving the strategic partnership between Russia and China are external factors arising from the international environment and its key player, the Unites States. In fact, internal factors such as Russia's demographic crisis seem to discourage a partnership. Thus, it is safe to assume that for the next 10-15 years, the Sino-Russian relationship will continue to be driven by external factors and will continue to lack internal motivation as long as the economic and social relationships between the two sides remain problematic. Because the major external factors pushing Russia and China together originate in Washington, it is not unreasonable to state that the future of Sino-Russian relations largely depends on American foreign policy.[85] As long as the United States continues to utilize its unmatched power in asserting its interests around the globe, we can expect a continuation and deepening of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. It is also likely that the longer that external pressures exist, the more entrenched and stable the relationship will become. Of course, the converse of this statement is that in the absence of any significant external threats, the relationship will likely weaken or at least cease to develop further.

This presents a difficult foreign policy decision for the American president. Naturally, the United States has its own security interests which will not always coincide with those of Russia or China. At each step of the way the question becomes 'which is the greater threat: the security concern at hand or the future of the Sino-Russian relationship?' While the United States can not allow its national security interests to be dictated by the threat of a closer Sino-Russian alliance, American leaders must tread carefully in the world in an effort to reduce the negative effects of American power. This will necessitate careful, measured negotiations on sensitive issues like NATO expansion, NMD, and Taiwan.

Nonetheless, given the problems in the Sino-Russian partnership of today, as well as the potential problems of tomorrow, the United States should not fear a full-fledged Sino-Russian military alliance. At present such an alliance is not in the interests of either Russia or China. Only in the event of a series of major political blunders on the part of the United States would Russia and China be cemented together in a true strategic alliance.[86] While not entirely impossible, such an occurrence is highly unlikely.

Thus, for the next 10 to 15 years we can expect to see a continuation of the 'Eurasian' approach to foreign policy adopted by Yeltsin and Primakov and subsequently continued by the Putin administration. Russia will likely attempt to navigate between East and West, balancing its relations between the United States and China.[87] It is therefore important that American policy-makers do not automatically assume this centrist foreign policy to be a rejection of cooperation with the West. It is simply the consequence of a more pragmatic foreign policy on the part of Russia. An objective evaluation by American leaders of the Sino-Russian relationship should therefore allow for the continued development of American ties with each power, furthering the interests of all.

Beyond the next two decades, though, it is difficult to predict which direction the Sino-Russian relationship will take, as its long-term future depends on a number of issues. First is the development of U.S.-Russian relations. The overall deterioration of these relations will likely add fuel to the Sino-Russian partnership, while an extended improvement in relations may reduce Russia's need for a strategic partner in China. The same can be said with regard to Sino-U.S. relations. The future stability of the partnership also depends on whether Russia and China will be able to find greater internal or bilateral reasons to cooperate with each other (such as sustainable bilateral trade). In 20 years it may become apparent that neither side has much to offer the other, and the two will part amicably. However, the strong link developed today in the energy sector has the potential to serve as the foundation for a strong, mutually beneficial economic relationship. Another important factor which will affect the long-term partnership is the further success of China's political and economic reforms. Dmitri Trenin questions the ability of China to maintain its rate of economic growth and at the same time maintain social cohesion.[88] He also questions the ability of the Communist Party of China to maintain control over the reform process as China edges closer to becoming a market economy. Such a loss of control could theoretically lead to widespread social instability, adversely affecting China's position in the world and thereby having a significant impact on Sino-Russian relations. Whether China's future reforms succeed or fail remains to be seen, leaving another major unknown variable in the equation. Finally, the events of the post-Cold War era have demonstrated that the shape of the international system is changing: Russia is on the decline and China?at least for the time being?is on the rise. How Russia ultimately carries itself as a secondary power and how China carries itself as a first-rate power in the world will affect not only the Sino-Russian partnership but also the entire international system in numerous ways.

So, while the next 10-15 years seem to be predictable for Sino-Russian relations, beyond that there arises a rather intimidating question mark. It is often said that actions speak louder than words. At this point it is hard to predict whether the Sino-Russian strategic partnership will develop into anything more than empty words, substance-less jargon carefully hidden behind the veil of official statements. Still, we must always remember that the Sino-Russian partnership is akin to a crouching tiger, having the potential to spring into action against those who dare disturb its slumber. Given this uncertainty, how should Americans deal today with the unknowns of tomorrow? I believe that the best way to prepare for the international system of the 21st century is through careful, prudent policy-making which strives to guarantee U.S. interests not through coercion or intimidation, but rather through cooperation and negotiation with other world powers, China and Russia included.

On this count, the Bush administration's record toward Russia has been somewhat disappointing. The downgrading of Russia on Bush's foreign policy agenda, combined with aggressive rhetoric aimed at Russia by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have soured relations. Combined with the diplomatic crisis arising from the recent Robert Hanssen spy case, we see that U.S.-Russian relations are possibly at their coldest since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in the coming years will be strained at best.

On the other hand, the Bush administration's handling of recent conflicts with China gives reason to be hopeful. Indeed, it appears that the Bush administration has been successful in its initial negotiations surrounding the April 2001 spy plane incident. Through persistent negotiation, the U.S. was able to ensure the release of its service men and women, while at the same time allowing the Chinese to maintain their dignity and 'save face.' This, I believe, can be considered a foreign policy success. There is also cause for cautious optimism about the administration's recent handling of relations with Taiwan. President Bush's decision to refrain from selling Taiwan destroyers equipped with the Aegis radar system and his decision to end the yearly review of weapons sales to Taiwan are wise when one considers the delicate triangle of U.S.-Chinese-Taiwanese relations. At the same time, Bush's statement that the United States would do "whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself," was a misstep that set off alarms immediately in Beijing, forcing Bush to backpedal with softer language.[89] Thus, it seems that Bush's policy toward China has been relatively successful, with the exception of a few ill-conceived statements.

Overall, it is still too early to predict the Bush administration's success in handling relations with Russia and China. One would hope that in the coming years the administration will take a cautious, balanced, and respectful approach toward both Russia and China. Such an approach is the only way the crouching tiger of the Sino-Russian partnership can be tamed, ensuring greater peace and stability throughout the international system.

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