

# WHY RUSSIA AND CHINA HAVE NOT FORMED AN ANTI-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

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Since the Cold War's end, many analysts have expected China and Russia to cooperate vigorously to counter U.S. geopolitical superiority.<sup>1</sup> Although Chinese and Russian leaders have collaborated on some issues, substantial obstacles have impeded their forming an anti-American bloc. This failure of the two strongest countries with both the capacity and (arguably) incentives to counterbalance U.S. power and influence in world affairs suggests why the United States continues to enjoy unprecedented global preeminence. This article analyzes why Russia and China have not allied against the United States and offers policy recommendations on how to avert such an anti-U.S. bloc in the future.

At their third November summit in 1997, Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin (then the presidents of their respective countries) set for their two countries the goal of establishing a "strategic partnership for the twenty-first century." During subsequent meetings, they reaffirmed this commitment and jointly criticized NATO's intervention in Kosovo, U.S. plans to develop ballistic missile defenses (BMD), and other

American policies they opposed. The many comparable statements by representatives of the two governments, the large number of meetings between senior Chinese and Russian officials, and Russia's extensive arms sales to China intensified expectations that the two governments would form an anti-American bloc.<sup>2</sup> At this time, U.S. intelligence agencies undertook a major initiative to analyze evolving Chinese-Russian relations and their implications for the United States.<sup>3</sup>

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Notwithstanding these plausible expectations, however, the normalization of Chinese-Russian relations during the past decade has proceeded for reasons mostly unrelated to any joint effort to counterbalance the United States. For instance, the quality of Russian arms purchased by China has been impressive, but these transactions alone do not constitute a Chinese-Russian military alliance. Furthermore, the two countries' policies on a range of important issues have been uncoordinated and often conflicting. Finally, although the two governments have signed border and other security agreements signifying the end of their Cold War hostility, nondefense economic ties and societal contacts between Russia and China have remained minimal compared to those found between most friendly countries, let alone allies.

#### POST-COLD WAR IMPROVEMENTS IN RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS

Chinese-Russian relations improved along several important dimensions during the 1990s, but how one assesses the extent and significance of these changes depends on what metric and starting point one uses. For example, ties between Moscow and Beijing might be said simply to have experienced a "regression toward the mean" from their excessively poor state during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. The changes look so impressive only because Sino-Soviet relations were so problematic before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union in 1985. Ties between Russia and China have come to resemble those one would expect to exist between two neighboring countries sharing important interests and concerns but differing on many others. Indeed, despite recent improvements, relations between China and Russia remain less harmonious than those existing between Germany and France, the United States and Mexico, or Russia and India.

##### *Border Stability and Arms Control*

During the past decade, China and Russia largely have resolved the boundary disputes that engendered armed border clashes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they have demilitarized their lengthy, 2,640-mile shared frontier. (The section to the east of the Russian-Mongolian border is 2,606 miles long; that to the west is thirty-four miles.)<sup>4</sup>

Border demilitarization talks began in November 1989. They soon split into parallel negotiations, one on reducing military forces along the Chinese-Russian frontier, the other on establishing confidence and security building measures in the border region. In July 1994, the Russian and Chinese defense ministers agreed to a set of practices to forestall incidents. These measures included arrangements to avert unauthorized ballistic missile launches, prevent the

jamming of communications equipment, and warn ships and aircraft that might inadvertently violate national borders. In September of that year, Chinese and Russian authorities pledged not to target strategic nuclear missiles at each other. They also adopted a “no first use” nuclear weapons posture with respect to each other.<sup>5</sup> In April 1998, China and Russia established a direct presidential hot line—China’s first with another government.<sup>6</sup> China has also signed multilateral security agreements with all the adjoining former Soviet republics.

These security agreements reflect a common Chinese and Russian desire to manage instability in the volatile neighboring region of Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> At their December 1999 encounter, Jiang told Yeltsin, “China is ready to cooperate with Russia, and make use of the meeting mechanism between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the links with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, in order to promote stability in Central Asia.”<sup>8</sup> Both governments fear ethnic separatism in their border territories, emanating in part from Islamic fundamentalist movements in Central Asia. Russian authorities dread the prospect of continued instability in the northern Caucasus, especially Chechnya and neighboring Dagestan. China’s leaders worry about separatist agitation in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, where deadly uprisings have occurred since the 1980s. Of the ten million non-Han Chinese in Xinjiang, eight million are Turkic and have ethnic and religious links to neighboring Turkic populations in Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> From Beijing’s perspective, the security agreements also facilitated the favorable revision of its borders with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>10</sup> Chinese and Russian policy makers also have worried about the activities of Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States in Central Asia.

The institutional manifestation of these shared Chinese and Russian interests in Central Asia initially was the so-called “Shanghai Five,” a loose grouping of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. On 26 April 1996, the five governments signed in Shanghai a treaty on military confidence-building measures that imposed restrictions on military deployments and activity within a hundred-kilometer (sixty-two-mile) demilitarization zone along their mutual frontiers. On 15 June 2001, these governments, along with Uzbekistan—a country that had not participated in the original Shanghai Five, which initially focused on border security, because it does not adjoin China—formally established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>11</sup> (Both India and especially Pakistan also have expressed interest in joining.)<sup>12</sup> Building on the arms control achievements of the Shanghai Five, the SCO has sponsored extensive, senior-level consultations on several issues, including crime, narcotics trafficking, economic development, transportation, communication, energy, the war in Afghanistan, and terrorism, which has become its most important issue

of concern. The parties are establishing concrete mechanisms to facilitate such cooperation—including annual meetings of their defense, foreign, and prime ministers—as well as formal structures to interact with nonmember governments and other international institutions. In particular, they agreed in September 2002 to form a SCO secretariat in Beijing, which will be headed by Zhang Deguang, China's current Russian-speaking ambassador to Moscow, who will serve a three-year term as the SCO's secretary general, supervising a four-million-dollar budget.<sup>13</sup> The previous year, they established a regional anti-terrorist center to share intelligence and coordinate responses to terrorism. The latter agency has an initial staff of approximately forty and resides in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, where a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) antiterrorist center already functions.<sup>14</sup> The SCO members also signed a formal twenty-six-point charter in St. Petersburg on 7 June 2002, and a "Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism" at their June 2001 summit. (The juxtaposition of these three terms highlights the priority the organization's members place on countering ethnoseparatism and antigovernment dissent as well as terrorism *per se*.) In October 2002 China and Kyrgyzstan conducted the first bilateral antiterror exercise within the SCO framework, involving joint border operations by hundreds of troops. It marked the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s first maneuvers with another country's military.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese military also transferred small arms, ammunition, and other military equipment to Kyrgyz security forces, and they have not opposed neighboring Kyrgyzstan's permitting Russian warplanes to deploy at Kant airbase, near Bishkek, or the basing of U.S. forces at Manas International Airport.<sup>16</sup> Other SCO members have announced their intention to conduct analogous exercises.

Since the USSR's collapse, Chinese leaders have favored a preeminent security role for Russia in Central Asia, as a hedge against untoward changes in the region's political status quo and the growth of radical Islamic and American influence. They also believe a Russian-dominated regional security environment would allow for the region's economic development by Chinese and other firms, especially in the important realm of energy, and permit China to concentrate on more vital issues—such as Korea and Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> The Russians have sought and welcomed this Chinese support. Through the SCO, Moscow recognizes as legitimate Chinese interests in Central Asia, and China finds a mechanism to promote these interests, in close cooperation with Russia. The newly independent states of Central Asia have become not objects of rivalry between Moscow and Beijing, as was once expected, but a major unifying element in Chinese-Russian relations.

### *Mutually Supportive Policy Statements*

During the past decade, Chinese-Russian joint statements typically have criticized various American policies. Although these pronouncements normally have not referred explicitly to the United States, the target was obvious. In place of an American-dominated international system, the two governments frequently have called for a “multipolar” world in which Russia and China would occupy key positions, along with Europe, the United States, and perhaps Japan. They evidently have hoped that such a system would establish a geopolitical balance that would prevent one great power (e.g., the United States) from dominating the others.

Chinese and Russian officials also regularly endorse each other’s domestic policies. Russian representatives have not challenged China’s human rights practices in Tibet or elsewhere, and they have not backed American-sponsored UN resolutions criticizing its internal policies. For their part, Chinese officials have expressed understanding for Russia’s military operations in Chechnya despite other foreigners’ complaints about excessive civilian casualties.<sup>18</sup> Such statements have reflected both governments’ commitment to uphold traditional interpretations of national sovereignty, which severely limit the right of external actors to challenge a state’s internal policies. Russian and Chinese officials likely have found it easier to interact with each other than with their Western interlocutors, who constantly importune them to improve their human rights and other domestic practices.

Beijing and Moscow also frequently express a desire to strengthen the role of the United Nations in international security. As permanent members of the Security Council, their vetoes (or even the threat of them, as was the case in March 2003 concerning the then-imminent Iraq invasion) allow them to prevent the United States and its allies from obtaining formal UN endorsement of any military operations they oppose. NATO’s decision to intervene in Kosovo without UN approval evoked outrage and dismay in both capitals. China, Russia, and the other governments of the Shanghai Five publicly affirmed at their July 2000 summit that “they will unswervingly promote the strengthening of the United Nations’ role as the only universal mechanism for safeguarding international peace and stability” and that they “oppose the use of force or threat of force in international relations without the UN Security Council’s prior approval.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Russian Arms Sales to China*

Russia’s arms sales to China have constituted the most salient dimension of the growing security cooperation between the two countries. Since the two governments signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation in December

1992, China has purchased more weapons from Russia than from all other countries combined. Estimates of the annual value of these deliveries range from seven hundred million to a billion dollars during the 1990s, and 1.5 to two billion dollars during the three years ending in 2002.<sup>20</sup> Since the resumption of Russian arms sales, China has ordered Su-27 and Su-30 advanced fighter aircraft, Mi-17 transport helicopters, Il-72 transport aircraft, A-50 warning and control aircraft, SA-10 and SA-15 air defense missiles, T-72 main battle tanks, armored personnel carriers, Kilo-class diesel submarines, several *Sovremenny*-class destroyers (equipped with supersonic Sunburn SS-N-22 antiship missiles), and other advanced conventional military systems or their components. In 2002 alone, China reportedly ordered two *Sovremenny* destroyers and eight Kilo submarines, and sought to buy forty Su-30 fighter-bombers.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in February 1996 China bought a multiyear license from Russia to assemble two hundred Su-27s (without the right to export them to third countries).<sup>22</sup> Keeping these systems operational will require China to import Russian spare parts for years.<sup>23</sup>

Economic rather than strategic considerations largely explain Russia's decision to sell advanced conventional weapons systems to China. Russia has both surplus arms stocks and excess defense production capacity. This combination has resulted in widespread insolvency among Russian defense firms, and high unemployment and low wages in regions that had heavy concentrations of defense enterprises in Soviet times.<sup>24</sup> From 1991 to 1995, Russian government orders for products of a military character fell by more than 90 percent.<sup>25</sup> In 1998, the Russian armed forces did not buy a single tank, aircraft, or nuclear submarine.<sup>26</sup> Russia's leaders believe, however, that if it is to remain a great military power, their country needs to maintain a healthy defense industry. They appreciate that many Russian companies require increased investment to develop the advanced systems that proved so effective for Western militaries in the Persian Gulf, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They also have proven susceptible to defense managers' arguments that a revived Russian military-industrial complex would help promote recovery in other economic sectors.<sup>27</sup> Since the impoverished Russian government cannot place enough orders to keep its defense enterprises healthy, Russian officials have encouraged the firms to sell their wares abroad. By the end of the decade, Russian defense firms exported approximately four-fifths of their armaments production.<sup>28</sup>

China and Russia, however, engage in other forms of military cooperation besides arms sales. A 1993 agreement permitted the Chinese to recruit Russian weapons specialists to work in China, and Russian aerospace institutes have employed Chinese ordnance experts.<sup>29</sup> A Hong Kong newspaper reported in 2000 that Chinese enterprises had hired more than 1,500 weapons specialists (including many in nuclear physics and aerodynamics) from the former Soviet

republics.<sup>30</sup> Another Hong Kong paper claimed that “hundreds” of Russian experts have helped develop China’s missile technology.<sup>31</sup> The two countries also regularly exchange officers and defense information expertise. In October 1999, for example, the Chinese and Russian defense ministries agreed to discuss changes in their military doctrines and to organize joint training.<sup>32</sup> Frequent visits take place between senior military officials, including annual meetings of defense ministers.<sup>33</sup> Contacts between midlevel military officers, especially those in charge of border security units and military units in neighboring Chinese and Russian territories, have grown as well. From 1991 to 1997, 5,205 Russian military advisers went to China and 1,646 Chinese defense specialists graduated from Russia’s military academies.<sup>34</sup> The first Chinese-Russian naval exercise, between two warships of the Russian Pacific Fleet and vessels of the Chinese East Sea Fleet, based in Shanghai, occurred in October 1999.

#### IMPEDIMENTS TO DEEPER GEOPOLITICAL COOPERATION

Managing their lengthy border demands a minimal level of cooperation between China and Russia. Their governments have had to work together to regulate trade and migration flows, resist such illegal transnational activities as smuggling and narcotics trafficking, curb international terrorism and regional separatism, and implement arms control and demilitarization agreements that permit them to redeploy or reduce military units. They also perceive mutual benefits (and a mutual dependence) in their arms trade. The Chinese government seeks military modernization, and Russian companies need the money.

##### *Nonmilitary Economic Ties Remain Limited*

Russian-Chinese economic exchanges not involving arms sales also have grown during the last decade, but much less dramatically. Russian consumers, unable to afford newly available but expensive Western imports, initially showed great interest in acquiring cheap Chinese products. The Russian government, besides desiring to satisfy this demand and help China generate income to purchase Russian arms, has also sought to entice Chinese investment in the impoverished Russian Far East. A member of a Russian delegation visiting Beijing in March 2000 explained, “Russia wants to balance its trade with China so that it does not depend so much on military sales. [It] also hopes to attract Chinese investment into Russia.”<sup>35</sup> Although most Chinese investors prefer more enticing opportunities in Southeast Asia, Chinese merchants have eagerly sought to sell goods, including food and services, to Russian consumers.

Despite these mutual interests, economic intercourse between Russia and China has remained limited. Bilateral trade did triple between 1988 and 1993 (from \$2.55 billion to \$7.68 billion). The initiation of Russian arms sales to

China provided the main impetus for this upswing, but a March 1992 bilateral trade agreement and a relaxation of visa requirements, which encouraged private traders to shuttle inexpensive manufactured goods and agricultural products across the border, also helped.<sup>36</sup> This economic recrudescence resulted in China's becoming Russia's third-largest export market and its second most important trading partner after Germany. (Russia became China's seventh-largest commercial partner.)

Nevertheless, while Russian manufacturers have been able to sell weapons to China, as well as some advanced technology in the fields of nuclear energy and aerospace, Chinese importers have preferred to acquire most other categories of advanced technology from the West. Russian government and business leaders reacted with dismay in 1997 when the Chinese rejected their tender to help construct hydroelectric power generators for the Three Gorges Dam. Rather than reward Russia for its political and military cooperation, the Chinese government selected on commercial grounds a consortium of European firms for the \$750 million contract. Grandiose Russian proposals to sell oil, gas, and surplus electric power in Siberia to China also remain unfulfilled. The ineffective legal, regulatory, financial, and insurance systems of both countries confront traders and investors with additional obstacles. As one Russian analyst lamented, Sino-Russian trade continues to "rely disproportionately on 'shuttle-traders' and arms dealers."<sup>37</sup> As of the end of 2002, only 1,100 firms involving some Russian capital have invested in China (with an estimated \$250 million), and less than five hundred enterprises with some Chinese capital have invested in Russia (with approximately the same \$250 million volume of investments).<sup>38</sup> Few of the many registered Russian-Chinese joint ventures have become functional.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of these impediments, Chinese-Russian trade flows have fallen far short of the ambitious goal their presidents established at their April 1996 summit—twenty billion dollars by the year 2000. When Jiang and Vladimir Putin, Russia's new president, met in Beijing in July 2000, they termed their bilateral economic and trade relations "unsatisfactory."<sup>40</sup> The chairman of the Russian Duma's International Affairs Committee, Dmitri Rogozin, acknowledged, "Moscow and Beijing are primarily concerned at the imbalance between political and economic cooperation, which is effectively zero today."<sup>41</sup> Much commerce still involves barter arrangements rather than the hard currency deals Russia, which typically enjoys a substantial trade surplus with China, so desperately wants. Even arms sales suffer from this problem. In 1993 China remitted four-fifths of the purchase price of Su-27 aircraft in the form of goods.<sup>42</sup> Arms purchases also produce constant disagreements over the prices and technical specifications of weapon systems, as well as Chinese pressure for offsets (favorable nonfinancial side-agreements, such as licenses). Russians prefer to sell



off-the-shelf items, while the Chinese favor joint or licensed production arrangements that transfer Russian technology and manufacturing capabilities to China.<sup>43</sup>

The discrepancy between China's stagnant economic relations with Russia and its burgeoning commercial ties with many other countries has been reflected in a steady shrinkage in the percentage of Chinese foreign commerce involving Russia. The bottom line is that whereas during the heyday of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s over half of China's total annual trade involved Russia, the corresponding figure today is approximately 2 percent. (In 2000 and early 2001, only 3–5 percent of Russia's trade was with China.)<sup>44</sup> From Beijing's point of view, its annual bilateral trade with the United States and with Japan, each worth over a hundred billion dollars, towers over its yearly trade volume with Russia, which has never exceeded eleven billion. Revealingly, China and Russia largely ignored each other when seeking to enter the World Trade Organization (Russia has yet to become a full member). Notwithstanding the complementary nature of their arms sales, both countries are basically competitors for foreign investment from American and other Western sources.

*Still a Top-Down (and Skin-Deep) Process*

Encounters between Russian and Chinese leaders have become institutionalized. A pattern of annual summits between presidents developed during the 1990s. Furthermore, the prime ministers of the two countries agreed in December 1996 to meet biannually in a format similar to the "Gore-Chernomyrdin" framework initiated by the former American vice president and the Russian prime minister. This structure employs a preparatory committee, headed by vice prime ministers, that addresses a range of security and nonsecurity issues. Bilateral working groups of lower-level officials iron out details and manage implementation of agreements. Meetings also regularly occur between Chinese and Russian foreign, defense, and economic ministers. The two countries have signed over a hundred intergovernmental agreements and a comparable number of interregional and interagency accords.<sup>45</sup>

But contacts among the two countries' regional authorities and private citizens have lagged far behind those of senior officials. For many years, local political dynamics in the Russian Far East presented serious barriers to cross-border trade and other contacts between Russians and Chinese. Although Russians living near China desired Chinese consumer goods, many of them feared illegal Chinese immigration could lead to their de facto incorporation into China.<sup>46</sup> Former Russian defense minister Pavel Grachev even remarked that "persons of Chinese nationality are conquering the Russian Far East through peaceful means."<sup>47</sup> A few years later, in February 1998, Chinese prime minister Li Peng felt compelled to say that the increased flow of Chinese citizens into Russia did not

represent a “secret colonization.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, aside from those few Chinese business people who find Russian spouses, most Chinese traders see Russia mainly as a place to make money—not as a home.<sup>49</sup>

The source of much anti-Chinese feeling in Russia has been the demographic and economic disparities existing between Russians and Chinese, which have encouraged Chinese migration to Russia. The seven million inhabitants of the Russian Far East (representing about 5 percent of Russia’s total population, and about five hundred thousand fewer inhabitants than in 1992) live in a region of 2.4 million square miles (representing around 28 percent of the Russian Federation’s total area), a mean population density of only 1.3 persons per square kilometer. In contrast, over a hundred million Chinese live in the border provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning, resulting in a population density fifteen to twenty times greater. Furthermore, China’s rapid economic growth has obscured the fact that its standard of living still lags behind that of Russia. Northeastern China has not experienced the rapid economic growth or prosperity of the southeastern part of the country, and its aging heavy industries cannot provide adequate employment for local workers. Chinese laborers who work in Russia typically earn higher wages than they would at home.<sup>50</sup>

The failure of economic and social exchanges to follow the paths desired by the two central governments represents a telling example of the top-down nature of the Chinese-Russian rapprochement. The improved relations between their leaders have not extended to the larger societies. Igor Ivanov, Russia’s foreign minister, recently revealingly described “genuine people-to-people diplomacy” between Russians and Chinese as “an untapped potential for further consolidation of our relations.”<sup>51</sup> Even at the elite level, the men and women who once lived and studied in the former USSR are yielding their leading positions, through retirement or death, to English-speaking technocrats.<sup>52</sup> Unlike among Europeans, or between Europeans and Americans, grassroots ties linking ordinary Russians and Chinese remain minimal. Tourism, cultural exchanges, and other unofficial contacts lag far behind the growth in security relations. In terms of popular values and culture, the two nations also sharply differ.<sup>53</sup> The partnership between the Chinese and Russian governments remains a largely elite-driven project that, lacking deeper social roots, could wither as easily as the earlier Sino-Soviet bloc.

#### *Anti-U.S. Cooperation: Rhetoric versus Reality*

Foreign policy cooperation between Russia and China has been much more visible in their joint approach to Central Asia than in other important areas—despite their leaders’ calls for foreign-policy “coordination.”<sup>54</sup> Their genuine desire to counter what both consider excessive American power and influence in the

post–Cold War era manifests itself mostly rhetorically. Since the early 1990s, the two governments have issued numerous joint communiqués in which they have denounced various U.S. policies and called for a multilateral rather than a unilateral (i.e., American-led) world. They also jointly sponsored resolutions in the United Nations urging respect for the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which limited the U.S. ability to deploy defenses against Russian (and, by extension, Chinese) ballistic missiles. Most recently, they urged the United States and its allies not to intervene militarily in Iraq without UN (e.g., their) approval.

Despite their common rhetoric, the two governments have taken no substantive, joint steps to counter American power or influence. For example, they have not pooled their military resources or expertise to overcome U.S. ballistic-missile defense programs. One Chinese official threatened such anti-BMD cooperation shortly after Yeltsin’s December 1999 visit to Beijing.<sup>55</sup> The Director General for Arms Control of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Sha Zukang, repeated the warning in May 2000.<sup>56</sup> But such threats ended after Putin, on his July 2000 visit to Italy, proposed that Russia and NATO cooperate to defend Europe against missile strikes—despite prior acknowledgment that Chinese officials were “suspicious about Russian initiatives to create a non-strategic missile defence system in Europe.”<sup>57</sup> When asked about the prospects of a joint Chinese-Russian response after the December 2001 U.S. decision to withdraw formally from the ABM Treaty, President Putin told journalists, “Russia is strong enough to respond on its own to any changes in the sphere of strategic stability.”<sup>58</sup>

An important indicator of the shallowness of Sino-Russian ties has been their failure, despite the Russia-China “partnership,” to adopt a mutual defense agreement such as the treaty of friendship, alliance, and mutual assistance that Moscow and Beijing signed in February 1950. Representatives of both governments have consistently dismissed the suggestions of such Russian analysts and politicians as Roman Popkovich, chairman of the Duma Committee for Defense, and A. V. Mitrofanov, chairman of the Duma Committee on Geopolitics, that a genuine military alliance be established.<sup>59</sup> Although both governments agreed in July 2000 to begin drafting a Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation, and signed it in July 2001, they made clear that neither party had sought a military component in the accord.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the Chinese and Russian militaries have neither trained together nor taken other steps that would allow them to conduct joint combat operations—even if their governments wanted them.

#### *Diverse Approaches toward Asia*

The limits of foreign-policy harmonization between China and Russia are most visible in East and South Asia, where the two governments have adopted sharply

divergent positions on important issues. For instance, despite their mutual concern about the May 1998 Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, Russia and China have persisted in supporting their respective Cold War allies—India in the case of Russia, and Pakistan in the case of China. PLA analysts and other Chinese security specialists continue to see India as a potential threat to China’s security.<sup>61</sup> For these reasons, the Chinese have expressed irritation at Russia’s commitment to provide India with nuclear reactors for its civilian nuclear power program.<sup>62</sup> The Chinese also have resented Russia’s willingness to sell India advanced weapons that Moscow has not offered to China, including certain fighter planes and other military technology.<sup>63</sup> Russian representatives reportedly have urged the two governments to improve their relations, but with seemingly little effect.<sup>64</sup> In July 2001, a Russian newspaper reported that “informed sources” believed that the Indians had rejected “through diplomatic channels” an effort by one of the directors of the Russian aviation industry to involve the Chinese in a Russian-Indian effort to develop a “fifth-generation combat aircraft.”<sup>65</sup>

Although Russia and China share important concerns on the Korean Peninsula, they have pointedly declined to coordinate their policies there. Neither country desires a war or the use of weapons of mass destruction in Korea. They both also want to keep the North Korean government mollified as they improve their own ties with South Korea. But in both 1994 and 2002–2003, they resisted separately U.S. threats to impose international sanctions against North Korea to deter Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons. Moscow refused to renew the 1961 Soviet–North Korean Friendship and Mutual Assistance Treaty, which had a military intervention clause, when it expired in September 1996. The two governments agreed only to a watered-down treaty of friendship, good-neighborliness, and cooperation in February 2000. The new document provides for nothing more than consultations in the case of security threats. Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov described military cooperation and sales between Russia and North Korea as of mid-2000 as “virtually absent,” owing to the latter’s financial problems.<sup>66</sup> Russia began in 1996 to provide South Korea with “defensive weapons,” to cover the commercial debt with Seoul that it had inherited from the USSR. In contrast, former president Jiang Zemin stated that China had no plans to abrogate its defense treaty with North Korea.<sup>67</sup> As a result, China has become North Korea’s closest ally.

Most tellingly, Chinese representatives resisted giving Russia a formal role in the four-party negotiations on establishing peace in Korea. As leaders of a state bordering the peninsula, Russian officials were understandably concerned about the implications for their security of either Korea’s nuclearization or reunification. Although neither development would necessarily have threatened Russia directly, either could have affected U.S. and Japanese defense interests,

which in turn would have influenced China's security policies, all of which would have affected Russia. For these reasons, Russian representatives complained that the agenda, goal, and membership of the four-party talks were too narrow and declared that the future of Northeast Asia "cannot be decided unless all countries in this region participate."<sup>68</sup> In July 2003, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that Russia's participation in any multilateral talks regarding the situation on the Korean Peninsula would be "logical."<sup>69</sup>

With respect to Japan, Russia and China likewise have coordinated only rhetoric—and their statements have not always converged. Although the joint April 1997 Russian-Chinese declaration did affirm opposition to "enlarging and strengthening military blocs," Russian officials have evinced much less concern about U.S.-Japanese security ties than their Chinese counterparts.<sup>70</sup> (Chinese leaders desire neither a strong U.S.-Japan alliance, which could work to contain China, nor a weak alliance, which might collapse and lead to Japan's remilitarization.)<sup>71</sup> On a visit to Japan in May 1997, then Russian defense minister Igor Rodionov even praised the Japanese-American alliance as contributing to regional security, an assessment shared by other Russians anxious about China's increasing economic and military strength in East Asia.<sup>72</sup> From Moscow's perspective, periodically joining Beijing to denounce U.S.-Japanese defense cooperation elicits, at minimal cost, Chinese declarations against NATO enlargement and other Western policies the Russian government opposes. The appearance of an embryonic Russian-Chinese united front toward Japan also encourages Tokyo to moderate its claims of sovereignty over the Russian-occupied southern islands of the Kurile chain—Habomai, Shikotan, Etorofu, and Kunashiri, known in Japan as the "Northern Territories."<sup>73</sup> One could expect the Japanese to recall that they were the principal target of the three previous treaties between Moscow and Beijing (in 1896, 1924, and 1950). During the last decade, Chinese officials have expressed renewed support for Russia's position on the Kurile issue.<sup>74</sup> After supporting Japan during the 1970s and 1980s, the Chinese government adopted a neutral stance in the 1990s following the USSR's disintegration. The status quo, in fact, best promotes China's security interests. The unresolved Kurile dispute impedes a close Russian-Japanese relationship and helps place Beijing in the advantageous position of having better relations with Moscow and Tokyo than they have with each other.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, Russia has offered only declaratory and symbolic support for China's stance on Taiwan. In September 1992, Yeltsin recalled Russia's unofficial diplomatic mission from Taipei and signed a decree committing Russia to a "one-China" policy. He made these decisions after Beijing had protested that a Yeltsin aide had visited the island and signed an accord on exchanging semiofficial representation between Russia and Taiwan.<sup>76</sup> During his visit to the

People's Republic of China three months later and subsequently, he said that Russia would maintain only nongovernmental relations (i.e., nonofficial economic and cultural links) with Taiwan.<sup>77</sup> The connection between Chinese support for Russia's policies in Chechnya and Russian support for China's position on Taiwan manifested itself clearly in the text of the December 1999 joint communiqué following the second informal summit between Yeltsin and Jiang: "The Russian Side supported the principled position of the People's Republic of China with regard to Taiwan. The People's Republic of China voiced its support to the Russian Federation's actions aiming to fight terrorism and separatism in Chechnya."<sup>78</sup> As with Beijing's own relations with Taipei, however, these political differences have not impeded substantial economic ties between Moscow and Taipei. Taiwan regularly ranks on an annual basis as Russia's fourth-largest trading partner in Asia. Furthermore, Chinese officials have complained repeatedly that local Russian officials have established excessively close links with the Taiwanese government.<sup>79</sup>

The question of which country would lead a Chinese-Russian alliance presents a major psychological impediment to the formation of any formal bloc. Unlike in the 1950s, Chinese authorities will no longer follow Moscow's guidance in international affairs as a matter of course. Influential Russians in turn have evinced little interest in according Beijing primacy. Foreign policy analyst Dmitry Trenin observed that China, rather than Russia, would likely lead any geopolitical coalition against the United States: "Having refused to become the USA's junior partner, Russia could turn into the PRC's vassal."<sup>80</sup> This impediment likely becomes stronger as Russia's military power, its main source of political influence in East Asia, declines and China's economy surges ahead. During the 1990s, whereas China's GDP increased by 152 percent, Russia's *declined* by 47 percent.<sup>81</sup> As Putin himself noted, this divergence in growth rates has resulted in a stark transformation in the balance of economic power between the two countries since 1990, when China and Russia had approximately equal GDPs.<sup>82</sup> Today, although the Russians' per capita gross domestic product is still approximately four times greater than that of the Chinese, China's *aggregate* GDP is four or five times Russia's.<sup>83</sup> Many influential Russians fear the long-run implications for Russia's security of China's growing economic and military potential.<sup>84</sup>

For their part, Chinese leaders have displayed more reluctance than their Russian counterparts even to suggest that they aim to establish an anti-American bloc. They studiously ignored then Russian prime minister Yevgeni Primakov's suggestion of a tripartite alliance among China, Russia, and India.<sup>85</sup> The Chinese describe their relationship with Russia as a "strategic partnership," the same phrase they use to characterize their ties with the United States.<sup>86</sup> They have characterized China's approach to Japan in similar terms.<sup>87</sup>

Chinese representatives repeatedly affirm that “three noes” govern their policy toward Russia: “no alliances, no oppositions, and no targets against a third country.”<sup>88</sup>

The current global war on terrorism has provided a further telling example of how China and Russia have failed to unite to counter American preeminence—even in the neighboring region of Central Asia. Neither government actively opposed the vast increase in the U.S. military presence there, which has seen Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and several other governments host U.S. military bases on their territory. Rather than offer joint or even unilateral resistance, the Russian and Chinese governments have contented themselves with gaining Washington’s tolerance for their respective “antiterrorist” campaigns in southern Russia and western China. The Russian military even assisted allied operations in Afghanistan with intelligence and other support. Although Russian leaders opposed the U.S.-British invasion of Iraq, their diplomats cooperated more with the French and German governments than with their Chinese colleagues in seeking to avert the attack.<sup>89</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

The decade-long improvement in Russian-Chinese relations has yet to evolve into an anti-American bloc—and it probably won’t. Although both governments complain about various U.S. economic and security policies, their opposition on specific cases has been largely uncoordinated and rhetorical. While they denounce “hegemonism” and use other code words to criticize American foreign policy, they have preferred to deal with the United States bilaterally rather than as a united front. Even their mutual opposition to NATO’s military campaign against Serbia, which the allies justified on human rights grounds that Russian and Chinese officials feared could later be used against them, did not prompt them to create an anti-U.S. or anti-NATO alliance. Instead, Russian officials eventually pressured the Serbian government to yield to Western pressure. Similarly, neither the May 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade nor the April 2001 midair collision between an American EP-3E surveillance aircraft and a Chinese fighter induced Beijing to seek still closer strategic ties with Moscow. After failing to extract concessions from Washington on unrelated disputes (such as the terms for China’s entry into the World Trade Organization), Chinese authorities decided to downplay the events. They evidently feared that their outcries about the bombing and the midair incident, combined with the negative fallout from the Chinese nuclear spy scandal in the United States, were excessively damaging Chinese-American ties. Moscow and Beijing also eventually accepted the U.S.-led military operation against Iraq and supported a new U.N. Security Council resolution that authorized the occupying powers to govern the country until a new indigenous government emerged.

Cooperation between China and Russia has remained limited, episodic, and tenuous. The two countries support each other on some issues but differ on others. Thus far, their fitfully improving relationship has not presented a major policy challenge to the United States or its allies. Russian arms sales have not been of sufficient quantity or quality by themselves to enable China to defeat the more technologically advanced militaries of Taiwan or Japan. In fact, China has imported less military equipment in dollar terms than either of those countries. The PLA typically buys small quantities of advanced weapons in order to learn about their technologies and how to counter them.<sup>90</sup> As a result of this practice of selective modernization, only a few “pockets of excellence” exist within the PLA. Most of the Chinese military still relies on pre-1970s Soviet defense technology. China’s ability even to maintain its complex, imported weapons systems or make the doctrinal and organizational changes necessary to employ modern military technology optimally in combined arms operations remains questionable.<sup>91</sup> The expected increase in the quality of China’s defense industries, the continued decline of Russia’s military-industrial complex, and Russia’s stated refusal to sell its most advanced weapon systems to a modernizing PLA could decrease the importance of the Sino-Russian arms trade in the future.

The Chinese-Russian rapprochement appears so prominent largely because it contrasts so vividly with their recent enmity and because they both lack close allies. Resentful about lying outside the core American-European-Japanese axis now dominating international politics, they naturally both try to gravitate toward the West and simultaneously seek mutual solace for their isolation in each other’s loose embrace. In some respects, they are following the path set by Germany and the USSR during the 1920s with their Rapallo Treaty and cooperative military programs. Ironically, the better ties between the two countries, as well as Russia’s improved relations with France and Germany, may work in Washington’s favor by reassuring foreign observers concerned about potential American hegemony.

The U.S. government nevertheless should pursue several policies designed to prevent Russia and China from developing a genuine strategic alliance, which could impede the attainment of important American foreign-policy goals. Although the probability of such a bloc is low, the negative consequences for U.S. policies in East Asia and elsewhere could be quite severe should one emerge. Washington also needs to hedge against the possibility that unanticipated factors beyond its control will engender such an anti-American coalition.

Continued efforts to maintain strong U.S.-Japanese security ties represent an essential hedging strategy against a Chinese-Russian military bloc, however improbable. The U.S.-Japanese alliance, unlike the weaker Sino-Russian alignment, involves extensive cooperation, and not only in the military sphere. More



generally, U.S. officials should continue to retain robust military forces in the Asia-Pacific region. Reductions in the size of the U.S. military presence in the western Pacific could prove possible or even necessary, but they should proceed in a deliberate manner and in close consultation with other governments. Regardless of the numbers involved, the military presence, combined with nonconfrontational commercial policies, reassures Asian countries about the value of maintaining good relations with the United States. The likelihood that most countries neighboring China and Russia would side with the West against a Sino-Russian bloc presumably deters these two governments from seeking one.

U.S. policy makers also should continue to encourage reconciliation between Russia and Japan. Better ties between Moscow and Tokyo would give Moscow an alternative to aligning with China on Asian security issues. Furthermore, better commercial ties between Moscow and Tokyo could improve the prospects that the two countries will satisfactorily resolve the Kurile Islands dispute, perhaps through some creative shared-sovereignty arrangement. But most Japanese and other foreign investors will not enter Russia until Russian lawmakers create a more favorable domestic economic climate.<sup>92</sup> In the interim, enhanced cooperation to deal with such mutual, low-level threats as drug trafficking and environmental degradation might help start a reconciliation between these logical economic partners.

Additional arms control measures could substantially improve regional military transparency. Unfortunately, East Asian militaries traditionally have shown little enthusiasm for arms control.<sup>93</sup> Clarifying the quantity and quality of Russian arms sales to China warrants top priority. Seeking to guard against a worst-case scenario, other countries might respond to the sales by increasing their own defense efforts, which in turn could heighten security anxieties in China and perhaps Russia. From such security spirals, dangerous arms races can arise.

American officials should try to deprive their Chinese and Russian counterparts of opportunities to confront the United States jointly. When negotiating divisive issues with these two countries, U.S. representatives should employ institutions in which either China or Russia, but not both, are members. For this reason, the new NATO-Russian Council or the Organization for the Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE) would provide a better framework than the UN Security Council for resolving military differences between NATO members and Russia. Similarly, Russian and Chinese concerns over American TBMD, or U.S. complaints about Chinese and Russian commercial and legal practices (such as those affecting intellectual property rights), are best handled bilaterally. In this respect, the current practice of excluding Russia from the four-party peace talks on Korea has the advantage of not encouraging concerted Chinese-Russian action on that issue.

As a general rule, however, Washington should try to include Russia in East Asian institutions or negotiations. Such a policy would recognize that two-thirds of Russia's territory lies in Asia and that many Russians identify their nation as Eurasian. Overtly trying to circumscribe Russia's role in East Asia would encourage Moscow to turn more toward China. Integrating Russia into East Asia's numerous (though weak) institutions would provide for Russian representation independent of Beijing.

Two objectives that might well come into conflict are limiting joint Chinese-Russian institutional involvement and pursuing important arms control goals. China's exports of ballistic missiles and technologies related to nuclear weapons already work against U.S. nonproliferation objectives. Furthermore, China's refusal to participate in strategic nuclear arms control negotiations could impede U.S.-Russian progress in this area. Inviting Chinese representatives to enter into exclusive trilateral arms control talks with Russia and the United States might induce their participation, since it would underline China's status as a great power. Issues warranting trilateral discussions could include reducing strategic nuclear forces, banning antisatellite weapons, and especially managing ballistic missile proliferation.

In this regard, U.S. ballistic-missile defense programs should not even appear to undermine the viability of Russia's or China's nuclear deterrents. The fact that both Russia and China possess secure retaliatory nuclear forces removes a common factor underpinning most military alliances—shared vulnerability. Each state can defend itself, by itself. China's and Russia's assured capacity to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike against the United States or other countries (including each other) allows them to regard U.S. military superiority with a degree of equanimity.<sup>94</sup> No currently envisaged U.S. BMD architecture could negate this capacity, and the quixotic pursuit of one would drive China and Russia closer together.

American efforts to dissuade Russia from selling arms to China will have to focus on especially disruptive systems. For reasons discussed earlier, Russians will want to continue to sell weapons to China. A comprehensive U.S. attempt to bloc Russian arms sales would prove counterproductive, but reasoned arguments about the need to avoid transferring weapons that could enhance the PLA's ability to project military power far beyond China's borders might persuade some Russian policy makers worried about harming Russia's relations with Washington or its Asian allies.

Russia and China will continue to work together to pursue common goals, but if the events of the last few years—especially the U.S. military interventions in Serbia, Afghanistan, and Iraq—have not galvanized them to form an anti-American alliance, it is hard to envisage what will. The global war on terrorism should if

anything improve relations among China, Russia, and the United States because their governments all consider radical Islamic terrorism their most pressing security threat. Just as fears of a revanchist Russia or an expansionist China have faded in official Washington during the past year, so policy makers in Moscow and Beijing have become preoccupied with problems other than potential American hegemony. If a new great power alliance emerges in Eurasia, the United States will more likely be its member than its target.

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#### NOTES

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91. These challenges are described in Dennis J. Blasko, “Chinese Military Purchases from Russia: A Relative Evaluation,” *Strength through Cooperation: Military Forces in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Univ. Press, 1997), chap. 8; and Dennis J. Blasko, “Evaluating Chinese Military Procurement from Russia,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 17 (Autumn/Winter 1997–98), pp. 91–96.
92. On the problems impeding the Russian Far East’s economic integration into the rest of northeast Asia see Duckjoon Chang, “The Russian Far East and Northeastern Asia: An Emerging Cooperative Relationship and Its Constraints,” *Asia Perspective* 26, no. 2 (June 2002), pp. 41–76.
93. Paul Dibb, “Strategic Trends: Asia at a Crossroads,” *Naval War College Review* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2001), p. 34.
94. Their vast territory and the absence of plausible invaders also contribute to their sense of security. Robert J. Art, “Creating a Disaster: NATO’s Open Door Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (Fall 1998), p. 387.