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The Sino–Russian Strategic Partnership

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The Sino–Russian Astrategic partnership, formed after decades of rancorous verbal (and sometimes lethal) dispute, we find to be genuine, bespeaking a genuine desire on both sides to put the past behind them and forge a more friendly and mutually profitable relationship. Certainly there are underlying problems and suspicions, but the painstakingly institutionalized, multi-stranded network of exchange and consultation seems quite capable of containing areas of friction. Though primarily oriented to bilateral concerns, the partnership also has a more ambitious international agenda, oriented essentially to the protection of national sovereignty from the forces of globalism and human rights, as typically symbolized by the United States.

The relationship between these two vast empires astride the Eurasian heartland has been full of rivalry for centuries, despite certain superficial similarities in size and political–economic structure. The Mongol Golden Horde successfully invaded Russia in the thirteenth century, burning Moscow and taking Kiev, and they continued to rule southern Russia and extort tribute for the next 200 years, leaving an historical legacy of dread. Russia would lag China developmentally for the next several centuries, with a population that did not reach 13 million until 1725 (compared to China's brilliant civilization and ca. 150 million people), and the first visitors to Beijing in the modern era (beginning in the mid-seventeenth century) were obliged to prostrate themselves [*koutou*] before the Qing emperor. Yet the decline of the Manchu Dynasty coincided with Russian industrialization following the defeat of Napoleon, and Russian appetites for trade and territorial expansion led to increasing impingement on imperial China. The Russian imperialist strategy was that of a 'free rider': Russian forces typically ventured claims only when China was preoccupied by more urgent threats. Thus in 1854–59, while China was engulfed by the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64), General N. N. Murawjew and 20,000 troops occupied the delta and north shore of the Amur/Heilong R. and the maritime provinces without firing a shot. During the second Opium War, Russian forces made further opportunistic inroads, formalized in the 1860 Sino–Russian Treaty of Beijing. During the Yakub Beg Rebellion in Xinjiang, Russian troops occupied part of the Yili region, formalized in the Treaty of Livadia (later modified slightly in China's favor in the Treaty of St. Petersburg). Completion of the trans-Siberian railway and the decline of the Qing offered further opportunity for cheap acquisi-

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tions, and in 1898 Russia made Port Arthur and Dalian imperial treaty ports, occupied Manchuria in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion and extended its sphere of influence over China's Northeast in 1905. After encouraging the Mongols to rebel in 1910, Russia established a protectorate over Outer Mongolia in the midst of the 1911 Xinhai revolution.

After the Bolshevik Revolution the new Soviet regime renounced its share of the Boxer reparations as well as most imperialist privileges in China, and quickly established diplomatic relations with the short-lived Peking Republic (1924), while also helping to organize and advising the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and assisting in the reorganization of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT), thus insinuating its interests in China through multiple avenues. After some three decades of turmoil, during which two tenuous Communist–Nationalist united fronts fell apart in the process of trying to reunite the country and ward off foreign invasion, the Chinese Communist Party ultimately drove the KMT from the mainland and turned to the CPSU for help in consolidating its revolution. After prolonged and wary negotiations, Mao and Stalin signed a 30-year Sino–Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance (14 February 1950) capitalizing on shared ideological values and a history of revolutionary collaboration to establish a Eurasian partnership.[1] Moscow agreed to provide a loan of US$300 million over 5 years, plus construction aid in building 50 (eventually three times that) massive heavy industrial projects, and ceded most of the concessions it had recently gained in negotiations with the Nationalist regime. But not until Beijing sent 'volunteers' into the Korean War, and soon after contributed generous aid and advisors to the first Indochina War (particularly at Dienbienphu), was Stalin fully satisfied with the Chinese contribution. Although this massive exercise in transplanting modern (socialist) industrial culture from one country to another was to end badly, for amply documented reasons, the period of cooperation made an undeniable objective contribution to Chinese development—meanwhile establishing 'old school ties' of lasting value with the next generation of future Chinese and Russian leaders.[2]

The period of friendship segued in the late 1950s into three decades of fratricidal polemics, diplomatic encirclement and counterencirclement maneuvers, arms race, and border violence that obsessed both sides at the time and has puzzled them ever since. As we now know, the most sensitive phase of this rivalry was touched off by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, exciting Chinese apprehensions of analogous application of the incipient Brezhnev Doctrine to the PRC and leading directly to the series of border clashes initiated by Beijing in March 1969. After Mao's death in August 1976, the ideological animus against 'socialist hegemonism' began to dissipate, while the rise of Reagan's anti-Soviet

1. See the massive study of this period by Dieter Heinzig, *Die Sowjetunion und das kommunistische China 1945–1950: Der beschwerliche Weg zum Buendnis* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgellschaft, 1998).

2. For example, Jiang Zemin himself was trained at Moscow's Stalin Autoworks, a showcase of Soviet industry. Li Peng was a graduate of the Moscow Power Institute, and Admiral Liu Huaqing, a prominent advocate of increased purchases of Russian weaponry, was trained at the Voroshilov Naval Academy in Leningrad. See Jennifer Anderson, *The Limits of Sino–Russian Strategic Partnership* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper no. 315, 1997).

crusade led to a new Cold War and bipolar arms race. Beijing came to interpret this exclusively in 'superpower' terms, a status to which China did not aspire, hence relieving Beijing of some of its security concern: PRC arms spending was reduced by some 7% per annum as a proportion of GDP from 1979 to 1989. Whereas the Chinese quietly allowed the Sino–Soviet treaty to lapse upon its expiry in 1981, they agreed to discuss mutual problems, and beginning in 1982, after Sino–American normalization and the Third Communiqué, a new series of Sino–Soviet 'normalization' talks were held, alternating semi-annually between the two capitols in the spring and fall of each year, usually involving the same team of officials on either side. Progress was initially glacial due to Soviet intransigence over what Beijing called the 'three fundamental obstacles': heavy fortification of the Sino–Soviet border and in Outer Mongolia; Soviet troops in Afghanistan; and support of the Vietnamese threat to China's southeastern flank (and to China's ally Cambodia). Talks nevertheless continued on schedule, accompanied by gradually increasing trade and cultural exchanges, helping to contain the dispute during the long post-Brezhnev succession crisis.

When Gorbachev decided to rationalize Soviet foreign policy in the late 1980s he decided, while terminating high-risk ventures in the Third World, to try to revive the Sino–Soviet friendship, in the hopes of creating a Eurasian socialist redoubt. In speeches at Vladivostok (July 1986) and Krasnoyarsk (September 1988) he proposed a freeze on the deployment of nuclear weapons in the Asia–Pacific region, Soviet withdrawal from the Cam Ranh Bay naval facility in Vietnam, and unilateral reduction of the Soviet military by 500,000 troops within 2 years, nearly half (200,000) of which would come from the region east of the Urals. This Soviet 'new thinking' [*novo myshlenie*], according to which Brezhnev's vaunted achievement of 'strategic parity' had redounded in few substantial gains at immense cost, eventually satisfied all three Chinese 'obstacles'. Meanwhile, inasmuch as both countries' economies were running aground on the limits of 'extensive development' under command planning—the Soviet Union after years of stagnation under Brezhnev, China after radical Maoism had exhausted itself in the Cultural Revolution—fresh leadership teams in both capitols turned to 'socialist reform', an attempt at revitalization referred to as *perestroika* and *gaige kaifang*, respectively. There was again a sense that both countries, with symmetrically structured and ideologically oriented economies, could learn from one another. Because China had been first to experiment with reform, much of the initial learning was by the Soviet Union—but China also paid close attention to Soviet experiments, and in fact the liberalization that culminated in the 1986 protest movement that in turn led to the fall of Hu Yaobang had been inspired by Gorbachev's prior call for Soviet political reform (as well as Deng Xiaoping's Delphic encouragement). Whereas such 'learning' was, to be sure, selective and ultimately led in divergent directions, the fact that both countries were engaged in analogous socioeconomic experiments and interested in each other's experience helped to orchestrate their detente.[3] Based then on both foreign policy and domestic policy convergence, it had become possible by the end

3. Lowell Dittmer, *Sino–Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992).

of the 1980s to convene a summit meeting sealing the 'normalization' of Party-to-Party relations.

This summit, held in May 1989 amid student demonstrations at Tiananmen Square that necessitated moving all ceremonies indoors, quite unexpectedly marked both climax and terminus to this process of convergence around socialist reform. The sanguinary Chinese solution to spontaneous student protests, implemented within a fortnight of Gorbachev's departure, led to international sanctions and to a Soviet decision to avoid any analogous crackdown, either domestically or among fellow Warsaw Pact Organization signatories.[4] But without resort to outside force the European socialist regimes could not stand, and by the end of 1990 all but China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Cuba and the Soviet Union had succumbed to a wave of anticommunist protest movements. Throughout this period the Chinese leadership, still defending both Marxism–Leninism and the Tiananmen 'solution', deplored this turn of events, criticizing the Gorbachev leadership for 'deviating from the path of socialism' and for contributing to the collapse of the bloc; in early 1990 Deng Liqun and the more ideologically self-righteous wing of the CCP even advocated a public critique of Soviet errors, which Deng Xiaoping vetoed. No sooner had Beijing become reconciled to cooperation with Gorbachev—after the Gulf War (January–February 1991), some socialist rejoinder to a triumphalist American 'new world order' was deemed advisable—than was Gorbachev's own survival threatened by the August 1991 coup attempt. Though Beijing came perilously close to supporting the coup before its consolidation, it recovered in time to reaffirm its commitment to noninterference, only to witness (with mounting dismay) the ensuing dissolution of the Soviet Union into 15 republics, 12 of whom agreed to join the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Part of the reason for the PRC's quick recognition of this new political reality was that had it not, many alternatives seemed open to the former USSR: there seemed every likelihood of reconciling the old Russo–Japanese territorial dispute (involving three small islands and a tiny archipelago north of Hokkaido) and signing a peace treaty with Japan; South Korea had just granted Moscow a $3 billion concessionary loan, and Taiwan briefly established consular relations with Latvia and very nearly exchanged ambassadors with the Ukraine and Outer Mongolia before being deterred by PRC warnings. The new line in the Kremlin under Yeltsin and Kozyrev, erstwhile bete noires of Chinese Kremlin watchers who plausibly suspected the CCP of supporting the August 1991 coup conspirators, was

4. It is fairly clear that Gorbachev's visit played some role in exacerbating the Tiananmen protest, but China may have also played a role in the collapse of Soviet and Eastern European communism, first by contributing a 'demonstration effect' to European protesters, and second by discountenancing mass repression as a politically feasible option. Cf. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 'China as a factor in the collapse of the Soviet Empire', *Political Science Quarterly* 110(4), (Winter 1995), pp. 501–519. The negative significance of the Chinese 'solution' should not be overstated, however. Gorbachev already began backing away from his Eastern European commitments after Reikjavik and the Intermediate Nuclear Force agreement revived detente in December 1987. The significance of INF was to remove American power from Western Europe (from whence US Pershing IIs could pulverize Moscow in less than 10 minutes), enabling Gorbachev to dismantle Soviet security forces there and put the relationship on a cash basis. In March 1989, in a meeting with Hungarian Premier Grosz, Gorbachev stated his opposition to Soviet intervention in WPO members' affairs, in effect rescinding the Brezhnev Doctrine. Richard C. Thornton, 'Russo–Chinese detente and the emerging New World Order', in Hafeez Malik, ed., *The Roles of the United States, Russia, and China in the New World Order* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 221–238.

anticommunist and pro-American. Beijing was also concerned lest successful reform in the new Russia lure foreign direct investment from China and thereby undermine growth-based CCP legitimacy.

Yet Moscow's new international prospects under bourgeois democracy proved greatly exaggerated. The decisive domestic factor is that the Russian 'double bang' of marketization and privatization failed utterly to revive the economy, which went into free fall: real GDP declined 13% in 1991, 19% in 1992, 12% in 1993, and 15% in 1994. Under the circumstances, leading Western industrial powers, still overburdened with debt in the wake of the arms race and a world-wide recession following the second oil price hike, were far less munificent with financial support than had been expected; only Germany, now reunified thanks to Gorbachev's refusal to invoke the Brezhnev Doctrine, made substantial subventions to Russian economic development (over US$20 billion in 1993 alone). In the West, after Russian arms were discredited (and a former ally defeated) in the Gulf War (in which Moscow played no visible role), Russia was demoted from bipolar nemesis to diplomatic nonentity, excluded from any role in resolving the Yugoslav imbroglio, finally invited to the 'Group of Seven' but initially only as an observer. Yeltsin's emergent political rivals, both on the left (Zyuganov and the revived communist party, the CPRF) and the right (e.g. Lebed) challenged his nationalist bona fides and urged a shift from West to East, arguing on geostrategic grounds in favor of a more 'balanced' international posture between East and West. Even in the East, hopes of new breakthroughs were quickly dispelled: negotiations with Japan premised on a territorial compromise realizing Khrushchev's (never implemented) 1958 agreement (provisionally splitting the four, then phasing in a more comprehensive retrocession) aroused unexpectedly passionate military and local opposition, prompting Yeltsin to postpone his visit twice and not even to table the proposal when he finally arrived in Tokyo in October 1993. With regard to Korea, the initial euphoria raised by Gorbachev's 1988 Krasnoyarsk speech and by the September 1990 establishment of diplomatic relations (to Pyongyang's indignation) did not survive shock at the collapse of the Soviet regime, and though bilateral trade has revived it has not led to much South Korean investment. Thus the 1993 admission of six former satellites to the Council of Europe, and the 1994 proposal to enlarge NATO to include three former Eastern European satellites, implemented in 1997 in apparent appreciation of American election-year constituency concerns more than any realistically perceived security threat, was but the last in a series of diplomatic setbacks.[5]

Thus ironically, two nations who had never been able to agree on the same ideology now found it possible under straitened international circumstances (post-Tiananmen and the Russian economic meltdown) to converge on a 'strategic cooperative partnership' [*zhanlue xiezuo huoban guanxi*], a formulation the Chinese attribute to the Soviets, who had to be dissuaded from a formal alliance.[6] First proposed in the form of a 'constructive partnership' by Yeltsin in September 1994

5. Admitted to the Council of Europe, a loose confederation of future candidates for the European Union, were Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Romania, and the Baltic Republics of Lithuania and Estonia.

6. Personal interview, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

(at the inaugural presidential summit in Moscow), then elevated to a 'strategic partnership for the 21st century' during Yeltsin's April 1996 summit in Beijing (a month after China's confrontation with the US over Taiwan and immediately following Clinton's reaffirmation of a strengthened Japanese–American Security Alliance), the partnership has since become a fungible term of endearment in the diplomatic lexicon of both powers, as China formed partnerships with Pakistan, France, Germany, the European Union, Japan, Korea and the US, while Russia claimed partnerships with Japan, Iran, India, and the US. The implication is to vaguely privilege a relationship without making (or demanding) any specific commitments of one's 'partner'—and one can obviously have an indefinite number of partners at once. Yet for both, the first partnership has remained pivotal, an entry ticket back to what Jiang Zemin calls 'great power strategy' [*da guo zhanlue*], precisely because this was the only relationship with sufficient leverage to pose a credible alternative to the lone superpower. The partnership disavows any threat to a third party (i.e. the US), from whom each stands to gain more in economic terms than from its relationship with the other, but without specific treaty commitments, without mutually agreed strategic goals or opponents, just how meaningful is this 'partnership'?

The argument here is that it is far more meaningful than generally credited, held together by dovetailing strategic and material interests and institutional complementarity. True, the ideological constituency of the relationship has shifted over time, from the committed socialist reformers of the 1980s to a 'red–brown' coalition of communists and nationalists in the aftermath of Tiananmen to Putin's power pragmatists of the early 2000s. The collapse of the communist bloc threw both opponents and proponents of the relationship into disarray—whereas before that time, the relationship was endorsed by the reform bloc on both sides and opposed by the old guard, since then there has been an ironic reversal of positions. In China, despite the Yeltsin regime's repudiation of the Marxist ideology still embraced by the CCP, two factors now sweeten the relationship: first, the fact that Russia's embrace of capitalism has been so disappointing at correcting the Soviet malaise has made it an effective object lesson for the CCP to vindicate its own hard line; second, despite its supposed ideological transformation (and loss of military prowess), Russia remains the world's most powerful strategic counterweight to US 'hegemonism'. China's reform bloc was more chary of the partnership because, by raising the old specter of the Sino–Soviet alliance within a 'strategic triangle', it threatened to alienate China from the West—but then most reformers did not survive Tiananmen. In the former Soviet Union, while Tiananmen momentarily disabused Gorbachev and his supporters of their illusions about Chinese reform, they too did not survive the dissolution of the Union. Meanwhile, in Russia, the fact that the CCP was able to crush liberal opposition and prevail while communism was self-destructing elsewhere inspired the forces of orthodoxy that had once been among China's most vocal critics.[7] The pro-China stance of the CPRF, since the

7. The Institute of the Far East (IDV, in its Russian initials) in the Russian Academy of Sciences, previously led by Oleg Rakhmanin, now by his former deputy Mikhail Titorenko, still the largest Moscow research center for Chinese studies, has shifted from its critical stance toward Maoist ideology to an ardent embrace, largely the CCP has avoided

1995 elections the most powerful party in the Duma, reflects this group's ideological assumptions. At the same time the former pro-China liberals, including scholars such as Lev Delyusin and former diplomats such as Yevgeniy Bazhanov, though on guard against any nostalgia for fraternal solidarity, remain basically sympathetic with the PRC. The now marginalized anti-China bloc consists of two quite disparate currents: the radical pro-Western bloc, intellectually led by the Moscow Institute of Foreign Relations (affiliated to the Russian Foreign Ministry) and linked politically to such figures as Yegor Gaydar and the Yabloko movement; and radical nationalists such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky (whose Liberal Democratic Party had a startling electoral success in 1993), who regard China as an alien security threat. The local political leaders (now elective) of contiguous regions of the Russain Far East, particularly Primorskiy and Khabarovskiy krays, share some of this radical nationalism in their obsession with the border threat and inflated estimates of the problems of smuggling and illegal migration; but at the same time, the economic prosperity of their domains has become so closely linked to that of the PRC that they cannot but support trade. At the top, a pragmatic majority under first Yeltsin and then Putin has, since 1996, favored a 'balanced' pro-China tilt. One ironic upshot is that in the context of confluent interests, the disappearance of a shared ideological communications medium has not aroused insuperable contradictions—it may have even facilitated understanding between the two sides by eliminating the legacy of theoretical disputes.

Perhaps the partnership's greatest value is bilateral, turning what is still the world's longest land border from an iron curtain into an economic thoroughfare and generally improving relations between two of the largest countries in the world.[8] Since 1992 there have been dozens of high-level diplomatic exchanges and summit meetings have been regularized on an annual basis; these have resulted in hundreds of agreements, among the most important of which were the 1991 agreement to delimit the eastern borders and initiate border demarcation, the 1993 5-year Military Cooperation Pact, the September 1994 agreement for mutual nonaggression, mutual detargetting of strategic weapons, and non-first use of nuclear force; and the 1997 agreements on trade, oil and gas development and cultural cooperation. Substantial progress on mutual force reduction had already been achieved under Gorbachev, and Yeltsin at the 1992 summit followed suit with a proposal for mutual but gradual demilitarization (thus avoiding the dislocation occasioned by rapid Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe) to the minimal number of troops required for peaceful border patrolling (now numbering some 200,000). This has permitted both countries to shift priorities, as China deploys forces to face Taiwan and the South China Sea and Russia addresses the security

Footnote 7 continued
privatization and political reform while successfully regenerating socialist economic performance. Alexander Lukin, 'Russia's image of China and Russian–Chinese relations', *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 17(1), (Spring 1999), p. 5; see also Evgeniy Bazhanov, 'Russian perspectives on China's foreign policy and military development', in Jonathan Pollack and Michael Yang, eds, *In China's Shadow: Regional Perspectives on Chinese Foreign Policy and Military Development* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 1998), pp. 70–91.

8. The Sino–Soviet border was some 7000 km long. Since the disintegration of the USSR, it has contracted to 3484 km, while the Sino–Kazakh border stretches for about 2000 km, the Sino–Kyrgyz border for 1000 km and the border with Tajikistan is about 500 km long.

threat created by the expansion of NATO. The most significant development since 1992 has been the set of five-power agreements between China and Russia and the three bordering central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) signed in Beijing in April 1996 and Moscow in April 1997. In the former, both sides agreed on mutual force reduction and military confidence-building measures on their borders; while the latter established a 'zone of stability' restricting military activity to a depth of 100 km along the frontier and making border security arrangements more transparent. Although Moscow guards its strategic interests in these loyal members of the Commonwealth of Independent States jealously it has seen fit to chaperone this somewhat unusual negotiating teamwork, thereby facilitating Chinese border agreements with all three republics (though subsequent border demarcation has lagged in the case of war-ravaged Tajikistan). China has since become Kazakhstan's largest trade partner, agreeing in 1997 to invest US$9.7 billion (the equivalent of half the host country's GNP, China's largest FDI project on record) to build oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian oilfields to the Xinjiang region and ultimately on to Shanghai. Kazakhstan in turn has promised to control Uighur acolytes of an independent 'Eastern Turkestan' (whose borders coincide with contemporary Xinjiang) on its territory.

Jiang Zemin and Gorbachev, during their April–May 1991 Moscow summit, had already agreed in principle on how to 'delimit' the borders (e.g. Moscow accepted the Thalweg or deepest part of the main channel as the 'line' dividing the Ussuri/Wussuli and Amur/Heilungjiang rivers). Demarcation was then conducted during the next 7 years, over the vociferous objections of local Russian politicians. This resulted, among other things, in giving China access to the Sea of Japan, via the Tumen River, whose development was foreseen in a cooperative development project also involving Korea and Japan. China also regained sovereignty of one-square-mile Damansky/Chenbao Island, where the 1969 border clash started. At the November 1997 Beijing summit, the two sides signed a demarcation treaty for the eastern sector, including an agreement suspending the sovereignty issue for joint development of three still disputed small islands on the Amur/Heilong River (including Heixia/Black Bear Island). At the November 1998 'hospital summit' in Moscow, both sides expressed satisfaction that both eastern and western sections of the border had finally been accurately demarcated. Although that seemed to wrap up the issue, China declined Russia's request that the border treaties be negotiated in perpetuity, insisting on a renewal clause for 2010.[9] Implementation of the 1997 agreement on joint land use has also remained incomplete, while negotiations have turned to the most sensitive issue of all, the ultimate disposition of Heixiazi, an island on the outskirts of Khabarovsk where many city notables have their dachas.

Bilateral trade made a great leap forward in the early 1990s, to fill the vacuums left on the one hand by the Tiananmen sanctions (the value of all Western investment in China dropped 22% during the first half of 1990) and by the collapse of the centralized Russian distribution system. While total Soviet foreign trade dropped 6.4% for 1990, Sino–Soviet trade volume increased to $5.3 billion, a quarter of which was border trade. Several Sino–Russian Special Economic

9. Stephen Blank, 'Which way for Sino–Russian relations?' *Orbis* 42(3), (Summer 1998), pp. 345–360.

Regions were established in emulation of the thriving SEZs in the southeast, more than 200 cooperative projects were initialed between localities of the two countries, and China dispatched some 15,000 citizens to the Soviet Far East for temporary labor service. But these steep early rates of commercial growth could not be sustained: the 1991–92 economic crisis in the RFE left Russians unable to repay Chinese exporters, and the Russians complained of shabby product quality and disruption of their (hitherto monopolized) retail networks. Visa-regime negotiation in 1993 and Moscow's subsequent imposition of steep border duties, cuts on transport subsidies and restrictions on organizations entitled to engage in foreign trade thus caused Sino–Russian trade to plunge by nearly 40% in the first half of 1994. In 1995 it began to recover, reaching $5.1 billion that year and $6.85 billion in 1996; but in 1997 it sank to $6.12 billion, and dropped further to $5.48 million in 1998, particularly after the mid-August devaluation of the ruble and debt restructuring. While this obviously foreclosed Yeltsin's expressed ambition to raise bilateral trade to US$20 billion by 2000, China remains Russia's third-largest trade partner outside the CIS, and long-term demographic trends suggest a potential for continuing growth of commerce and perhaps even investment.

The primary beneficiary of expanded trade is the Russian Far East (RFE), a resource rich but climatically forbidding region hosting only about 7% of the Federation's population. In the Soviet period, the region was subsidized by artificially low transport rates, and by Moscow's financial support for the military industrial complex constructed there. When these subsidies were curtailed upon the Union's collapse, the RFE suffered an economic decline even worse than that of European Russia. The RFE experienced its first population contraction of 250,000 in 1992, and has continued to shrink through out-migration, falling by the end of the millennium to some 7.4 million people (vs some 120 million along the Chinese side of the Heilongjiang). Against this background, the sudden influx of Chinese workers or traders (allegedly including large numbers of criminals) incited alarm. According to Chinese statistics, border crossings amounted to 1.38 million in 1992 and 1.76 million at their peak in 1993—but for the Russians, the central issue was not how many were crossing but how many stayed: unofficial Russian estimates of Chinese illegal residents ran as high as 1 million in the Far East and 2 million nationally in 1994 (vs Chinese estimates of 1000–2000). According to some Russian demographic projections, Chinese could be the second largest minority population in the Russian Federation by 2050. In the light of these trends, the future seems to hold a contradiction between a growing Russian need for supplemental labor to realize the RFE's economic potential in the wake of continuing population decline and Russian fears of a Chinese demographic threat. For the moment, fear seems to be the controlling factor, with extravagant Russian predictions of future trade growth mocked by border restrictions that result in a steep trade imbalance in Russia's favor. For their part, the Chinese, seeing little progress on the Tumen or other joint border projects since the mid-August ruble devaluation, have been stinting in their approval of Russian investments (such as the failed Russian Three Gorges Dam construction bid, or the Lianyangang nuclear reactor).

One facet of the economic exchange that has clearly battened on the post-Tiananmen sanctions is that of military technology and equipment. Deprived of

American arms since 1989, the Chinese returned to Russian arms merchants, from whom much of their original hardware came and which hence offered advantages in terms of compatibility of parts. From the perspective of Chinese elite preferences this, in fact, may have been one of the relationship's saving graces, appealing to precisely those 'leftists' otherwise critical of the Gorbachev regime. General Xu Xin, deputy chief of the PLA General Staff, accompanied Li Peng on his ice-breaking (23–26 April) 1990 visit, and on 30 May, this was followed up by a military delegation led by Liu Huaqing, vice-chair of the CCP's all-powerful Central Military Commission (CMC), to discuss the transfer of military technology. During Liu's meeting with Soviet Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov (the highest level military contact since the early 1960s), the Soviets indicated that they would be willing to provide help in the modernization of Chinese defense plants constructed on the basis of Soviet technology in the 1950s, at bargain prices. This visit coincided with the Chinese decision to cancel a US$550 million purchase of avionics to upgrade 50 Chinese F-8 fighters, the first such Sino–US deal to be considered since Tiananmen. It was reciprocated on 1 June by the first Soviet army delegation to visit China in 30 years. By the fall of 1990, China had agreed to buy 24 troop-carrying helicopters from the USSR capable of operating in high-altitude climates (the US had refused to consider selling such weapons systems, which seemed ideally suited for operations in Tibet).

Global sales of Soviet arms dropped 'catastrophically' in the wake of the Gulf War, where Soviet equipment was seen to be eclipsed by high-tech American weaponry. Inasmuch as military equipment had been the second largest item in the Soviet export inventory (after petroleum products), continued Chinese interest was particularly welcome at this point, and Russian monitoring of arms exports relaxed conveniently.[10] In 1993, the two countries signed a 5-year military cooperation pact giving China access to advanced military technologies in nuclear submarine propulsion, underwater missile launchers, muffling technology for diesel submarines, technology for increasing the range and accuracy of ICBMs, sold rocket fuel, and so forth. Negotiations for the purchase of Sukhoi SU-27 fighters, under way since early 1990, culminated in the purchase of 26 at a 'friendship' price of more than US$1 billion (about 35% of which China could pay in hard currency, the rest in barter goods), with an option to buy an additional 48. In March 1992, China also took delivery of the sophisticated S-300 anti-aircraft missile system and SA-10 anti-tactical ballistic missile missiles. The first contingent of Chinese pilots was sent to Moscow in June 1992 to undergo a one-and-a-half year training course, and by 1999 more than 2000 Russian experts were based in China by 'private' contractual arrangement, helping to modernize Chinese nuclear and missile capabilities.[11] The 1995–1996 confrontation over the Taiwan Strait whetted Chinese appetites for further acquisitions, and in November 1996 the two sides renewed

10. Russia's export of tanks in 1992 dropped 79-fold, sales of combat aircraft fell 1.5 times in comparison to 1991, leaving warehouses of the military–industrial complex overstocked with unsold weapons. China was the principal buyer of Russian weapons in 1992, making purchases worth US$1.8 billion. Pavel Felgengauer, 'Arms exports continue to fall', *Sogodnya* (Moscow), (13 July 1993), p. 3.

11. Sharif M. Shuja, 'Moscow's Asia policy', *Contemporary Review* 272(1587), (April 1998), pp. 169–178; Jamie Dettmer, 'Russian–Chinese alliance emerges', *Insight on the News* 16(13), (13 April 2000), p. 20.

their military cooperation pact, allowing China to purchase 30–50 SU-30 multipurpose fighters, four diesel-powered (Kilo-class) submarines, four Sovremenniy-class destroyers with accompanying Sunburn anti-ship missiles designed to counter US carrier fleets (two of which have been delivered), and a 15-year licensing agreement to produce up to 200 additional Su-27s (as Chinese F-11s) at a production line in Shenyang (with a restriction against exporting them). By early 1997, China was the leading purchaser of Russian arms, machinery and equipment (rivaled only by India), buying nearly 70% of its arms imports there. Miffed by the private contract to license Chinese production of SU-27s, the Russian Foreign Ministry reportedly vetoed sales of Tu-22 Backfire long-range bombers and Su-35 fighters, but the Chinese were able to purchase Russian in-flight refueling technology to extend the range of Chinese bombers to more than 1000 miles, as well as Russian space technology. The media in early 2000 (Russian and Israeli sources—denied by the Chinese) divulged an arrangement whereby China would purchase sophisticated radar surveillance aircraft (similar to the American AWACS), produced in Russia and electronically equipped in Israel, but when Washington induced the Israelis to renege on the deal, the Russians reportedly agreed to sell China their own Il-76 aircraft. The Russians have also endeavored with some success to interest the Chinese in nonlethal technology—some 25% of the Chinese commercial aircraft pool is now Russian.[12] In interviews, the Russians dismiss Western concerns that their weapon sales might upset the military balance, pointing out that if they do not sell arms to the PRC some other country will, with the worst conceivable consequences for Russian security.

Building upon such mutually useful interactions, the following set of symbiotic constituencies has emerged to provide institutionalized support for the partnership. (1) Russia's military–industrial complex finds it simpler to continue production runs rather than undergo defense conversion, at least in the short run, and China is their largest customer. Heavy industry more generally (e.g. the machine tool industry, oil and gas companies, the nuclear and hydropower industries) is oriented to market-opening initiatives for similar reasons, though they may be overly optimistic: whereas the Chinese have been ready purchasers of Russian weaponry, they have by and large not sought to upgrade aging Soviet plant technology, preferring to leapfrog to the most advanced levels, even if that means starting from scratch in many enterprises.[13] Still the Russians may be competitive (certainly price competitive) in hydroelectric power and nuclear energy development projects, albeit less able to swing financing deals. (2) The state trading companies who, since the 1994 Russian tariff and immigration legislation, have regained control over bilateral trade, are now staunch supporters of expanded economic relations. At the same time, both Chinese and Russian shuttle traders continue to evade bureaucratic control, as border trade has revived, comprising some 30% of the total (with illegal barter trade adding an unknown additional percentage) by the late 1990s, serving a broad market on both sides of the border. (3) Regional governors, though

12. Cf. Peggy Falkenheim Meyer, 'Russia's post-Cold War security policy in Northeast Asia', *Pacific Affairs* 67(4), (Winter 1994), pp. 495–513.

13. Sherman W. Garnett, ed., *Limited Partnership: Russia–China Relations in a Changing Asia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998), pp. 22–23.

vociferously opposed to territorial concessions and open borders, have willy-nilly come to appreciate their regions' growing dependence on the Chinese economy as a locomotive for their own.

From the Russian strategic perspective, Asia has generally gained importance since the Cold War, following secession of the Eastern European satellites, the Baltic states, Ukraine and Belorussia: though the national identity remains preferentially 'Western', Russia now defines itself geopolitically as a land bridge between Europe and Asia. The Russian Federation survived its experiment with communism in rather ravaged condition—while inheriting four-fifths of the former USSR's territory, it was left with half its GDP (equivalent to half of China's current GDP) and less than half its population (about 148 million, which has proceeded to shrink). The Soviet military of 6 million men has shrunk to a demoralized force of 2.3 million unable to subdue rebellion in tiny Chechnya. Thus the 'big brother' relationship has, to a certain extent, been reversed. Within Asia, India and China emerge as the twin pillars of Russian foreign policy—one in the South, the other in the East. The partnership already provides access to Hong Kong (where Russia now has a consulate) and to membership in ASEAN's Regional Forum and (since 1998) to APEC. Whereas Kozyrev once lectured his Chinese hosts on human rights, Moscow has since repeatedly used its vote to block China's condemnation by the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The two frequently make common cause against interventionist initiatives supported by the US and Britain, leading to deadlocks on the UN Security Council redolent of the Cold War era. General Leonid Ivashov, head of the Russian Defense Ministry's international cooperation department, recently claimed China as Russia's 'ideological ally' with a common interest in rejecting 'military *diktat* in international relations', and the two are now coordinating their defense doctrines and staging joint military exercises. Noting that 'NATO is being turned into a global organization', they see no alternative but to draw together to oppose US 'hegemonist' interventions, and both protested against American bombing campaigns in Iraq and Yugoslavia. Joining the Russians in opposition to NATO expansion, the Chinese also oppose any alteration of the ABM treaty or to American plans to install National Missile Defense or Theater Missile Defense on the Asian rimland. All of these mutual strategic interests are to be drawn together in a 'fundamental treaty' which 'will determine the future directions of bilateral relations in key spheres', according to preliminary consultations under way in December 2000; if this treaty is concluded as planned in 2001, it would be the first time China has signed a broad political treaty with any country since deciding against such commitments decades ago.[14]

If the partnership were purely bilateral it could hardly be 'strategic', but it also has multilateral implications. Their joint refusal to support international sanctions against the DPRK during the early phase of the effort to prevent Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons suggests a common interest in retaining a protective glacis against the crescent of nuclear threshold states (viz., Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) on their shared eastern rim. Whereas China's relations with Vietnam and India have improved of late, the new Sino–Russian intimacy deprives such former

14. *Interfax* (Moscow), 26 and 28 December 2000.

regional rivals of alternative patronage. For China, neutralization of the Russian threat permits a readjustment of military modernization priorities from the army to the navy and air-force, and a shift of forces from the north to the southeast. In the context of a growing PLA budget amply supported by a booming economy, this has strategic relevance for Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Southeast Asia, all of whom depend on sea lanes of communication through the South China Sea, to which China has made rather sweeping territorial claims. But of most direct and immediate relevance is the security of Taiwan, against which most Chinese arms purchases seem now to be directed. On the Taiwan issue, Russia has played an interesting double game. On the one hand, the Russians have unstintingly endorsed Chinese claims to the island. Not only did Yeltsin parrot Clinton's July 1998 'three nos', denying Taiwanese claims to sovereignty, but Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov recently cautioned Washington not to interfere militarily to protect Taiwan if China were forced to invade,[15] and Russians have not hesitated to promote the efficacy of the weapons they sell in deterring American aircraft carriers.[16] On the other hand, like many other countries, Russia has inaugurated informal trade relations with Taiwan (Taiwan opened its trade office in Moscow in 1994, Moscow reciprocated in Taipei in 1996) while formally recognizing only the PRC, and trade relations with Taiwan expanded by 1995 to US$1.2 billion (vs. $5 billion with China); by 1997, Taiwan had become Russia's fourth largest trading partner in Asia, with arrangements under way for direct air links.

Acutely aware of the precariousness of an Asia policy premised exclusively on one 'partnership' with a partner whose relative power in East Asia is greater than Russia's own, Moscow has sought to augment it with ties to other powers. Thus Moscow's relations with Tokyo improved considerably after the November 1997 Krasnoyarsk 'tieless' summit, reviving the prospect of Russo–Japanese rapprochement. Though Japan has become the third biggest aid donor to Russia (after the US and Germany) and Japanese trade with the RFE increased 40% from 1992 to 1995, making Japan the RFE's biggest Asian export market, investment has not followed trade, and the border dispute has continued to hamper bilateral relations.[17] For imports, of temporary workers as well as commodities, the RFE prefers to rely on South Korea, which has no history of irridentist territorial claims, geopolitical rivalry or demographic pressure. Russia has declared its intent to form a strategic partnership with India, an old treaty partner that under nationalist (BJP) leadership has been expanding its traditional rivalry with China into Southeast Asia and the South China Sea. India is Russia's second-largest weapons client, having purchased

15. Dettmer, 'Russian–Chinese alliance emerges', p. 21.

16. China has reportedly also been negotiating for Russian satellite intelligence information on strategic facilities in Taiwan. Igor Korotchenko, 'Moscow and Beijing are building up their strategic ties', *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye* (Moscow) 1(42), (11–16 October 2000), p. 215.

17. During Prime Minister Obuchi's November 1998 visit the two signed a joint 'Moscow Declaration on Building a Creative Partnership between Japan and the Russian Federation', which provided for the establishment of two subcommittees, one to discuss border demarcation, the other to study joint economic activities on the four disputed islands without prejudice to the two countries' legal claims. They also agreed to establish a joint investment company, to strengthen economic cooperation, and to promote intellectual and technical cooperation and exchanges. Japan has also facilitated Russian entrance into APEC. See Peggy F. Meyer, 'The Russian Far East's economic integration with Northeast Asia: problems and prospects', *Pacific Affairs* 72(2), (Summer 1999), p. 209.

tanks, aircraft, missiles and naval vessels, and Moscow has gone so far as to promise that it would take its relationship to India into account in selling arms to the PRC. The RF has also attempted to reactivate its Soviet-era relationships with North Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq—all in Beijing's sphere of interest. Just as China's grand design for the Asian Pacific Region tends to leave Russia out and focuses on the Sino–Japanese–American triangle, Russia's grand design diverges from the Chinese preference for unilateral power balancing in its historically rooted interest in multilateral grand designs. Gorbachev first pushed the idea of an Asian collective security treaty in the late 1980s (to little effect), and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev revived the idea in January 1994, advocating step by step movement toward a 'security community' open to every country in the region; for these purposes, Russia proposed to establish an Asian–Pacific Center for Conflict Prevention and an Asian–Pacific institute on security problems. In the late 1990s Russia promoted the CBM and demilitarization agreements signed in 1996–97 by the 'Shanghai five' as a security model applicable to the Asian–Pacific region, and has held meetings promoting this idea with various countries (e.g. India's December 1996 agreement with China was modeled on the five-nation CBM). Although China has shown little interest in seeing Russia's initiatives progress further, Japan has shown considerable interest in this type of multilateral forum.[18]

Conclusions

The scholarly literature on the Sino–Russian strategic partnership conveys two contrasting images. On the one hand is the image of the strategic partnership as a serious threat to Western, and specifically to American, global interests. In the wake of the collapse of the communist bloc, the Iron Curtain, and the Cold War, this is an attempt to shore up the forces of authoritarianism via militaristic nationalism in the dearth of ideological legitimation. The second image dismisses the first as misconceived or greatly exaggerated. The partnership is not an alliance, has no treaty commitments, and is bound by neither shared interests, strategic objectives, nor common adversary. Indeed, the two countries' national interests have little in common and are likely to diverge and even possibly conflict in the long run.

The position taken in this essay is that the strategic partnership is, on the one hand, more than a figment of Russia's otherwise downwardly mobile international trajectory and China's post-Tiananmen pariahdom, and while lending itself to rhetorical bombast it is not without political content. On the other hand, it is not yet a clearly conceived design for a coordinated foreign policy toward shared international objectives. It represents, rather, a stable and meaningful commitment to bilateral aid and support, whose content is left vague to allow for unpredictable vicissitudes in the far less structured post-Cold War era. Although the partnership can and has been applied to any variety of its relationships, the most meaningful of these remains that between China and Russia, because in this particular case it represents the attempt of two large and precarious multiethnic continental empires

18. Anderson, *The Limits of Sino–Russian Strategic Partnership*, p. 68.

to form a mutual help relationship that would be uniquely useful to them in the face of a relatively hostile international environment. Both countries have traditionally been ‘garrison states’ or ‘developmental dictatorships’ ruled by a hierarchically disciplined national security apparatus (while this tradition was temporarily broken in the Russian case, it seems to be returning to the mold), and in a post-Cold War world lacking strategic structure or balance both feel threatened by de facto American hegemony. Without international help, they fear being ostracized, sanctioned by international regimes, torn asunder by ethnic cleavages, even possibly bombed by self-appointed international peace-keeping forces. Through mutual help, these two permanent Security Council members form a geopolitical bloc large and sufficiently formidable to forestall such prospects. Meanwhile, they may be able to help each other achieve certain compatible national objectives.

Although the strategic partnership does represent a challenge to specific American ideological objectives (such as human rights) or foreign policies (such NMD and TMD), it is not necessarily a threat to world peace or American national interests. The partnership is not a Comintern Pact organized around a programmatic vision for a new world hierarchy, but is essentially designed to enhance the national interests of the two participants. Each partner has demonstrated a willingness to use violence to achieve those interests, but the threat to peace that this entails is for the most part (e.g. Chechnya, Xinjiang, Tibet) localized.[19] And beyond the endorsement in principle to their right to use violence on behalf of sovereign interests, neither partner necessarily feels obliged or even inclined to come to the aid of the other in such an instance. For example, the limits to Chinese efforts to prevent NATO expansion, to persuade Japan to forfeit the four northern islands, or to promote an Asian collective security arrangement, are fairly clear. And the Russian interest in blocking the expanded definition of the Japanese–American Security Treaty agreed in 1997, or in forcing Taiwan to negotiate reunification on Chinese terms, has been mostly rhetorical. Neither partner has, nor do they share, either an ideology or a coherent international vision beyond their endorsement of multipolarity. It remains to be seen whether the relationship should evolve in a future direction conducive to the realization of such objectives, but for now it is limited not only by implicit conflicts between specific national priorities but by the interest each partner retains in closer relations with the center of international economic gravity in the West.

19. The Taiwan issue, in the Chinese case, is a conspicuous exception, but far too complex to be reviewed in this compass.

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