
18. Sino-Russian relations after the break-up of the Soviet Union

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I. Introduction

China has the largest population in the world, while Russia is the largest nation in terms of territory. Both are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Obviously, the significance of Sino-Russian relations extends far beyond the interests of the two nations. It also affects the stability of Asia and the world at large.

Sino-Soviet relations before the disintegration of the Soviet Union were characterized by a number of ups and downs. In February 1950, just four months after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the two countries signed the Treaty on Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Cooperation.¹ The first half of the 1950s were a honeymoon period. However, by the late 1950s differences in national interests and ideologies emerged, leading to serious disputes in the early 1960s which developed into acute conflicts and border clashes in 1969. Hence, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union regarded China as one of its main rivals and stationed approximately 1 million troops and one-third of its SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles along the Sino-Soviet border, threatening to make a 'surgical' first strike on China's nuclear bases. Under serious threat, China had to prepare for a military intrusion from the north. However, in the 1980s, the two countries came to the realization that tense relations were not in the interests of either side and they made efforts to alleviate the situation. Their efforts resulted in the normalization of relations during a state visit to Beijing by then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in May 1989.

In December 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated into 15 independent republics and Russia succeeded it as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Sino-Russian relations thus faced a new test. Could the two countries maintain normal relations regardless of their different social systems and ideologies, or would their relations deteriorate even to a state of hostility? This was not only of concern to the two neighbouring countries but also to many others, especially the United States, Japan, and other North-East Asian and European nations. Fortunately, the leaders of both China and Russia handled the transition in the relationship carefully and skilfully.

¹ Xue Mao Houn and Pei Jian Zhang, *Zhong guo Weijiao* [Contemporary Chinese diplomacy] (China Social Science Publishing: Beijing, 1988), pp. 24–25.

So far their relations have developed smoothly and are as good as they have ever been. Because of their strategic significance there are bound to be different views of and comments about Sino-Russian relations worldwide. In China and Russia there are also different views of the relationship, which is close to the interests of both countries. This chapter aims to describe the development of Sino-Russian relations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, to examine the foundations of and the problems remaining in the relationship and, finally, to examine the different courses the relationship may take in the future.

II. The development of relations

On 25 December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev was forced to resign from the Soviet presidency and the flag of the Soviet Union fell. China lost no time in establishing diplomatic relations with Russia and the other new republics. On 27 December 1991, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen sent letters to the new republics, including Russia, informing them that China recognized their independence and was preparing to establish diplomatic relations with them. Two days later the Chinese and Russian deputy foreign ministers signed a protocol expressing the mutual desire to develop a 'good-neighbourly', friendly relationship on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence² and China expressed its support for Russia as successor state to the Soviet Union in the United Nations. Thus the two nations made a first key step towards normalization of their relations.

Since then Sino-Russian relations have developed in a smooth and healthy direction. There have been three stages in the development of the relationship.

1. In December 1992 Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited China and met Chinese President Yang Shang Kun. This was the first summit meeting between China and Russia. The two signed a Joint Statement on the Foundation of Mutual Relations, stipulating that they would establish a good-neighbourly and mutually beneficial relationship on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The document set the tone of friendship and cooperation.³ In addition, they signed a further 24 agreements on cooperation in various areas, providing good prospects and ample scope for the development of bilateral relations. This first stage of relations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union could be called the stage of friendly, cooperative partnership.

2. In September 1994 Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Russia for a second summit meeting with Yeltsin. This produced a second joint statement defining the bilateral relationship as a 'constructive partnership oriented toward

² The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefits; and peaceful coexistence. First incorporated into a trade agreement between China and India of 29 Apr. 1954, they were presented in Apr. 1955 to the Bandung Conference of African and Asian states.

³ Shanghai Institute for International Studies, *Guoji Xingshi Nianjian 1993* [SIIS yearbook: survey of international affairs] (Shanghai Education Publishing House, 1993), p. 107.

the 21st century' and a statement affirming the two countries' commitment to no-first-use of nuclear weapons and not to target nuclear-armed missiles against each other. The two leaders also signed an agreement delineating the 55-km western sector of the Sino-Russian border.⁴ (An agreement on the 4300-km eastern border, signed by China and the former Soviet Union in May 1991, was awaiting implementation.⁵) This second summit meeting brought Sino-Russian relations to a new stage, which could be termed the stage of constructive partnership.

In May 1995 Jiang visited Russia to attend the 50th ceremony commemorating victory in World War II. During his visit Russia confirmed its support for the 'one China' principle and its opposition to Taiwan joining the UN. It also stated that it would abide strictly by the Sino-Soviet eastern border agreement despite some opposition from local officials in the Russian far east. China confirmed again that the Chechnya issue was an internal matter for Russia and that no other country should intervene, expressed its support for Russia's application to join the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum (APEC),⁶ and suggested that the two countries might cooperate further in UN affairs. This visit consolidated and developed the constructive partnership.

3. In April 1996 the third Sino-Russian summit meeting was held in Beijing. Jiang and Yeltsin signed a new joint statement proclaiming the forging of a 'strategic partnership of equality and trust oriented towards the 21st century'.⁷ Both nations appealed for the establishment of a just international political order. The Chinese leaders expressed their understanding of and support for Russia's position against NATO's eastward expansion and Russia committed itself to further strategic cooperation with China to make their shared border and their borders with the new Central Asian nations more peaceful and stable. The two countries also decided to increase their bilateral trade to \$20 billion by the end of the century. On 26 April, the heads of state of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan met in Shanghai and signed an agreement on confidence building in the military field in the border area.⁸ Since then, Sino-Russian relations have developed beyond a bilateral relationship, with greater cooperation in the international arena. This indicates that the relationship has reached a stage of strategic partnership.

In April 1997 the strategic partnership moved to a new level when Jiang visited Yeltsin for a fourth summit meeting. They issued a joint statement on the development of a multipolar world order rather than a unipolar world dominated by a single superpower, and expressed their determination to strive for a new international order based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.⁹ Another important event during Jiang's visit was the signing by the leaders of

⁴ [SIIS yearbook, 1995], p. 91.

⁵ This was approved by the Chinese National People's Congress in Dec. 1994 and by the Russian State Duma in June 1995. See section IV in this chapter.

⁶ For the membership of APEC, see appendix 1 in this volume.

⁷ [SIIS yearbook, 1997], p. 114.

⁸ [SIIS yearbook, 1997], p. 109.

⁹ For the text of their statement, see *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 25 Apr. 1997, p. 3.

China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan of a Treaty on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Areas which, combined with the agreement on confidence building in the military field signed in April 1996, constituted a new kind of security mechanism in Central and North-East Asia.¹⁰ Jiang and Yeltsin also announced the setting up of a committee on Sino-Russian friendship, peace and development for the 21st century.

In November 1997 President Yeltsin made his third visit to China for the fifth summit meeting since 1992. The most important outcome was the accomplishment of the demarcation of the 4300-km eastern border, thus settling a long-standing dispute and leaving only the question of three small islands to be settled by future generations.¹¹ This was a major breakthrough, especially considering the opposition to the settlement from some local officials in the Russian far east. Demarcation of the 55-km western sector of the border was completed in 1998.¹² A further important development was the setting up of a biannual meeting mechanism at prime ministerial level, which has run well. In June 1997 Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin visited China; in February 1998 Li visited Russia again. The meetings focused mainly on economic cooperation. A wide range of projects was discussed, including cooperation in machine-building, aeronautical and aerospace technology, the building of a gas pipeline from eastern Siberia to north-east China, and the building of a thermal power network in China. There were a number of agreements including one on the construction of a nuclear power plant in Lianyungang City, Jiangsu Province.

During Chernomyrdin's June 1997 visit the two countries signed a trade agreement for the years 1997–2000 and decided to establish a committee for coordinating border trade and regional economic and commercial cooperation.¹³ They discussed joint economic programmes, including the natural gas pipeline project mentioned above. Through their efforts economic and trade cooperation has made remarkable headway. The value of bilateral trade reached \$6.8 billion in 1996—far more than the annual value of Sino-Soviet trade at its height in 1991 (see table 18.1)—and it is becoming more orderly and regular, the greater part of it being conducted in cash and between major companies. In July 1998, then Russian Prime Minister Sergey Kiriyenko made a working visit to Beijing, meeting Jiang and the new Chinese Prime Minister, Zhu Rongji. The two prime ministers discussed mainly economic cooperation programmes and reached several new agreements.¹⁴

¹⁰ Lachowski, Z., 'Conventional arms control', *SIPRI Yearbook 1998: Armaments, Disarmament and International Relations* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), pp. 526–27.

¹¹ See section IV in this chapter. The 3 small islands still under dispute are Hei Zia Zi (Ussuri) Island and Yinlong (Tarabarov) Island, located at the intersection of the Amur and Ussuri rivers near Khabarovsk, and Bolshoy Island in the Algan River near Manzhouli.

¹² *Renmin Ribao* [People's daily], 24 Nov. 1998, p. 1.

¹³ [SIIS yearbook, 1998], p. 301.

¹⁴ *Xinhua Yuebo* [Xinhua monthly], Aug. 1998, p. 149.

III. The foundation of the relationship

The flourishing state of Sino-Russian relations is not accidental but solidly based.

The first element of the foundation of the relationship is mutual respect. The two countries suffered considerably as a result of their ideological disputes between the 1960s and the 1980s and are now confronted with the arduous task of developing their national economies. They badly need stability in the international environment, particularly in the immediate neighbourhood. When dramatic changes occurred in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping declared that 'no matter whatever change might occur in the Soviet Union, we should calmly develop relations including political relations with the country on the basis of five principles of peaceful coexistence, and should not launch ideological debate once again'.¹⁵ The Chinese Government has followed this consistently. Russia, under the leadership of Yeltsin, affirmed its commitment to all the positive achievements of Sino-Soviet relations and to the continued implementation of the obligations of the treaties and agreements signed by the Soviet Union and China in May 1989 and May 1991. It also confirmed again its support for China's position on the Taiwan issue. On 15 September 1992 President Yeltsin signed the 'Order on the Russian Federation's relations with China' and reaffirmed that (a) there is only one China; (b) the PRC Government is the sole legal representative of China; (c) Taiwan is a part of China; and (d) Russia will never establish official relations with Taiwan.¹⁶ So far Russia has handled its relations with Taiwan cautiously, restricting non-official contacts. This is very important for the maintenance of normal and friendly relations between China and Russia.

A second element is the two countries' shared views on an increasing number of international issues in the light of the challenge from the United States and its allies. In the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia adopted a pro-Western foreign policy, hoping for economic aid from the West and for recognition as a strong power and an equal partner of the United States. Later, however, deeply disappointed by the level of Western aid and by Western countries' fierce competition over the sphere of influence in the newly independent states, Russia switched to an 'omni-directional' or 'two-headed eagle' policy, pursuing relations with both Western and Eastern countries. Especially after 1995, under heavy pressure from NATO's eastward expansion led by the United States, Russia attached greater importance to its relations with China, India and other Asian countries.

China also faces US pressure on human rights, interference on the Taiwan issue and the threat of 'containment'. Naturally, the two countries sympathize with, support and cooperate with each other on many international issues. They agree extensively on the post-cold war situation. Both believe that the world is

¹⁵ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 3 (People's Publisher: Beijing, 1993), p. 353.

¹⁶ *Renmin Ribao*, 18 Sep. 1992.

evolving from a bipolar structure to a multipolar one. Neither can accept a unipolar world. Both are willing to contribute their due share to the establishment of a new, equitable and reasonable international order in which no one country dominates another. In addition, both oppose the re-emergence of hegemonies and power politics and the resurgence of cold-war thinking. This provides a solid political foundation for the Sino-Russian rapprochement.

The third element is that the two countries have great potential for economic cooperation. China is a large country with rich human resources, a large market and a good agricultural and industrial base but is relatively lacking in natural resources, including oil, natural gas, water, forest and arable land, and is relatively weak in high technology. Russia is a large country with rich natural resources and an industry with great potential, and is very strong in some high-technology areas but weak in light industry and agriculture. In addition, Russia has a relative lack of labour resources in relation to its large territory. Naturally, the two nations can help and cooperate to mutual benefit.

IV. Problems

While the progress achieved by China and Russia in their relations in recent years is significant, some remaining problems should not be ignored.

Bilateral trade

Economic cooperation between China and Russia is not commensurate with their highly developed political relations. Table 18.1 shows the value of their trade in 1991–97. It should be noted that, although since 1992 annual trade has exceeded the highest figures achieved in Soviet times, it is still very low—less than 2 per cent of China's total foreign trade by value,¹⁷ and less than 10 per cent by value of the trade between China and Japan.¹⁸ Moreover, its growth is not yet stable and fluctuates from year to year.

In 1994, the value of the bilateral trade fell by one-third. This was a major setback to economic cooperation between the two countries. The causes of the drop are somewhat complicated. First, before 1994 citizens of the two nations did not require a visa when travelling between China and Russia. Taking advantage of this opportunity, tens of thousands of small Chinese speculators flowed over into the Russian market with inferior goods, causing considerable harm to China's commercial credibility. In 1994, in order to check speculation, Russia strengthened its border controls, tightened its export control laws and raised import and export taxes. Border trade, which accounted for a high proportion of the bilateral trade, was drastically reduced. Second, Russia has

¹⁷ According to China's official statistics the value of its total foreign trade in 1997 was \$325 billion. *Zhengfu Gongzuo Baogao* [Government report 1997, made by the Prime Minister, Li Peng] (People's Publisher, Beijing: 1998), p. 13.

¹⁸ According to official Japanese statistics, the value of trade value between China and Japan in 1995 reached \$57.8 billion. [Japan–China economic cooperation monthly], Aug. 1996 (in Japanese).

Table 18.1. Bilateral trade between China and Russia, 1991–97

Year	Value of trade (current US \$b.)	Comparison with previous year (%)
1991	3.90	. .
1992	5.86	+ 50.0
1993	7.68	+ 31.0
1994	5.10	- 33.5
1995	5.46	+ 6.0
1996	6.80	+ 24.5
1997	(6.00)	(- 11.7)

Sources: Liu De Xi, Sun Yan and Liu Song Bin, *Sulian Jiatikedi Zhong e Guanxi* [Sino-Russian relations after the disintegration of the USSR] (Heilongjiang Education: Harbin, 1996), pp. 127, 128, 136, 139; Goskomstat [Russian State Committee for Statistics], [Statistics handbook 1996] (Russian State Committee for Statistics: Moscow, 1997), p. 142 (in Russian); and Xinhua News Agency Moscow report, 19 Feb. 1998.

suffered a serious recession and a capital shortage since 1993. Its trade and investment environment further deteriorated in 1994 while China began to adjust its economic policy in 1993 and its demand for Russian products fell. Third, some Russian corporations were not always able to provide quality goods to their Chinese partners or meet contract deadlines, which seriously harmed their commercial credibility. Finally, a large amount of Western consumer goods were flowing into Russia, greatly reducing China's share in the Russian market. These factors combined made the fall inevitable.

After the 1994 drop the two governments took some measures to revitalize bilateral trade and the situation has improved somewhat in recent years, but progress is still unstable and in 1997 bilateral trade fell again, by 11.7 per cent. Both China and Russia are dissatisfied, Russia especially so when it failed to secure the contract for the Three Gorges power project, although China had promised to give favourable consideration to its bid. Some Russians complained: 'Between Chinese and Americans, there is cooperation but no friendship, while between Chinese and Russians, there is friendship but no cooperation'.¹⁹

To increase their bilateral trade to \$20 billion by the year 2000, the two countries have made considerable efforts to promote economic cooperation. Still there are many difficulties. Since both are at present pursuing a market economy, the level and speed of economic cooperation, unlike political cooperation, cannot simply be decided by the leaders. It dictates its own terms. Both China and Russia are capital importers and cannot help each other in this regard. Neither China's consumer goods nor Russia's heavy industrial products are the best in the world or the most attractive to the partner country.

¹⁹ Personal communication with a senior official of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Misunderstandings and suspicions

For historical, cultural and geopolitical reasons, there are still some misunderstandings and suspicions among the population on both sides. In the early 1990s there were some difficulties with the demarcation of the eastern sector of the border between the two countries. Under the agreement on the eastern border signed in 1991²⁰ an area of 15 km² in Russia's Primorskiy Krai (Maritime Province), including some small islands in the Amur and Ussuri rivers and small pieces of land along the Tumen River, was to be transferred to China. This was in full conformity with the principle of international law that border rivers should be demarcated along the central line of the navigation route. However, some local officials in Primorskiy Krai denounced the agreement, alleging that the land to be handed over would include 'two strategic sections of the Tumen River that would provide direct access to the Sea of Japan' and that 'the Chinese were expected to build a seaport in the area that could compete with existing Russian Far East ports'.²¹ This allegation is totally groundless. China has no intention of building a seaport on the Tumen River, and it is not actually feasible to build a seaport on the small pieces of land transferred.

For a time this issue was an obstacle for the final solution of the border disputes. Fortunately, under the leadership of Yeltsin, the Russian Government took a steady position on the implementation of the border agreement. Then Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev denounced allegations that the agreement harmed Russia's sovereignty and rejected the demand for a review. In 1995 the State Duma, after holding a hearing on the border problem, reconfirmed the 1991 agreement and stressed that it would not be revised. On 25 April 1996 President Yeltsin issued an order to accelerate the demarcation of the eastern border. Meanwhile China took a steady but restrained attitude towards the issue and consulted with the Russian Government closely.

Now the border disputes are basically resolved. Nevertheless, some Russians still fear that China will claim territory from Russia in the future. Their fears are based on earlier statements by China that the border treaties signed by the two nations in the 19th century were unfair. This is a misunderstanding. It is true that in border negotiations in the 1960s China said that the border treaties signed by Qing China and tsarist Russia in the 19th century, including the 1858 Ai Hui Treaty, the 1860 Beijing Treaty, the 1864 Treaty on demarcation of the north-west border and the 1881 Yi Li Treaty, were unequal treaties imposed on China by Russia. However, at the same time China declared: 'Considering the reality, China is willing, through peaceful negotiations, to resolve the border disputes between the two countries comprehensively and to redefine the whole demarcation line on the basis of those treaties. China is not demanding back the territories grabbed by tsarist Russia'.²² Firmly adhering to this position, the

²⁰ See section II in this chapter.

²¹ *Asian Survey*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Jan. 1996), p. 106.

²² 'Statement of the Chinese Government', *Renmin Ribao*, 24 May 1969, p. 1; and 'Chinese Foreign Ministry document', *Renmin Ribao*, 8 Oct. 1969, p. 1.

Chinese Government negotiated with the Soviet Union and then Russia to reach the two border agreements. China is happy to see a final settlement of the disputes and has no intention of raising the problem once again.

Some Russians still harbour the old 'yellow peril' thinking. They think that a strong and prosperous China might be a threat to Russia, especially to its far east. In China, some fear that when Russia recovers from its current difficulties it might resume its expansionist policy and constitute a threat to China. This is obsolete thinking, reflecting the hostile past. Nevertheless, it is a problem, and indicates the need for greater exchange between the peoples of the two countries in order to promote mutual understanding.

Illegal immigration

Another source of friction has been the issue of illegal Chinese immigrants in the Russian far east. In 1994 the Russian news media, with the support of some local officials in the Russian far east, issued a number of reports about China's 'expansion' in the far east, claiming that an estimated 2.5 million Chinese had entered the Russian far east in search of jobs and business opportunities.²³ General Pavel Grachev, then Russian Defence Minister, even asserted that Chinese nationals were conquering the Russian far east by peaceful means.²⁴ Clearly the problem was greatly exaggerated. According to Emil Payin, adviser to the Russian President, 'The Chinese immigrants mainly concentrated in four cities, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, and Nakhodka. As a matter of fact, the total population of the four cities in 1993 was 1.8 million. The two-million figure, hence, is not worth refuting. In fact, in 1992 and 1993, the amount of Chinese immigrants was no more than 50 000 and 80 000, respectively. By 1997, it was no more than 200 000'.²⁵

Payin also pointed out that the real problem was that the economy of the Russian far east had been bogged down in a long-term crisis since 1988. In 1990 the situation deteriorated: the region could not get food, consumer goods or other necessities from the Russian European regions and had to rely on border trade with China. Chinese immigrants flowed in with capital and goods. By 1993, 43 per cent of joint ventures in the Russian far east region were established by Chinese investors. Chinese workers found employment on farms and in the building industry as cheap labourers. At the same time, China opened its own market to Russians. In 1993 the region's exports to China were 33.6 per cent by value of its total exports, next only to its exports to Japan. This was obviously beneficial to the region's economy. The problem was that some Chinese entered the region and made money illegally, and among those illegal immigrants the crime rate was relatively high.²⁶

²³ ITAR-TASS, 26 Jan. 1994, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report—Central Eurasia (FBIS-SOV)*, FBIS-SOV-94-17, 26 Jan. 1994, pp. 24–25.

²⁴ *Asian Survey* (note 21).

²⁵ Pain, E., 'Problem: "illegals" on Amur shores. On Chinese immigration to the Russian far east', *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, 6 May 1997 (in Russian), in FBIS-SOV-97-093, 15 May 1997.

²⁶ Pain (note 25).

Payin's report and analysis may be close to the facts. The Russian far east and north-eastern China are highly complementary. The former is a large territory with rich resources but a relatively small population. Lack of labour and capital is a major problem in its development. North-eastern China has a big population and a large, cheap labour force, and is more developed than the Russian far east. Clearly the two regions can gain benefit from cooperation. The problem is good management. In 1994 the Russian Government strengthened its border controls by removing 20 border checkpoints from the control of local governments and putting them under Moscow's direct control, terminated the liberal visa system and restricted the issuing of visas to Chinese businessmen.²⁷ In 1995, Russia's Federal Immigration Service and China's defence, civil and public security ministries concluded three agreements to prevent illegal migration and illegal trafficking in arms, ammunition, drugs, and poisonous and radioactive materials.²⁸ Since then the situation has improved substantially. Further cooperation on border control and migration is needed. Any exaggeration of the issue is not in the interests of either country.

V. Conclusions: Sino-Russian relations in the future

Since China and Russia are large countries with considerable strategic significance, the future of their relations is of concern to the rest of the world. A variety of views have been expressed in the context of this problem. Roughly divided, they can be presented in three possible scenarios for the development of Sino-Russian relations.

Scenario one: alliance against the USA

Some Western scholars suggest that, under certain conditions and on the basis of the current strategic partnership between the two nations, Russia will try to unite with China and probably Iran to form an alliance against the USA.²⁹ This is very unlikely.

The important question is how to assess the strategic partnership between China and Russia. It was initiated by President Yeltsin and accepted by China. It is a new type of state-to-state relationship based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. 'Strategic' here does not mean a military alliance but indicates that the two countries will cooperate in bilateral affairs and in the establishment of a fair, reasonable and stable international order. Both China and Russia believe the world to be in a state of change and believe that the new world configuration will be a multipolar one. Both have an omni-directional foreign policy, which entails that they would like to keep good relations with all countries. China wants to maintain good relations with both Russia and the

²⁷ *Asian Survey*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Jan. 1995), p. 103.

²⁸ *Asian Survey* (note 21).

²⁹ Brzezinski, Z., *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (Basic Books: New York, 1997), pp. 115, 116.

United States, while Russia wants to maintain good relations with China and the United States. They are well aware that the United States is still the strongest power in the world and will certainly be one pole of the future multipolar world. Neither China nor Russia will challenge its primacy in today's world. As a matter of fact, both China and Russia have decided to establish a strategic partnership with the USA.³⁰ What they do not want to see is US 'world leadership' or a 'unipolar world'. Nor, in fact, do most Americans. According to a poll held in June 1996, only 13 per cent of Americans endorsed the idea that 'as the sole remaining superpower, the United States should continue to be the permanent world leader in solving international problems'. An overwhelming majority of respondents (74 per cent) preferred that the USA 'do its fair share in efforts to solve international problems together with other countries'.³¹

The Sino-Russian strategic partnership is characterized by three 'nons'—non-confrontation, non-alliance and non-aiming at any third country. Some people believe that, since both have expressed their opposition to hegemony in any form, their strategic partnership must be directed against the United States. This is also a misunderstanding. China regards anti-hegemonism as a basic principle of its foreign policy and considers it necessary to oppose hegemony in order to protect sovereignty and safeguard world peace. It will oppose the pursuit of hegemony whether by a global or a regional power or any other. This does not mean that it regards that particular power as its enemy. China will not cease its efforts to improve relations with the United States, despite opposing US hegemonic policy or action on specific issues. Conversely, it will not give up the anti-hegemony principle in order to improve relations with the United States.

Russia holds similar views in this regard. Hence it is not correct to say that their strategic partnership is directed against the United States. The limitation is very clear: when Russia denounced the eastward expansion of NATO, China only expressed its understanding, sympathy and moral support and did nothing further. When China criticized the September 1997 Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation and asked Japan and the USA to clarify whether their defence cooperation covered the Taiwan Strait or not, Russia kept silent.

The fact that China has procured some weapons from Russia should not be exaggerated. By 1996 its main procurements from Russia included 50 Su-27 fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, 10 Il-76 transporters and 2 Kilo Class submarines.³² In addition, it is reported that the two countries signed an agreement to produce an updated model of the Su-27 fighter aircraft in a Shenyang factory.³³ In comparison with the procurement of advanced weapon

³⁰ After a summit meeting in Washington, China and the USA declared their intention to establish a constructive strategic partnership in a statement of 29 Oct. 1997. [SIIS yearbook, 1998], p. 410.

³¹ Brzezinski (note 29), p. 221.

³² See appendix 3 in this volume.

³³ Japanese National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review, 1996–97* (Japanese National Institute for Defense Studies: Tokyo, Dec. 1996), pp. 109–10.

systems by India, Japan and even Taiwan in recent years, China's procurement is modest.³⁴

In terms of relations with Iran, it is true that both China and Russia regard Iran as an important developing country and are maintaining good relations with it, but this does not mean that they share the same views as Iran on international affairs. Neither China nor Russia would like to see ultra-nationalism or religious fundamentalism in any region of the world after the cold war. In this respect they share common interests with many countries, probably including the United States.

It therefore seems impossible that China and Russia would ally themselves against the USA unless the USA makes terrible mistakes in regarding them as its enemies.

Scenario 2: a return to conflict

Some observers suggest that conflicts between China and Russia might emerge again if China becomes stronger or Russia recovers its great-power status. This is also very unlikely. As mentioned above, the border disputes are resolved and China is happy to see the problem settled once and for all. China has no intention to penetrate into the Russian far east through immigration. Its position is clear: all Chinese immigrants should abide strictly by Russian law. China sincerely hopes to cooperate with Russia to improve the management of migration and settle the problem of illegal immigrants. As long as the two countries stick to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, there is no reason why they should not live together peacefully, cooperatively and harmoniously. The only possible cause of conflict would be if one of them became powerful and adopted a hegemonic stance. China has made it very clear that it will never pursue hegemony or seek a sphere of influence. At the Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly in April 1974, Deng Xiaoping even said that if China were to develop a hegemonic stance some day in the future the world's population should expose, oppose and topple it together with the Chinese people.³⁵ This reflects China's firm determination never to seek hegemony or to bully, threaten or invade other countries.

Historically, Russia has had a tradition of expansionism. However, the world situation has changed drastically. Peace and development are the theme of the current epoch and economic matters have become the most important factors in international relations. Russia has also changed tremendously. Drawing lessons from history, Russia is concentrating on economic reform and revitalization, and hence needs a peaceful environment. There is no reason why this great country should repeat the mistakes of history. The probability of this scenario is thus slight, if not zero.

³⁴ See, e.g., Hagelin, B., Wezeman, P. D. and Wezeman, S. T., 'Transfers of major conventional weapons', *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), p. 426.

³⁵ Deng Xiaoping's speech at the 6th Special Session of the UN General Assembly, *Renmin Ribao*, 11 Apr. 1997, p. 1.

Scenario 3: normal relations and limited strategic cooperation

A third scenario is that the two countries maintain a normal, friendly and harmonious relationship, handling disputes through continual dialogue and consultation. Economic cooperation will be pushed forward step by step, but the achievement of the \$20 billion goal for bilateral trade should be postponed to the early 21st century. In international affairs, the two nations will further their strategic dialogue and cooperation and support each other in many but not all areas. China will support Russia's legal interests but not its dominance in other newly independent states on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

China will also support Russia in playing an important role in the Asia-Pacific region. In North-East Asia, China regards Russian-Japanese rapprochement as a positive development, conducive to the strategic balance of power in the region. Both China and Russia want to see peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. In Central Asia China and Russia are cooperating smoothly, both keeping a vigilant eye on religious fundamentalism and ultra-nationalism. China regards Central Asia as one of its sources of energy supply in the near future, and has made some investments in oil exploration which have so far been supported by Russia. However, as Russia regards the Central Asian republics as its 'near abroad', some conflicts of interest involving the region may emerge in the future. In South Asia, both China and Russia denounced India and Pakistan for their nuclear tests of May 1998, but while China stressed that India, having initiated a nuclear weapon competition, had seriously threatened peace and stability in Asia, Russia did not stress the fact. India is Russia's traditional strategic partner, while China maintains fairly close relations with Pakistan. Some differences of opinion in this respect might therefore emerge under certain conditions. Hence the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences is also applicable in Sino-Russian relations. This is the most plausible scenario.

Obviously, the third scenario is not only in the interests of China and Russia, but also the most favourable for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large. No country has reason to fear a healthy development of Sino-Russian relations—rather there is every reason to support and encourage it.