

Challenges of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership

One of the most dramatic diplomatic turnarounds in the past decade is the deepening of Sino-Russian strategic ties. The roots lie in the 1980s, as Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev and Chinese premier Deng Xiaoping sought to overcome decades of ideological, military, and political mistrust and competition. The real momentum that has carried the relationship beyond normalization is a product of the 1990s and of the diplomacy of Russian president Boris Yeltsin, Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov, Russian president Vladimir Putin, and Chinese president Jiang Zemin.

In June of this year, the leaders of the two states met—alongside the leaders of four Central Asian nations—to reaffirm their partnership and interests on major global issues, to expand their economic ties, and to broaden their Central Asian diplomatic forum (the so-called Shanghai Cooperation Organization) to include Uzbekistan. Just weeks later, in July, Zemin arrived in Moscow to sign the Good Neighborly Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The treaty itself and the extensive official commentary around it made the stated ambitions of Sino-Russian partnership difficult to miss, causing some U.S. observers to warn of the formation of a full-fledged anti-U.S. alliance.

Although such a description overstates what the two states intend, or indeed are capable of achieving, no one should underestimate the strategic significance of these ties. Sino-Russian cooperation is a fact of international life, one that needs to be factored into such key issues as the stability of the inner Asian corridor, missile defense, energy development in Eurasia, and any crisis likely to affect the interests of Russia or China. Even as observers debate the character of this bilateral relationship, Sino-Russian ties continue to strengthen. That cooperation corresponds to the basic interests and

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needs of both sides and has shown its value practically and materially, particularly in the defense sphere. Unquestionably, it helps a weakened Russia and an emerging China worried about an assertive United States, sending a signal of major-power solidarity on missile defense, intervention in Kosovo, and the need to respect traditional Russian and Chinese zones of influence.

Perhaps most important for U.S. policymakers and analysts, the relationship is in some ways indicative of diplomacy in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower. Sino-Russian behavior is a particularly clear example of a response to U.S. power that is hardly limited to these two states. As long as U.S. military power is not an immediate requirement or threat in the security environment, a number of countries, including even the closest U.S. allies, are tempted to distance themselves from Washington. Russia's and China's public embrace of a "multipolar world" and its deepening defense ties are a special case.

Ties That Bind

The success of the current Sino-Russian partnership arises from a decision by both leaders to accentuate areas of common interest and build on them. The two sides have largely settled, avoided, or waived potential friction. This approach has led to a somewhat lopsided relationship, with defense relations dwarfing other forms of economic interaction and with interaction between the two countries' leadership being far more robust than contact between the two societies at large. Nevertheless, it has worked in establishing and expanding the partnership. Sources of friction will be easier to address as a result of the current strategy and the subsequent strengthening of bilateral ties.

At least four ties bind these two countries. The first and most basic connection is the profound change in the strategic environment—namely the collapse of the Soviet Union. The legacy of Sino-Soviet rivalry could easily have overburdened the Sino-Russian relationship. The two sides disputed portions of the world's longest land border, in the Russian Far East and in Central Asia. Skirmishes between them over disputed sites on the Usuri and Amur Rivers in the late 1960s led to a sustained, large-scale Soviet military buildup in Siberia, the Russian Far East, and Mongolia. The two sides quarreled over the Soviet support of Vietnam and the invasion of Afghanistan. They were often at loggerheads over issues of Communist ideology. Gorbachev's attempts to alter the strategic environment, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union itself, simply put the relationship in a more benign context, especially from the Chinese perspective.

The legacy from the last days of the Sino-Soviet period—the beginnings of normalization—provided the impetus for the relationship that exists today. Border talks began under Gorbachev, Soviet forces left Afghanistan, and Gorbachev committed to the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Mongolia. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the military decline that followed removed a key obstacle to bilateral negotiations. China felt confident it could resolve old issues on terms compatible with Beijing's interests, not on the basis of Soviet pressure and military superiority. Then came Yeltsin, whose initial impulse appeared to be to cultivate a relationship with Japan before China. The Kurile Islands dispute proved too difficult to resolve or relegate to the back burner, however, as a potential Russian-Japanese compromise unraveled on the eve of a summit in 1992. Yeltsin also completed Gorbachev's promised withdrawal of Soviet forces from Mongolia. The time was right for Russia and China to put old divisions behind them.

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The Sino-Russian relationship has marked several milestones in border negotiations, demarcation, and demilitarization. The two sides have wisely chosen to seize the moment and settle all but a few kilometers of border demarcation. Any residual disputes will not lead to military confrontation and will be resolved on terms favorable to both parties.

In addition, Russia and China have captured ongoing military trends through agreements to limit deployments and to open military activities near borders to observation and dialogue. In 1994, the two sides agreed to measures that would reduce the risk of dangerous military incidents. They have expanded military-to-military contacts, particularly at high levels. Arms sales and military-technical cooperation have flourished. In April 1996, the leaders of Russia, China, and three Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—agreed to a set of confidence-building measures on their shared borders, including the regular exchange of information on military exercises, and limits on the size of such exercises to no more than 40,000 troops. At the April 1997 summit, Russia agreed to reduce the size of its forces on the 100-meter border zone by 15 percent and place limits on a wide range of ground, air defense, and frontal aviation equipment and personnel. These lower levels probably reflect actual holdings—not future reductions—on the Russian side, given the unilateral reductions in force structure that have been taking place since the early 1990s.

The second tie that binds is the strong impetus that has come from the top. Leadership in both countries has been the driving force for improving Sino-Russian relations. Summit diplomacy is now an annual feature of the relationship and provided crucial early momentum. Regular meetings between ministers of foreign affairs, defense, and atomic energy are also a part of this relationship. Indeed, cooperation between the two sides includes special committees on defense cooperation, atomic energy, economic issues, borders, and other questions that meet regularly and advance the agenda. This structure works exactly like Washington had hoped the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission would work but ultimately did not; it ensures the development of strong bilateral working relationships across governmental ministries and structures from the top to the mid- and working levels. In many respects, the leaderships have far more invested in the relationship than their populations. Indeed, anti-

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Chinese sentiment remains a factor in the Russian Far East, but first Yeltsin and now Putin have worked hard to present an official, unanimous appreciation of China, to the point of silencing those military personnel worried about a powerful China.

The leadership saw in the new strategic environment a set of common interests that would not only overcome problems but also forge new and enduring ties between the two states. For the Russians, as early flirtations with “Atlanticism” encountered obstacles, forging a working strategic partnership with a large and emerging power with its own concerns about U.S. power and influence made perfect sense. Stronger Sino-Russian ties would suggest that Moscow had other options than what Washington or Brussels might put on the table. Once the threat of Soviet military power in the north subsided, China too looked for advantages that closer ties might provide. Russia, no longer a potential rival in Asia, might well become a supporter of core Chinese aims there. Moscow could certainly provide important military equipment and defense know-how that the modernizing People’s Liberation Army requires. China shared Russia’s concerns about a very powerful United States. Both sides also feared sources of instability, such as ethnic separatism and radical Islam. Initial steps in the partnership had to be orchestrated from the top of both nations and had to be sustained by a broad vision of what the relationship might become once normalization was in place. An early accomplishment of the relationship, especially since the mid-1990s, was both sides discerning a set of shared interests.

The third impetus for strategic partnership is arms sales and defense cooperation. From 1995–1999, Russia's arms trade with China accounted for more than \$3.3 billion.¹ Obviously, current momentum and declared intentions will only expand this form of bilateral cooperation. China intends to modernize its military, particularly in areas most likely to improve its power projection capability vis-à-vis Taiwan and the South China Sea. Russia has assisted through the provision of the Su-27—Russia's most advanced air-superiority fighter—in three separate deals (26 in 1992; 24 in 1995; and 72 in 1997, along with a licensing and coproduction arrangement). The two sides have agreed on a Chinese purchase of up to 45 Su-30K flankers. Reports suggest further Chinese purchases of MiG-29s, MiG-31s, and perhaps even the Tu-22M Backfire bomber lie ahead. China, prioritizing improvements in its navy's blue-water capabilities, has purchased Sovremenny-class destroyers and Kilo-class diesel submarines from Russia. Even the ground forces have benefited, with China purchasing T-72 tanks and advanced infantry fighting vehicles in 1992; ordering T-80s; and discussing acquisition of the latest Russian main battle tank, the T-90. Other acquisitions include antisubmarine warfare helicopters, transport aircraft, surface-to-air missile (SAM) and mobile SAM systems, and a wide variety of radars to outfit the destroyers. China also seeks SS-18 engine and guidance technology to continue modernizing its strategic force. Other reports suggest a broad-based effort of scientific and technical exchanges focused on middle technology. The two sides have developed nearly 100 joint projects, about 30 of which seek to adapt Russian defense technology to Chinese standards.²

These sales and defense arrangements meet the needs of both parties now and for the foreseeable future. A wholesale Chinese effort is underway to improve nuclear and advanced conventional forces, especially ballistic and cruise missiles, submarine and surface capabilities, and air forces. Russia is more than willing to oblige, given its own defense industry woes and its hope that profits from arms sales might contribute to its own military modernization and reform efforts.

Russia has imposed some limits, however, on what it has offered China. Russian officials claim that the aircraft it sells to the Chinese have less capable avionics and radar packages than in versions provided to the Russian air force. From time to time, Russian critics inside and outside the military have questioned whether contributing to a stronger China is in Russia's interests. In December 1996, then–Defense Minister Igor Rodionov included China on the Russian government's list of potential threats, although he later recanted this view under pressure from those government officials responsible for relations with Beijing.³ Although Russia and China agreed in the mid-1990s to observe a bilateral “no first use” pledge and to de-target

their missiles, Russia's increasing reliance on nuclear weapons in its doctrine and Chinese strategic modernization keep the nuclear card in play. Despite this situation, positive developments in the security field are substantial, boosted by the erosion of Soviet and Russian military capabilities as well as China's own unilateral conventional reductions and increasing military attention to its coastal areas.

The very success of defense ties underscores the missing elements of an economic partnership. The April 1996 summit statement, for example, announced an overall goal of \$20 billion in trade between the two sides by the

Central Asian developments could easily put an unwanted strain on the partnership.

end of the century and identified leading projects in energy, large-scale construction, and nuclear power as priorities for matching the momentum and scale of defense efforts. Putin's July 2000 visit to China resulted in agreements on feasibility studies on gas and oil pipelines from Siberia to China. China's transformation last decade from energy exporter to importer will slowly emerge as a major factor in Eurasia, one likely to shape eastward-oriented energy projects in both Russia and Central Asia. Russia also agreed

to assist China in building a fast-neutron cycle reactor at Beijing's nuclear power institute. The June 2001 summit did not highlight economic issues, although follow-on meetings should return to these issues. These steps forward suggest the possibility of a defense-, energy-, and nuclear power-led economic partnership, though not what was envisioned in 1996. The 2000 Russian Foreign Policy Concept admits that, for the Sino-Russian partnership, the main task is "as before, bringing the scale of economic interaction in conformity with the level of political relations."⁴ The scale of bilateral trade—even in a best-case scenario accounting for possible improvements in that scale—is a mere fraction of Sino-U.S. or Sino-Asian trade. Thus, economic ties likely will largely remain state-directed and focused on defense.

The fourth and final source of strategic cooperation is best described as a systemic incentive. Both Russia and China have major-power ambitions. China once again seeks to be the major power in Asia. It is conducting across-the-board reforms and modernization of its economy, technological base, and military. It wants and needs good relations with the United States, but also believes that these relations need to respect and accommodate the growth of Chinese power and regional ambitions. It suspects that Washington may wish to pursue a version of containment of Chinese power. It views U.S. meddling in Taiwan with suspicion. Therefore, China wishes to expand

its options to respond to what it sees as U.S. pressures. Russia has simply not done well in the last decade. It has fallen into internal decline, no matter what measuring stick is applied, whether of social and economic indicators or military power. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement and the alliance's assertiveness in the Balkans has frustrated Moscow. Both Moscow and Beijing see U.S. aims as culminating in U.S. dominance of a unipolar world system. Both envision a multipolar world, where Russia and China are major pillars of the international system.

Both powers are theoretically inclined to work in concert at the United Nations (UN) to handle systemic issues. Both are practically inclined to cooperate on specific problems, be it U.S. national missile defense, NATO enlargement, Taiwan, or a whole range of issues. In some cases, this cooperation is largely rhetorical, with one power having most of the chips on the table and the other adding moral support, but on some issues, both the merits of the case and the power differential between Washington and their side clearly make cooperation the preferred option.

Russia and China are unlikely to be the only examples in the current global environment. The world now has a system where U.S. power is palpable. To some states, this force is overwhelming, even as the immediate threats that made such U.S. power desirable have receded. Consequently, resentment toward the United States has grown, creating resistance to U.S. diplomacy, the formation of anti-U.S. coalitions of the moment, and the possibility of even more enduring alliances. Russia's and China's neighbors still view U.S. power as critical to their own freedom, and even Russia and China need U.S. support on key issues, such as World Trade Organization membership, but dealing with a certain amount of resentment of U.S. power is an inherent cost of doing business for Washington in today's world.

Avoiding Roadblocks

Several potential sources of friction cast a long-term shadow over the Sino-Russian partnership and limit its scope. The two states share a common border and, in Central Asia, a common set of Islamic neighbors. The ebb and flow of power, which for the past several centuries has made Russia the stronger actor, are again at work but apparently to different ends this time. Taken singly or together, these issues could enormously strain cooperation and even renew conflict between the two countries. So far, however, Russia and China have skillfully managed these issues and will probably continue to do so for the next several years.

In any potential great game in Central Asia, the two leading candidates to play are Russia and China. Both sides have historically coveted the re-

gion, with both enjoying periods of hegemony there. Yet, under current circumstances, the two sides have defined their respective interests in Central Asia in consonance. They both want stable regimes in the region as allies in the struggle against radical Islamic forces. The last thing China or Russia wants is a radical Islamic regime serving as a refuge for China's Uighurs or Russia's numerous Muslim minorities. Even while carefully cultivating its own ties in the region, China has been content to let Russia continue its security primacy in the former Soviet Union. Beijing has happily supported the Commonwealth of Independent States and other Russian-led plans for integration, as well as Russian military deployments and obligations in the region. China clearly sees its most important security interests engaged along and beyond its littoral, not in inner Asia. Beijing and Moscow have thus cooperated to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan in 1996, and now including Uzbekistan. China has sought to improve its economic position in Central Asia markedly. It has assiduously cultivated ties with the Central Asian states, and its energy companies have concluded important agreements with the Kazakhs which could well be seen in the years ahead as the forerunners of large-scale operations in Central Asia, if a pipeline from the area to China's coast can be financed and built.

The rub may be if Russian military capabilities in the former Soviet Union do not match Putin's renewed assertiveness in the region, which regimes such as Uzbekistan, having seen the dangers of Islamic radicalism, have welcomed. Putin has indeed given new vigor to bilateral relations in the region, sustained Russian support for the ceasefire in Tajikistan, and avoided the collapse of collective security arrangements. Yet he has not succeeded in addressing the underlying causes of the erosion of Russian power. Economically, the states of Central Asia are looking increasingly to China, Iran, and the West, especially to develop the region's energy resources. Politically, Central Asian regimes enjoy their independence. Militarily, no power—Russia nor indigenous military force—is prepared for large-scale instability or Chechen-style conflicts that could come as a result of the passing of key leaders from the scene, ethnic separatism, or state failures.

Under such circumstances, Beijing will face unpleasant options that could put it at variance with Moscow. It cannot wait indefinitely for Russia to right itself and reassert its power in a declining region. It cannot permit a radical Islamic regime to gain a foothold on its northwestern border. Despite extensive military cooperation with Russia, Chinese forces are not trained to operate with the Russians. As a result, Moscow might well encourage limited Chinese deployments into the region. Even this course of action might not upset the partnership, unless it appears to be part of a wider pattern of

Chinese assertiveness in the region and elsewhere. Nevertheless, Central Asian developments could easily put an unwanted strain on the partnership and distract it from other interests.

A second, more serious strategic challenge over the long run for the partnership is the Russian Far East. Russia's position there is economically and politically weak. The collapse of the Soviet Union exposed these weaknesses, as energy and economic subsidies disappeared and high costs and shortages followed. Regional discontent, corruption, and other hardships have led to a steady migration of people from the region to European Russia. This trend draws attention to the fundamental disparity between a vast, resource-rich Russian region of about 8 million next to the 120 million Chinese across the border. The population figures for Primorskiy Krai and its neighboring region in China are 2.3 million and 70 million, respectively, reflecting tremendous potential pressure for change in the status quo, even in defiance of the best wishes of diplomats and statesmen in Moscow and Beijing.

It is a mistake to see this partnership as a full-fledged alliance.

Fears that “the Chinese are coming” have been a consistent theme of some local politicians in the region and nationalists in Moscow. Exaggerated estimates of illegal Chinese migration commonly claim two million or more in the region. Careful governmental and academic efforts have found only tens of thousands.⁵ Nevertheless, a recent Russian survey found that almost half of the respondents feared that the Chinese population in the region could grow to 20–40 percent of the total within the next decade. Another 20 percent believed the figure could become as high as 40–60 percent.⁶ This suspicion rests on ethnic prejudices, the rough-and-tumble of the suitcase trade, and decades of separation and isolation, but also on memories of Chinese claims to the region and scenarios that suggest ways that the Chinese could press such claims, by a determined and resurgent government and by a weakened one unable to control the flow of its people.

Presently, both sides have taken steps to reduce tension in the area. The Chinese have cracked down on illegal migration, introducing greater controls for obtaining a visa. Border trade—once seen as the engine of growth for both sides of the Amur—is kept within bounds and even controlled in ways that concentrate it at select border locations.

Population shifts are by no means destiny. Barring a radical change in Chinese policy, continued Russian or Chinese collapse would have to trigger these movements. Another cause could be an economic resurgence in the

region that would look to nearby China, not faraway European Russia, to supply the labor required to sustain it. The U.S. military has explored long-range scenarios that see conflict arising between the two states as a result of a slow and steady influx of Chinese into the region and resulting tensions with local Russian nationalist groups. A steady and large-scale influx of Chinese into the region under anything like the current conditions would indeed be a destabilizing trend. For Putin, the clock is ticking in these faraway regions. Some semblance of order and well-being must be reestablished so

The U.S. should welcome trade and other forms of normalization.

that future demographic shifts, if they come, will take place on a stronger regional, economic, and political base.

A third potential roadblock to partnership is the shifting balance of power between the two states. Despite the Russian foreign policy community's widespread acceptance of the Sino-Russian partnership, some members of this community still are concerned by the evident shift of political, economic, and

even military power in favor of China. Suspicions are just below the surface. Concerns are repeated often in less formal settings and in interviews with regional and central defense and security officials and analysts. Overall, however, the prevailing public sentiment is that Russia benefits from the partnership, even if China's power is growing at a much faster rate than Russia's.

The prospect of long-term improvements in Chinese economic and military power inevitably will inspire those concerned, but largely silent, about Russian weakness in Asia. The moribund and discredited Atlanticism of Russia's former foreign minister, Andrey Kozyrev, is unlikely to resurrect itself in Moscow, but both Putin and a wide array of Russian policymakers want a wider role in Europe. U.S.-Russian ties need not sputter along at their rate. Although rising Chinese power and influence, like any other development, can obviously be managed, it will cause concerns.

For example, the two sides easily agree that U.S. national missile defenses are undesirable. Both sides are united in their opposition, and both have threatened various countermeasures if a system is deployed. Yet the range of countermeasures threatened by both sides in response to U.S. deployments could not help but unsettle military planners in Moscow and Beijing. A serious rise in the quantity and quality of Chinese nuclear forces could remove the last area of unequivocal Russian military superiority. Russian nuclear countermeasures, especially abrogation of strategic arms control agreements and unrestricted improvements in Russian offensive forces (e.g., MIRVing

the Topol-M) would likewise attract Beijing's attention. The very arguments raised against U.S. actions—that the two countries must judge capabilities, not declared intentions—would mean both partners would have to reassess the impact of changes on the bilateral “correlation of forces.” Moreover, whether the issue is missile defense or NATO enlargement, the current united stance will not necessarily hold as new offers are put on the table. Russian nuclear forces, for instance, are large enough to accept a truly limited form of national missile defense. Both national and theater missile defenses are likely to affect smaller Chinese nuclear forces.

Precipitous growth in Chinese power will likely cause Moscow to search for ties that will not leave it solely at Beijing's mercy, much as Ukraine and Kazakhstan seek outside support to manage relations with Russia. Russian efforts with India and Japan, underscored now as consonant with the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, are likely to continue. Moscow's best outcome is a range of friends and interlocutors in Asia that preserve both its partnership with Beijing but also its options should that partnership become too great a burden. China's main advantage in having Russia as a friendly partner is its elimination as a military threat. China does not need more from Russia than basic stability and the continued absence of military pressure. Beijing's most important strategic priorities are south and east.

Future Prospects

Given the contours of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and its likely durability, what should be the U.S. response? Perceiving this partnership as a full-fledged alliance, directed across the board against U.S. interests, is a mistake. The common rhetoric is easy to sustain, but what will happen if the United States negotiates with Russia in earnest on an antiballistic missile compromise? Would Chinese opposition to changes in the regime really block a bilateral deal? Are China's interests really engaged in NATO enlargement?

Perceiving this partnership as a reversal of the balance in the old strategic triangle is also a mistake. Such a view overestimates Sino-Russian leverage, especially given Russia's economic weakness and the current military balance. Most critically, it misdiagnoses an emerging security environment that cannot be reduced to a triangle. Japan, the two Koreas, key Central Asian states, India and many other countries have a direct say in many of the core issues of interest to Russia, China, and the United States. All three powers must adjust to these new actors and to the new patterns their actions will engender on important trade, energy, environmental and security questions.

Such a view underestimates the continued leverage Washington has in its bilateral ties over both Moscow and Beijing, even in the aftermath of the

Friendship Treaty and the crisis in Sino-U.S. relations over the downed spy plane earlier this year. Russia and China need trade and investment far in excess of what the other can provide.

Sino-Russian cooperation will not markedly change questions on issues such as Taiwan or NATO enlargement. These issues remain bilateral or regional; the outside partner has little standing. Moreover, issues such as these remain subject to a dynamic outside the control of the distant partner. Russia will act in its own interests in Europe, and China in Asia. For example, China remains comfortable with a framework in Korea that excludes Russia and Japan. Russia's European interests could well lead it much closer to Europe and the European Union in the years ahead. Chinese analysts cannot confidently exclude the European turn they feared in the early 1990s. Chinese economic interests place the United States, Japan, and a wide variety of Asian countries far ahead of Russia. Although Sino-Russian economic ties have expanded, they have not reached the levels outside the arms trade that many in Moscow expected or hoped.

Sino-Russian cooperation at the UN could make future peacekeeping operations more difficult to negotiate (e.g., Macedonia) or make vetoes more likely as both countries now hold leverage over this body. Although current U.S.-Russian differences are serious, U.S.-Russian strategic talks on missile defense could yield a satisfactory outcome for Moscow that would complicate the situation in Beijing. Moreover, serious challenges have not yet arisen in Central Asia, though the next decade will bring changes of leadership, regional instability, and other problems there. If sustained Chinese migration pressure appears in the Russian Far East, the current strategic partnership will be difficult to maintain. Washington still controls many levers of influence, and the most ambitious bilateral expressions of solidarity and cooperation have yet to be tested.

The most important near-term consequence of Sino-Russian partnership is a negative one: the Russian contribution to Chinese military modernization. For the foreseeable future, China will have an enduring need for Russian military technology and systems, while Russia will have a variety of reasons to sell. Official statements from senior Russian defense officials indicate that they believe Russia has a long lead on China in key military capabilities and thus that current sales do not create a military threat to Russia itself. Russia's own economic problems and the ideological motivations of some in the Russian foreign policy community create incentives for sales, not restraint. These sales—and the broader defense and technology cooperation that is linked to them—could in time alter regional military balances in areas of vital U.S. interest in East and Southeast Asia or the Taiwan Strait. China does not need to match the military of the United States and

its allies to affect this alteration. It need only develop capabilities that substantially raise the cost of U.S. intervention in the region. At the very least, the upgrading of key Chinese military capabilities places an added burden on the United States and its regional allies in future crises.

Chinese military modernization may well be inevitable and may proceed at a relatively moderate rate that gives regional powers and the United States time to adjust, but large-scale improvements in Chinese nuclear, missile, and conventional power projection capabilities will cast a long shadow over Asia. Russia's short-term advantages from arms sales and defense cooperation may well not be compatible with long-term Asian stability and Russia's role there. These advantages are certainly at variance with U.S. interests. The Clinton administration paid little attention to this aspect of the Sino-Russian partnership. The Bush administration cannot be so relaxed. It should pay closer attention and make Russian arms sales and defense technology transfers a part of its bilateral strategic dialogue with Moscow. This issue needs to be the focus of Washingtonian analysis and policy.

Decisionmakers should also pay more attention to the possibility that Russia's public delight in the strategic partnership simply does not match its private concerns over a future of an increasingly capable China. Upcoming meetings between Putin and President George W. Bush provide an opportunity to explore Russian thinking away from the public communiqué.

U.S. and Western efforts in Central Asia to develop energy sources, create transportation and communication infrastructure, and address sources of internal instability are also important. Russia and China are not the only countries that have an interest in the success and stability of these states. Ensuring greater equilibrium in inner Asia ought to be part of Western policy. Such a policy should not be directed against either Russia or China and should in principle be open to cooperation with either power or both. Such a policy must continue, however, regardless of Russian or Chinese objections.

Ultimately, the Sino-Russian partnership is an enduring reality that U.S. policy must acknowledge as it pursues its interests in Eurasia. The United States should acknowledge the benefits that grow out of a relaxation of tension between Asia's two largest land powers. It should welcome increased trade and other forms of normalization. It should endure high-profile calls for multipolarity, much as it must endure French complaints of U.S.

Closer attention should be paid to Russian contributions to Chinese military modernization.

“hyperpower.” Yet Washington should not exaggerate the dangers of the strengthening ties between Russia and China and must pay attention to this relationship and define its interests in light of these ties. It should presume areas of cooperation but not be dissuaded by efforts to exclude it or cast doubt on its interests and presence in any area of Asia. Ultimately, the United States wants to see both Russia and China integrated globally and to establish stable and enduring bilateral partnerships with each country. To the extent that the Sino-Russian partnership contributes to these goals, it is no threat. To the extent it distracts either country or the surrounding region from them, it must become an object of increasing U.S. attention.

Notes

1. Bjorn Hagelin, Pieter D. Wezeman, and Siemon T. Wezeman, “Transfers of Major Conventional Weapons,” in *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 341.
2. Bjorn Hagelin, Pieter D. Wezeman, and Siemon T. Wezeman, “Appendix 7C: Register for the Transfers and Licensed Production of Major Conventional Weapons, 1999,” in *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 387–388.
3. Rodionov’s list of potential threats is variously reported in the leading newspapers. China is among those countries listed in the report printed in *Kommersant-Daily*, December 26, 1996, p. 1.
4. *Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy federatsii* [The Russian Federation’s Foreign Policy Concept], approved by President Vladimir Putin, June 28, 2000, www.in.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf, accessed June 2000.
5. Russian regional politicians and press considerably exaggerate the scope of Chinese migration to the area. Work by the Carnegie Endowment’s International Migration Policy Program, which has representatives conducting surveys in the Russian Far East, estimate the number of Chinese in Primorskiy and Khabarovskiy krays and Amur oblast to be between 30,000 and 70,000 in each region. This number includes shuttle traders. A special commission of the Russian Duma also investigated Chinese migration in the mid-1990s and came to similar conclusions.
6. Mikhail Alexseev, “‘The Chinese Are Coming’: Public Opinion and Threat Perception in the Russian Far East,” *Program on New Approaches to Russian Security: Policy Memo 184* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, January 2001).