

Russia's Image of China and Russian-Chinese Relations¹

By Alexander Lukin

I. Introduction

Discussion and debate about Russian-Chinese relations is on the rise and attracts the attention of experts and policy-makers around the world. From the Russian perspective, the importance of developing relations with its neighbor is determined by several considerations: shared interests and concerns about the international situation, the need to secure a peaceful international environment for economic development, worries about the future of the Russian Far East, and advantages from trade and economic cooperation with the fastest growing Asian economy. Russian approaches to China differ among various groups, political trends and individual experts; moreover, they exist not in vacuum, but within the framework of more general perceptions of the international situation and Russia's position therein. Based on these perceptions, it can be expected that Russia will develop closer relations with China for the foreseeable future. However, since the official Russian attitude toward China strongly depends on Russia's relations with the West, especially with the United States, US policy towards Russia and China will significantly influence the future Russian-Chinese partnership.

The remainder of this paper is organized into four sections: current Russian approaches towards relations with China; Russian images of China and the prospects for Russian-Chinese relations in the 21st Century; the motives behind Russian-Chinese rapprochement; and the impact of US policies on Russia-China relations.

¹ The working paper is part of a forthcoming book-length work entitled *Russia's Image of China and Russian-Chinese Relations*. The author wishes to thank Jennifer Chang for her assistance in the final editing stages of this paper.

II. Current approaches towards relations with China

Difficulties immediately arise in this study because the various approaches to China do not coincide with particular Russian political groups and parties. One can often find differing opinions regarding China among the members of one party; conversely, bitter rivals from opposing political camps can often agree on China policy even when they cannot find common ground on any other issue.

Supporters of a close friendship or an alliance with China

This group of observers can be seen in three camps: communists and communist sympathizers, non-communist nationalists, and pro-Chinese liberals. Various opinions are expressed in Russia on the question of what kind of relations Russia should have with its strengthening and successful neighbor. The strongest supporters of Chinese reforms and admirers of China's experience naturally tend to favor a close alliance. Many of them work at the Institute of the Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the major Russian research center that covers China, Japan and Korea. This institution was established in 1966 specifically to supply the government with academic arguments against "Maoism." Many former Soviet communist party experts on China, who worked under Oleg Rakhmanin, joined the Institute, and ironically, after the collapse of the Soviet Union changed their views from anti-Chinese to pro-Chinese.² The writing of a senior researcher at the Institute, Alexandr Yakovlev, offer a comprehensive presentation of the views of the Rakhmanin group on Chinese foreign policy and Russian-Chinese relations. Formerly one of the most outspoken critics of the "adventurous foreign policy course of Mao's heirs", today Yakovlev has completely reversed his position, to the point of

² A group of orthodox ideologists headed by a deputy head of the Communist Party Central Committee department for socialist countries, Oleg Rakhmanin, which controlled Soviet policy towards China during the 1970s and early 1980s, argued that Chinese Communists betrayed socialism and defected to capitalism. They warned of the dangers of following this example by the countries of the Soviet bloc and by the Soviet Union itself and insisted on maintaining the purity of Soviet socialism.

almost full endorsement of Beijing's foreign policies. Explaining why today's Russia needs friendly relations with China, Yakovlev argues that the collapse of socialism in the USSR "made China the principal integral part of the socialist pole in the international community" and "the central subject of hostility of the international anti-Communist forces that have significantly strengthened their positions." Hence, in this new situation, it is only natural for Russia and China to become allies. Russia and China, possibly with India, "can act as inspirers and organizers of a new anti-hegemonic, anti-Western international front."³

In the media, influential commentators, such as Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, often defend the idea of a close Russian-Chinese alliance. In his comments on the Sino-Russian signing of the Moscow Declaration for a multipolar world, Ovchinnikov argues that it would be too simplistic to see the declaration as aimed against the United States and its policy of NATO expansion. However, he writes that by signing it "Moscow and Beijing confronted the 'cold war mentality' and the attempts to recreate dividing lines in Europe and Asia" with "a positive alternative."⁴ Commenting on the fifth Russian-Chinese summit in November 1997, Ovchinnikov wrote that while Russia and China do not wish to revive the military-political alliance of the 1950s, they were being pushed in the direction of rapprochement and becoming "each others strategic rear" by "the shortsighted plans of NATO's expansion to the East and turning the American-Japanese 'security treaty' into an anti-Chinese coalition in the Far East."⁵

The foreign policy vision of the pro-Chinese, non-communist nationalists are close to that of communist sympathizers but often take much more radical forms. Thus, Aleksey Mitrofanov, the deputy to the leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and the party's main expert on foreign policy, writes that confrontation between East and West will soon

³ Alexander Yakovlev, "Confidential Partnership Aimed at Strategic Interaction," *Far Eastern Affairs*, No. 2 (112), 1997, p. 45.

⁴ Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, "Rossiya i Kitay: mnogopolyarnyy mir, spravedlivyy mezhdunarodnyy poryadok" [Russia and China: A Multipolar world and a Just International Order], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, March 26, 1997, p. 3.

be replaced by a “bipolar model of confrontation between the continents of Eurasia and North America.”⁶ To strengthen Russia’s position in this future confrontation, Mitrofanov proposes creating a “Berlin-Moscow-Tokyo” axis and to buttress this with a Russia-China-India axis.

Typical nationalist views toward China are routinely expressed by other authors of *Zavtra* and in the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. For example, in an article presenting Communist leader Gennadiy Zyuganov as a patriotic candidate for presidency, a *Zavtra* author, Nikolay Anisin, wrote, “Why have Western capitalists invested into Communist China five hundred billion dollars over the past decade, while Russia with its power turned bluish⁷ only received a snub? China has not renounced its past, has not given up its national interests, has maintained stability and legal order and received colossal direct investment. But the Yel’tsinists who spitted on, sold and betrayed everything, all the past years have been begging the IMF for the miserable billions in interest loans.”⁸ Also, in discussing the transfer of Hong Kong and Macao to China, a commentator Vasiliy Sofronchuk in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* accused the Kremlin of squandering Russian land at the very time when China was reuniting its historic parts. As a result, Sofronchuk warns that Russia will soon find itself in China’s situation of 1841-1949 when “imperialist predators were tearing it apart.”⁹

Some experts and politicians, who have been associated with the liberal camp also believe that Russia needs China as a friend. Lev Delyusin, for example, decisively rejects the claims of those in Russia who believe that China wants Russian land. Delyusin argues that the

⁵ Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, “Solntse vskhodit na Vostoke” [The Sun Rises in the East], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, November 15, 1997, p.3.

⁶ Aleksey Mitrofanov, *AntiNATO. Novaya ideya rossiyskoy geopolitiki. Taktika I strategiya na sovremennom etape* [Anti-NATO. The new idea of Russian geopolitics: Tactics and strategy at the current stage] (Moscow: 1996), Unpublished manuscript, pp.21-24. Mitrofanov headed the State Duma Committee on Geopolitics from 1995-1999.

⁷ “Blue” is a slang for homosexual in Russian.

⁸ Nikolay Anisin, “Zyuganov: kontrataka” [Zyuganov: a Counterattack], *Zavtra*, February 25, 2000, p. 1

⁹ Vasiliy Sofronchuk, “Kak Pekin sobiraet kitayskie zemli, a Kreml’ razbazarivaet Rossiyskie” [How China gathers Chinese land while the Kremlin squanders those of Russia], *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, July 1, 1997, p. 2.

border disputes, which had plagued Russia-China relations in the past, have already been mitigated, and that economic interests presently form the basis for bilateral relations. As a result, in his view, “if not a bright than at least not a dark road in the Twenty First Century has been opened” for the two countries.¹⁰ Although calls for a close alliance with China at present do not represent Moscow’s official position, it is popular among various influential groups: traditional heavy and military industry managers and a communist faction of the Duma. During the times when Yevgeniy Primakov was Foreign Minister (April to September 1998) and Prime Minister (September 1998 to May 1999), this view came very close to becoming part of official policy. In December 1998 during a visit to India, Primakov even put forth the idea of creating a Russian-Chinese-Indian triangular strategic partnership. The idea was immediately supported by Russian communist leader Zyganov but rejected by Beijing.¹¹ At present the idea of a Moscow-Beijing alliance has not officially been put forward by either side, but the Russian government is continuously pressed by the idea’s supporters at home to move closer to China.

Advocates of a balanced policy

Another large group of Russian academics and politicians advocate a balanced policy towards China. This position, which at the moment is the most influential and to the greatest extent coincides with the views usually expressed by Foreign Ministry officials, can be found in the writings of the deputy head of the Russian Diplomatic Academy, Yevgeniy Bazhanov, as well as such researchers as Vilya Gel’bras, Sergey Trush, Konstantin Sorokin and others.¹²

¹⁰ L. Delyusin, “Epokha Dena prodolzhaetsya” [The Deng’s Epoch is Continuing] (Interview to L.Mlechin). *Novoye Vremya*, No.8, 1997, p. 25. Delyusin is an influential China expert, formerly head of the China department at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

¹¹ See Boris Volkhonskiy and Andrei Ivanov, “Pekin podvel Primakova” [“Beijing has let Primakov down”], *Kommersant-Daily*, December 24, 1998, p.4.

¹² Yevgeniy Bazhanov, “Big Neighbour — Big Headaches”, *New Times*, August 1996; Sergey Trush, “Prodazha Rossiyskogo oruzhiya Kitayu: rezony i opaseniya” [Russian Arms Sales to China: Reasons and Worries], “*Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*,” April 25, 1996, p.6; V.G. Gel’bras, *Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskiy region: problemy ekonomicheskoy bezopasnosti Rossii* [Asian-

Clearly expressing the views of this group, Yevgeniy Bazhanov criticizes both those in Russia who “favour the restoration of the former military-political alliance with China” and those who go to the other extreme of “clamouring against a mounting Chinese menace”.¹³ Bazhanov argues that a new Moscow-Beijing axis is both unlikely and potentially detrimental to Russian interests. Also, an alliance relationship is not feasible because it runs contrary to official Chinese policy of not entering into alliance relationships. For Russia the new axis would also be “nothing but a nuisance” because “the expanding NATO would automatically turn into a sworn enemy of Russia, a majority of Asian states, which most likely will occupy positions of leadership in the world economy before long, would revert to their hostile stance towards us” and “Russia will have found itself cut off from financial, commodity and technological resources” and will have to give up its plans for economic modernization and social democratization.¹⁴

At the same time, Bazhanov criticizes those who claim that China has been growing stronger and so coveting adjacent lands, and he is critical of radical democrats who believe that Russia should join forces with the West and advanced Asian states (specifically Japan) against China. First, Bazhanov does not believe that China can afford a policy of expansionism in the foreseeable future. In his view, China “is simply ‘doomed’ to maintaining its course of reform and cooperation with the wider world” since “the country is not in a condition to divert its attention from its economic and social problems and get embroiled in expansionist drives and conflicts with other countries.”¹⁵ Second, an alliance with the West against China is not in the cards for the West either, since, in Bazhanov’s opinion, “NATO and Japan dislike and fear us more than they do the Chinese” and it has never occurred to the West to join efforts with Russia against China or any other country. Third, after forming an axis against China, Moscow could

Pacific region: Problems of Russia’s economic security] (Moscow: Institut mikroekonomiki pri Minekonomiki RF, 1995); K.E.Sorokin, “Rossiya i igra geopoliticheskikh interesov v areale Velikogo Okeana”, *Politicheskie issledovaniya*, 1994, No.4.

¹³ Bazhanov, “Big Neighbour — Big Headaches,” p. 47.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

find itself in a plight even worse than an alliance with Beijing would entail, since Russians who find it nauseating to fight a handful of Chechen separatists would be drawn into confrontation with a nation whose population far outnumbers that of Russia and whose economy can in a couple of decades surpass that of Russia's twelve to fifteen times over.¹⁶

An influential expert on China's economy and professor at the Institute of Asia and Africa at Moscow University, Vilya Gel'bras believes that China's development poses both opportunities and challenges for Russia and the rest of the world. In Gel'bras's opinion, the successful economic development of China is already leading to the creation of a new power in the Far East—based on the economic-cultural alliance between China and the countries of the South East Asia.¹⁷ Concurrently, potential economic problems, overpopulation and a lack of resources may result in Chinese immigration, thus this mighty “Greater China” constitutes a potential problem for Russia in the Far East. In light of this, Gel'bras also advocates a more cautionary approach to arms sales. While partnership with China is important, in Gel'bras's view, Russians should not interpret “strategic partnership” as a guarantee of China's support for all of Russia's major international policies--both today and in the future. China has all kinds of “partnerships” with many other countries—including the USA, France, Great Britain and Japan—and it has no intention of entering into a military-political alliance with any one of them. While Gel'bras calls the fear of Chinese demographic expansion “a myth, created by some politicians for speculative purposes” he also maintains that in terms of bilateral relations China is often egoistic and does not really trust Russia, and furthermore attempts to dictate international policy.¹⁸ At the same time he believes that if Russia approaches the Chinese challenge rationally, speedy Chinese development can provide the two countries with many opportunities for

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gel'bras, *Aziatsko-Tikhoookeanskiy region: problemy ekonomicheskoy bezopasnosti Rossii*, p.4

¹⁸ Natal'ya Ayrapetova, “Nado li opasat'sya Kitaya?” An Interview with Vilya Gel'bras. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2000, March, 3, http://ng.ru/ideas/2000-03-03_china.html.

cooperation and that “Chinese prosperity is certainly one of the main conditions for peace and cooperation in the international arena.”¹⁹

China as a threat to Russia

Three principal groups can be identified as attempting to portray China as a threat: Westernizers, those who fear “Chinese expansionism”, and radical nationalists. The contrast among these groups is striking since this view of China can be based either on radical Westernism, aiming to convert Russia into a model Western society and a faithful ally of the West, or on radical nationalism for which even China is too pro-Western and which sees an alliance with anybody (even an anti-Western one) as a subordination of Russian interests to an outside influence.

An example of the radical-Westernizing approach is clearly illustrated in an article by the former acting prime minister and one of the leaders of the pro-Western, Union of Right Forces, Yegor Gaydar. According to Gaydar’s bipolar scheme of the world, Russia finds itself between the “democratic West” and “poor, non-democratic countries” of the East, compared to which Russia is more prosperous, open and predictable. Under this scenario China is the most fearful. Gaydar, openly subscribes to the theory of a Chinese “population threat,” and adds that “China in the nearest future will not become a stable, prosperous market economy.” Thus he believes that Russia should not only cut its military budget and armed forces, but also transfer its “containment potential” from the friendly democratic West to the Far East. Since Gaydar believes that Russia’s main Asian ally should be Japan, it is clear that he wanted to contain China while at the same time develop the economic and military potential of the Russian Far East (RFE) and Siberia.²⁰

¹⁹ Gel’bras, “KNR posle Den Syaopina: problemy ekonomicheskogo razvitiya,” p.55.

²⁰ Yegor Gaydar, “Rossiya XXI veka: Ne mirovoy zhandarm, a forpost demokratii v Evrazii” [Russia in the 21st Century: Not a World Policeman but an Outpost of Democracy in Eurasia], *Izvestiya*, May 18, 1995, p. 4.

There is also a tendency among liberal commentators, representing the Kozyrev line in foreign policy, to criticize the Russian government's post-Kozyrev China policy. According to Georgiy Kunadze, Russian attempts for rapprochement with China are ill-conceived and too insistent. Kunadze argues that while the Chinese leadership claims to reject American hegemony and possibly is even "ready to fight it...to the last Russian," in its real policy it is "even on the gene level already too cautious and realistic to openly challenge the US, demanding equal rights." In this sense Kunadze believes it is unwise for Russia to pay its "strategic partner" with weapons and technologies which could be potentially dangerous to itself, at a time when it is only in the middle of the process of rapprochement with China.²¹

After Vladimir Putin took office, former foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev criticized of the new President's foreign policy, warning him against strengthening ties with North Korea, Iraq, Libya, Milosevic's Yugoslavia, and China. While in Kozyrev's view, Russia could get little from the first four countries, China was "playing the 'Russian card'" exclusively in its own interests in order to pressure Taiwan and enter the WTO with the US assistance." Kozyrev also explained that China was Russia's "direct competitor in the struggle for attracting Western investment to the developing markets." Instead, Kozyrev recommended developing relations with the "rich" Western "seven" which will be beneficial to Russia.²²

Many experts support the idea that a strong China is bound to turn expansionistic, or that perhaps it is already practicing "latent expansionism." This position is advocated by the Deputy Director of the Institute of the Far East, Vladimir Myasnikov, whose views differ greatly from those of most of his colleagues. Myasnikov is one of the leading Soviet experts on the history of the Russian-Chinese border, and is known for his role in providing the historical basis for the official Soviet position. Unlike most other members of Rakhmanin's group, he did not change

²¹ Georgiy Kunadze, "Sindrome kuz'kinoy matery," [An "I'll Teach You a Lesson" Syndrome], *Novoe vremya*, No.37, September 19, 1999 p.18.

²² Andrey Kozyrev, "Riski svoy i chuzhie" [Risks of Our Own and of Others], *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 30, August 1, 2000, p.5.

his view regarding Chinese foreign policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and continues to see China as a threat. He often employs openly xenophobic language when describing China and the Chinese people. Without providing much proof, Myasnikov talks of uncontrolled mass Chinese immigration to Russia. He claims that the Chinese have already “created a well-established illegal network on the Russian territory”, and that Chinese businessmen are siphoning out Russian resources and hard currency “like a giant pump.” According to him, the Chinese have coined the term, “the Great Northern Virgin Land”, meaning a place where a sparse population is easily cheated. This “virgin land” theme is allegedly openly propagated in China. Myasnikov claims that Chinese call Russians “stupid”, “hairy” and “bear-like”, and despite their interaction and business dealing with Russians, they strongly believe that they are only temporarily tolerating “the historical injustice” of Russia’s control over the Maritime and Amur regions.²³ Myasnikov expresses doubt in the usefulness of border cooperation, and claims that “the very transformation of the border into a zone of active economic interaction radically diminishes the level of its security.”²⁴

Similar views can be found in other studies. For example, authors of a study of illegal immigration in the Russian Far East claim that the “penetration of Chinese into Russian territory is detrimental to Russian interests in the region and should be strictly regulated by law at both federal and local levels.”²⁵ Fear of Chinese “demographic expansion” occasionally finds its way to the pages of central newspapers and magazines. Sensational headlines such as “Silent Occupation,” and “China Filled Russia up With Narcotics,” are not an exception even for

²³ V.S. Myasnikov, *Dogovornymi stat yami utverdili...* [By the articles of the agreed confirmed...] (Moscow: RIO Mosoblpolitgrafizdat, 1996), pp. 413-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.411.

²⁵ L.L. Rybakovskiy, O.D.Zakharova, V.V.Mindogulov, “*Nelegal naya migratsiya v prigranichnykh rayonakh Dal nego Vostoka: istoriya, sovremennost , posledstviya* [Illegal Migration in the Border Regions of the Far East: History, Present, Consequences] (Moscow: 1997), p. 37.

respected newspapers.²⁶ A typical passage from one such article, entitled “You Show Chinese the Door, They Come through the Window”, devoted to the alleged Chinese invasion of the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, runs, “The yellow-faced billion assimilate Russian Far Eastern villages which are close to the Chinese border somewhat excessively quickly. But beyond [to the West of] the Yenisey River the sound of the iron tread of the of the colonialist battalions from the East is not yet that strong.”²⁷ It is worth noting that the author of this article is probably not particularly nationalistic or nor does he intend to deliberately offend the Chinese. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, which published the article, is also considered to be a serious and respectable newspaper, not a tabloid. This excerpt simply reflects this widely accepted attitude and sensational style of the “liberated” Russian media.

The groups most hostile to China are the radical nationalists. Although most nationalists see China as a prospective partner in an anti-Western alliance, for the most radical China is too Westernized, and while it has always been a geopolitical threat, it is currently a part of a process of hostile encirclement. The LDPR leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, is very much a proponent of this point of view, and in contrast to his deputy Mitrofanov, said that “Today Russia has two main adversaries — the USA and China, who want to destroy us.”²⁸

The view of the radical Westernizers represents the opinion of the Russian ruling elite in the very first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1992-1993). At present the position of both radical nationalists and radical Westernizers have little influence on policy making, and their representatives are unlikely to find themselves in positions of power in the foreseeable future.

²⁶ See Aleksandr Platkovskiy, “Kitay zavalil Rossiyu narkotikamy,” [China Filled up Russia with Narkotics], *Izvestiya*, April 3, 1997, p. 3; Vladimir Chesnokov, “Tikhaya okkupatsiya: kazhdyy vos'moy ussuriets - vykhodets iz Kitaya” [Silent Occupation: One in Every Eight Citizens of Ussuriysk Comes from China], *Novyye Izvestiya*, November 26, 1998, p.5; Yevgeniya Lents, “Tol'ko dlya kitaytsev! V Primor'e vse chashche govoryat o 'tikhoy kitayskoy ekspansii'” [Only for Chinese! In the Maritime Kray They Talk about a “Quiet Chinese Expansion” more and More Often], *Segodnya*, October 14, 2000, p.

²⁷ Yuriy Chuvashov, “Kitaytsev — v dver', ony v okno” [You Show Chinese the Door, They Come through the Window], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 18, 2000, p. 4.

However, it still pushes the government towards a more cautious policy on some sensitive issues such as Chinese immigration and arms sales. Alarmist theories about an alleged “Chinese demographic invasion” are most popular not in Moscow, but in the Russian Far East. Partly because of its influence, however, the question of fighting illegal immigration became a legitimate topic of Russian-Chinese high-level talks and will reportedly be included in the Russian-Chinese treaty to be signed in July 2001.²⁹

III. The Image of China in Russia and the prospects for Russian-Chinese relations

The new Russian image of China which resulted from fundamental changes in both China and Russia in the 1990s has influenced current official Russian approaches toward China. Moreover, the influence of popular and elite perceptions on official policy in the new Russian Federation is much greater than in the Soviet period. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy mainly concentrated on relations with the West and on entering the “common European house”, thus initially disregarding relations with closer neighbors. However, the Russian government soon had to change its attitude. Speaking at the Chinese Association of People’s Diplomacy on January 27, 1994, Foreign Minister Kozyrev said, “The realization of Russian interests not through confrontation but through cooperation with the outside world allowed us in many respects to rediscover for ourselves a whole number of Asian states. This relates to China, our great Eastern neighbor.”³⁰

Pressure from various interest groups catalyzed this rediscovery by the Russian leadership. Among these groups was the Russian military-industrial complex that saw China as

²⁸ As quoted in: V.G. Gel’bras, *Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskiy region: problemy ekonomicheskoy bezopasnosti Rossii*, p.43.

²⁹ L.Moiseev, “Rossiya i Kitay na poroge novogo starta” [Russia and China at the Threshold of a New Start,” *Problemy Dal nego Vostoka*, No. 5, 2000, p.20.

³⁰ Andrey Kozyrev, “‘Aziatskim’” putem — k sisteme bezopasnosti v Azii” [By an “Asian” Way towards a Security System in Asia], *Segodnya*, February 4, 1994, p. 3.

a major commercial partner. In cutting the military budget the government refused to pay for its own contracts on arms production and as a result hundreds of thousands of workers were left without pay. Exports became the most secure source of income for Russian military producers and China turned out to be the most enthusiastic buyer. According to the former head of the main Russian arms exporter *Rosvooruzhenie*, A. Kotelkin, proceeds from arms exports finance more than fifty percent of Russia's military production³¹ and the largest part of the payments come from China.

The State Duma is another proponent of closer relations with China and has some influence on the leadership. Here, especially in 1995-1999, the influence of the CPRF was very strong. The Duma's Committee on Foreign Relations has always been actively China-friendly, and the influence of the academic community should not be underestimated. But, the leaders of some border regions, especially the Maritime Kray and the Khabarovskiy Kray, constitute a major pressure group which lobbies against unrestricted Russian-Chinese border trade and opposed a border demarcation treaty. While generally not resistant to trade relations, they lobby for a strictly controlled border and tough measures against Chinese immigration. It was their influence that led to the abolition of the no-visa border crossing system and although they failed to undermine the Russian-Chinese border demarcation treaty, they managed to attract the entire country's attention to border problems. The power of regional authorities was so strong during the Yel'tsin period that, as discussed above, they were able to take unilateral measures, such as change the border control regime. On the whole their influence and their vigorous anti-immigration propaganda creates an atmosphere unfavorable for developing relations with China, and, combined with the inconsistent and convulsive actions of Moscow, wreaked havoc on Russian-Chinese border disputes. Occasionally even a leader in Moscow can fall victim to this kind of propaganda.

³¹ Alexander A.Sergounin, Sergey V.Subbotin, "Sino-Russian Military Cooperation: Russian Perspective," *Regional Studies*, Vol.15, No. 4, 1997, p. 24.

Since the mid-1990s the official Russian position on relations with China, and Asia as a whole, is very close to that of “balance” and “equal distance” from power centers. However, since coordination in Russian foreign policy during Yel’tsin’s period, was very poor, the Foreign Ministry’s policy towards China was often not observed or was openly ignored by some government branches and departments. Even official statements issued by Russian leaders often contradicted each other. Sometimes the words of President Yel’tsin himself could be interpreted as favorable to creation of a strategic alliance with China. Defense ministers Pavel Grachev and Igor’ Radionov were known for their “non-conventional” statements. During a visit to China in spring 1995 Grachev, who obviously had not previously consulted with the Foreign Ministry, suggested creating a system of collective security in Northeast Asia which would include Russia, China, the United States, Japan and the two Koreas. Beijing respectfully declined.³² Radionov, who succeeded Grachev, worried Beijing by once listing China among the “main potential enemies of Russia.”³³

As a strong lobbying group, Russian arms producers and exporters also were reported to have their own agenda in relations with China, which, in the words of an expert, is based on the simple principle “to sell virtually anything to anybody.”³⁴ Formally, Russia has an arms export control system³⁵, and the Foreign Ministry claims that “the military and technological cooperation with China is developing on the basis of full observance by Russia of its international obligations and of the interests of its own security.”³⁶ In a 2000 interview, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov

³² See: G. Chufirin, “Kak perelezt’cherez Velikuyu kitayskuyu stenu?” [How to climb over the Great Wall?], *Moskovskie Novosti*, No. 36, May 21-28, 1995, p. 5.

³³ See: Igor’ Korotchenko, “Igor’ Radionov vystupil za sozdanie oboronnogo soyuza v SNG” [Igor’Radionov proposed creating a CIS defence alliance], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, December 26, 1996, p. 1.

³⁴ Pavel Fel’gengauer, “Oruzhie dlya Kitaya i natsional’naya bezopasnost’ Rossii” [Arms for China and Russia’s national security], in *Rossiya v mirovoy torgovle oruzhiem* [Russia and the world arms trade] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1996), p. 135.

³⁵ For more information about the arms sales management see p. 44-70 in *Russian Arms Transfers to East Asia in the 1990s*, by Alexander A. Sergounin and Sergey V. Subbotin.

³⁶ “Rossii nuzhen sil’nyy Kitay” [Russia needs a strong China] (Interview with G.Karasin), *Rossiya*, No.3, March 1997, p.14.

stressed that Russia only sells defensive weapons to China, and even then, only within the framework of international agreements.³⁷ However, in practice, at least according to one expert, the Russian Defense Ministry and intelligence services were “unable precisely to determine what was exported and what was not, especially in 1992, when, according to a general view, there was practically no control.”³⁸

President Putin expects to eliminate the administrative chaos of the Yel'tsin era, and establish orderly relations both inside the federal government, and in relations between the central government and the different regions. Now few governors dare to publicly challenge the official foreign policy line, including that related to China. Although some differences remain, most governors see Putin as a more effective defender of Russia's national interests (as well as of the interests of their regions) and have less reason to challenge the official policy. These changes have already played a positive role for Russia's dealings with China.

At the same time, the leadership in Moscow is beginning to pay more attention to the problems of the Russian Far East, which is lagging behind neighboring areas. Speaking at the conference of the development of the RFE and the Trans-Baykal region held in the Far Eastern city of Blagoveshchensk in June 2000, President Putin recognized the failure of Moscow's previous attempts to step up regional development and called for looking at the region from a global perspective, and taking the country's long-term interests into consideration. However, unlike some nationalist commentators, the Kremlin seems to believe that the dangers facing the RFE are mainly problems of domestic development, not a Chinese plot to take advantage of Russia's weaknesses. There is still some concern that if Moscow does not improve the situation in the RFE, neighboring nations could potentially exploit Russia, hence Putin warned, “I do not

³⁷ Igor' Ivanov, “Nashi vzaimootnosheniya svobodny ot emotsiy”, p. 3.

³⁸ Fel'gengauer, “Oruzhie dlya Kitaya i natsional'naya bezopasnost' Rossii,” p. 136.

want to dramatize the situation, but if we do not make every real effort, even the indigenous Russian population will soon speak mostly Japanese, Chinese, and Korean.”³⁹

Still, adhering to a balanced approach, Putin stated during his trip to Beijing in July 2000 that Russia should “lean on two wings: European and Asian.” He explained, “We know that Russia is both a European and an Asian country. We do justice to both European pragmatism and Oriental wisdom. Therefore Russia’s policy should be balanced. In this sense relations with the People’s Republic of China should undoubtedly be one of our major priorities.”⁴⁰

IV. Motives behind the Russian-Chinese rapprochement

In April 1996 during Yel’tsin’s visit to China, both sides announced their desire to develop “a strategic partnership directed to the 21st century.” As the then-Russian president explained, the purpose of this partnership was to promote an emerging multipolar world structure, and to oppose any attempts of hegemony by any single country in a situation where “there are absolutely no controversial issues between Russia and China.”⁴¹ Since that time, both sides have officially recognized the policy of a Russian-Chinese strategic partnership. Speaking in the July 2000 Shanghai Five meeting in Dushanbe, President Putin stated “China for us is really a strategic partner in all spheres of activity.”⁴² In April 2001, at a meeting with the Chinese foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, Putin stated, “We practically have no problems that irritate our relations. On the contrary, relations between the two countries are developing dynamically and positively.”⁴³

The aim of creating a “multipolar world” reflects a shared serious concern about growing US power and willingness to use its power to undermine the international order that emerged after the second World War. Both countries are worried over a perceived US desire to introduce

³⁹ <http://www.president.kremlin.ru/events/50.html>.

⁴⁰ <http://www.president.kremlin.ru/events//45.html>

⁴¹ *Izvestiya*, April 26, 1996.

⁴² Quoted in Igor’ Ivanov, “Nashi vzaimootnosheniya svobodny ot emotsiy” [Our relations are emotions free], *Rossiyskaya Federatsiya*, No. 10 (155), July 2000, p. 3.

“unipolarism,” and pursue hegemonic policies (as the Chinese like to put it) in order to undermine the role of the United Nations and its the Security Council. Actions such as these would sideline nations that are not members of US-led alliances (namely Russia and China) and isolate them from taking an active role in the decision making process regarding important international matters.

It is clear that the current rapprochement between Russia and China, although quite natural after years of unreasonably stormy relations, is to a great extent the result of shared concerns about the current international situation. According to the Russian foreign minister, Igor’ Ivanov, “it is especially important that Russia and China cooperate in key areas such as raising the authority and the role of the UN, defending the primacy of international law in world affairs, maintaining strategic stability, first and foremost, preserving the ABM treaty, creating a new, just, world economic order where everyone enjoys equal rights.”⁴⁴ These mutually shared goals all follow from a general concern over a perceived US tendency to undermine the existing system of international law by creating a center of international decision-making outside the UN (without the participation of Moscow and Beijing). NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia, which was not approved by the UN Security Council, was for both Russia and China a blatant manifestation of this trend.

Presidents Putin and Jiang reaffirmed their willingness to work toward a multipolar world during their talks in Beijing in July 2000. It is quite clear that this and similar formulas imply that Moscow and Beijing see the US as a country seeking to create a unipolar world order, with itself as the single hegemonic power. Nevertheless, the current Russian-Chinese accord is very far from the anti-American bloc as envisaged by some radical Russian communists. It is clear that both sides still seek cooperation with other parts of the world, including the West and the US.

⁴³ <http://www.ortv.ru>

⁴⁴ Igor’ Ivanov, “Nashi vzaimootnosheniya svobodny ot emotsiy”, p. 3.

Although Russian and Chinese leaders always claim the potential for economic cooperation between these two countries is huge, at present economics only provides a secondary impetus for rapprochement. While trade between the two countries reached a record US \$8 billion, it lags far behind Chinese trade with the US and its other major trade partners. For Russia, China is an important market for Russian weapons and raw materials. However, when it comes to industrial products and technology, Russian officials often complain that the Chinese, despite numerous official pledges, are unwilling to grant Russian producers the same terms that other Western competitors enjoy, and sometimes even refuse to sign contracts with Russian companies even if they make the best offer. Chinese business interests would like to sell more of their products to Russia and engage in more cooperative projects with Russian businesses in the RFE in order to boost economic development in China's Northeastern provinces.

On the whole, the two countries will most likely continue to strengthen bilateral relations. Forces that propound the China threat, be it at the radical nationalist or radical Westernist edge of the Russian political spectrum, have little chance of coming to power. Nor can we expect a significant increase of their influence in Moscow, unless an extraordinary political cataclysm occurs in Russia, and the supporters of a balanced policy between the West and the East are likely to maintain power in the Kremlin. The policy of a closer Russian-Chinese alliance may create problems for both Russian and Chinese relations with the West, whose cooperation both countries badly need if they hope to proceed with economic reforms. An alliance policy would almost surely encounter serious reservations from the Chinese side and could not be implemented anyway.

V. Russia, China and US policy

Russian official attitude towards China is strongly dependent upon the state of Russia's relations with the West, especially with the United States. Most areas of mutual Sino-Russian concern revolve around NATO and the United States. When President Putin came to power he

and his team were generally considered Westernizers both because of their education and ideology. Most of the top people in Putin's government are young, speak at least one European language, and some have even studied or worked in Europe or the USA. Putin's Westernism may not be out of a desire to turn Russia into a Western-style democracy, but rather from a belief that the best path for Russian development is speedy Western-style modernization — the type of Westernizing some Western-oriented authoritarian leaders, such as Park Chung Hee, Lee Kuan-yew, Suharto, or Augusto Pinochet, followed. There is the underlying motivation that the West has a decisive role in contemporary world politics, and that good relations with the West are necessary for Russia's modernization drive. This orientation can be seen in Putin's attempts to court British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at the beginning of his term, and in his original enthusiasm about negotiating with the West. The people with whom Putin surrounds himself were also very favorable toward George W. Bush's candidacy, since they believed that the new administration, as Republicans in the past, would be less ideological, focus less on human rights issues and instead put more emphasis on geopolitical cooperation and on issues of mutual importance.

The seemingly Western leanings of Putin's team caused some anxiety in Beijing, especially when Putin proposed to include Europe and Russia in a new non-strategic anti-ballistic system, excluding China. There are indications Beijing worried that the Russian president may be "flexible" on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. In fact, Putin had to make a telephone call to Jiang Zemin on June 8th, following the Russian-US summit, to explain that Moscow's position indeed had not changed.⁴⁵

To remain pro-Western one should at least receive something in return, and in this realm the new Russian leadership has not met with any concrete achievements. From the perspective of the new leadership in Moscow, the West is strongly pushing it in the direction of the non-Western world. As a practical politician envision a strong and prosperous Russia, Putin shows that he has

other options for solving Russia's problems. Neither Russia's internal situation, nor the country's foreign policy needs, will allow him to go back to the one-sided, pro-Western foreign policy of the early years of Boris Yel'tsin. An indication of this is the fact that China was one of the first foreign countries (and the first country in Asia) Putin visited after coming to power.

The Russian-Chinese treaty of "good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation", which should be signed during President Jiang Zemin's trip to Moscow in July 2001, attracted the attention of the Western media and foreign policy community. It will mark a new stage in Russian-Chinese relations and, as Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov put it at a meeting with his Chinese counterpart in Moscow in early 2000, "should record everything that has been achieved and draw prospects for further development of economic cooperation."⁴⁶ According to the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's First Asia Department, Leonid Moiseev, the treaty would cover the following areas: development of long-term bilateral friendship and cooperation; respect for the right to choose one's own way of development; consultations and cooperation on forming a just and rational world order; solving problems according to generally accepted norms of international law; strict observance of the status-quo at the Russian-Chinese border; and prevention of illegal migration, among others.⁴⁷

Symbolically, the treaty is very important. It will be the first framework treaty that China has signed with a foreign country since its decision in the 1980s to pursue an independent foreign policy. The treaty, however important it may seem, manifests a much broader tendency of closer bilateral relations between the two countries premised upon a clear understanding of the need for cooperation, in light of shared dissatisfaction with US international policy. The treaty itself will probably be declarative in nature, and will not include any clauses that bind either party to any specific obligations. Moreover, as it has already been announced, the treaty will not pronounce

⁴⁵ L.Moiseev, "Rossiya i Kitay na poroge novogo starta," p. 19.

⁴⁶ www.polit.ru, Novosty, March 29, 2001.

⁴⁷ L.Moiseev, "Rossiya i Kitay na poroge novogo starta," p. 20

the creation of a Russian-Chinese alliance. Besides, as history demonstrates, treaties alone cannot determine the practical relations between Russia and China.

This treaty, and similar documents, are an outgrowth of a mutual desire to do something about growing US foreign policy activism, which is viewed as an attempt to achieve world domination. This desire is the direct result of Washington's approach and policies towards these two countries. In the case of Russia, for example, it is hardly possible for the US to simultaneously denounce the ABM treaty while continuing with a national missile defense program; bring NATO to Russia's borders and give it the right to disregard the UN Security Council; press Moscow to pay off all of its debts (including those of the Soviet Union), while not allowing it sell conventional arms to Iran (which is not a violation of any international regulation); prevent Russian trade with the US and the European Union by branding any effective Russian exports as dumping; demand the cessation of fighting in Chechnya (which by many in Russia is seen as a sign of support for separatism); and all the while expect Russia to be a thankful, prosperous and friendly partner.

Russia is not the only country where anti-Western sentiments have grown over the last decade. In China, where people have their own reasons for dissatisfaction with US policy, such feelings are also on the rise. If these policies continue (and it currently seems that they are likely to continue) it is only natural to expect that Russia will gradually grow closer to China, as well as to India and other Asian countries with which it has fewer problems. Under this scenario, broader, multilateral partnerships including Russia and Asian countries, which seemed unrealistic when prime minister Yevgeniy Primakov first came up with the idea in the late 1990s, can in fact materialize. Of course, Russia and China both need good relations with the US and the West to develop their respective economies. But if they are put in a situation where their problems with the US to outweigh incentives for cooperation, then their choices will be severely limited. Naturally, Russian-Chinese cooperation does not have to develop as an outright challenge to the West. If the US pursues a more reasonable policy, the impact of external factors in the Russian-

Chinese partnership will play a less important role, while economic projects and trade can come to the forefront.

US security analysts often ask: What can Russia or China do to oppose a specific US foreign policy action? This approach is too simplistic. At this current stage of American strength and optimism, there probably is not one single measure or treaty that can stop the US from pursuing a policy that both countries, as well as many other countries of the world, see as hegemonic. US and Western politicians and political analysts should not be preoccupied with any single symbolic act, but should be cautious about a much broader tendency. It seems that sooner or later the US and its allies will have to make fundamental choices about the post-cold war foreign policy of the Western alliance —either to continue consolidating the Western alliance, broadening its territory and military strength at the expense of the rest of the world and regardless of its wishes — or try to come to terms with other countries, accepting that all players in the post-cold war era will have to make some concessions and compromises. In the case of the former, the US and its allies will sooner or later begin to feel the disadvantages and dangers of having alienated large parts of the world, including regions where most of world's population and enormous natural resources are concentrated, and of having pushed countries which still are — or will soon become — strong military and economic powers in the direction of an anti-Western alignment.