

United States Posture in Consideration of a Sino-Russian Alliance

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

United States Posture in Consideration of a Sino-Russian Alliance, by Ms. Shawn E. A. Jones, USAID, 56 pages.

The relationship between China and Russia has varied from peace to conflict throughout the course of their history. However, since 1991 following the fall of the Soviet Union, as each nation sought for global relevance, Sino-Russian interactions have increased and relations have improved in a consistent upswing. Together, these nations are shaping a modern strategic partnership that is quickly shifting into a bona fide alliance with substantial regional influence in Asia, Africa, Eurasia, and the Middle East. The United States recognized the competitive and ideologically aligned spirit of these noted great powers in the 2017 National Security Strategy, posturing a whole-of-society approach towards protecting US national security and interests. While presenting the historical relevance of their relationships and the importance of leadership to envision and drive a strategic direction, this monograph posits that the United States should actively posture itself by advancing democracy, supporting and strengthening partnerships, and employing instruments of power in an effort to stymie authoritarian influence and desires to shift the international order.

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Acronyms

BRI	One Belt and One Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPC	Communist Party of China
DCA	Development Credit Authority
EU	European Union
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
OPIC	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic

Introduction

Similarly, I believe we must be resolute and unambiguous in our approach to those countries whose strategic interests are increasingly in tension with ours. It is clear that China and Russia, for example, want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions—to promote their own interests at the expense of their neighbors, America and our allies. That is why we must use all the tools of American power to provide for the common defense... We must do everything possible to advance an international order that is most conducive to our security, prosperity and values, and we are strengthened in this effort by the solidarity of our alliances.

—Former Defense Secretary James Mattis, Washington, DC

The United States is in a new era of great power competition. The number of state actors challenging US national security and the security of US allies is growing, with China and Russia resurging as great power nemeses. Sino-Russian relations are at an all-time high and on a positive course, leaving indications that the growth of their strategic partnership is quickly becoming a strategic alliance. The mutability of such a partnership positions itself to compete against the United States aggressively, and challenge the existing international order and democratic ideals the United States and American allies forged and have defended for nearly eighty years.

The present Sino-Russian strategic partnership is fastened together by shared authoritarian ideology, and diplomatic and security agreements in place since the fall of the Soviet Union. Such a partnership aims at significantly weakening US influence while exerting control and dominance globally. Specifically, recent events such as agreement between Russia and China on military partnership, development and use of nuclear weapons, economic and trade agreements, renewed diplomatic relationships, agreement and defense of positions within the UN Security Council (UNSC), and each state’s growing influence within their respective regions are factors that signal strengthening toward an alliance. Given the aggression and tenacity of Sino-Russian relations, absent appropriate economic, political, diplomatic, and military posture and response, US influence will diminish globally among allies and partners as China and Russia strengthen their partnership to form an alliance and garner greater strategic geographical influence.

As a traditional definition, either states form alliances to counter threats by aligning with weaker states to balance power against a stronger state, or by bandwagoning with a stronger state that poses the greatest threat. States do not just ally because of power; they do so in response to the most threatening power.¹ However, the concept of alliances and alliance formation has shifted from its traditional definition. A modern interpretation of alliances expands past strict security or threat lines to collaborations based upon shared values and interests, shared goals or threats, and assuming responsibilities jointly to handle such challenges.² Perhaps this is a result of the expanding nature of international relations or as a result of the growth and preponderance of non-state actors such as an insurgency or global institutions that share similar goals. An expanded view towards alliances and alliance formation is important as one analyzes the developing relationships between nations, regional counterparts, and ideological kin, and is necessary to understanding the Sino-Russian strategic partnership.

The question of US posture in consideration of a Sino-Russian alliance is timely given the pressing threat such an alliance could have against US national security. To respond to this question, the monograph examines the historical relationship between China and Russia, including their challenges, failures, and successes that serve as building blocks or lessons learned for a modern era of a strategic alliance. Additionally, the monograph will apply insight from history and current affairs to provide a perspective of how Russia and China are influencing economic, diplomatic, and military arenas, signifying a stable alliance with long-term vision for shifting global order. Finally, this monograph will discuss how the United States should respond

¹Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985), 7, accessed, April 4, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2538540.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8adbf1b9d6201bd050eb3ceed024f054>. See for a detailed discussion of alliance formation based on Balance of Power Theory and Bandwagoning.

² Sir James Bevan, "Security Alliances: Drivers in the Emerging World Order" (Speech, Delhi, India, April 18, 2013), UK Government, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/security-alliances-drivers-in-the-emerging-world-order>.

in each of these spheres of influence—either with challenging or agreeing to current US policy, or by providing new approaches to how the United States should respond by shifting its policy and thus its influence. Ultimately, this monograph aims to inform how the United States should posture itself in the future, working to advance principles of democracy and partnership that have defined its place in the global sphere over decades.

The monograph is divided into two parts. The first part provides background on the history of relations between China and Russia. The available literature on the subject matter is voluminous; where possible, this monograph highlights arguments from authors that help to support the monograph’s discussion. For example, Michał Lubina’s review and analysis on Russia and China concludes that current Sino-Russian relations represent a return to past engagement similar to the 17th century, that rapprochement between 1991-2017 has been extraordinary despite highly complex or challenging engagement, and that Russia and China simply see the world different from their western counterparts.³ This view drives their engagement. Similarly, Sherman Garnett’s collection of essays on the rapprochement or rivalry between Russia and China offers a significant assessment of Sino-Russian relations until 2000.⁴ The benefits of the arguments are unfortunately time-bound as the analysis is unable to bear witness to the events of September 11, 2001 that helped to shape a new era of US global engagement and security to stem the tide and spread of terrorism and Islamic extremism preponderant in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The second part of the monograph identifies areas in which the United States can posture itself in consideration of a growing Sino-Russian strategic partnership and potential alliance.

³ Michał Lubina currently serves as an assistant professor at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His first book written in 2017, *Russia and China: A Political Marriage of Convenience—Stable and Successful*, (Opladen, Germany: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2017), explores the relationship between the two nations historically to present.

⁴ In 2000, at the time of writing and editing *Rapprochement or Rivalry*, Mr. Garnett was the Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia. He currently serves as the Dean of James Madison College, Michigan State University.

Defending democratic ideals and US strategic partnerships is the consistent theme of this section and is important to consider given the current state of US policy that holds in jeopardy once-stable partnerships and alliances. Notwithstanding existing partnerships with the United States, there has been an increase in interest from the global community expressing a willingness to travel new roads to partner with China and Russia on their terms. Through diplomatic, economic, and security means, external partnerships are being forged; thus, the relationship between Russia and China is growing stronger in such a manner that a formal alliance is likely.

This monograph does not intend to present an exhaustive representation of every historical endeavor between the two nations. A monograph of such limited length could not possibly cover the vast and intricate history of Sino-Russian relations and partnership in such a deep manner. Such an endeavor falls slightly outside of the scope of research that aims to present how the United States should posture itself. However, this monograph does attempt to present critical snapshots in history through four time periods and identify principal factors or conditions that motivated the development of a Sino-Russian partnership or provoked its fall. Taking this history into consideration, a clearer picture of the current Sino-Russian strategic partnership is presented and helps to support the argument that the current partnership is unlike those of the past. The current relationship is morphing into an alliance and has greater potential for success given the strategic vision of both nations and the shift globally to partner with these countries. The United States should position itself in consideration of that reality.

Part I. Significant History of Sino-Russian Relations

Much has been written about the relationship between China and Russia. Such rich, diverse, and oft-times troubling interactions have shaped the historical relational identity between the two nations. Though somewhat naive, one could reduce the relationship to its simplest terms:

China and Russia share a land border. This physical reality forces engagement and guides decisions of whether and how to move forward in war or in peace. Yet, sharing a common land border is a primitive entrance; throughout history, the two nations have engaged each other on diplomatic, economic, and security means. As history progressed, the complexity of the relationship between the two landmasses has been shaped by a shifting world that employed new thought in the form of new political theory, the development of a global community, and circumstantial and regional politics.

Asymmetrical Win-Win: The 17th and 18th Centuries

In his book, *Russia and China*, author Michał Lubina posits that the current state of Chinese and Russian affairs is a revision of 17th century relations that predated the period of European Enlightenment. To understand and determine the accuracy of this statement and relevance for current Sino-Russian interactions, one must understand the dynamics of that time period. Seventeenth-century Sino-Russian relations were shaped in a principal of neutrality, both for institutions that did not infringe upon the “prerogatives or sensibilities” of the other and culture which accepted customs and the political culture of the state to maintain successful relations.⁵ Essentially, Sino-Russian relations operated according to natural law, or the Law of Nations, which prioritized a responsibility to the state to preserve and protect itself first, then to assist other states.⁶ Trade and other engagements were permitted so long as the commercial

⁵ Lubina, 25. Lubina provides a historical description of the 1689 Nerchinsk-Kyakhta Treaty that was modified in 1727, which provides an example of how China and Russia eventually established diplomatic relations. The prospect of lost trade and impending war helped to broker a compromise which ultimately left China in a superior position to Russia, yet with Russia in a stronger position in comparison with other European nations. Commercial privileges and access reached a balancing point, garnering an asymmetric win-win.

⁶ Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations, Or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns, with Three Early Essays on the Origin and Nature of Natural Law and on Luxury* (LF ed.), (1797), 10, accessed March 17, 2019, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/vattel-the-law-of-nations-lf-ed>. Contrast Vattel’s natural law argument with Immanuel Kant’s essay on “Perpetual Peace,” points of which were incorporated in the United Nations.

activity did not interfere with the duty the state owed to itself. Such a principal cultivated humanity and society with an objective of creating a universal republic.

Sino-Russian relations existed soundly in this frame until the European Enlightenment in the late-18th century, which were characterized by a period of widespread Europeanization and modernization of political and cultural systems of engagement.⁷ As the rest of the world progressed in thought and political system making, China and Russian found itself at odds with how to move forward in light of new political dynamics. The center of the world was shifting towards Europe in an effort to advance a more regulated and rules-based international legal order, also known as positive law.⁸ Finding advantage in this western shift and inflexibility in the ruling Qing Dynasty to “embrace political and economic change,” Russia began exploiting China in tandem with western cohorts.⁹

Ideological Influence and Diversion: 1917-1979

The next most significant phase of Sino-Russian relations was rooted in the revolutionary spirit of both countries against world imperialism. This view was espoused by Vladimir Lenin, a political theorist and Bolshevik leader in Russia who identified ideologically with communism, which is a system of governing that seeks to reduce inequalities between classes of citizens.¹⁰ The

⁷ Lubina, 26.

⁸ The definition of positive law is “legal rules enacted by people in a political community. Positive law includes constitutions, statutes, and regulations. Legal Information Institute, “Positive Law,” *Cornell University*, accessed March 31, 2019, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/positive_law.

⁹ Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.), 23. For deeper treatment, see Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), 115-254. Consider also the significance of Peter the Great’s economic, political, military, cultural and foreign policy reforms that transformed Russia into a great power within twenty-five years from a backward state to a viable European competitor. Interestingly, the Chinese would also see Peter the Great as influential to China’s revolutionary aims as many Chinese thinkers studied Peter the Great. For deeper treatment on this topic, see Don C. Price, *Russia and the Roots of the Chinese Revolution, 1896-1911* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

¹⁰ Lukin, 75. As Lukin notes, Asian people were seen as allies of Russia and other Western communists. All groups sought to override and defeat imperialism.

Bolshevik Revolution was a significant turning point in Russia that aimed at achieving unity amongst Western communists and providing assistance to growing anti-imperialist movements in Asia.¹¹ Specifically for China, the fervor of the Bolshevik Revolution ignited a shift within the political structure. Already sparked by the events of the May Fourth movement in which students from colleges and universities issued five resolutions and protested in front of the Forbidden City at Tiananmen Square¹², the translation of the Communist Manifesto into Chinese and the development of a Sino-Russian news agency and foreign language school effectively served to spread communist propaganda and advocate recruitment.¹³ In 1921, Moscow-based agents engaged Marxist study groups filled with intellectuals and journalists to organize formally the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹⁴

The formation of the Communist Party in both China and Russia was influenced greatly by the political leaders of the day, for better or worse. For Russia, revolutionary Stalinism was an instrumental but disruptive force that imbalanced agricultural and industrial development while

¹¹ Ibid. Also see, Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, & China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 243-262. Skocpol presents a detailed analysis of the rise of two communist party factions, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the CCP, both of whom were influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution and financed by the Soviets. The KMT based itself on urban support and resources (leading to its downfall), whereas the CCP upon peasant support and resources. Eventually the peasant revolt was victorious and drove out the KMT the cities.

¹² Spence, 286. The May Fourth movement is regarded as the signature step toward cultural and political upheaval in opposition to global imperialism that occurred in China 100 years ago, paving the way to communism. Spence characterizes the movement as both limited to the actual day, and broad in consideration of the “complex emotional, cultural, and political developments that followed.” Students gathered on May 4, 2019 to introduce five resolutions. “(O)ne protested the Shandong settlement reached at the Versailles conference; a second sought to awaken ‘the masses all over the country’ to an awareness of China’s plight; a third proposed holding a mass meeting of the people of Peking; a fourth urged the formation of a Peking student union; and a fifth called for a demonstration that afternoon in protest of the Versailles treaty terms.” For additional information, see: R. Keith Schoppa, “From Empire to People’s Republic,” in *Politics in China: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, ed. by William A. Joseph (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹³ Spence, 295-96.

¹⁴ Joseph, 57.

using force against sectors of the population.¹⁵ This forced collectivism experienced similar abysmal failure in China three decades later when Mao Zedong initiated his Great Leap Forward, an incoherent and aggressive economic policy to shift China from an agrarian to an industrialized society. The Great Leap Forward created internal political discord, trade imbalances leading to food shortages and famine, and resulted in an estimated fifty to sixty million Chinese deaths.¹⁶

Despite these ultimate results, what transpired between Stalin's and Mao's regimes at the time was the development of the Sino-Soviet Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance Treaty of 1950 once Mao defeated the Kuomintang-run government and the CCP took power. This treaty replaced that signed in 1945 between the Soviets and Kuomintang-run China, which was facilitated by pressure from the United States and the Soviet's in exchange for Soviet support in the Sino-Japanese war. Following the victory of the CCP and with Mao firmly in power, Stalin could achieve asymmetric leverage over China by obtaining the economic and territorial concessions he previously sought in Manchuria and Xinjiang with the Kuomintang government. Similarly, Mao obtained economic aid for reconstruction and the security he sought against perceived US imperialism.¹⁷

However, such a friendship was short-lived when Nikita Khrushchev took power. Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" signaled a departure and condemnation of Stalin's policies of which Mao was very fond.¹⁸ As political leadership shifted, so did the application of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the expansion of socialism in both countries. An ideology that once united

¹⁵ Luthi, 21.

¹⁶ Frederick C. Teiwes, "Mao Zedong in Power (1949-1976)," in *Politics in China: An Introduction, 2nd edition*, ed. by William A. Joseph (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87-89.

¹⁷ Luthi, 29, 31.

¹⁸ Luthi, 49. In the speech, which he advanced without clearance, Khrushchev specifically blamed Stalin for military mistakes made during World War II, the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist camp, and for crimes committed during his final years in leadership. This speech helped to provide a divisive rift between revisionist Soviets and the staunch Mao who lauded and emulated Stalin's efforts.

the two nations would also be central to the split that ensued between the two countries. In Mao's view, Khrushchev's statements threatened the internal power base he was struggling to retain and signaled a capitulation to the United States in the guise of peaceful co-existence. Khrushchev heralded the economic and military strength of the USSR, leaving Mao to believe that the Soviets would exploit advantages gained with the United States. Mao also was concerned that "the two great powers might reach an accommodation at China's expense."¹⁹

Between 1960 and 1979, various issues contributed to the dissolution of Sino-Soviet relations. The following factors contributed to the collapse: territorial disputes, trade imbalance and disruptions, relational and ideological ambiguity, schisms in internal Russian politics, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviets including the fallout from the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviet military failure in Afghanistan; Soviet backing of Vietnam in Kampuchea against China, and Soviet nuclear build-up along the border with China aimed at intimidating the Chinese.²⁰ As the ideological split regarding economic development, de-Stalinization, and international relations deepened, the United States sought to capitalize by driving a wedge between the Sino-Soviet alliance.²¹

From in 1969 until 1979, relations between China and the United States strengthened, a pinnacle of which was the formal recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and establishment of diplomatic relations with this Communist nation.²² Engagement between the United States and China became a game of tactics. For the United States, the view under the Nixon Administration was that China's influence was growing in Asia and the principle players

¹⁹ Rajan Menon, "The Limits of Chinese-Russian Partnership," *Survival*, 51:3, 99-130 (2009): 102, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330903011529>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 102-104.

²¹ Luthi, 345.

²² Menon, 103.

of the region would be Japan, India, China and the United States in the future. President Nixon persuaded China that its interests would be served by participation in the world community. For China, as Soviet aggression heightened, the United States became less of a near threat compared to Russia. What followed in Sino-American interactions were important steps in building diplomatic relations. These included: public statements concerning the United States' new role in the world and multilateral diplomacy, withdrawal of US forces from Taiwan; advancing a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution that replaced Taiwan with the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Security Council, the historic visit of a sitting US President (Nixon) to China, and efforts to expand trade and people-to-people contact. By President Carter's Administration, the menacing Soviets were deeply entrenched in Afghanistan, creating greater opportunity and support for China and the United States to align. The Carter Administration agreed to recognize one China, cementing US policy concerning Taiwan and the PRC. In kind, China agreed to peaceful resolution with Taiwan.²³ In opposition to the Soviets, between the United States and China, the axiom of self-interest and self-preservation had proven itself true, even in the face of ideological differences.

Rapprochement: 1989-2001

Of the recent historic rapprochement between China and Russia, Li Jingjie provides a detailed overview in Garnett's collection of essays on Sino-Russian rapprochement.²⁴ Jingjie's article provides background on China and Russia's shift from neighbors to strategic partners.²⁵

²³ Dong Wang, *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 223-246.

²⁴ Li Jingjie is director of the Institute of East European, Russian, and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and is a professor of international politics.

²⁵ Li Jingjie, "From Good Neighbors to Strategic Partners," in *Rapprochement or Rivalry?: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia*, ed. by Sherman Garnett (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), 71-97.

Significantly, Jingjie outlines the political posturing by Sino-Soviet and Sino-Russian leaders following the fall of the Soviet Union.

Beginning in 1989, two years slightly prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, President Mikhail Gorbachev was instrumental in initiating a new era of Sino-Soviet relations by seeking to normalize bilateral relations with China. Such agreement was summarized in two communiqués, the most important of which was released in 1991 as a Joint Communiqué between Russian and China. Gorbachev and PRC Chairman Jiang Zemin signed the agreement that became a foundation of the new and future dynamic of interactions between the two countries. Importantly, as Jingjie notes, the communiqué first reinforced China's five principles of peaceful coexistence. These principles include "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in their respective internal affairs; mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence."²⁶

Additionally, the two nations agreed on six additional points that reflected steps forward to ameliorate the deteriorated conditions of relations that spiraled quickly in the 1960s and 1970s. First, China and the Soviet Union agreed to resolve all disputes peacefully between them without using force or the threat of force. Second, the nations agreed to initiate talks to cut military force and begin measures to build confidence on the border areas. Likewise, both sought to resolve problems on the eastern section of the Sino-Soviet border, while agreeing to continue talks on unresolved border questions. Such areas had been in dispute since 1969 and was an important factor that contributed to the deep sever in Sino-Soviet relations. All border issues were fully resolved in 2008 when a final border demarcation agreement was signed.²⁷

²⁶ Jingjie, 96.

²⁷Guo Shipeng and Ben Blanchard, "China Signs Border Demarcation Pact with Russia," Reuters, July 21, 2008, accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-russia-border/china-signs-border-demarcation-pact-with-russia-idUKPEK29238620080721>.

Next, the two nations worked to expanded trade, and technical and scientific cooperation that sought to broaden engagement between the citizens of both countries, foster exchanges, and facilitate cooperation. Fifth, the Soviets agreed to support China's position on Taiwan and recognized it as a part of the PRC. Finally, both agreed to issue a joint proclamation establishing a new international and political economic order.²⁸

This Communique helped shape the future of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership following the fall of the Soviet Union. The timing of this agreement was important given the historical context of the day. In 1989, China drew global criticism due to the Tiananmen Square incident. The incident was sparked by student occupation and protests at Tiananmen Square for nearly two months following the death of ousted Communist leader Hu Yaobang, an advocate of the student movements in China. The Tiananmen tragedy culminated on June 4, 1989 when Chinese troops fired on Chinese citizens, resulting in an untold number of deaths, though estimated in the thousands.²⁹

In moral outcry, the global community responded by issuing sanctions against China. Specifically, the United States suspended "foreign aid, government-to-government arms sales and military exchanges, commercial arms sales, high-level government exchanges, export licenses, and support in international financial institutions for loans and grants to China."³⁰ That the Soviet Union did not participate in sanctions against China with the West and instead expanded bilateral relations served as an important signal to China and quickly united the common outcasts. Sino-Soviet trade grew from \$370 million to \$6 billion between 1989 and 1991.³¹ Of their common

²⁸ Jingjie, 72-73.

²⁹ "Tiananmen Square Fast Facts," *CNN*, May 27, 2018, accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/asia/tiananmen-square-fast-facts/index.html>.

³⁰ "China: Economic Sanctions," *Congressional Research Service*, accessed March 17, 2019, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20160822_R44605_160c92226c43bf33f590663dd758fe9b4e0b8caa.pdf

³¹ Menon, 106.

interests, a relationship was shaped from diplomatic isolation as a result of Tiananmen sanctions, the collapse of communism in Russia, criticism against human rights issues and abuses, and a disenchantment with the West and American influence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.³²

Despite the fall of the Soviet Union and rejection of Communist ideology, President Boris Yeltsin maintained rapprochement with China, reinforcing the important priority position of this eastern economic and trade partner.³³ With many border issues resolved, China and the new Russia could advance a solid framework and principles that would guide their interactions and development of bilateral relations. In 1992, Yeltsin and Chinese leaders signed the “Joint Declaration Concerning the Fundamentals of Relations Between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation” and helped usher in a new era of Sino-Russian relations.³⁴

The Yeltsin presidency encouraged expanded bilateral cooperation with China despite the ebbs and flows of economic conditions, trade, border issues, and internal Russian political instability. What emerged in the view of Chinese foreign policy analysts was an independent

³² Elizabeth Wishnick, “Russia and China,” *Asian Survey*, 41:5, 797-821 (2001): 800, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2001.41.5.797>.

³³ Jingjie, 75-76.

³⁴ Jingjie, 78. Specifically, the 1992 Joint Declaration outlined seven fundamental principles. These include: “1. China and Russia see each other as friendly nations. 2. They will develop good-neighbor and mutually cooperative relations in accord with the five principles of peaceful coexistence. 3. Both nations will respect the right of each country’s citizens to freely select their country’s path of domestic development. 4. They will resolve disputes in a peaceful manner; they will not participate in military or political alliances directed against the other. 5. They will not conclude with any third country any kind of treaty or agreement that will harm the other country’s sovereignty and security; nor will they allow a third country to use their territory to harm the other country’s sovereignty and security interests. 6. Russia respects that Taiwan is an inseparable part of Chinese territory and guarantees that it will not develop official relations with Taiwan; Russia and Taiwan will maintain bilateral talks and cooperation at each level, based on the existing treaties. 7. Russia and China will continue to conduct negotiations on still unresolved border demarcation questions, reduce border-area military forces, and strengthen confidence between the two militaries.” Also, as Jinpie notes, the new declaration most resembled a “friendship and mutual non-aggression treaty.”

Russian state, detached from western influence.³⁵ Such independence signaled the potential for Russia and China to strengthen diplomatic relations beyond a friendly agreement to a strategic partnership. Two key moments in history reinforced the move towards a strategic partnership. The first occurred in 1994 when Presidents Yeltsin and Zemin agreed to a new Sino-Russian Joint Declaration that sought to secure a long-term and stable relationship through a 21st century “constructive partnership.”³⁶ The second transpired in 1996, when language was recommended to replace constructive partnership with an “equal and trustworthy strategic partnership.”³⁷ An additional Joint Communique summarized this change from constructive to strategic and advanced a new era of Sino-Russian strategic collaboration.

One should give consideration to the author’s closing remarks concerning the mid-1990’s Sino-Russian strategic partnership and determine whether the assessment still holds true. Jingjie characterizes the partnership as “not an alliance”, the nature of which is “an act of mutual strengthening and self-protection, not an instrument for outside aggression or assertiveness” and one in which “the world has nothing to fear from the development of this partnership nor from its future.”³⁸ This is now debatable. It is important to note that Jingjie’s essay was in *Rapprochement or Rivalry?* was published in 2000, somewhat in advance of rapidly increasing Islamic extremism and the events of September 11, 2001 that forever shaped global engagement and security.

Security cooperation was (and remains) an essential facet of the Sino-Russian alliance. The economic nature of arms sales shaped the Sino-Russian strategic partnership following the fall of the Soviet Union. In a 1997 US Army War College study, Stephen Blank outlines the dynamics of such weapons sales from Russia to China, something that raised eyebrows at the

³⁵ Ibid., 86.

³⁶ Ibid., 82.

³⁷ Ibid., 88.

³⁸ Ibid., 93.

time as to the intent. Blank suggested several economic, political and constituent-based motives for Russia's sales to China: 1) the Yeltsin government subsidized and consented to arms sales in support of the Russian defense industry, 2) the Russian Ministry of Defense needed cash flow to support the preservation of forces and divisions versus developing future technology, 3) the cost to procure modern weapons would have depleted the defense industry and exports were the escape needed for large firms unable to off-load weapons systems, 4) the ability to sell weapons increased the coffers of the defense industry and corrupt Russian leadership, and 5) sales would provide revenue to recover costs associated with procuring the next generation of weapons sales.³⁹ Blank provided a list of arsenal acquired by China to include weapons, missile systems, submarines, tanks, air defense, offensive air, and other aircraft systems that would advantage China over Taiwan or in the South China Sea.⁴⁰ By the time President Yeltsin resigned in 1999, Russia was China's prime weapons supplier.⁴¹

With new Russian leadership in President Vladimir Putin, the security cooperation relationship endured and was included as the basis of the new Sino-Russian Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation signed on July 16, 2001. Including the ability to combat the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia, the Treaty covers four additional areas of cooperation including joint actions to offset US hegemony, border resolution, arms and technology transfers, energy and raw materials.⁴²

³⁹ Stephen J. Blank, *The Dynamics of Russian Weapon Sales to China* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1997), 1-5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 37. Blank provides a listing of Russian arms sales to China through 1996 which was acquired from open source documents. His summary is sufficient for this monograph to demonstrate the point of increased arms sales during that time period.

⁴¹ Menon, 106.

⁴² Ari Cohen, "The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: A Strategic Shift in Eurasia?," *Heritage Foundation*, July 18, 2001, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/the-russia-china-friendship-and-cooperation-treaty-strategic-shift-eurasia>.

When signed, the treaty provoked questions as to whether it signaled a new Sino-Russian alliance. As noted previously, traditional alliances involve state-to-state agreements that are treaty-based with a strong defense angle.”⁴³ Significantly, while the new treaty did not contain a mutual defense clause, Article 8 of the treaty commits the two nations from entering into agreements with other states that could “harm the security, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of the partner”; and Article 9 “obliges the signatories to contact each other immediately in case of a threat of aggression against the partner.”⁴⁴ Such clauses are de facto components of alliances, which are sealed based on security considerations that are tense, threatening or provoke compromise to a country’s well-being.⁴⁵

As highlighted earlier, an expanded definition of alliance that extends beyond security issues is important as one considers the effect of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), both in 2001 and at the present. The SCO is one important example of a regionally and ideologically aligned group or de facto alliance that was started by Russia and China. The creation of the SCO in 2001 announced one month prior to the treaty signature signaled a significant step forward and towards strengthening the region and Sino-Russian relations.

The principal aim of the SCO at the time was to confront radical Islam and promote economic development.⁴⁶ Since inception as a small cohort of six Eurasian states including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan⁴⁷, the SCO expanded into a multinational, intergovernmental alliance of eighteen nations that as of 2019 seeks to:

⁴³ Sir James Bevan, “Security Alliances.”

⁴⁴ Wishnick, 803.

⁴⁵ Dai Weilai, “Will Trump Cement the China-Russia Alliance?,” *Diplomat*, June 6, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/will-trump-cement-the-china-russia-alliance>.

⁴⁶ Cohen, “Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.”

⁴⁷ The original grouping of states formed in 1996 and excluded Uzbekistan. The group was called the Shanghai Five. When this expanded in 2001 to become the SCO, Uzbekistan was added, making initial SCO membership six member states.

strengthen mutual trust and neighborliness among the member states; promote their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; make joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and move towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.⁴⁸

Perhaps it is the final point of establishing a “new international political and economic order” that should raise questions as to the long-term motivation of the SCO, and by default, the interconnected relationship of SCO voting member, participating observer, and non-voting dialogue partner states with and between the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. When created in 2001, the treaty’s one goal was to guard against US hegemony in the establishment of a new international order. Such a motivation, whether explicit or not is being carried forward in the SCO. Since the treaty was signed, both China and Russia have taken steps to expand influence globally and to shift aggressively the international order in their favor and in consideration or promotion of an authoritarian or anti-democratic system of governing.⁴⁹

An important point for discussion is whether a strengthening or expanding SCO signals a bona fide formation of allies in alignment with Sino-Russian principles of friendliness and cooperation identified in the treaty. One consideration towards this is Iran’s motive as it petitions for full SCO membership status. The United States considers Iran as a rogue state; it is a brutal regime against its own people, and a destabilizing, regional actor that threatens the United States

⁴⁸ “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, January 9, 2017, accessed March 17, 2019, http://eng.sectsc.org/about_sco/. As of the time of this writing, current SCO composition includes eight member states including India, Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, four observer states including Afghanistan, Belarus, Mongolia, and Iran (though Iran has petitioned for full membership), and six dialogue partners including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.

⁴⁹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Authoritarianism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/authoritarianism>. Authoritarianism is defined “as a principle of blind submission to authority as opposed to individual freedom of thought and action.” The website further notes: “In government, authoritarianism denotes any political system that concentrates power in the hands of a leader or a small elite that is not constitutionally responsible to the body of the people. Authoritarian leaders often exercise power arbitrarily and without regard to existing bodies of law, and they usually cannot be replaced by citizens choosing freely among various competitors in elections. Authoritarianism thus stands in fundamental contrast to democracy.”

and US allies.⁵⁰ Iran continues to promote terrorism and terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.⁵¹ Therefore, a threat from Iran remains a serious concern against US national security interests and US allies in the Middle East and Africa. The ascension of Iran to full membership contributes to the shifting nature of the SCO, perhaps moving more certainly from a simple to more powerful block of economically aligned nations that share ideology contravening established international norms and principles.

A second important consideration is Turkey's desire to become a member of the SCO as a balance against stalled negotiations to join the European Union (EU). The EU is a political and economic union of twenty-eight member states.⁵² Since 1959, Turkey sought collaboration in the EU bloc and took steps to become a full EU member. These steps included signing the Ankara Agreement, or a treaty of cooperation between the EU and Turkey in 1963, submitting a formal application for full membership to the EU in 1987, receiving acceptance in 1999 for EU candidacy, and commencing accession negotiations in 2005.⁵³

With EU negotiations stalled, by 2012 Turkey maneuvered for dialogue status in the SCO. While this status does not constitute full membership, it allows participation with the group. Finally, by 2016, following an attempted coup in Turkey that arrested negotiations for EU

⁵⁰ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2.

⁵¹ NSS, 7,11. Though not noted in the NSS, it is suspected that Iran also supports the rebel-led Houthi forces in Yemen. Consider Gerald Fierstein, "Iran's Role in Yemen and Prospects for Peace," US Institute of Peace, accessed, March 30, 2019, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2018/dec/05/iran%E2%80%99s-role-yemen-and-prospects-peace>. Fierstein provides a blog article for background on the role of Iran in Yemen.

⁵² Official statistic from the European Union website available at https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries_en, accessed March 30, 2019.

⁵³ Lina Wang, "Will Turkey Join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Instead of the EU?" *Diplomat*, November 24, 2016, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/will-turkey-join-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-instead-of-the-eu>. Additional background is provided by Hurriyet Daily News, accessed March 30, 2019 <http://www.hurriyetcailynews.com/president-erdogan-eu-not-everything-turkey-may-join-shanghai-five-10632>.

membership, President Recep Erdoğan expressed a more resolute posture to begin moving Turkey towards SCO membership status, partly driven by the indefinite pause in EU accession and partly considered by Erdoğan as a sound move for Turkey since he perceived the SCO becoming stronger and more dominant than the EU. Such a decision by Turkey's President demonstrated compelling insight into the growing influence and global strength of the SCO and the perspective of the lengths to which apparent disenfranchised nations will go for growth and relevance. Of the balance between the EU and the SCO, Erdoğan noted that Turkey should not be fixated on joining the EU and that SCO membership would enable Turkey to act with greater ease even in its bid for EU status.⁵⁴ Essentially, Erdoğan was willing to ride both sides of the fence in order to advance Turkey's economic and political aims.

Turkey's decision to join the SCO raises additional concerns related to security. Turkey is one of twenty-nine North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance members and has been such since 1952.⁵⁵ By design, NATO is a traditional security alliance that encompasses a consortium of democratic European states including Canada and the United States, all of which are committed to contributing financial and military resources to the North Atlantic region's security. Also, the organization promotes and enables democratic values. These values were cemented as part of the international order following World War II and expanded against Communist repression during the Cold War. Ideologically, socialist Russia and communist China clearly fall outside the scope of the Western world order. Even since the fall of the Soviet Union and expansion of NATO to include former Soviet-bloc states, Russia remains critical of NATO and views the organization as an encroaching alliance on its borders and against its sovereignty.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ NATO, "What is NATO?," accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>. Official statistics from NATO Official website.

Similar to NATO, SCO members agree to provide security and stability among member states. Should Turkey become a full-fledged SCO member, this may cause a conflict of interest. NATO member states should rightly question Turkey's allegiance, specifically whether this long-term ally will choose to remain in support of NATO or leave to take advantage of a growing SCO. Such a move to participate in both organizations should certainly draw ire from long-standing NATO partners as full participation in both groups creates ambiguity, particularly should conflict arise between the two alliances in some distant future. Whether Turkey will support NATO and member states or will withdraw from NATO in order to take advantage of the growing SCO is a question beyond the scope of this monograph. Nevertheless, it is an important question to consider in light of a growing Sino-Russian alliance and expanding global influence.

Overall, the extent of the SCO's influence globally has not been fully realized. What began as a small cohort of Eurasian neighbors to counter Islamic extremism has expanded into a legitimate counter to western ideas of international order expressed in NATO and the United Nations. Whether such a contradiction will become dominate is yet to be seen.⁵⁶

The New Era: Shaping a Modern Sino-Russian Alliance

Eighteen years after the implementation of the treaty and creation of the SCO, the Sino-Russian strategic relationship is stronger, more pronounced, and growing. There are several factors that contribute to this including economic development and expansion, a desire to reshape the global world order and counter perceived US hegemony, an abiding distrust of the United States and other Western nations, and authoritarian leadership at the helm of both countries.

⁵⁶ The organization and member states are, however, signaling a shift posturing towards the formation of a new open world economy. See, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, "Interview: SCO Stands for Formation of Open World Economy, Says Secretary General," SCO, March 12, 2019, accessed March 30, 2019. <http://eng.sectesco.org/news/20190312/516049.html>; See also, Xi Jinping, "Work Together for an Open Global Economy that is Innovative and Inclusive," (Speech, Opening Ceremony of the First China International Import Expo, Shanghai, 2018), accessed January 21, 2019, <https://china.usc.edu/xi-jinping-%E2%80%9Cwork-together-open-global-economy-innovative-and-inclusive%E2%80%9D-nov-5-2018>.

Individually, the rise of these two modern superpowers already affects the ability of the United States to maintain peace and prosperity globally. However, united together and having both nations working to advance the strategic aims of a Sino-Russian alliance presents a thornier problem for the United States to navigate.

In 2015, Russia released its updated National Security Strategy (NSS) that incorporates considerations for national security and the national interest, any perceived threats and safeguards and the systems to facilitate such.⁵⁷ The Russian NSS reinforces Russia's ability to safeguard the sovereignty and protection of its territory and citizens, including those abroad; as well as contributing to resolving international problems, conflicts and ensuring interstate relations. A few key items bear noting.

First, there is a call to return to traditional Russian values and morals that seek for unity, respect for family values and patriotism. Such a statement is similar to Russian legitimization theories of imperialism that permitted expansion based on common denominators of religion (Russian Orthodoxy), culture (Pan-Slavist unity under Russia), and politics (Communism).⁵⁸ Second, the strategy persists in criticizing the United States and allies, noting that there is persistent political, economic, military, and informational pressure against Russia and its implementation of an "independent foreign and domestic policy."⁵⁹ Finally, Russia highlights the influence that weapons modernization, NATO expansion and influence, and engagement in Ukraine as factors that encroach upon Russian security, perception abroad and in proximity with neighboring states, and stability. To this end, Russia pledged to avert threats to national security by strengthening Russian internal unity, social stability, religious tolerance and interethnic

⁵⁷ Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015 – Full-text Translation", accessed April 4, 2019, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 32-42.

⁵⁹ Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russian National Security Strategy."

accord. Additionally, Russia will modernize the economy, expand partnerships, and seek equal trade and economic cooperation with foreign states. Finally, Russia will improve defense capabilities and moving to use force when nonviolence has proved ineffective.⁶⁰

Similarly, China's strategy has expanded over time to have a more global influence. In 2006, the strategy was thought to advance China as the dominant regional power in Asia, focusing less on military strengthening and more on peaceful development that incorporates economic growth and nationalism.⁶¹ China sought "soft balancing" versus "hard balancing" against the United States with the latter signifying traditional military buildup and formal alliances, and the former being an intentional diplomatic effort, engaging limited arms buildup, ad hoc cooperative exercises, and/or collaboration in regional or international organizations in a manner that seeks to limit the United States.⁶² The balancing against the United States remains an important criterion for China to achieve its goals, with specific consideration given to its ability to exert economic leverage over other nations while reducing exposure to Western coercion.⁶³ Significantly, China has expanded ownership over mines, oil wells, and farms to control commodities including energy, minerals, and food. Additionally, it has sought control over portions of maritime transportation systems, and diversified supply networks by building rail links and pipelines across Eurasia.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See generally, Yuan-Kang Wang, "China's Grand Strategy and U.S. Primacy: Is China Balancing American Power?," *The Brookings Institution* (2006), accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/wang2006.pdf>. Interestingly, Wang offers a definition of grand strategy that bears importance on the leadership to formulate a strategy that is appropriate for the power of the country and the shape of the international system, as well as capable of coping with unexpected challenges that emerge in the implementation of the strategy.

⁶² Ibid., 13-14.

⁶³ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Globalisation and Chinese Grand Strategy," *Survival*, 60:1, 7-40 (2018), 13, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1427362>.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 23-25.

Such leverage is the center-point of the new grand strategy, and China intends to employ geo-economics, or utilizing economic means to achieve geopolitical ends, in order to advance its goal.⁶⁵ The One Belt, One Road Initiative (BRI) is China's ambitious infrastructure project with plans to connect more than seventy countries from Asia to Europe via land and maritime transport routes. The popular view is that success of the BRI will catapult China into great power status, with the existing global order transformed into a Sino-centric system of norms and rules. Yet, a deeper dive into the BRI raises questions as to whether the strategy is a loose policy platform driven by bottom-up management, unsustainable economic policies and debt traps, challenges to intrastate relations, and ongoing internal Chinese struggles.⁶⁶ The success or failure of the BRI will prove itself over time; yet, it is important to recognize that such strategic vision poses a concern to the United States and its allies.

The 2017 US NSS acknowledges the challenges that Russia and China pose to US security, posterity, influence, and interests. Broadly, the NSS highlights Sino-Russian attempts to “make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.”⁶⁷ The factors that contribute to this assessment include those noted in the strategy's third pillar of preserving “Peace Through Strength”.⁶⁸

The NSS adeptly highlights the challenges it perceives are driven from each country. For China, the challenges stem from overreach in the Indo-Pacific region, expanding and exploitative

⁶⁵ Mark Beeson, “Goeconomics with Chinese Characteristics: the BRI and China's Evolving Grand Strategy,” *Economic and Political Studies*, September 3, 2018, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20954816.2018.1498988>.

⁶⁶ Lee Jones and Jinghan Zeng, “Understanding China's ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Beyond ‘Grand Strategy’ to a State Transformation Analysis,” *Third World Quarterly*, December 11, 2018, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046>.

⁶⁷ NSS, 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

economic influence globally, corruption, surveillance, and authoritarian modes of governance, and an expanding nuclear arsenal and strengthened military designed to emulate the United States military institutions. Of Russia, the NSS notes attempts to return to great power status, maintain or establish influence at its borders, subvert and destabilize by utilizing cyber capabilities, strengthen and expand military capabilities, and generally weaken US influence globally, but particularly among partners.⁶⁹

As each nation seeks to advance its individual goals and long-term strategic plans, there is a tremendous advantage to continuing a Sino-Russian partnership and shaping a security or military alliance that returns to advance the principles of friendship and mutual cooperation articulated in the 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty. Time will determine whether the relationship between China and Russia fully represents a resurrected 17th century asymmetrical win-win in which China leads and a weaker Russia strategically follows. However, what is quite clear is that both countries bring a certain and necessary strength to the partnership.

China clearly needs partners and allies to support its grand strategy and economic aims. Factors such as opposing China's militarization of the South China Sea, perceived human rights violations, and unfair trade practices have negatively affected perceptions of this emerging superpower, thus directly affecting China's influence globally.⁷⁰ Russia has signaled a commitment to support China on economic endeavors, particularly in light of trade actions and tariffs announced by the United States in 2018.⁷¹ The unwavering support from Russia towards its partner in light of the recent \$250 billion tit-for-tat trade war between the United States and China sends a strong message of commitment at all costs to the United States and Russia's Eurasian and

⁶⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁰ "Russia and China Make Show of Unity as US Relations Falter," *Deutsche Welle*, June 8, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://p.dw.com/p/2z9g6>.

⁷¹ Ben Westcott, "China Says Relations with Russia at 'Best Level In History'," *CNN*, April 6, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/06/asia/russia-china-relations-us-intl/index.html>.

Middle East counterparts.⁷² This is significant given the influence of China's BRI that spreads across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and could dramatically affect the economic and diplomatic reach of the United States among traditional partners along these routes.

Demonstrating partnership support may have unintended consequences and potentially begin to tip the scales of international cooperation away from the United States and towards Sino-Russia.

Similarly, China's continued support of Russia and investment in Russia contends against the backlash the former Communist nation receives from western nations. This is also significant as Russia seeks to expand influence. Following the 2014 annexation of Crimea in which Russia forcefully and illegally seized sovereign Ukrainian land, Russia experienced decreased investment from Western nations, limited suspension of G8 membership, and diplomatic and economic sanctions.⁷³ Such stiff penalties have impacted Russia's "financial, defense, and energy industries" thereby restricting Russian-funded banks from accessing Western finance.⁷⁴ However, Russia has experienced opportunity and prosperity in its relationship with China, its largest trading partner at \$86 billion per year.⁷⁵ This opportunity is important as similarly economically weaker states observe the positive benefit of partnering with China. Whether economic

⁷² Tim O'Connor, "Russia Will Take China's Side Against U.S. in World Trade War," *Newsweek*, June 20, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-will-take-china-side-against-us-world-trade-war-986417>. The trade war

⁷³ Weilai, "Will Trump Cement." Also consider, NATO, "Statement by North Atlantic Council on Crimea," *NATO*, March 18, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_164656.htm and Lorne Cook, "Putin Marks 5th Anniversary of Russia's Annexation of Crimea," *PBS*, March 18, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/putin-marks-5th-anniversary-of-russias-annexation-of-crimea>. In 2019, five years following the illegal seizure of Crimea from Ukraine, the international community and particularly NATO actively condemn Russia's actions and refuse to recognize Crimea as a part of Russia. The situation is worse now as Russia increases military build-up on the peninsula and seeks to modernize the region. Sanctions remain in force and whether NATO takes military remains to be seen.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "Russia-China Partnership at Best Level in History: Putin," *Xinhuanet*, May 26, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/26/c_137207774.htm.

dependence constitutes a new asymmetric relationship ultimately becomes an inconsequential inquiry as both nations experience great benefits through cooperation.

Shaping a Strategic Alliance: The Influence of Putin and Xi Jinping

In the new era of alliance shaping, leadership matters. China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin continue to support each other publicly, signaling an enduring commitment on security matters and military cooperation in an attempt to demonstrate to the United States that the Sino-Russian alliance is maintains a stable and deliberate closeness between the Armed Forces of both nations.⁷⁶ Long-term success for the strategies of both nations and the overall alliance is persona driven. Perhaps a change in leadership could disrupt progress, yet a shift is unlikely in the near future given the re-election of Vladimir Putin and the ascension to president for life status for Xi Jinping.

The authoritarian leadership personalities of Presidents Putin and Jinping and the growing allegiance they experience within their respective countries help drive and strengthen current Sino-Russian partnership whether for the advantage of a formal alliance or for the advancement of their individual strategic interests. Perhaps there is a return to 17th century asymmetry and natural law as Michal Lubina suggests. Alternatively, perhaps, in alignment with individual state strategic visions, each understands that relevance and reshaping of a new world order must be done in coordination with ideologically similar superpowers. Advocating new norms helps to advance the national interest.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Shannon Tiezzi, "China, Russia 'Show Americans' Their Close Relationship," *Diplomat*, April 10, 2018, accessed March 27, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/china-russia-show-americans-their-close-relationship>.

⁷⁷ Sergei Medvedev, "Rethinking the National Interest: Putin's Turn in Russian Foreign Policy," *The Marshall Center Papers, No. 6* (Garmisch-Parenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2005), 40. In discussing Russia's adherence to the values of democracy following the fall of the Soviet Union, Medvedev notes that acceptance of liberal idealism "is a pragmatic approach in which accepting dominant Western norms has a long-term strategic value, a means of advancing the national interest." One could infer that this remains a modus operandi of both Russia and China with the west. Yet this is shifting as the Sino-Russian alliance is shifting.

Whether explicit or not, Vladimir Putin seeks to revive the glory days of Russian imperialism in which the state's primary function is expansion, control, development and defense of territory.⁷⁸ The four roots that classify Russian imperialism are "geographical position, economic system, expansionist tradition, and a deliberate expansionist policy conducted by the Russian ruling elite."⁷⁹ However, the current world order does not permit physical expansion without punitive measures. The annexation of Crimea is one significant example of distaste for such maneuvers. Therefore, Putin expands Russia's reach in modern ways across the interconnectedness of the web, satellites, and other modes of information. Internally, Putin has become an informational autocrat, or one who attempts to convince the population that he is a benevolent leader in order to gain broad support from the voting bloc in Russia to advance his strategic whim.⁸⁰

However, Putin's tactics are far from benevolent and include manipulation and distortion of facts, presentation of fake news, use of opinion polls, sidelining critics, manufacturing broad-based support, employing yes men and information agents, and decision-making sans advice or agreement of politicians.⁸¹ Although Putin won his 2018 election by a tremendous margin of nearly seventy-six percent of the vote, such a victory was not without conflict. These include voting irregularities and the timely conviction of Alexy Navalny, Putin's primary competitor and main opposition party leader who was barred from entering the races on embezzlement charges that he asserts were contrived by Moscow.⁸² To the extent that Russia is able to prosper under

⁷⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁹ Van Herpen, 15.

⁸⁰ Daniel Treisman, ed. *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics and Policy in Putin's Russia* (Washington: Brookings, 2018), 14.

⁸¹ Ibid., 14, 20.

⁸² "Russia Election: Vladimir Putin Wins by Big Margin," BBC, March 19, 2018, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43452449>. The article notes irregularities such as: "Voting papers found in some ballot boxes before polls opened; observers were barred from entering some

Putin with such a closed and antiquated mode of governing will determine how and whether he will be able to sustain his rule. Also important is the manner in which Putin is able to maneuver and improve relations with the West, a topic of great interest to the Russian people who favor such a step.⁸³

Similarly, leadership in China remains critical to its strategic advancement and achievement as global superpower. Xi was raised in an elite communist household, his father a prominent party member who was eventually imprisoned by Mao. Xi spent his teenage years being educated in peasantry and communist ideology, both of which shaped Xi's emotional toughness and independent thought that so characterizes the leader. Xi proved his ability to lead effectively and consolidate power; his unassuming yet competent nature surprised many as he diligently, carefully, and competently worked his way to become president of China in 2013, signaling a new era of Chinese politics.⁸⁴

President Xi defines the modern era of Chinese policy through his "Xi Jinping Thought," a neo-socialist view on Chinese modernization and governance.⁸⁵ This thought provides a two-stage approach divided into fifteen-year increments from 2020-2050, the first of which is achievement of the BRI and the second of which is creating China as a modern socialist country that is advanced and prosperous, strong and harmonious.⁸⁶ Xi Jinping Thought and the President's leadership is considered so influential that the plan was incorporated into the

polling stations; some people were bussed in amid suspicion of forced voting; webcams at polling stations were obstructed by balloons and other obstacles."

⁸³ Treisman, 20.

⁸⁴ Carrie Gracie, "The Thoughts of Chairman Xi," *BBC*, October 13, 2017, accessed January 24, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Thoughts_Chairman_Xi.

⁸⁵ Michael A. Peters, "The Chinese Dream: Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49:14, 1299-1304, (2017), 1299, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1407578>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1300.

Constitution during the 19th Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress on October 24, 2017, leveling Xi's leadership as influential as that of Mao Zedong.⁸⁷ The result of this dynamic plan and influence enables Xi to penalize corruption among CPC elites and diminish access to external western thought through constraining the internet and other media.⁸⁸ The methodical management of China's internal affairs enabled Jinping to align his party and remove China's Presidential term limits in place since 1990, effectively making him China's president for life, should he choose.⁸⁹ Essentially, within five years of leadership, Xi was able to consolidate power and influence the party to adopt his vision of China in an overwhelming fashion.

This move to make Xi the proverbial Emperor is not without concern as to the direction and future of China geopolitically. Whether China continues to adhere to Xi Jinping Thought is contingent upon placation within the Communist Party to permit Xi to drive the ship, and the overall success of the BRI that is the lynchpin to sustain party influence and geopolitical relevance. However, the BRI continues to receive criticism in international spheres as a weak and unfocused set of policy initiatives, a strategic blunder and overstretch of China's economic capacity, an approach that lacks centralized direction and management, an overly hinged effort to partner with weak nations, and neo-colonialism.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Grace, "The Thoughts of Chairman Xi."

⁸⁹ Stephen McDonnell, "China's Xi Allowed to Remain 'President for Life' as Term Limits Removed," *BBC*, March 11, 2018, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43361276>. The vote to remove the Constitutional limit was approved overwhelmingly. Out of 2,964 votes, three were abstentions and two were no-votes.

⁹⁰ See Beeson, "Goeconomics with Chinese Characteristics"; and Lee Jones and Jinghan Zeng, "Understanding China's 'Belt and Road Initiative.' Also consider: The World Bank, "Belt and Road Initiative," March 29, 2018, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>; and Tanner Greer, "One Belt, One Road, One Big Mistake," *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2018, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/06/bri-china-belt-road-initiative-blunder>. Green provides an argument against the United States emulating the BRI by presenting factors signifying its inevitable failure.

All told, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is a growing alliance that is shaped by the influence of political leaders, support for economic and security interests, and an enduring commitment to shift the international order. As former Secretary Mattis indicated, the aims of China and Russia are to destabilize the current world order and promote their own interests. As such, the United States should take steps to counter the growing alliance, even by positioning the two nations in opposition to the other when possible. By advancing and advocating democratic principles of governance and supporting partners and allies globally, it is possible that the United States could influence or stall the expansion of a Sino-Russian alliance.

Part II. Managing the Sino-Russian Alliance

As a Sino-Russian alliance strengthens, the United States should aim to constructively balance against this expanding strategic partnership. The effect of an unchecked partnership could hamper the United States' ability to advance its own and partner interests in the coming decades. Balancing against the effect of a Sino-Russian alliance will require constructively using diplomatic, security and economic tools, strengthening and sustaining commitment to international partners, and working with all tools of power to stifle alliance expansion.

Sustain and Strengthen International Influence

Maintaining strong diplomatic relationships globally is essential to diminishing the effectiveness and vigor of a growing Sino-Russian alliance. American diplomacy is a necessary and dynamic tool designed to advance US interests, protect partnerships, promote security and economic development, and advance the core tenets of democracy.⁹¹ However, the image of the United States as a beacon and expositor of freedom and diversity has been tarnished because of conflicts abroad. Protracted wars and regional conflicts have shifted some in international fora to decry a double standard by the United States as it seeks to maintain security interests abroad in

⁹¹ US Department of State, "Discover Diplomacy," accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/discoverdiplomacy/diplomacy101/issues/267356.htm>.

tandem with advancing democratic principles globally.⁹² Yet, democracy is the pillar upon which the United States was built. The wars fought and the economic policies engaged seek to promote that principle for the peace and security of the United States and the global community, managed under the United Nations system as a whole.⁹³

Despite perceived erosion of US values due to leadership and policy shifts coupled with engagement for eighteen years in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, the United States still maintains significant influence on the global stage and exists as a valued partner for many nations in support of defensive efforts against maligned actors.⁹⁴ For example, the efforts of coalition forces in Iraq to secure that nation against the Islamic State did not wholly end terrorism, but reduced its propensity by weakening and scattering the enemy, restoring governance in that region, and solidifying diplomatic relationships with the Government of Iraq.⁹⁵

Similarly, diplomatic engagement efforts and military alignment in order to draw partners such as NATO and regional or internal armies into the fight in Afghanistan have actually helped to advance principles of freedom, rule of law, good governance, and equality rejected by the

⁹² US Agency for International Development, “Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance,” updated October 26, 2018, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy>. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) designs initiatives in that help to protect human rights; promote accountability and transparency; impact youth to be drivers of change, peace, and prosperity; and, advance democratic governance, citizen participation, transparent and fair political citizen participation, justice and rule of law, and rights of civil society and media to maintain independence.

⁹³ The United States was a charter member of the United Nations. The Preamble of the United Nations promotes tolerance, unity, international peace and security, and economic and social advancement for all. See, United Nations, “Preamble,” accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble/index.html>.

⁹⁴ US Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge,” accessed July 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf> Also keep in consideration the perpetual battles the United States and allies have fought to counter violent extremism around the world in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Northern, Western and Eastern Africa, Nigeria, Central and Southeast Asia.

⁹⁵ US Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Iraq,” accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6804.htm>.

former Taliban-run government. The US military, along with NATO partner nations, has diligently worked to train Afghan forces to defend national interests and push the Afghan National Army towards some semblance of a functional military capable of handling threats. Such work supported conditions placed upon the Government of Afghanistan following its first election in 2014 and the first democratic transfer of power in that country.⁹⁶

In Afghanistan, the United States is reinforcing principles through development initiatives that it understands leads to strong and secure democratic states. These development programs include broad-based health services to reduce instances of mother, infant and child mortality, and general health care to rural Afghan populations. Additional initiatives include, basic and higher education programs to position Afghan students to access jobs in the marketplace, women's empowerment and opportunity in all spheres of society, and democratic systems advancement that also promotes respect for civil society participation and governance. Finally, economic initiatives include infrastructure projects that will bring electricity and hopes for prosperity throughout Afghanistan, and government-to-government assistance to a ruling Afghan political system to take ownership and leadership over internal development.⁹⁷ As was true when President John F. Kennedy established the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the same holds true now that the United States has "political obligations as the single largest counter to the adversaries of freedom."⁹⁸ The US efforts in Afghanistan, along with partner nations, led to a significant shift in the Afghan political context. As a result,

⁹⁶ US Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Afghanistan," accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>.

⁹⁷ US Agency for International Development, "Afghanistan, Our Programs," updated March 25, 2019, accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/our-work>.

⁹⁸ US Agency for International Development, "USAID History," updated February 16, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/usaaid-history>.

diplomatic initiatives to create a peace framework between the US, Taliban and Government of Afghanistan will propel Afghanistan towards a level of stability it has not seen since the 1970s.⁹⁹

Though the management of Afghan diplomatic relations may not be seen as directly related to countering a rising Sino-Russian alliance, it serves as a modern case study for political leadership, cautiously reminding of the importance of advancing democracy through diplomatic, economic, and informational means as well as sustaining the fight for partners and allies.¹⁰⁰

Russia's failure to spread communism as a governance model in Afghanistan unhinged that nation, and opened the door for extremism. The loss of American resources and lives during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars serves as a painful but hopeful reminder that the United States should continue to defend democracy at all costs.¹⁰¹ Abdicated global responsibilities as the arbiters of democracy leave only holes for anti-democratic beliefs to root influence.

The United States should reinforce by practice and in international fora the principles of freedom and democracy and advocate wholeheartedly their aim. American presidents addressing UNGA have generally expressed to this diverse global audience both the challenges and ideals of America. Most of this has been received with applause and renewed respect for the United States because of the commitment such statements make and actions taken globally to keep these ideals. While addressing the United Nations, political leaders should be cautious to continue communicating from one Presidential Administration to the next those basic US principles of democracy and freedom, thereby ensuring consistency in messaging regardless of political party

⁹⁹ Griffe Witte, "Afghanistan War," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, updated January 23, 2019, accessed March 17, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Afghanistan-War>. This site provides an overview of actions in Afghanistan from 1978 until the present.

¹⁰⁰ Diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME) are considered instruments of power or a means to achieve a strategic ends. A whole of government approach is needed to advance the NSS and meet strategic objectives. For the military's take on DIME, see Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018).

¹⁰¹ US Department of Defense, "Casualty Status," updated March 29, 2019, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status>.

or partisan aim. Strong statements by the President reassure the global community, both allies and opponents, that it can trust that American will fight for such ideals. The world can rely on the United States to step to the fore to defend democracy abroad.¹⁰²

Unique to American ideals in the post-World War II and Cold War eras is a notion to actively engage the global community, and advance freedom and democracy around the world. With this position on democracy is a requirement that the United States and allies remain invested in the internal affairs of other nations. In order to balance against a Sino-Russian alliance, the view toward democracy and human rights should be preserved.¹⁰³ A system of decision-making by the whole of society is the basic tenet of democracy, something Russia and China reject whether explicitly by law or implicitly by policy. This poison pill of anti-democratic thinking should be contained by advancing democratic partnerships globally and in full force. Russia and China dangerously view the global community as a tool for individual economic advancement or security dominance, while neglecting the principles of freedom and citizen rights to self-determination encased within the UN Charter.¹⁰⁴

Both China and Russia regard western influence and intervention into the affairs of state as intrusive and constraining, thereby interfering with the ability of less powerful states to manage their internal affairs and advance their own development path.¹⁰⁵ To support this position

¹⁰² Contrast UNGA speeches by President George W. Bush, President Barack H. Obama, and President Donald J. Trump.

¹⁰³ For historic relevance and reinforcement of the US position to protect freedom and democracy in opposition to Soviet authoritarianism post-World War II and before the Cold War, see US National Security Council, “NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” April 14, 1950, accessed August 1, 2018, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, “Charter,” accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/index.html>.

¹⁰⁵ For consideration, both China and Russia publicly reinforce principles of sovereignty and the concept of multipolarity in which more than two states benefit economically, militarily, and culturally. Such an argument helps to support alliance actions and economic expansion such as BRI. See: Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” (Speech, UN General Assembly, New York, 2015). Xi notes that the future of

and a rejection of diplomatic interference in the affairs of each nation, the two work in tandem to cast UNSC veto votes, resulting in a militarizing effect that blocks important UN maneuvers. The UNSC allows permanent members to veto any substantive resolution.¹⁰⁶

Whether the UNSC model should be revamped is a discussion outside the scope of this monograph, but admittedly is a critical question to ask, particularly given the growing threats against the international norm from China and Russia, two permanent Security Council members. For example, since 2011, China and Russia have joined forces to veto resolutions related to the ongoing civil war in Syria. Such resolutions call for condemning and ceasing human rights and fundamental freedoms violations. These include use of force against Syrian civilians and media, arbitrary detentions, interference with medical treatment, and violence against children. Further, the resolutions called for inspections, abandoning use of chemical weapons, and a right of return for Syrian refugees. These resolutions are critical statements concerning the nature of civil war and conflict that should be considered by the UN community; however, Syria's actions are shielded by veto votes.¹⁰⁷

the world should respect the principle of sovereignty and the right of countries to independently choose social systems and development paths. Wang Yi, "Multilateralism, Shared Peace and Development" (Speech, UN General Assembly, New York, 2018). Wang restates the right of nations to explore development paths that "suit itself to deliver happiness and security to its people." Sergey V. Lavrov, "Statement" (Speech, UN General Assembly, New York, 2018). Lavrov characterizes Western influence as intrusive to the "development of new centers of economic growth, the aspiration of peoples to preserve sovereignty and choose development models that are consistent with their national, cultural, and religious identities." These UNGA speeches continue to advance a narrative that the West is intrusive and limiting the growth of developing nations.

¹⁰⁶ The veto maneuver and current structure of the UNSC is under scrutiny with members harkening change to expand membership to better represent regions such as Asia and Africa, or to eliminate the UNSC altogether. See, United Nations, "Member States Call for Removing Veto Power, Expanding Security Council to Include New Permanent Seats, as General Assembly Debates Reform Plans for 15-Member Organ," November 20, 2018, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/ga12091.doc.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ For a deeper review on UNSC veto patterns, see United Nations, "Security Council Quick Links," updated January 4, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>. The specific Sino-Russian vetoed draft resolutions related to Syria are: S/2011/612, S/2012/77, S/2012/538, S/2014/348, S/2016/1026, and S/2017/172. Also consider that the United States and other members of the UNSC offer veto votes to support allies or interests. The Israeli-Palestinian ongoing conflict is one such issue that often receives a veto by the United States.

Also internally managing the affairs of state, Presidents Putin and Xi have strongly advocated a hands-off approach as they seek to curb corruption or manage populations that challenge their legitimacy. Russia's annexation of Crimea drew global condemnation, while China's treatment of its predominately-Muslim Uyghur population decries human rights abuses.¹⁰⁸ The global community should take actions in light of such findings. Blinded eyes to continued human rights abuses in the name of sovereignty send a dangerous message to burgeoning societies that are steps from dictatorial leadership, whether moving from or towards.

As history has shown, China and Russia's preference for authoritarian management styles has not produced favorable results, often leading to internal strife or newly elected leadership, but not before severely impacting huge percentages of the population. Even as a Sino-Russian alliance aims at advancing harmony, friendship and opportunity for all, it is important for the United States to pay attention to public commitments and statements, working diligently to solidify diplomatic relationships with its allies and future partners that more closely align with democratic systems, institutions and US policy. Such balancing of partnerships can help hinder a Sino-Russian alliance from advancing.

Secure Existing Partnerships and Agreements

The strengthening of Sino-Russian relations should signal a move by the United States to review and recommit to its existing partnerships and alliances regionally. Continuity in US alliances is important particularly as the Sino-Russian alliance expands and China and Russia seek to advance security and economic interests in Central Asia. While the BRI is a central component of China's grand strategy, Russian partnership is needed to maintain influence in Central Asian. The BRI therefore becomes a de facto component of the alliance relationship and

¹⁰⁸ See Jennifer Hansler, "Uyghurs and Allies Urge Action Against China in Washington," *CNN*, April 3, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/03/politics/capitol-hill-uyghur-reception/index.html>.

potentially a tool to affect US partnerships negatively and diminish US standing economically in Central Asia and the Middle East.¹⁰⁹

In countering violent extremism, the United States was advantaged by global partnerships. In the Middle East for example, continued support for democratically-aligned regimes was instrumental in countering ISIS and its barbaric moves towards establishing a caliphate. Shocking images of beheadings and decimated cities helped to justify US and allied intervention in Syria, despite ongoing war in Afghanistan, and in consideration of operations guided by Russia and the Bashar al-Assad regime.¹¹⁰ Whether expressed in security matters or in human rights justice, the global community united to condemn authoritarianism in its most barbaric form, signaling acceptance of democratic freedoms the United States has advocated throughout its history.

It remains important that the United States continue to defend the unique security cooperation agreement between NATO countries. Advocacy for the dissolution of NATO or withdrawal from this austere body only opens the door to problems down the line. The world has changed. The old fight between democracy and communism no longer defines the challenges taking place in the global community; instead, new challenges are on the rise that require a force sustained to manage against it. NATO as a check against Russian ambitions is but one of the many functions of the group, but it is an important function that must be supported. Significantly,

¹⁰⁹ Consider Kaneshko Sangar, "Russia and China in the Age of Grand Eurasian Projects: Prospects for Integration between the Silk Road Economic belt and the Eurasian Economic Union," *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, May 3, 2017, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.veruscript.com/a/YDG5KF>. Sangar highlights the foundations between Russia and China that would position it to become an alliance as some support, yet he argues that integration of the Eurasian Economic Union and the BRI is a difficult and complicated task. This complication may provide insight as to how to diminish the expansion of the Sino-Russian alliance.

¹¹⁰ Liz Sly, "In The Middle East, Russia is Back," *Washington Post*, December 5, 2018, accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-the-middle-east-russia-is-back/2018/12/04/e899df30-aaf1-11e8-9a7d-cd30504ff902_story.html?utm_term=.d5c9ce4eb8ee. Sly highlights the importance Russia has played in the Middle East during the Syrian conflict, stepping into a gap once filled by the United States.

in acknowledgement of an ever-changing security landscape, and amid President Trump's increasing public statements and threats to remove the United States from NATO, the US Congress reacted speedily to reaffirm the importance of the United States' participation in this important alliance. Drawing from the historical significance to modern necessity, the overwhelming vote by the House of Representatives in favor of the NATO Support Act was instructional to American citizenry and partners abroad that global partnerships matter; NATO matters as a security force and as a friend across the Atlantic.¹¹¹

The US Congress is an important advocate for global partnership and should continue to act to advocate American ideals effectively in the face of a Sino-Russian alliance. Creating trade pacts like the Asian-centric Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that examine economic and strategic interests between nations is essential to advancing American values globally while ensuring the United States maintains a seat at the table and remains competitive. When created, the TPP aimed to expand US trade and investment, spur economic growth, create new jobs and advance US strategic interests in the Asian-Pacific region. It is important to note that the TPP was signed by the United States under the Obama Administration, but received bipartisan rejection in Congress for differing reasons and was thus not ratified. Democrats were concerned with the protection of workers' rights, the environment, and human rights; while Republicans expressed concerns that TPP would negatively impact the US economy and job creation.¹¹²

The 2016 Presidential election of either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton would have further doomed the agreement, as neither candidate agreed to its ratification. The importance of

¹¹¹ NATO Support Act, H. Res. 676, 116th Cong., 1st sess., accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr676/BILLS-116hr676eh.pdf>. The NATO Support Act, passed the House of Representatives on January 22, 2019 by a bipartisan vote of 357-22.

¹¹² Republicans and Democrats were split on the TPP since 2015 and through the 2016 Presidential election. Some pro-trade Republicans called for President Trump to re-engage on TPP in 2018. See for example, Vicki Needham, "Senate Republicans Call on Trump to Re-engage TPP," February 21, 2018, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://thehill.com/policy/finance/374847-senate-republicans-call-on-trump-to-re-engage-on-tpp>.

the TPP in President Obama’s view was to “ensure that the United States—not countries like China—is the one writing this century’s rules for the world economy.”¹¹³ This statement is extremely important and should be revisited in consideration of the BRI, which is set to catapult China into global economic dominance. This position is significant particularly in Asia. Envisioned of the TPP, proponents argued that lower tariffs and increased market access “would have reduced prices for consumers, spurred cross-border investment and boosted US exports. More consistent rules and market-oriented reforms in developing countries...would make all the economies involved more efficient, increasing productivity and growth.”¹¹⁴

As a result of the United States’ withdrawal, the remaining eleven nations have moved forward with an amended TPP, the effect of which can shut the door to any influence the United States would have sustained in the region, and the potential economic growth the United States would have experienced. Further, the TPP could have been a balancing tool against the BRI, mitigating the effects of Chinese saturation of products, trade methods, and ways of doing business that remain skeptical to many nations. Many African nations already in partnership with China are awakening to the reality of China’s diplomacy that includes Chinese influence in their nations and predatory lending practices.¹¹⁵

The newly elected 116th Congress should re-examine the TPP and expected effects in the region, particularly as the NSS advances a framework for Indo-Pacific engagement. There is also potential to identify legislation that can work in tandem with the provisions of the TPP in an effort to demonstrate to TPP members and other Asian partners US commitment in the region,

¹¹³ James McBride and Andrew Chatzky, “What is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP),” *Council on Foreign Relations*, updated January 4, 2019, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ For additional information on China’s use of soft power, see Patrick Wesner, “China Goes Soft in Africa,” Masters Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS (2016). See for additional information on China’s use of soft power.

regardless of whether the current President or new Congressional leadership consider the TPP.¹¹⁶ As the NSS notes, China is staking a more aggressive position in the South China Sea, actions at odds with international law and the sovereignty of partners in the Indo-Pacific region.¹¹⁷ Though it pales in comparison to the near \$1 trillion BRI investment, the \$113 million the United States is committing to the region includes support for digital connectivity, energy, and infrastructure projects. The United States can leverage these investments with existing development assistance, legislative initiatives, and partnerships to balance against Chinese influence.¹¹⁸

Despite the uncertain outcome President Trump's current and future trade tariffs will have on jobs, the deficit, production, or the economy as a whole, there are opportunities for engaging the trade space in a manner that promotes America's prosperity and continued commitment to our partners in-line with the National Security Strategy.¹¹⁹

In keeping a campaign promise, the Trump Administration took on one such trade agreement, the nearly thirty year North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). When initially ratified, NAFTA expected to reduce trade costs, created a competitive North America in the global sphere, and increase business investment. With pundits, NAFTA was contentious since

¹¹⁶ It should be noted that in 2016, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi rejected the TPP as was written. It is difficult to determine if a new iteration drafted under her leadership as Speaker of the House of Representatives will prompt her support absent specific requirements of environmental and worker's rights protections. See, Michael McAuliff, Nancy Pelosi Declares Opposition To Obama's TPP Trade Deal, *Huffington Post*, July 26, 2016, accessed January 21, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nancy-pelosi-tpi-trade-deal_n_5797ab5be4b01180b5307124

¹¹⁷ NSS, 45-47. The NSS outlines a balance of power approach for maintaining regional cooperation and security.

¹¹⁸ Already, four of the eleven TPP members receive US foreign assistance. Additionally, the US maintains bilateral relationships with the majority of nations in the Indo-Pacific region. The compounding effect of US efforts and established relationships can balance against China's large but uncertain or skeptical investment and relationships.

¹¹⁹ NSS, 19-20. See also, Shawn Donnan, "Trump has a Message for the World: My Trade Wars Aren't Over Yet," *Bloomberg*, Updated April 10, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-09/trump-has-a-message-for-the-world-my-trade-wars-aren-t-over-yet>.

its ratification; it created disagreement as to its effectiveness for the United States, those in opposition citing the detrimental effect NAFTA has had on American jobs and industry.¹²⁰

From the United States' perspective, the new "NAFTA", entitled the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), significantly aims at leveling the playing field for American workers, benefitting American farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses through modernization, supporting intellectual property protections, and ensuring small- and medium-sized enterprises benefit from the agreement.¹²¹ Such a move to strengthen the agreement versus abandoning it not only seeks to strengthen a partnership between the United States and border neighbors, but reinforces the United States' commitment to the principal of increased collaboration and protection against Chinese influences that may be exasperated in the TPP, now exclusive of United States' participation.

Though signed by the President on November 30, 2018, the USMCA awaits ratification by Congress. Agreement by new leadership is important, particularly of Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, who prior to assuming leadership as Speaker of the House of Representatives in January 2019, signaled lack of commitment to ratify the USMCA. Pelosi's main contention mirrored similar objections she held against the TPP concerning environmental and labor concerns. Specifically, her view was that the USMCA lacked an appropriate enforcement mechanism within the agreement. While Canada signaled willingness to address Pelosi's concerns and work to strengthen the agreement, President Trump demonstrated less interest in modifying the USMCA and instead signaled a willingness to force Congress to vote on the existing legislation without improvement.

¹²⁰ James McBride and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "NAFTA's Economic Impact," *Council on Foreign Relations*, updated October 1, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/naftas-economic-impact>.

¹²¹ US Trade Representative, "Agreement Between the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada Text," accessed January 29, 2019, <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement/agreement-between>.

Similarly, as a bargaining tool, he threatened withdrawing the United States from NAFTA to provoke agreement of the USMCA.¹²² Withdrawing from NAFTA prematurely may damage trade relations with Mexico and Canada, particularly if Congress does not ratify the USMCA, thereby forcing the two TPP signatories to seek expanded trade opportunities elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific region or with China. Therefore, it is important for the Trump Administration to leave NAFTA in place, but work with Congressional leadership to ratify the USMCA. Finalizing this agreement will secure trade between neighbors while fastening the door against expanded Chinese influence in North America.

Finally, in consideration of trade opportunities US partners have with BRI and TPP, Congress should intervene by introducing legislation to reduce the effects of tariffs and quotas on partners, businesses and US producers. Tariffs seek to benefit US producers by taxing imported goods, while quotas seek to limit quantities of imported goods. If over-extended, both approaches to binding trade may have a detrimental economic effect on consumers and businesses by increasing the costs of goods and services. The recent steel and aluminum trade tariffs is one example, impacting traditional trading partners and allies such as Mexico, Japan and Germany, and Canada.¹²³ In response, Canada issued countermeasures on all US-originated imports totaling \$12.4 billion.¹²⁴ There is no solid evidence at present that the US tariffs will benefit or harm steel and aluminum producers to the extent planned; yet, what is evident is the growing dissatisfaction with the United States from our most trusted allies and a desire to seek trade opportunities

¹²² Sabrina Rodriguez, “Pelosi Casts Doubt on Passage of Trump's new NAFTA Without Changes,” December 6, 2018, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/06/pelosi-casts-doubt-on-trumps-usmca-passage-without-changes-1014361>.

¹²³ US Customs and Border Protection, “Section 232 Tariffs on Aluminum and Steel,” October 24, 2018, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.cbp.gov/trade/programs-administration/entry-summary/232-tariffs-aluminum-and-steel>. Argentina, Brazil, and South Korea are also steel partners but are unaffected by tariffs because they have agreed to quotas.

¹²⁴ Government of Canada, “Notice of Intent to Impose Countermeasures Action Against the United States in Response to Tariffs on Canadian Steel and Aluminum Products,” May 31, 2018, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.fin.gc.ca/activity/consult/cacsap-cmpcaa-eng.asp>.

elsewhere.¹²⁵ While BRI is advancing, the United States cannot risk retreating to a position of non-competitiveness; this flies contradictory to US national security interests. An extended trade war through tariffs or quotas may produce short-term wins, but long-term effects may actually hurt US future interests, potentially diminishing standing in the global economy.¹²⁶

Maximize Russia's Europeanness

Whether ideological similarities exist between China and Russia as a binding tie for alliance strengthening, it is also clear that cultural similarities exist between Russia and its European neighbors. The longing to belong functionally to Europe remains a matter of interest for Putin and such a desire infiltrates his policy to advance Russia as a global superpower and return to former imperial glory. It is important to draw Russia back to Western interests through security and trade policy that stifles or limits the growth of a similar partnership between China and Russia.

Although distrust of Russia is at an all-time high in the United States particularly given admission of interference in the 2016 Presidential election, there is an opportunity to pounce on Russia's desire for relevance with the United States. The ego massaging from China has promoted stronger alliance building; yet there are certain indicators that Russia under Putin's leadership seeks to rise without the help of its stronger Asian neighbor. Russia's effort to sway the election is a lesson for the history books; moving forward, the United States should seek ways to maximize and reshape its relationship with Russia.

¹²⁵ Consider Alan Rappeport, "U.S. Steel Companies Face Downturn Despite Trump Claims of Revival," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/steel-companies-trump.html>, noting hiring slowdowns, investor wariness, and increased angst by American businesses and trade groups. Also, consider Josh Wingrove, "Canadian Trade Panel Recommends Reducing Safeguard Tariffs on Steel," *Bloomberg*, April 3, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-04/canada-trade-panel-recommends-reducing-steel-safeguard-tariffs>, noting the tit-for-tat effect the tariffs have garnered including jeopardizing the USMCA (new NAFTA).

¹²⁶ Donnan, "Trump has a Message for the World."

The attempts Russia is making to return to relevance it experienced pre-Soviet Union collapse are desperate but dangerous, particularly if caution about Russian action is thrown to the wind. The United States needs to develop a Russia-specific economic, political, and security strategy that will reinforce the need to balance sanctions with opportunities. Aggressively breaking treaty obligations, such as the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty that prohibits the United States and Russia from possessing, producing or flight-testing missiles with a capacity of 500-5000 km should draw swift sanctions or diminished economic opportunities.¹²⁷

From January to October 2018, trade with Russia rose to \$23 billion, which was a near eighteen percent increase from the same period in 2017. This trade imbalance has significantly benefited Russia, creating a deficit of \$11.93 billion for the United States.¹²⁸ The United States should consider closing the gap by decreasing utilization of Russian oil (thereby weakening its economy and utility for China) and increasing demand from Canada, the United States' second oil import partner. While this is a small measure, it could have an important impact on the resource-limited Russian economy, but could have a greater impact if similar measures were also taken from NATO partner countries. Such could have a ripple effect on the Russian economy that could compel compliance and serve as a united front against Russian aggression.

One should note an important point regarding the INF treaty. Should Russia continue to violate the terms of the treaty, the United States has guaranteed withdrawal.¹²⁹ The effect this

¹²⁷ See, Robin Emmott and Vladimir Soldatkin, "NATO, Russia Fail to Agree Over Missile Breach, U.S. to Quit Treaty," *Reuters*, January 25, 2019, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nuclear/nato-russia-fail-to-agree-over-missile-breach-us-to-quit-treaty-idUSKCN1PJ14N>.

¹²⁸ US Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Russia," accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4621.html>.

¹²⁹ During the drafting of this monograph, the United States suspended the INF Treaty on February 2, 2019 with formal withdrawal to occur in six months should Russia fail to comply and remove the SSC-8 Missile that has a reported max range of 2,500km, far exceeding Treaty limitations. See, Jeremy Chin, "US to Suspend INF Treaty Obligations," *Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies*, last modified April 8, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/us-to-suspend-inf-treaty-obligations/>.

action would have on security relations in the long term is important in the frame of a Sino-Russian alliance. As the signatories, the INF Treaty only binds the United States and Russia; other nuclear states such as China are not bound by its limitations. Neither has Russia been prohibited from sharing technology with China as a strategic partner. Therefore, the United States should weigh the advantage of withdrawing from the treaty as a check against a greater Chinese threat. If the United States and NATO partners can contain Russia by economic means, the United States could focus on strengthening weapons systems and technology to account for Chinese aggression in Asia. This would allow the United States greater participation and opportunities for partnering with Asian allies. If Russia is considered a legitimate threat or certain nuisance, it may be advantageous to withdraw from the treaty, enforce economic penalties against Russia, and recalibrate to address future Chinese aggression against US interests and partners.

Minimize China's Asian Influence

The Indo-Pacific region is a heterogeneous conglomeration of nations, each with its individual needs and strategic ambitions. Yet what unites these countries is an enduring desire for peace, prosperity, and security. In many ways, whether intended or not, China presents itself as an adversary to these regional goals. Such maneuvers as militarization of the South China Sea and the BRI send strong and steady signals that China seeks to dominate the region.¹³⁰

The BRI promotes four projects in the region, including the “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM), the Trans-Himalaya Corridor, and China’s cooperation with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives under the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.”¹³¹ Notwithstanding positive progress in each of these

¹³⁰ US Department of Defense, “Assessment on U.S. Defense Implications of China’s Expanding Global Access,” December 2018, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/14/2002079292/-1/-1/1/EXPANDING-GLOBAL-ACCESS-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

¹³¹ Antara G. Singh, “China’s Vision for the Belt and Road in South Asia,” *Diplomat*, March 2, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/chinas-vision-for-the-belt-and-road-in-south-asia/>.

projects, challenges exist and include “political instability and unsustainable policies by different governments; threats and attacks by violent extremist forces; geopolitical rivalries; operational risks including unsustainable debt accumulation; and constraints put by issues like environment, culture, religion, and governance.”¹³² Such challenges leave space for influence from the US and its allies. The NSS provides a roadmap for engaging the Indo-Pacific region.

Simply put, the United States and regional allies should exploit the BRI and any relational gaps to gain influence and balance against an expanding China. This monograph already discussed the importance of the TPP and strategic partnerships; yet absent mechanisms in place, the United States should seek to forge wedges and bridges whenever possible. For example, the new US International Development Finance Corporation will leverage resources to provide capital and innovative financing valued at \$60 billion.¹³³ While this amount is limited compared to the over \$1 trillion investment China is making, the financing will provide options and opportunities for places where BRI may have been the only source of funding. Further, the development assistance sends a firm message that the United States is interested in sustaining regional influence for the long haul. This is important given the fallout from the TPP and ongoing trade wars.

Additionally, the United States should sustain and find areas to strengthen partnership with India, a vocal opponent to the BRI. While India maintains its own development goals, it

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, “The BUILD Act,” accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.opic.gov/build-act/overview>. The bipartisan Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act, combines USAID’s Development Credit Authority (DCA) and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation into one new agency. Per legislation, the objective of BUILD is to facilitate private sector development and inclusive economic growth in less developed countries through providing credit, capital, or other financial support. Such support will enable Indo-Pacific countries to access credit and other financial tools with the full backing of the United States Treasury. For more information on USAID’s DCA program, see US Agency for International Development, “Development Credit Authority,” last updated January 28, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/economic-growth-and-trade/development-credit-authority-putting-local-wealth-work>.

remains cautious as to the path China is on for regional dominance.¹³⁴ Tensions have mounted in the past as China courted Pakistan into BRI initiatives in opposition to India. Additionally, India is constrained by its relationship with Russia, an aggressive proponent of the BRI and beneficiary of Sino-Russian strategic relations. India must weigh these considerations in the near term; yet working alongside the United States could strengthen India's position and leadership in the region as a counterbalance to China.¹³⁵

Conclusion

There is great potential in a cemented Sino-Russian alliance if the two nations continue their trajectory of mutual respect, collaboration, and common defense. Unlike the past, which is a fluctuating timeline of conflict, peace, distrust, and mutual respect, the future holds the potential to catapult both nations into world leadership and transform the existing global order. By all appearances, China and Russia have learned from their past failures; this is evident as, in tandem, they navigate a world system created to counter their ideological way of thinking. Current actions prove they are more successfully able to navigate systems to their advantage. Working together, and exhibiting a balance of power influence against the United States can turn the cards in their favor. Therefore, the United States remains a central factor in pivoting against the aims of these two emerging great powers.

To demonstrate the strength needed to counter this growing alliance, the United States is in a precarious position given internal political strains, and unresolved policy direction despite a relatively sound and earnest national security strategic roadmap. Current US political leadership should work together and take active steps to strengthen existing partnerships, mechanisms, and institutions to sustain peace, freedom, and security globally. The United States will need to use

¹³⁴ Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative."

¹³⁵ Consider, Harsh V. Pant, "The Sino-Russian Entente and India's Choices," *Diplomat*, September 19, 2018, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2008/09/the-sino-russian-entente-and-indias-choices/>.

every instrument of power at its disposal to be successful. Therefore, the upcoming election cycle will be critical in consideration of advancing a policy that creatively and effectively balances against China and Russia.

Partnerships will remain the most important tool, and these should be reinforced as a critical part of US strategy. With the acceleration of the BRI, a new weapons race, technological advancements, and ambitions for power from developing nations, the United States cannot bear to anger or abandon partners and long-standing allies; to do so would shift the United States into a position of isolation.

The question of whether the UNSC should be eliminated or expanded bears additional research outside the scope of this monograph. Yet, the question is worth analyzing particularly in the context of a Sino-Russian alliance, and the concept of multipolarity these nations advocate. Whether the dismantling of the UNSC will aid the aims of a Sino-Russia alliance or the United States and its allies, is worth considering.

Overall, the United States maintains a responsibility to defend the principles of democracy that have galvanized a global community and been victorious over tyranny. Abdicating that responsibility now at such a crucial juncture in history would be a drastic mistake. Despite all else, America must continue to shine as a beacon of hope.

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