

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Many Russian elites and experts believe that one of Russia's ultimate geopolitical goals is to strengthen the Russian state as a regional superpower. Additionally, Russian experts identify two primary factors affecting the accomplishment of such an objective: whether Moscow could unify the diversity of opinions in Russian societies and conceptualize a clear national foreign policy, and whether Russia could find a way to retain the regional stability and power balance among Russia and other Asian countries.

On the national security front, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia gradually perceived the importance of Central Asian region and the Far East in regard to its interests about international situations. Having lost the access to several harbors in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea after the USSR dissolution, the Far East region became Russia's vital trade link and transit route abroad. As compared with the decline of military influence in the Baltic Sea, Russia's northern route to the Pacific Ocean turns out to be more prominent in military strategy terms. It should be a strong incentive for Russia to have closer Far East regional security ties with China.

However, resilient memories of ideological, political and military rivalries hindered closer Sino-Russian relations. Opponents of the "China threat" or "Yellow Peril" theory maintain that as the result of unprecedented economic development and military modernization, China will soon become more of a challenge to Russia than a partner in a geopolitical "balancing game". They also note that overpopulation and a lack of resources may result in Chinese encroachments in Russian territories.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, numerous obstacles might also adversely affect Sino-Russian cooperation, including the anti-China trends in the Russian Far East, the ingrained mutual distrust traced

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<sup>58</sup> See: V.S. Myasnikov, *Confirmed by Treaty Articles*, Moscow: Mosoblpoligrafizdat, 1996, pp. 413-9; Yegor Gaydar, "Russia in the 21st Century: Not a World Policeman but an Outpost of Democracy in Eurasia," *Izvestiya*, 18 May 1995.

back to Russian encroachment in Far East in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideological differences, and the unresolved mutual territorial claims.

Experts also note limited compatibility of Russian and Chinese perceptions of threats to their respective security interests. In a fundamental way, Russia attempts to preserve its territory, resources and other assets spread over vast territories. On the contrary, China desires to get out of territorial and other “status-quo” situations forced on it in the past. Historically, the two countries proximity has complicated territorial divisions and mutual claims have led to recurrent conflicts. A recurrence may not be excluded in the future under varying internal and international circumstances. Moscow is particularly wary of Chinese economic and demographic dynamics that perceivably push it towards expansion, while Russia’s abilities to defend its assets diminish progressively as the result of similar albeit negative economic and demographic tendencies.

Besides the above-mentioned security interest controversies, both China and Russia know that either would betray one another for a healthy relationship with the United States (and the West) should such a window open. This is not in least due to the economic issues involved. In 2005, bilateral trade between China and the US topped \$285.3 billion, while China’s trade with Russia, although rapidly increasing stood at \$29.1 billion.<sup>59</sup> Russia’s total trade volume with the US was approximately \$18.3 billion the same year, while the European Union’s share makes up around 50 percent of Russia’s total foreign trade.<sup>60</sup> Considering the dependence of Russia and China on the EU and the US respectively, it is hard to see anything that could make them sacrifice this.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there is no imperatively “China versus the EU” trade-off, as it is in Russia’s best interest to maintain healthy economic ties with both the EU and China. Historically, the traditional thoughts in Russia viewed China solely as an inevitable

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<sup>59</sup> The US-China Business Council, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> US State Department, 2006.

partner for Russia's geo-strategic planning in the global power balance, as intimate Sino-Russian relations emerged simply as the reflection of the counterbalance of the US-Japan alliance. The past Sino-Russian relations were particularly characterized by such thoughts – an enthusiastic political cooperation with shrinking economic ties.<sup>61</sup> However, with the trend of globalization, economic cooperation currently has become an essential lifeline of the diplomacy for many countries, as the closer economic interdependence between China and Russia develops, the more mutual interests they would have, and the more serious attitude towards the potential Sino-Russian controversies the two sides would adopt.

The other dilemma in Sino-Russian relations is that officials are enthusiastic about interacting with each other, but the common people are not. The reason is that China and Russia have not yet built mutual trust between each other. Indeed, we can only see the two countries' leaders' claims plenty of plans, however they are not supported by the media, NGOs, and popular opinion. Such a kind of “hot in upper-strata, but cold in lower strata” situation (上熱下冷) is very harmful toward both countries in developing strategic partnership. Since they have been hustled and isolated from each other for 20 years, there is no mutual understanding or mutual trust between them, so how to build a good partnership and to get a positive reaction from the people in both countries are important issues.

We are clear that China and Russia don't want to see the uni-polar world of present, and hope to build a multi-polar world together. Especially after the Kosovo crisis, China and Russia have absolutely tried to strengthen their relations. But unfortunately, there still exist some unstable factors between them. In short, Russian society is undergoing a transforming period, and the foreign policy might be changed every minute after Yelsin. The “China Threat” theory and the problems of China's population flowing to Russia are both major issues that may deteriorate Sino-Russian relations.

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<sup>61</sup> 于有慧，〈中國的大國外交〉，中國大陸研究，臺北，1999年3月，P.45-61。(Yu Yo-huae, <The Big Countries' Diplomacy of China >, Mainland China Study, Taipei, March, 1999, p.45-61.)

Convinced by Russia's foreign policy priorities in the past few years, Russian experts identify numerous incentives that constantly push Moscow to develop close a alliance with Beijing, including:

- Russian worries about the future of the Russian Far East in which China is undoubtedly the key determinant;
- The two sides have shared interests and concerns about the international situation, yet Russia and the West have differences of opinions on resolving international conflict situations, e.g. Iran and North Korea, and
- Russia could reap enormous advantages from trade and economic cooperation with China, the fastest growing Asian economy.<sup>62</sup>

It was reported that a more China-friendly foreign policy that has served as the prevailing opinion in the Russian government can be tracked even back to Andrei Kozyrev as Foreign Minister in the Yeltsin government.<sup>63</sup> While Evgenii Primakov replaced the overtly pro-Western Andrei Kozyrev as Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation in January 1996, the stage was further set for substantial re-engagement with long-term friends like India, North Korea, and China.<sup>64</sup> This Asian engagement was also to be formalized with Primakov's strategy of forming a strategic triangle between China, Russia, and India in 1998.

In conclusion, as relations between Russia and China have reached new heights today, numerous impediments are likely to turn the China and Russia relations hostile in the near future, including, without limitation, distrust, power imbalance, territorial disputes, national security controversy, energy trade disagreement, ideological conflicts, and immigration problem. Considering the historical swings, excessive use of rhetoric, and reactive nature of

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<sup>62</sup> Alexander Lukin. "Russia's Image of China and Russian-Chinese Relations." CNAPS Working Paper, *Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies*, May 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Karen Brutents and Konstantin Sarkisov, *O vneshnepoliticheskoy kontseptsii rossii v Aziatsko-tikhookeanskom regione* (論俄國在亞太地區的外交概念), Moscow: Apreli-85, 1955, p.46.

<sup>64</sup> Elisabeth Wishnick. "Russia and China: Brothers Again?" *Asian Survey* 41, No. 5 (2001): 800.

this partnership, there are few reasons to believe this to be everlasting even though few would doubt that Sino-Russian relations have strengthened significantly in recent years.