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Tripolar Stability: The Future of Nuclear Relations Among the United States, Russia, and China

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BACKGROUND: The Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) was founded in 1998 to integrate and focus the capabilities of the Department of Defense (DoD) that address the weapons of mass destruction threat. To assist the Agency in its primary mission, the Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (ASCO) develops and maintains an evolving analytical vision of necessary and sufficient capabilities to protect United States and Allied forces and citizens from WMD attack. ASCO is also charged by DoD and by the U.S. Government generally to identify gaps in these capabilities and initiate programs to fill them. It also provides support to the Threat Reduction Advisory Committee (TRAC), and its Panels, with timely, high quality research.

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PREFACE

Since the creation of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency in 1998, IDA has provided analytical support through the Agency's Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (ASCO). This work, performed under the task entitled "Threat Reduction Strategies in the New Strategic Environment," has included a series of papers on nuclear weapons and international stability, including explorations of the nuclear planning environment in 2015, nuclear multipolarity, East Asia's nuclear future, and the China-U.S. nuclear relationship.¹ The purpose of this work is to identify policy and strategy issues associated with long-term nuclear threat reduction. For fiscal year 2002, the ASCO commissioned this follow-on paper. Its purpose is to explore the emerging nuclear dynamic among the United States, Russia, and China in the context of the new strategic framework pursued by the Bush Administration.

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¹ Brad Roberts, *Geopolitics and Nuclear Order: The Nuclear Planning Environment in 2012* (IDA Document D-2369, September 1999), *Nuclear Multipolarity and Stability* (IDA Document D-2539, November 2000), *East Asia's Nuclear Future: A Long-Term View of Threat Reduction* (IDA Paper P-3641), and *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations: What Relationship Best Serves U.S. Interests?* (IDA Paper P-3642, August 2001). The latter three papers are available electronically at the website of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (www.dtra.mil).

reflected in this final report are the author's, who assumes full responsibility for the arguments presented here.

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SUMMARY

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought with them the end of the bipolar nuclear standoff and the East-West divide in international politics. What will succeed bipolarity? Multipolarity is one possibility, with a diffusion of power and nuclear weapons among multiple power centers in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Unipolarity is another, with a growing gap in the power differential between the United States and other powers, major and minor. A third possibility is tripolarity, in which the competition for influence and nuclear security between the United States and the Soviet Union is replaced by a three-way competition among the United States, Russia, and China. Is this a realistic possibility? How might it come to pass? Would this be a stable world? How should the new strategic framework and the strategy for stability being pursued by the Bush administration be informed by this analysis of tripolarity?

CHARACTERIZING TRIPOLARITY

The end of the Cold War brought with it an end to ideological competition and a three-way balancing process and gave rise to increasing hopes that cooperation could replace competition among the three. But instead, political relations among the three entered a period of drift and uncertainty, foundering on the difficulties of political and economic transition in Russia and China and on unmet expectations for cooperation in the security realm. The second post-cold war decade dawned with a number of unresolved political questions about relations among the three countries. The most important questions are about the “true intentions” that each holds for the others. Suspicions abound.

The dramatic impact of the attacks on America of September 11 and the subsequent call by President Bush to all countries to “choose sides” in the war on terror would seem to have answered many of these questions. Russian President Putin clearly saw a strategic opportunity, to shift the terms of debate within and about Russia, by closely aligning his government with the West and by bowing to Bush administration preferences on a range of issues, including strategic stability. Chinese President Jiang Zemin saw a tactical opportunity—not a strategic one—to restore a more cooperative and

constructive character to relations with the United States, though at the price of a substantial U.S. military presence in East Asia.

This first-cut assessment points to the conclusion that the need to fight a common enemy has helped induce Moscow and Beijing to shift from counterbalancing to bandwagoning—from inhibiting American power to working with it. A second-cut assessment must be more circumspect. Putin’s gamble may not pay off domestically in Russia and may be more contingent on Western deference to Russian interests than is so far understood. China’s leadership remains deeply suspicious of U.S. strategic intentions in Taiwan and more generally. The Sino-Russian political relationship has receded from visibility in the year since September 11, but their partnership has not entirely lapsed.

Overall, nuclear factors seem very much in the background in this picture of strategic interaction. They have nowhere near the political and military prominence that they did at the height of the Cold War. But they are relevant today, both as vehicles for deeper strategic cooperation among the three and as potential disruptors of desired political relationships. The United States is on “a journey to reduction and a new triad.” Russia remains immersed in a long-running debate about the role of nuclear weapons in its overall security posture. China is modernizing, but toward what end is not clear.

In surveying these myriad political, economic, and security factors, it seems that the word “tripolarity” does not accurately describe the strategic interactions. It conveys a tightly coupled, deeply interconnected set of interactions. And these appear to be missing. Moreover, the term suggests something also about the orientation of the rest of the international system, as other powers align themselves with one of the major powers to form a pole. This behavior too is missing, as only the United States finds itself with such alliance responsibilities. Accordingly, “triangular” is a more accurate word than “tripolar.” It points to the real but loose coupling of political, economic, and security relations among the three.

But the triangular relationship could well become a tripolar one. Bandwagoning may end. Economic interaction may bring more friction than cooperation. Nuclear matters may resume a more competitive character. Competitive tripolarity would have many implications for the global nuclear order.

KEY DRIVERS OF ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

The Bush administration has elaborated “a journey to reduction and a new triad” that sketches out the approximate contours of its preferred nuclear future. And it has

charted a path with Russia away from mutual assured destruction and toward common responsibilities and common interests. How might relations among the United States, Russian Federation (RF), and People's Republic of China (PRC) evolve over the next decade to impact "the journey?" There are four key drivers.

China's Reactions to Developments in the U.S.-Russian Dimension

China's muted reaction to U.S. withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty has fueled the perception that China is unlikely to make any sharp departures in its own policies or posture as a result of the new strategic relationship between the United States and Russia. This perception may prove incorrect.

China has already anticipated much of the "new triad" called for in the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and thus may be poised to make some important adjustments in its own posture. China's central concern is about U.S. missile defense. Beijing fears that defense of the American homeland will undermine the credibility of China's strategic deterrent. Washington is not yet clear whether or how the defense should be postured vis-à-vis China. It might choose to "capture" modernizing and expanding Chinese forces with a defense targeted explicitly on China, or it might choose to tolerate such modernization without countervailing defense deployments. The former choice would likely lead to an offense/defense "race" between China and the United States.

The prospect of reductions in Russia's deployed strategic force raises a more interesting question for China than do U.S. reductions. It has provoked a small debate in China about whether, when, or how China might seek to replace Russia as the "second nuclear power," on the argument that China is replacing Russia as the second political and economic power.

In sum, as a result of developments in the U.S.-Russian dimension, the Chinese posture could evolve in a number of undesirable ways. Modernization of the Chinese force is underway, but it may come at a more rapid pace and planners may revise their goals to higher levels. Increased reliance on penetration aids is likely, as is rising interest in lighter and more easily maneuverable nuclear warheads.

Russia's Reactions to Developments in the U.S.-PRC Dimension

Russia has been more concerned about possible developments in the U.S. strategic posture than the Chinese one. But it has also been concerned about the impact of Chinese strategic modernization on the overall Russian nuclear situation. A central

Russian concern is to preserve some measure of balance as China deploys the new generation

DF-31 missile. That concern is magnified by the likelihood that U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) deployments will lead China to deploy larger numbers and more capable versions of that missile than might otherwise have been the case. Accordingly, Russian planners have kept certain forces in being with warhead up-load potential that might otherwise have been relinquished had they been concerned only with the U.S. nuclear posture. Moreover, they have expressed concerns about the absence of restraints on the Chinese build-up at the same time that Russia accepts new restraints on its own forces.

U.S. Choices

Various U.S. choices will play a critical role in shaping the nuclear future. The decision about whether to tolerate or attempt to trump China's strategic modernization has already been flagged. Another decision relates to the resumption of nuclear testing; the effects on the triangular interaction would seem to depend on the extent to which Washington would or could persuade Moscow and Beijing that such testing is in the service of the status quo ante (i.e., to redress a surprise technical defect in existing forces). A third choice lies potentially somewhere closer to 2012, when and if Russia falls behind in keeping a large standing nuclear force and when and if the United States succeeds at bringing into being a robust, adaptive force: might Washington choose a posture of overt superiority over the collection of all potential adversaries?

Exogenous Wildcards

Six exogenous factors are considered here: 1) the failure of transitions in Russia, China, or both; 2) the emergence of space as a zone of intense military competition; 3) transitions in the "rogue" states that unfold in ways that teach powerful lessons about the ability of the United States to shape international events; 4) a collapse of the nuclear nonproliferation, and of the treaties on chemical and biological weapons along with it; 5) the actual use of nuclear weapons; and 6) a war against Saddam Hussein that teaches further powerful lessons, positive or negative, about U.S. power and about the utility of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as instruments of strategic coercion. Each could set the triangular nuclear interaction off on a sharply different trajectory.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES TO 2012

How might these drivers in the nuclear realm interact with political and economic factors to determine the pathway from the present to 2012, when the Treaty of Moscow expires and Washington must chart a new course? Four scenarios are examined to illuminate the possibilities.

One is that “the journey” continues smoothly. A second is that “the journey” stumbles along, as political and economic relations produce significantly more friction in the trilateral relationship but not significant defections from the effort to construct the nuclear peace envisioned in the new strategic framework

A third possibility is that “the journey” ends but without tripolar competition. Along this pathway some regional actor, whether state or non-state, employs weapons of mass destruction in ways that lead one or more of the three to conclude that a major refurbishment of its nuclear arsenal is required. Major power nuclear relations are a muddle, but it doesn’t really seem to matter.

A fourth possibility is that “the journey” ends with tripolar competition. Along this pathway political relations sour significantly, nuclear relations are increasingly tightly coupled, and major departures in strategic relations result. Economic cooperation suffers. The rogues look opportunistically at the falling out among the three and act to remake local regional orders.

Each pathway would seem to portend a very different set of expectations about the nuclear “order” to come in 2012. A smooth journey would paint 2012 as a window of opportunity to deepen cooperation among the major powers and extend reassurance to others. In the stumbling journey, 2012 would loom as a potentially major turning point, with increased hedging among nuclear-capable states. If “the journey” has ended, 2012 would no longer loom as a significant milestone. To some it would look as an opportunity lost.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEW STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Bush administration has emphasized its commitment “to continue working with friends and allies to create a new framework for security and stability that reflects the new strategic environment.” How might this analysis of tripolarity inform thinking about the new strategic framework and the strategy for stability?

The “new strategic framework” has come into use as shorthand to describe the changing strategic relationship with Russia, the post-ABM world, and the strategic

capabilities envisioned in the NPR. In developing this framework, the administration has naturally focused heavily on Russia. Thinking about China's place in the framework appears much less fully developed than thinking about Russia's place. In the NPR, China would seem to be a central focus of the so-called dissuasion strategy, i.e., the retention of a large standing force and the creation of a large adaptive force so as to signal to any potential competitor that there cannot be any potential payoff from strategic competition with the United States. But Washington must be increasingly concerned with *China's* dissuasion strategy. China seeks to dissuade the United States from choosing to construct a ballistic missile defense oriented at "capturing" China's strategic modernization. The Bush administration seems committed to the proposition that it will not be persuaded to so construct the defense unless China's future foreign and defense policies make this seem necessary. Beijing must better understand the conditions that would lead Washington to make such a choice. Thus, the two appear to have a common interest. The new strategic framework seems not to have accounted for the need to capitalize on this common interest. Washington must also recognize that Russian acceptance of U.S. missile defense as not threatening to its deterrent will be put in jeopardy if a defense/offense "race" between the United States and China unfolds.

The "new strategic framework" is also founded on the vision of moving relations between the United States and Russia from a framework of mutual assured destruction (MAD) to "common interests and common responsibilities." Thus it would seem that success in the journey to the preferred nuclear future depends critically upon the success not just in shifting *away from* the balance of terror but also in shifting *toward* the envisioned common interests and common responsibilities

In putting together the "new strategic framework," the Bush administration has rightly attempted to anticipate and prepare for possible departures from its preferred nuclear future. This is the purpose of the very substantial hedge, in the form of a large deployed force and large adaptive force. But by giving such a significant place to the hedge in strategy, the administration risks making its worst fears come true. The need to hedge against departures and worst-case possibilities leads to an emphasis on strategies that maximize U.S. freedom of maneuver. But these will be purchased at the price of a perception of increased unpredictability in major power relations, greater suspicion in Russia and China of American strategic intentions post-2012, and rising hedging by U.S. allies. These are sharp trade-offs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STRATEGY FOR STABILITY

The “strategy for stability” is shorthand encompassing administration efforts to persuade allies, friends, and others of the benefits of the new strategic framework and to secure the intended benefits of assurance, dissuasion, and deterrence.

With successful conclusion of the Treaty of Moscow, there is a temptation in Washington to see this strategy as having reached a logical conclusion. After all, Russia has acquiesced to American preferences, and that acquiescence has quieted fears in Europe and Asia. It is preferable to see the Treaty of Moscow as closing an initial phase in the strategy for stability. Now is the time to get on to some additional business.

Work now must focus on consolidating gains in the relationship with Russia while also looking beyond Russia to other interested parties. The dialogue with U.S. allies in East Asia has not proceeded nearly as far as that with U.S. allies in Europe. The promised dialogue with China is also an important component, one that has been slow to unfold and slower to find its appropriate scope and content. A significant barrier to effective dialogue is the simple fact that, unlike in the U.S.-Russian relationship, the two sides have not had years of dialogue about strategic matters.

The strategy for stability does not appear to include a component specifically focused on nonproliferation, except to the extent that Washington presses both Moscow and Beijing to bring their nonproliferation practices into closer alignment with its preferences. Indeed, the Nuclear Posture Review seems not to have sought to come to terms with the long-term political requirements of sustaining the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Yet nonproliferation remains, by and large, a top-level common interest of the major powers. And management of the existing global treaty regime legally remains a common responsibility (in their joint role as treaty guarantors on the U.N. Security Council).

An important question remains about whether stability remains the right organizing principle in considering relations among the major nuclear powers.

In elaborating its commitment to a strategy for stability, the Bush administration seemed to be trying to recapture the debate about the consequences of U.S. actions from those who use the term “destabilizing” as a generic strategic pejorative for any U.S. policies that they find objectionable. It also made its case forcefully that the greatest threat to stability today is not found in nuclear relations among the major powers but

instead exists in the WMD ambitions of regional actors with a demonstrated willingness to challenge established orders and flaunt international norms.

In elaborating this strategy, the administration has consciously set aside the traditional benchmarks of stability in the nuclear era—crisis stability and arms race stability. Russia and China have been conspicuously reluctant to set aside traditional notions of stability. Can they be persuaded that their interests in peace, prosperity, and stability are best served by a preponderance of American power? Is there a viable argument that stability will be preserved and exploited for common purposes if the United States succeeds in maximizing its flexibility through an escape from the balance of power? More work needs to be done on both these points. So far at least it would appear that the best answer from Washington is that friendship with the United States pays more economic and political dividends than enmity.

Given the inevitability of adjustments in the U.S. strategic posture that some consider destabilizing, a new notion of strategic stability has come into increasing usage, one emphasizing predictable change. In reacting to concerns about predictability, the administration seems to be of two minds. On the one hand, its leaders expect and to an extent fear strategic surprise and want to take steps to minimize it. On the other hand, they also want to maximize U.S. flexibility and freedom of maneuver to meet future strategic surprise. The dilemma is that maximizing freedom of maneuver may have the result of increasing the likelihood of surprise.

In sum, stability remains an important organizing principle for strategy, including nuclear stability. But it is not the only value. After all, it is a means, not an end.

INTRODUCTION

The Bush administration has pursued an ambitious agenda of strategic reform, with deep unilateral reductions in the arsenal of nuclear weapons, withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and open-ended pursuit of missile defense, and elaboration of the new Treaty of Moscow codifying in minimalist fashion the new strategic relationship with Russia. This reform agenda is being pursued with the goal of transforming the political relationship with Russia from one based on mutual assured destruction to one based on the common responsibilities of two major powers with many common interests. As Washington and Moscow transition to this new strategic footing, they are accelerating the move away from an era defined by tightly coupled bipolarity between East and West.

But what are they moving *toward*? What will follow this bipolar order? The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) seems to indicate that administration leaders believe that this reform agenda portends a more stable and orderly world, in which the possibilities of major power nuclear confrontation are driven into the political background and as regional aggressors come to recognize that their challenges will prove both futile and counterproductive. Such stability ought to be broadly welcomed on the world stage. But there are of course other possibilities. Much international discussion has focused on the possible emergence of a more multipolar nuclear world, in which stability is either broadly enjoyed because of the effects of the balance of power or is little in evidence because of competitive pressures and flashpoints. Yet another possibility is that the bipolar order will give way to a more tripolar one. This might be so if somehow the nuclear and strategic interactions of the United States, Russia, and China were to become tightly coupled, with deep and far-ranging implications for the larger structure of international relations.

The purpose of this paper is to explore this third possibility. In prior work for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the Institute for Defense Analyses has identified the increasingly complex nuclear offense/defense relationships between the United States,

Russia, and China as a potential major source of nuclear instability.¹ The purpose of this analysis is to carry this work forward in light of the new strategic framework and to explore whether and how China might emerge as a potential spoiler of the nuclear future that Washington and Moscow have now embarked on constructing.

In order to gain insights into these matters, this analysis proceeds as follows. It begins with an exploration of the strategic interaction among the three countries, with an eye toward identifying its essential components and characterizing its functioning as a connected system. The paper then considers how relations among the three might evolve between now and 2012. The 2012 timeframe was selected not merely for its convenience as a milestone a decade hence but because the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) explicitly envisions “a journey” to 2012—and because the Moscow Treaty will expire that year, raising questions about the nuclear order to follow.² This consideration requires an elaboration of the drivers of those alternative futures (four are considered). This analysis suggests that the journey to the nuclear future preferred by Washington and Moscow could prove troubled. The alternative journeys could pose starkly different challenges for U.S. national security and international stability. On the assumption that Washington should want to shape the trajectory of developments in ways that serve its interests in security and stability, the paper then explores implications for policy and strategy. The focus here is on implications for the “new strategic framework” and for the “strategy for stability” being pursued by the administration. The paper then closes with discussion of conclusions and implications.

Given the future-oriented framework of analysis, this is necessarily a speculative inquiry. Its purpose is to illuminate facets of the tripolar interaction, possible system dynamics, and logical policy implications with the hope of stimulating deeper and more sustained investigation of the initial insights here.

Given the intense focus of U.S. national leadership on the war on terror, it is necessary to consider why an inquiry into the future tripolar nuclear dynamic might be of

¹ Brad Roberts, *Nuclear Multipolarity and Stability*, IDA Document P-2539, IDA, pp. 4-19.

² The term “the journey” is taken from the unclassified briefing “Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review,” January 9, 2002, available at www.defenselink.mil.

value at this time. After all, al Qaeda and militant, radical Islam appear to pose a new strategic threat to the United States and to international stability more generally. Prolonged war holds out the possibility of a basic realignment of world politics in a way that eclipses the present divisions and balances of power with a new structure synopsized by some as the “clash of civilizations.”³ It is indeed conceivable that the crisis of modern Islam may end up remaking world order in fundamental ways, including ways that eclipse previous major power factors. But it is too early to tell. Moreover, the United States does not have the luxury of focusing on the war on terror to the exclusion of other national security challenges. Major power relations remain important even if for the moment they are in the political background, as do their nuclear relations. Russia wishes to regain its great power status. China is an aspiring global power. Both hold the U.S. homeland at risk with nuclear weapons. Both have a U.N. Security Council veto power that may be used to constrain U.S. freedom of action. Moreover, in prosecuting the war on terror, Washington may find unexpected opportunities for consolidating peace and cooperation among the major powers, as well as unexpected pitfalls along the way.

CHARACTERIZING TRIPOLARITY

Strategic interactions among the United States, Russia, and China occur at three different levels—political, economic, and security. Each is considered in turn.

The Political Dimension

The political component reflects an episodically strong strategic interaction among the three. In the Cold War, a “grand triangle” was sometimes in evidence, as China was courted by both Moscow and Washington in a classic balance of power game, and shifting patterns of cooperation and competition among the three were evident.⁴ Ideological factors were of course an important factor in this process, in addition to pure balance of power considerations.

³ The term is Samuel Huntington’s from his best seller, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁴ For a detailed assessment of the patterns of competition and cooperation among the three during the Cold War, see Joshua S. Goldstein and John R. Freeman, *Three-Way Street: Strategic Reciprocity in World Politics* (Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

With the end of the Cold War, hopes rose that cooperation could substantially replace competition among the three. Indeed, the decade of the 1990s began with the promise of major power concert, in reaction to the aggression and illicit WMD programs of Iraq. But political relations among the three instead entered a period of drift and uncertainty. Soviet strength gave way to Russian decline, and a deepening internal debate about where and how Russia should anchor itself in a changing international system—whether to the East with China, to the West with the transatlantic community, or to an independent third way.⁵ China's move to political and economic reform in the 1980s gave way to the violent suppression of democratic forces in Tiananmen square, and increased emphasis on controlled economic openness and heightened nationalism. Over the 1990s it joined many international institutions and processes while also flirting with the notion that a more militarily assertive role in Asia had become necessary. This fueled a sharp debate within and outside China about whether it is a near-status-quo power or is committed to a Chinese way of Asian international life that includes removal of U.S. influence. Also in this period the United States rose to clear preeminence in world politics, while making frequent use of force in places near and far from its borders. U.S. preeminence became a central preoccupation in both Moscow and Beijing, where some policymakers grew fearful of the unfettered use of U.S. military power in areas of vital interest to them.

Thus, a decade after the end of the Cold War, the promise of improved major power relations had given way to a more mixed picture. The desire to cooperate and to reap the benefits of enhanced economic interaction was counterbalanced in each capital by suspicion about the intentions of the others. The second post-cold war decade dawned with a number of basic political questions about the relations among the three countries.

- Could Russia and China make effective common cause in their effort to counterbalance U.S. power? In summer 2001 the two concluded a treaty of mutual friendship and cooperation aimed explicitly at working toward realization of the ambition for a more multipolar world order.

⁵ Dmitri Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002).

- Would Moscow choose a consistent course in its foreign policy or continue to cater to all, with contradictory policies toward the West, the East, and the rogues?
- Would decision-makers in Beijing use force to seek an early resolution of the conflict across the Taiwan strait?
- Would they seek strategic cooperation with the United States—or strategic confrontation?
- And what were Washington's intentions? Both Moscow and Beijing were seized with debates about Washington's true intentions—to seek constructive partnership within a rule-governed international system or to seek hegemonic power relations in which U.S. military power would be used to press U.S. ideological interests in areas of vital Russian or Chinese interest. The 2000 presidential election featured in part a debate about whether the Clinton administration had been too deferential toward Russia and China, with critics arguing that the administration had exaggerated their power and reduced U.S. freedom for maneuver.⁶

One reflection of the apparent falling out among the three was to be seen at the U.N. Security Council, where the major powers were deeply divided over what if anything to do about nearly a decade of failure in imposing the will of the Council on Saddam Hussein.

The dramatic impact of the attacks on America of September 11 and the subsequent call by President Bush to all countries to “choose sides” in the war on terror would seem to have settled many of these debates.

Russian President Putin clearly saw a strategic opportunity, to shift the terms of debate within and about Russia, by closely aligning his government with the West and by bowing to Bush administration preferences on a range of issues. Among those issues was strategic stability; Putin led the Russian government to abandon its efforts to maintain the ABM Treaty, though he was ultimately able to extract from President Bush a

⁶ For some context for that debate, see Robert Kagan, “The Benevolent Empire,” *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1988), pp. 24-35; and Peter W. Rodman, “The World's Resentment: Anti-Americanism as a Global Phenomenon,” *National Interest* (Summer 2000), pp. 33-41.

commitment to formalize the new strategic relationship in the Treaty of Moscow.⁷ By and large, policymakers in Washington seem to take for granted that the battle for Russian hearts and minds has been won, the Soviet enemy has been converted to the Russian partner, and the futile effort to counterbalance American power has given way to recognition of the more promising opportunity to influence U.S. policy by bandwagoning with it. Whether reality closely accords with these perceptions remains an open question, to be discussed in further detail below.⁸

Chinese President Jiang Zemin saw a tactical opportunity, not a strategic one. Surveying what many Chinese considered the derailing of U.S.-PRC relations in the first few months of the Bush administration, including the crisis over the EP-3 surveillance aircraft, Jiang saw an opportunity to restore a more cooperative, constructive character to those relations—hence his commitment to contribute intelligence and other resources to the war. But China also saw the war on terror as unfolding in ways that reinforced suspicions of long-term U.S. ambitions to contain China's rise, with the establishment of a substantial U.S. military presence in Central Asia. Moscow's acquiescence to that U.S. presence was only a further insult to Chinese sensibilities. China's treaty partners in Central Asia are all providing direct support to the United States in the war on terror. Also alarming to the Chinese is the more expansive role of the Japanese military, with deployment of military forces out of its immediate defense perimeter.⁹

September 11 and the war on terror also had an impact on Washington's view of the tripolar political dynamic. The Bush administration perceived the need to set aside

⁷ See Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir V. Putin on a New Relationship Between the United States and Russia, November 13, 2001, available at www.whitehouse.gov.

⁸ For further context, see Hearing on U.S.-Russian Relations, Committee on International Relations, February 27, 2002; especially useful is the testimony of Michael McFaul, "An Assessment." Available at www.ceip.org.

⁹ John Tkacik, "Antiterror War is Geopolitical Disaster for China," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* (Vol. 1, No. 12), December 20, 2001; Bonnie G. Glaser, "Terrorist Strikes Give U.S.-China Ties a Boost," *Pacific Forum CSIS Comparative Connections* (3rd Quarter 2001), ejournal at www.csis.org/pacfor; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Sino-American Relations: A Matter of Debate," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* (Vol. 1, No. 7), October 11, 2001; Jing-dong Yuan, "The War on Terrorism: China's Opportunities and Dilemmas," Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, September 25, 2001, at www.miis.edu; and Jing-dong Yuan, "A New Opportunity for Sino-US Relations," *Asia Times*, February 13, 2002.

other, divisive issues in its agendas with Moscow and Beijing in order to focus on the war on terror. It was eager to have whatever cooperation and support might be forthcoming. From both, it sought much more substantial cooperation on intelligence and financial controls. From Russia in particular it sought above all acquiescence to the U.S. military need to use formerly Soviet bases in Central Asia.

This first-cut assessment points to the conclusion that the need to fight a common enemy has helped induce Moscow and Beijing to shift from counterbalancing to bandwagoning—from inhibiting American power to working with it. Putin brought Russia westward. The Sino-Russian friendship pact became a footnote to history. Beijing sought cooperation with Washington. Bush needed and wanted partners. Reviewing these matters a year after September 11, a more cautious assessment seems warranted. The political drawing together among the three that was evident in the wake of the September 11 attacks has not entirely swept aside the long list of political questions. Indeed, concerns in Moscow and Beijing about unfettered American power seem only to have magnified with the quick victory against the Taliban in Afghanistan, the near-global dispersal of military power for the war on terror, and the increasing conviction in Washington that ultimate success in the war on terror requires the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. This has sharpened thinking in Washington about the durability of the post-September 11 political alignments and about the conditions that might have to be met by the United States to sustain Russian and Chinese support for U.S. policies.

Time will tell if Putin's embrace of the West will take firm hold as a fundamental realignment of Russian interests. Within Russia, Putin's gamble seems to enjoy at best thin support amidst strong anti-Westernism; this has generated a debate about what types of rewards are needed, or appropriate, and what happens if they are not forthcoming.¹⁰ Some have sought rewards in the strategic realm (e.g., Bush's deference to Putin's

¹⁰ For an assessment of the prospects for consolidating Moscow's "Westward progress," see Eugene B. Rumer and Richard D. Sokolsky, "U.S. Russian Relations: Toward a New Strategic Framework," *Strategic Forum* No. 192 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, May 2002). See also H.H. Gaffney and Dmitry Gorenburg, "U.S.-Russian Cooperation after September 11, 2001," a January 2002 report of the Center for Strategic Studies at the CNA Corporation, and Yuri Fedorov, "Russian-American Relations: Partnership Prospects," *Moscow Yadernyy Kontrol* (Moscow: PIR Center, January 29, 2002), pp. 4-8.

preferences on the new strategic framework, including specifically a formal treaty format) and see U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty as proof that such rewards will not be forthcoming. Others look for rewards elsewhere, whether in debt forgiveness, the easing of Jackson-Vanik immigration-based trade barriers, or Chechnya. So far, Washington has been quite parsimonious in ceding to Russian interests and, with further NATO expansion in the works, seems scarcely motivated to address Moscow's concerns on these and other matters. This leads to speculation that Moscow's embrace of the West may prove short-lived, speculation fueled by initiatives by President Putin in summer 2002 to strengthen relations with the three states deemed the axis of evil by President Bush. Still others in Russia do not look for short-term rewards, and look instead for longer-term rewards in the basic political relationship between Russia and the West.¹¹

The possibility that China's tactical shift may give way in time to a more strategic one appears dim. China's leaders appear deeply wedded to the notion that the United States is bent on pursuit of an escape from the balance of power before China's emergence as the co-equal great power ("peer adversary")—and to the notion that Washington is willing to play with fire in Taiwan in service of its democratic zeal. Their fear of U.S. hegemony is visceral. Some rail against what they see as the absence of a rational international political order. Some count on increasing Chinese wealth to increase the military potential of China in East Asia, and beyond. Some see the need to act militarily on Taiwan sooner rather than later—before the balance of power shifts even further to America.¹² On the other hand, China's top priority has long been—and remains—preservation of a stable and peaceful international environment so that it can focus on its domestic agenda. Moreover, the domestic reform process holds out the prospect of a further loosening of the grip of the Communist Party, a richer and thus arguably more liberal China interested in preserving existing various forms of cooperation in existing mechanisms, and ultimately even a resolution of the Taiwan issue through political accommodation.

¹¹ Vladimir Frolov, "Carrots Off or On the Summit Menu?," *Moscow Times*, May 14, 2002.

¹² See Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000).

Of course, the U.S.-PRC political relationship is shaped by Washington as much as Beijing. And Washington is deeply ambivalent about China, even after its more cooperative stance post-9/11.¹³ The unending U.S. debate about whether to engage or contain China masks a deeper debate about the kind of China that is emerging and what kind of China the United States is compelled to accept—communist, ideological, militarily assertive, or pluralizing, pragmatizing, integrating. The debate about how to cope with China's rise also masks concern about the possibility of its failure to rise—to fracture and again fall into chaos. There is growing recognition of the possibility that war across the Taiwan strait is a serious preoccupation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and a serious potential flashpoint in Sino-U.S. relations.

And Sino-Russia political relations have not fallen completely apart as a result of Putin's shift. To be sure, there is resentment in China about Russia's "latest sell-out," an emotion fueled by years of effort expended by Chinese policymakers "stiffening the Russian spine" not to accommodate collapse of the ABM Treaty (and years of Russian assurances that it would not do so). This sense of sell-out cuts against two important shared interests, however. One is the immediate interest in a profitable flow of Russian military technology and systems into the Chinese arsenal. Russia is selling to China precisely the types of military systems likely to be used in a military clash between China and the United States over Taiwan—and potentially in future clashes between Russia and China along their border or in Central Asia.¹⁴ The other is the common interest in gaining access to the markets, capital, and technology of the United States and the West more generally—and, frustratingly for governments in Moscow and Beijing, "access" to

¹³ For two post-9/11 assessments of these matters, see *Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Security Review Commission* (July 2002), available at www.uscc.gov; and David A. Lampton and Richard Daniel Ewing, *U.S.-China Relations in a Post-September 11th World* (Washington, D.C.: Nixon Center, 2002).

¹⁴ See Mitsuo Mii, "Russian-Chinese Relations and Arms Exports," in Gennady Chufirin, ed., *Russia and Asia-Pacific Security* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1999); and "International Arms Transfers," chapter 8 in *SIPRI Yearbook 2002* (Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press for SIPRI, 2002).

the solutions to regional security problems that only America for now seems able to provide.¹⁵

A second-cut assessment of the impact of the war on terror on relations among these three countries must also address the willingness of Washington to accept Moscow and Beijing as full partners in this war. President Bush's early conviction that partners are essential to the war seems to contrast with a broader-based ambivalence within his administration about the actual roles of those partners—and concerns about the constraints they impose on U.S. freedom of maneuver.¹⁶ Policymakers have tended to express appreciation for offers of assistance from others while pursuing largely unilateral solutions. And of course Americans have debated just how much the United States should be prepared to help Russia and China with their own domestic conflicts, by turning a blind eye to Russian war crimes in Chechnya and Chinese repression of dissident movements in Tibet and in China's Western provinces.

This second-cut assessment suggests that the impact on triangular relations of September 11 and the war on terrorism remains ambiguous. The bandwagoning shown by Moscow and Beijing may not survive long. It may prove more superficial or contingent on reciprocity than has been obvious so far. It is particularly at risk if decision-makers in one or both capitols see U.S. expansion of the war to include an effort to unseat Saddam as a self-interested exploitation of terrorism to advance narrowly American interests. On Iraq, Beijing is a secondary player; Moscow's decisions about how to respond to President Bush's initiatives will prove pivotal for the future political relations among the three. A concert of power in the broader sense, one that would see the three committed to joint pursuit of a common international agenda beyond the war on terror, clearly does not exist. This simple fact suggests that the Bush administration's commitment to shift major power relations "from enemies to common interests and

¹⁵ For current assessments of the state of Sino-Russian relations, see *Pacific Forum CSIS Comparative Connections*, an electronic journal available at www.csis.org/pacfor, which quarterly assesses the state of bilateral relations in East Asia. The China-Russia relations articles are authored by Yu Bin.

¹⁶ Anatol Lieven, "The Secret Policemen's Ball: the United States, Russia, and the International Order after 11 September," *International Affairs* (London), (Vol. 78, No. 2), Spring 2002.

common responsibilities” has a long way to go, will take more effort than demonstrated to date, and is likely to be difficult to accomplish.¹⁷

This overview of shifting political relations among the three encompasses only one dimension of the strategic interaction among them. As argued above, economics and security are also essential elements of that interaction. This assessment now turns to each of these in turn.

The Economic Dimension

In interactions among the three countries, the economic component has assumed a prominent and increasingly influential role. Russia and China have overarching strategic imperatives to generate and sustain economic growth for decades ahead, as they try to catch up with the developed world while satisfying rising expectations domestically and sustaining employment and thus political stability during the transition. Peaceful and stable external environments are seen as essential for achieving these ambitions. The desire to prosper economically is a constraint on the ability to compete too directly or boldly in other realms. Moreover, enhanced economic integration creates powerful constituencies in countries that caution against conflicts in the political and military realm that disrupt the benefits of economic interaction.

For Russia, the perception that strategic cooperation with the West promises significant advantages to Russia over the longer term has been an incentive for President Putin's embrace of the West. Oil may be especially significant in this calculus. Russia is a net exporter of energy and has the potential to substantially increase its exports of petroleum products. The Bush administration is eager to diminish dependence on petroleum exports from the Middle East and Persian Gulf. The Russian desire to expand its energy exports and the U.S. desire to diminish dependence serve as an important incentive for sustained political cooperation and as a disincentive to confrontation over policies on Iraq or Chechnya (or elsewhere) that are unpopular in one or the other capitol.

¹⁷ Jessica T. Mathews, *September 11, One Year Later: A World of Change*, Policy Brief, Special Edition 18 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2002), available at www.ceip.org.

For China, far more extensive integration into the global economy is essential for maintaining domestic growth rates and providing employment as the old state-run economic structures decay. Many countries are betting that China's stronger integration into the global economy will reinforce its commitment to existing norms, practices, and institutions in realms other than the economic. Some also hope or believe that the domestic reforms necessary to effectively govern the market economy in China will bring political modernization and liberalization.

Even for the United States, economic cooperation is also a priority—with China for markets and cheap labor and with Russia for energy.

But enhanced economic cooperation brings political frictions too. Those frictions arise from disputes over the flow of technology in the globalizing market. Washington, for example, is obviously aggrieved about technology imported by China for commercial purposes but diverted to military application. It is also aggrieved about the dual-use technology that flows from loosely controlled entities in Russia and China to WMD proliferators. It is also aggrieved about the flow of military hardware and technology from Russia to China. Beijing is aggrieved about the flow of advanced U.S. conventional military technology to Taiwan. Political frictions also arise from disputes over gaps in patterns of trade and investment seen to unfairly advantage and disadvantage one party—as in the growing trade imbalance between the United States and China.

Economics factor into the strategic equation in one further way—as a determinant of the capacity of a state to acquire the instruments of hard power. Here some conventional wisdoms have emerged—and there is reason to be skeptical on each. In shorthand, these are simply that Russia is too poor to afford much of anything while China and the United States are rich enough to afford anything. Russia has of course suffered a major breakdown of economic structures over the last 15 years, but it also appears to have at last begun to come to terms with the barriers to growth in the way its law and society operate, apparently putting it on a path to renewed economic growth. China has of course enjoyed world-leading growth rates following its opening in the mid-1980s, but those growth rates may well have been exaggerated; in any case, more economic trouble certainly lies ahead as the more difficult challenges of structural reform come to the fore. The United States remains of course the wealthiest society on earth, but

it has shed a phenomenal amount of wealth over the last couple of years as a result of cyclical recession, the bursting of the information technology stock market bubble, and the adverse effects of the attacks of September 11 and the anthrax scare. Moreover, its wealth is itself a target of al Qaeda. These factors raise an important question about whether the United States can indeed “afford it all”—whether American voters might ultimately prove reluctant to finance a prolonged war on terror, major U.S. military action in the Middle East, and sustained military deployments to the Balkans and elsewhere, as well as transformation of the conventional military instrument and open-ended acquisition of ballistic missile defenses, all in the context of tax cuts. Choices may come to be seen as necessary.

The Security Dimension

The collapse of the Soviet Union and with it the ideologically driven expansion of Soviet power into Europe, Asia, and elsewhere has completely and profoundly altered the security relationships among the United States, Russia, and China. The Warsaw Pact collapsed. Soviet forces withdrew into Russia and then shrank considerably. Washington and Moscow have walked back from the nuclear brink in myriad ways. Moscow and Beijing agreed to measures to stabilize and demilitarize their border (the longest common border in the world). The risks of military confrontation of any kind appear sharply reduced; the risks of military confrontation leading to massive nuclear exchange and Armageddon appear to have completely disappeared. The fact that these three major powers do not actively plan for wars of national survival against the others is essentially unprecedented in the history of the modern inter-state system, which for centuries has been shaped by the competition for survival among the major states in a complex and often unstable balance of power.

But the risks of military confrontation have not entirely disappeared. Russian security experts worry about a possible resurgence of military confrontation with China once the latter has grown wealthy.¹⁸ For Chinese security experts, the possibility of

¹⁸ Dmitri Trenin, *Russia's China Problem* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1999); and Jennifer Anderson, *The Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership*, Adelphi Paper 315 (London: Oxford University Press for IISS, 1997).

military confrontation with the United States over Taiwan is a central preoccupation. Generally speaking, the American security community is much less focused on this possibility, though there is certainly a camp that sees Chinese aggression against Taiwan as likely—and likely soon.¹⁹ This camp also worries about the longer-term possibility of Chinese military pressure against U.S. military forces in East Asia and the hosts of those forces, as an inevitable consequence of China’s growing might. However real a flashpoint Taiwan actually proves to be, it is important to recognize that war in the Taiwan strait would not invite questions about the occupation and conquest of China by the United States—or vice versa. This is limited war, not total war. This is not to dismiss the possibility that all three parties to such a conflict (including Taiwan itself) might find it useful to attempt to cast nuclear shadows.

In the security realm, the nuclear aspect is of course important. Yet the nuclear relationships among the three seem very much in the background today. Nuclear matters have nowhere near the political and military prominence that they did at the height of the Cold War. But they are relevant today, both as vehicles for deeper strategic cooperation of the three and as potential disruptors of desired political relationships. In the nuclear dimension as well, some specific dynamics among the three can be identified. The present strategic interaction of the three is defined neither by intense competitiveness nor stable minimum deterrence. The nuclear posture of each is evolving, with force posture decisions made to a certain extent with an eye in each capital toward possible reactions by the other two.

The United States is on “a journey to reduction and a new triad” and toward a strategic posture that employs military power for purposes of assurance, dissuasion, deterrence, defense, and defeat.²⁰ Nuclear weapons continue to have an important place

¹⁹ The so-called Blue Team adheres to the view that China is a real and present threat that the United States alternately ignores and appeases. The Blue Team’s often harsh attacks on others in the U.S. community of Asian experts has fueled the inaccurate perception that they account for the entire group of people concerned about the possibility of war in the Taiwan strait. That group is indeed larger than the Blue Team. A standard point of reference in the debate about China’s military intentions is the *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People’s Republic of China*, issued by the Department of Defense to the U.S. Congress pursuant to the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act. Available at www.defenselink.mil.

²⁰ “Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review,” January 9, 2002.

in the U.S. military posture, but the Nuclear Posture Review appears to be continuing the effort, evident already since the late 1980s, to move such weapons from a central place in U.S. military strategy to one very much in the background.²¹ The Bush administration sees defense transformation and ballistic missile defense as essential to maintaining stability in an era dominated strategically by the challenges of asymmetric adversaries, small powers (whether rogue states or terrorists) made large by their weapons of mass destruction.²² Washington is hopeful that both Russia and China will respond to this new posture cooperatively and constructively, not least by refraining from further assistance to regional challengers armed with weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—especially assistance of the kind that would deprive the United States of the advantages it seeks through missile defense (such as defense penetration aids and other countermeasures).

Russia is immersed in a long-running debate about the role of nuclear weapons in its overall security posture. Some in Russia have seen nuclear weapons as a panacea for weakness in the conventional force, while others have been skeptical that the supposed advantages of nuclear weapons can be reaped so readily. The balance between strategic and tactical capabilities also remains a matter of contention, as some press the potential advantages of tactical uses in securing rapid war termination while others argue that such advantages cannot be reaped unless Russian nuclear forces are also able to dominate escalation to the strategic level. In the strategic realm, Moscow is concerned with preserving the credibility of its deterrent in the face of U.S. missile defenses. But it is also concerned with the need to hedge against the possibility of a substantial increase in Chinese nuclear forces targeted on Russia.²³

²¹ For more on the Nuclear Posture Review, see chapter 7, “Adapting U.S. Strategic Forces,” in *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, 2002. See also Kurt Guthe, *The Nuclear Posture Review: How is the “New Triad” New?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002).

²² These themes are sketched out in the *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (September 30, 2001) and in the “Administration Missile Defense Papers,” White House, July 11, 2001.

²³ For more on the Russian nuclear debate, see Nikolai Sokov, “Modernization of Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia: The Emerging New Posture” (1998), “Russia’s New National Security Concept: The Nuclear Angle” (2000), and “Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Issues and Analysis” (2002), as revised and updated for the NIS Nuclear Profiles Database of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (www.nti.org). See also Sokov, “Russia’s Approach to Nuclear Weapons,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3

China is different kind of nuclear actor. Its nuclear posture is rather different from that of the United States and Russia—it has sought strategic stability not in large numbers and effective counterforce but in minimum deterrence backed by a robust emphasis on deception and denial. Its strategic force heavily emphasizes theater capabilities as well as conventionally tipped ballistic missiles, on the argument that these are more usable than nuclear-tipped missiles and thus ought be more credible. Only a tiny fraction of its nuclear weapons can be delivered at intercontinental range—perhaps no more than 20. But China is modernizing and expanding both its theater and intercontinental missile forces, with an emphasis on mobility, survivability, and defense penetration. It is also modernizing its conventional forces in order to gain war-winning capabilities for conflict across the Taiwan strait, albeit at a slow rate.²⁴ Like Moscow, Beijing is concerned with preserving the credibility of its deterrent in the face of U.S. missile defenses.²⁵ It is also concerned about the possible resurrection of a Russian nuclear threat along their shared border, whether through redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons or reconstitution of a modern force of intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

These force posture interactions are given an added level of complexity by the geography of competition. China and Russia share the longest border in the world and thus their nuclear interaction is colored by consideration of force balances at the tactical,

(Summer 1997), pp. 107-114; Alexei G. Arbatov, "Military Reform in Russia: Dilemmas, Obstacles, and Prospects," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 83-134; Alexander A. Pikayev, "The Rise and Fall of START II: The Russian View," A Working Paper of the Carnegie Endowment Non-Proliferation Project, No. 6, September 1999; *Evolving Russian Perspectives on Missile Defense: The Emerging Accommodation* (Fairfax, Va.: National Institute for Public Policy, 2002); and Pavel Podvig, ed., *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

²⁴ For a description of China's strategic posture—and of how it differs from those of the United States and Russia—see "China's Nuclear Posture," in Robert A. Manning, Ronald Montaperto, and Brad Roberts, *China, Nuclear Weapons, and Arms Control: A Preliminary Assessment* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2000). See also Bates Gill, James Mulvenon, and Mark Stokes, *The Chinese Second Artillery: Transition to Credible Deterrence* (undated draft monograph; electronic version available at: <http://www.cia.gov/nic/pubs/index.htm>); Paul H.B. Godwin, *China's Defense Modernization: Aspirations and Capabilities* (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, 2001); and Mark B. Stokes, *China's Strategic Modernization: Implications for the United States* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1999).

²⁵ A comprehensive review of Chinese attitudes and policies toward U.S. ballistic missile defenses can be found in appendix one to Roberts, *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations*.

theater, and strategic level. China and the United States are divided by two oceans (Pacific and Arctic) just as Russia and the United States are; thus, many in the United States discount China's nuclear forces beyond that tiny fraction deployed with the 20 or so ballistic missiles capable of reaching U.S. targets. This view overlooks Chinese capabilities to deliver nuclear missiles against U.S. bases and allies in East Asia, its ambitions for advanced submarine and cruise missile-delivered nuclear capabilities, and its dominant nuclear posture in the East Asian region. These two points are merely illustrations of the complexity of characterizing the three-way nuclear interaction.

A Tripolar Model?

This review of the components of the tripolar interaction suggests a number of conclusions. First, the term “tripolarity” has some utility in illuminating the interconnected character of decision-making about nuclear force postures, the interests and frictions created by deepening economic interaction, and shifting patterns of balancing and bandwagoning at the political level. On the basis of this assessment, it would appear that political and economic factors are more prominent in the tripolar dynamic than are nuclear ones—which seem to remain largely in the background. Nuclear relations among the three pose a series of issues, challenges, and problems, but working them out does not appear to be a short-term priority, not least because none appear to raise basic questions of nuclear crisis or conflict. There is no political or ideological or territorial dispute of a magnitude that could lead to war of the kind feared throughout the Cold War—nuclear conflagration. Indeed, over the last 15 years, the countries have moved, albeit haltingly, toward enhanced political and economic cooperation. This is true even in the security dimension, as the West has tried to draw Russia closer to NATO and as the United States and its friends and allies in East Asia have tried to draw China closer to existing security dialogue mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (though obviously this has been far less ambitious and indeed has gone less far than efforts vis-à-vis Russia).

But the tripolar model also has some clear limitations.

Tripolarity has not replaced bipolarity as an overarching geopolitical construct. The current international system is shaped by the interplay of unipolar and multipolar

dynamics. The current international system includes a number of states beyond the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (the United States, Russia, China, Britain, and France) who can legitimately claim to be major or emerging major powers—including India, Germany, Japan, and in a certain sense Europe, among others. On the other hand, the world is dominated as never before by one power with global vision and global capability—the United States—which appears to be the only power capable of projecting military power unilaterally around the world and also, ironically, the only power capable of mobilizing multilateral institutions to action. Moreover, Russia and China are not poles in the classic power sense. The asymmetries of military, economic, and political power among the three are too great. Indeed, Moscow and Beijing promoted multipolarity as a counter to U.S. hegemony, an effort (or at least a rhetoric) they have dropped after September 11. Beijing seems today to hope for a form of tripolarity to emerge, so that it can count on Russia as an additional counterweight to U.S. dominance, though this too seems largely in the background as China copes with Russia's Westward tilt and with the singular position of the United States in world affairs. Even in Asia, the locus of U.S.-Russia-PRC interaction, the tripolar dynamic is submerged in a highly complex system of more than three dozen countries. Thus the term tripolarity is wide of the mark because it suggests a tight coupling among the three that does not exist.

The term “tripolarity” is deficient also in the “polar” character it implies. In an international system dominated by poles, those poles are defined in part by the willingness of additional, usually smaller states to collect around the major powers, essentially as satellites to the poles. In the present international system, few states are willing to align themselves with Russia or China. For the foreseeable future, whatever economic or military strength either or both acquire, the emergence of such collections of states around the power of Moscow or Beijing appears extremely unlikely. East Asia would not readily become a sphere of Chinese influence, just as the Warsaw Pact will not be resurrected in Europe.

Moreover, to the extent that the emergence of new structures of international power is today a real possibility, it would seem that something profound might be afoot in the war that began for America on September 11. The Islamic world may emerge as a

competitive source of power in the international system, if somehow the radical-militant-fundamentalist agenda makes headway and gains control of one or more states. If a radical Islamic front were somehow to form as a band of radical states, the “classic” great power relationships of the last century could find themselves submerged in an entirely new structure. And in their submergence, they would be made essentially irrelevant, at least to the behavior of other major actors.

Even in the nuclear realm, relations are not tightly coupled. The one-paragraph Treaty of Moscow is testament to the degree to which the closely interconnected postures of yesteryear are now moving along much more independent trajectories. The United States is overtly moving away from a strategic vision that is focused primarily on matters nuclear and on Russia and toward a way of thinking that is both more global and less focused on matters nuclear. Russia explores nuclear options as a generic fix to conventional weakness at least as much as a way to compete with the United States and China. China faces a multi dimensional nuclear planning environment, in which both India and non-nuclear Japan play an important role; to be sure, the United States is its primary nuclear planning concern, but even in this aspect China seems at least as likely to pursue asymmetric counters to developments in the U.S. strategic posture as directly linked ones.

These limitations suggest that it is preferable to think in triangular as opposed to tripolar terms. “Triangular” conveys the real but loose coupling of political, economic, and security relations among the three. It does not connote the role of relations among the three as a broader determinant of the structure of international relations, as “tripolarity” does.

But the triangular relationship could well become a tripolar one. Bandwagoning may end, not least if domestic transitions in Russia or China falter. Economic interaction may bring more friction than cooperation. Nuclear matters may resume a more competitive character. Benign triangularity may give way to competitive tripolarity in the medium to long term. It seems obvious that this would have large implications for the global nuclear order.

One of the primary purposes of this analysis of relations among the United States, Russia, and China is to identify policy and strategy challenges associated with nuclear

threat reduction. Accordingly, this paper now turns to explore in a more focused manner the nuclear relationships among the three, with an eye toward defining future possibilities.

KEY DRIVERS OF ALTERNATIVE NUCLEAR FUTURES

As noted above, the Bush administration has sketched out the approximate contours of “a journey to reduction and a new triad.”²⁶ Central elements of that journey include the following:

- Deep unilateral reductions in operationally deployed forces: Candidate Bush committed himself to deep reductions in the arsenal of deployed strategic forces and President Bush made this a top priority. The forces being cut are deemed superfluous in a world in which Russia is not a peer adversary. The administration was willing to proceed with such cuts unilaterally, on the argument that the close linkage of the nuclear postures of Russia and the United States was a Cold War anachronism.
- Creation of a new triad: Improving conventional strike capabilities will play an increasingly important role in the overall strategic offensive capabilities of the United States. Together, these conventional and nuclear strike components are defined as one component of the new triad. The other two components are defenses, primarily ballistic missile defenses, and a responsive infrastructure.
- Retention of a large responsive force: Rather than destroy much of the strategic force being decommissioned, the Bush administration plans to retain many of those forces as a ready capability to cope with strategic surprise, whether in the form of a Russia that reemerges as an aggressive adversary, a China that seeks strategic parity, or some new constellation of nuclear-armed challengers (or potential technical problems in one or more elements of the aging weapons stockpile or aging delivery systems).

Conspicuous by its absence from this short list is arms control. The administration has also seen arms control generally as unhelpful for managing the new strategic relationship with Moscow and as a constraint on the ability to meet future

²⁶ This introductory section and the quotations included here are drawn from “Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review,” January 9, 2002.

potential contingencies. But at the last minute, as ABM withdrawal was imminent, the administration proved willing to meet President Putin's requirement for some codification of the new strategic relationship, in the brief Treaty of Moscow.

What goals motivate this envisioned journey? One is transformation of the defense posture. As new conventional strike and missile defense capabilities are fielded, nuclear weapons are expected to play an ever less central role in the U.S. strategic posture. Another goal is transformation of the political relationship with Russia from one based on mutual assured destruction to one based on common responsibilities. A third goal is to reduce reliance on deterrence in dealing with the new class of strategic problems encompassing rogue states and WMD-armed terrorists. In a general sense, the new nuclear posture is intended to support the defense strategy goals of assuring allies and friends, deterring aggressors, dissuading competitors, and defeating enemies. The "journey" to reduction and a new triad is an ambitious one. Assuming it succeeds, it would seem that nuclear risks and threats to the United States and its allies and friends would be significantly reduced. This in sum is the vision of the Bush administration for the nuclear future.²⁷

How might relations among the United States, Russia, and China evolve over the next decade to impact "the journey" envisioned by the Bush administration? To what extent might nuclear coupling increase or decrease? How might nuclear matters shape the political dynamic—and vice versa? In order to gain insight into these questions, this section of the paper explores a set of four drivers of alternative futures in the nuclear realm. The following section then integrates these with political and economic factors into a discrete set of pathways to four basic alternative futures. The key drivers considered here are:

- China's reactions to developments in the U.S.-Russian dimension

²⁷ This vision has been criticized as taking insufficient account of the requirements of nuclear nonproliferation and of improved international cooperation to deal with the new challenges of countering terrorist interest in nuclear capabilities. See for example Michael May, "An Alternative Nuclear Posture," unpublished conference paper, June 4, 2002. It may be that these matters are beyond the purview of the U.S. nuclear posture and are in fact requirements of national security strategy more generally. At this writing, the Bush administration has yet to release its national security strategy, so criticism of the kind noted above may be unwarranted or premature.

- Russia's reactions to developments in the U.S.-PRC dimension
- U.S. choices
- Exogenous wildcards.

China's Reactions to Developments in the U.S.-Russian Dimension

To the extent China has figured in the Bush administration's vision of the nuclear future, it looms in the background as a long-term potential adversary to be dissuaded from seeking strategic parity (and perhaps deterred and/or defeated in a Taiwan contingency). China's muted reaction to U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty has fueled the perception that China is unlikely to make any sharp departures in its own policies or posture as a result of the new strategic relationship between the United States and Russia. Yet China's actions could significantly disrupt the intended journey.²⁸

Let us consider first Beijing's muted reaction to developments between the administration's stated intent to withdraw from the ABM Treaty in December 2001 and the Bush-Putin Treaty of Moscow. As argued above, Chinese leadership was eager to somehow remedy what they perceived to be the derailing of U.S.-PRC relations in the first few months of the Bush administration. Beijing had also been counting on Moscow's sustained opposition to Bush administration policies, and once President Putin signaled his intent to acquiesce to President Bush's preferences in the strategic relationship, the Chinese chose also to downplay their opposition rather than soldier on in solitary opposition (while also regretting the fact that they seemed to lack any negotiating leverage of their own on this point).

Beijing's muted reaction also reflects some other factors. One is the deep suspicion that many Chinese have concerning U.S. strategic intentions. Reading U.S.

²⁸ To the extent possible, characterizations of Chinese thinking and perceptions are supported with citations. But many of the views catalogued here do not exist in written form—at least not in English. Chinese thinking on these matters is typically done behind closed doors and is sometimes shared in conference settings where off-the-record rules prevail. The author has benefited from periodic opportunities to exchange ideas with Chinese counterparts in meetings of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific and in other venues. The analysis reflected here is informed by these exchanges and supported by citations where possible. The views reflected here cannot necessarily be taken as authoritative. But in the author's estimate, they are informative and every effort has been made to characterize them accurately.

documents such as the Quadrennial Defense Review, many Chinese experts see the U.S. national security community as preoccupied with the future return of a peer military competitor (which in Chinese eyes must inevitably be China; so apparently too in the view of some of the authors of the QDR).²⁹ They also see it as committed to the radical transformation of the U.S. military posture at both the conventional and nuclear levels (and in space) so that the United States will enjoy freedom of maneuver when that peer emerges. Many Chinese also believe that Washington nourishes the ambition of pro-independence forces in Taiwan, signaling a future direct military clash between China and the United States in an area of vital interest to Beijing. Hence the oft-stated Chinese argument that Washington seeks Absolute Security—and at China's expense.³⁰

The other factor is simply that China has already anticipated much of the “new triad” called for in the NPR. China has been focused on improving U.S. non-nuclear strategic strike capabilities since at least 1991, and the superior performance of those capabilities in the Persian Gulf War. And some in its leadership groups have seen U.S. ballistic missile defenses as inevitable since at least 1997.³¹

Accordingly, it would seem imprudent to read China's muted reactions to U.S. ABM Treaty withdrawal as signaling acquiescence to the new strategic framework and the future trajectory of U.S.-Russian nuclear relations. Looking out to 2012, what impact might the envisioned “journey to reduction and a new triad” have on Chinese nuclear forces? This analysis considers four factors: reductions in the offense, improving non-nuclear strike, the responsive force, and missile defense.

²⁹ The QDR figured prominently in a meeting of U.S. and Chinese security experts in which the author participated: “China-US Relations and Regional Security,” Center for American Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, January 7-9, 2002. Discussion focused on a paper by Admiral Michael McDevitt (ret.) of the CNA Corporation, “The Continuity of Post-Cold War U.S. Security Strategy, The Quadrennial Defense Review of 2001, and Some Observations on Ballistic Missile Defense.”

³⁰ As China’s ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, Sha Zukang, has argued, “The real motive of the U.S. government is to make use of the country’s unrivalled economic and technological might to grab the strategic high ground for the 21st century in both the scientific and military fields, so as to break the existing global strategic balance, seek absolute security for itself, and realise its ambitions for world domination.” Sha Zukang, “U.S. Missile Defence Plans: China’s View,” *Disarmament Diplomacy* (January/February 2000), p. 3.

³¹ For a detailed review of the genesis of Chinese thinking and policy on these points, see appendix one in Roberts, *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations*.

Reductions in the Offense

The promise of steady reductions in deployed offensive nuclear forces to 1700 to 2200 warheads is welcomed by Chinese disarmament community commentators as a further retreat from the risks of cold war-vintage Armageddon. But Chinese policymakers are also quick to argue that even at these levels the United States and Russia will retain large standing nuclear forces and will relinquish few real nuclear options. They also see the relatively easy withdrawal clause of the Treaty of Moscow as promising a renewed arms race at some point over the next decade. Moreover, Chinese readers of the reporting on the NPR believe that reductions in the U.S. arsenal do not equate with a reduction in the U.S. nuclear threat to China. On the contrary, they see specific references to China as a potential nuclear adversary, the rising importance of the U.S. ability to effectively attack hard and deeply buried targets, and the emphasis on capabilities-based planning (along with the anti-China tone of the QDR) as signaling a major U.S. effort to enhance its nuclear first strike posture vis-à-vis China.

Reductions to this level invoke an old question in Chinese disarmament diplomacy: When and how might China join the nuclear reductions process? At the height of the Cold War Beijing professed a willingness to join the arms control process when the two superpowers began serious reductions. A bit later it stated a willingness to join the process when their arsenals had been reduced by half. The 1700–2200 level is well below that halfway mark. But it is also well above the total number of warheads assumed to be held by China (variously estimated at between 450 and 600). China has made no statement suggesting that it is now prepared to join the nuclear arms control process (beyond its limited obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty).

Then there is the question of dissuasion. To what extent might the U.S. commitment to retain a relatively large operationally deployed force actually serve to dissuade China's leaders from seeking to build up China's nuclear forces to quantitative parity with the United States? At the present time, China seems unmotivated to seek such parity. There is very little sentiment in China for competing in quantitative terms with the other nuclear powers. Nuclear minimalism is deeply engrained and for decades has been seen as meeting the requirements of nuclear sufficiency. Moreover, the Soviet Union is held up as a powerful example of a country that bankrupted itself in an arms

race with the West. Most Chinese experts seem to adhere to the view that effective parity can be had without numerical equivalency. This form of “parity” equates with mutual vulnerability. China’s leaders seem to have believed that China can have nuclear sufficiency in this context with a small standing force; a robust program of concealment, denial, and deception; and other forms of asymmetry. Thus it would seem that the potentially dissuasive effect of a large U.S. operationally deployed force is not of immediate significance but may be so in the longer term. It is directly tied to the question of whether nuclear minimalism will be seen in Beijing as still adequate to meet the requirements of sufficiency. This seems to be an open question, for reasons elaborated below.

Improving Non-Nuclear Strike

Improving U.S. non-nuclear strike is a familiar problem for the Chinese. The performance of U.S. conventional strike capabilities in the Persian Gulf War signaled to Chinese experts a breakthrough in the U.S. strategic posture, presenting for the first time the possibility of a successful U.S. preemptive strike on Chinese intercontinental nuclear forces without unleashing nuclear war. The Persian Gulf War also signaled of course the very poor performance of U.S. conventional strike capabilities against mobile targets—a factor that reinforced the Chinese commitment to new generation strategic forces of its own that are solid-fueled and road-mobile.

The U.S. commitment to seek continued improvement in the use of non-nuclear systems for strategic strike purposes must suggest to Chinese military planners the possibility that the United States may succeed in developing the means to successfully attack mobile ground-based systems. This would call into question the viability of their intended fix to the strategic vulnerability they perceive. Presumably the performance of new U.S. capabilities is being watched closely by Chinese military analysts for what it might convey about the U.S. ability to find and destroy mobile systems. If the Chinese come to see such a development as likely, they may see large numerical increases in their own deployed strike systems as necessary. They might also put increased emphasis on development of improved abilities to deliver multiple warheads from surviving platforms,

whether through MRV, MARV, or MIRV technologies.³² They might also make more determined efforts to modernize sea-based systems, in order to make them more survivable—and for the purpose of holding hostage U.S. bases and U.S. allies in East Asia and ultimately the United States itself.

The Responsive Force

Together with the operationally deployed force, the responsive force (of downloaded warheads and residual force structure) is intended in part to help dissuade potential U.S. adversaries from competing to develop and deploy strategic forces with the hope of gaining newly effective forms of leverage over the United States and its allies and friends. In the U.S.-PRC relationship, the Bush administration has placed primary emphasis on the operationally deployed force for this dissuasive effect. The responsive force seems not particularly salient in the calculation of Chinese strategic interests at this time. Moreover, the form of “arms racing” that is readily conceivable in the U.S.-PRC relationship is a defense/offense race in which the U.S. capacity to generate defensive forces as opposed to offensive ones might be the real measure of merit.

Some Chinese analysts have expressed the view that the further development of the responsive force is a sign of American posturing for a post-2012 breakout from parity with Russia to clear superiority over all other nations.³³ They cite also the easy withdrawal clause of the Treaty of Moscow and the absence of any commitment to nuclear reductions beyond the treaty’s 10-year timeframe. This perception has apparently fueled the debate about whether and how far China might move away from nuclear minimalism in the longer term.

³² MRV is multiple reentry vehicle. MARV is maneuverable reentry vehicle. MIRV is multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles.

³³ In making their case about the U.S. pursuit of superiority, they draw in part on arguments found in a document prepared in 2000 by many of the individuals now serving in policymaking positions in the Bush administration. See *Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control* (Fairfax, Va.: National Institute for Public Policy, 2001), p. 9, subsection: “The Political-Psychological Importance of Numbers.”

Missile Defense

The component of the new triad of most obvious immediate concern to China is the defense component. Here China has exhibited various interests.³⁴

Its first concern has been about the possible provision to Taiwan of improved ballistic missile defenses. With its ongoing build-up of short-range ballistic missiles across the strait, China is already well along the way to “racing” to an advantage in this balance, whatever missile defense system(s) the United States and Taiwan may ultimately choose to deploy there. Beijing's concern is as much political as military-operational. It sees U.S. missile defenses in the region as drawing Taiwan closer into a long-term defense relationship with the United States, as violating the U.S. commitment to decrease the technical capabilities of military systems provided to Taiwan, as reinforcing the Taiwanese independence movement, and thus as leading to a situation in which the People's Liberation Army (PLA) must act in order to restore momentum toward full Chinese sovereignty. Americans should not be surprised to see a future Chinese offer to freeze missile deployments with the hope of forestalling U.S. BMD deployments there—and preserving its quantitatively superior position. Actual U.S. deployment of some new generation defenses into the strait could stimulate Chinese deployment of missiles with improved penetration aids, as well as increased reliance on cruise missiles and remotely piloted vehicles. Some Chinese experts have also talked about a possible reposturing of Chinese forces to decrease reliance on the types of short-range systems against which such defenses might be effective and to increase reliance on medium-range systems against which such theater defenses might be less effective.

China's next concern is about U.S. provision of theater missile defenses to Japan. Again Beijing's overarching political interest is to inhibit new forms of defense cooperation that seem to promise an even longer U.S. military presence in the region. But there is also a specific concern that Japanese missile defenses would be used as part of a covert strategy aimed at nuclear breakout by Japan. The Chinese expert community is convinced that Japan is headed toward such breakout, and with active U.S. support. They see signs of this effort in the accumulation of fissile materials in Japan's civilian nuclear energy program, the advanced design and engineering capabilities in Japan's defense industrial and commercial energy sectors, the development of space-launch

³⁴ As noted earlier, these views are elaborated in further detail in appendix one to Roberts, *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations*.

capabilities, and now an independent Japanese satellite reconnaissance system as well. An independent Japanese nuclear force would put new demands on the Chinese strategic posture—and would certainly color its view of the international security environment more generally. Most Chinese remain deeply wary of Japan, which they see as an unrepentant aggressor that is therefore not a “normal” power that can be expected to behave in peaceful ways. In general, many Chinese security specialists see deployment of U.S. theater missile defenses to its friends and allies in East Asia as part of a secret U.S. strategy to deepen its post-cold war military engagement in the region and to draw those friends and allies into an alliance aimed at encircling and containing China.

China's final concern about missile defense relates to its fear that defense of the American homeland will undermine the credibility of China's strategic deterrent. This is a long-standing concern that took more concrete shape with the developments in Washington in the summer of 1997, including principally the act of Congress to declare the fielding of such a defense an immediate national priority. Chinese policymakers and experts appear nearly unanimous in their view that ballistic missile defense has as its primary purpose the blunting of the Chinese deterrent. They dismiss arguments about the rogues as a subterfuge and cannot envisage a U.S. willingness to spend so much money to defend itself against threats they see as miniscule and incredible.³⁵ They also interpret the history of U.S.-PRC relations as marked by a good deal of nuclear arm-twisting by Washington before China acquired a nuclear capability and an absence of such arm-twisting thereafter. Therefore, they fear renewed American meddling in areas of vital Chinese interest if Americans no longer feel themselves potentially vulnerable to Chinese nuclear attacks. Hence they perceive large stakes in what happens with regard to missile defense of the United States.

Between now and 2012, the United States seems unlikely to put in place a robust defense against ballistic missile attack of its territory. To be sure, even modest defenses could be seen to effectively negate the Chinese force, depending on their technical characteristics and also the Chinese response in terms of numbers and types of deployed systems (and associated decoys and other penetration aids). Between now and 2012, the more important question may well be what intention forms in America concerning how to proceed when further technical options become available. Might it choose to “capture”

³⁵ In Ambassador Sha's words, the North Korean missile threat is “an almost absurd pretext.” Sha, “U.S. Missile Defence Plans,” p. 3.

modernizing and expanding Chinese forces with a more effective defense targeted explicitly on China? If Washington chooses not to “trump” those forces but instead to tolerate Chinese modernization without countervailing defense deployments of its own, will the political will to exercise defensive restraint prove durable in the face of mounting Chinese deployments?

For the moment, U.S. national policy seems to be not to choose but to hedge against future requirements.³⁶ Over the next decade, choosing not to choose will not continue to be an option. Washington will make specific choices about which missile defense capabilities to deploy and which technologies to pursue. The currently “open-ended” pursuit of missile defense must ultimately foreclose certain options and lead the nation toward others. If the United States clearly chooses to tolerate Chinese modernization without countervailing defense deployments, Chinese experts and policymakers predict sufficient Chinese modernization to field a small but modern force that is seen as capable of second-strike defense penetration. If the United States chooses instead to trump Chinese modernization, there are predictions instead of more robust Chinese responses. Chinese reliance on past practices of nuclear minimalism and concealment, deception, and surprise would likely seem less promising to Chinese strategists. Quantitative factors and major qualitative improvements could seem much more necessary. These could include a larger than planned build-up of delivery systems and of deployed nuclear warheads. These could also include asymmetric counters that depend not on force-on-force calculations to restore balance but new means to target U.S. vulnerabilities other than by ballistic missiles.

There are two caveats to this assessment. First, even as the United States debates its trump-tolerate-hedge choice, China is investing. U.S. unwillingness now to foreclose certain future options appears to have the effect of reinforcing worst-case planning by Chinese officials. After all, those officials have heard for years from interlocutors in Moscow (and many BMD advocates in the United States) that once the United States commits itself to missile defense it won't stop until it has the best possible defense within its impressive technical reach. Second, Chinese experts are as concerned with the command-and-control architecture for missile defense as much as the actual deployed intercept capability of 2012—an architecture that they imagine will have a capability to enable a rapid build-up of the intercept component.

³⁶ The nature of this choice and the benefits, costs, and risks of each option were the focus of Roberts, *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations*.

China's Reactions to the Emerging Russian Posture

Let us turn now to possible Chinese reactions to developments in the Russian strategic posture as a result of the new framework with the United States. Here the list of concerns is much shorter. There is no prospect of a dramatic breakthrough in Russian non-nuclear strategic strike capabilities. Russia's own ballistic missile defense capabilities are an old and familiar problem for the Chinese, in contrast to its newfound concern with U.S. defenses. Moscow after all has been protected by such defenses for decades, and China has worked to develop capabilities to penetrate those defenses. Indeed, the DF-31 missile, now of growing concern to U.S. military planners because of its apparent capability to reach targets in the United States, was originally conceived and designed as a "Moscow buster."³⁷ The central question for China relates to Russia's nuclear reductions.

The prospect of reductions in Russia's deployed strategic forces raise a more interesting question for China than U.S. reductions. Some Chinese analysts see it as highly unlikely that Russia will manage to maintain strategic nuclear force levels envisioned in the Treaty of Moscow and conjecture about how China ought best respond to a more dramatic collapse in the Russian strategic posture. This has provoked a small debate in China about whether, when, or how China might seek to replace Russia as the "second nuclear power." The argument runs roughly as follows: Russia, after all, is a country in sharp decline. China is a country clearly in the ascendancy. As China replaces Russia as the first country behind the United States politically and economically, perhaps it should do so in the nuclear realm as well, to signal to all China's full arrival as a global great power. It is difficult to gauge if these arguments have any currency in the corridors of power in Beijing. Of course, Moscow has also embraced the Treaty of Moscow and with it the easy withdrawal clause, which could serve its interests well if this option were to be seriously debated at senior levels of the Chinese government.

Other Factors

Possible future shifts in China's strategic posture are likely to be shaped by additional factors beyond technical ones driven by developments in the U.S. and Russian postures.

³⁷ See Gill, Mulvenon, and Stokes, *The Chinese Second Artillery*; and Stokes, *China's Strategic Modernization*. 9

One is the strategic political fact of Moscow's tilt away from Beijing and back toward Washington. President Putin's partnership with President Bush is seen in Beijing as Moscow's latest sellout and as a reminder that China cannot count on partners in counterbalancing America. This fuels the already flammable sense of go-it-alone Chinese nationalism. But Russians also argue to Chinese that Putin was able to secure an important benefit for China in the Treaty of Moscow. In this period of domestic rejuvenation and external weakness, the Chinese highly prize predictability in the international environment—not least in nuclear relations between the United States and Russia and also within neighboring regions. The Treaty of Moscow offers the maximum degree of predictability that the Bush administration is prepared to offer, and this is a strategic benefit for Beijing.

U.S. policy on Taiwan will also be a central factor in the future evolution of China's strategic posture. That policy directly informs Chinese expectations of war there. Chinese perceptions of U.S. strategic intentions more generally will be important. Does it perceive an America seeking cooperation and conciliation or obstruction and confrontation? China's own political-military strategy for the East Asian region will also be a driver. Does it seek an expansion of its military influence there and increasing confrontation with the United States or does it seek cooperation and conciliation? Choices on these matters point to different weightings of the Chinese strategic force.

In sum, what does this analysis suggest about possible departures in the PRC posture as a result of developments in the U.S.-Russian dimension? Modernization of the Chinese strategic/missile force is underway, but it may come at a more rapid pace and planners may revise their goals to higher levels. Chinese capabilities seem likely to increase numerically in response to developments in the triangle, but how much is uncertain—despite reductions in the arsenals of the United States and Russia. Increased reliance on penetration aids seems likely. Advanced warhead types that are lighter and more easily maneuverable also seem likely to be of heightened interest to the Chinese. This raises questions about whether China would need to test new types of nuclear weapons in order to gain confidence in them before deployment; this invokes questions about the fate of the test moratorium.³⁸

It is important to note that not all possible departures are in the Chinese nuclear force posture. Developments in the U.S.-Russian dimension may generate a more

³⁸ Technical Issues Related to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2002), especially chapter 3, "Potential Impact of Foreign Testing."

concerted pursuit of asymmetric counters to U.S. hegemony generally, as well as more challenges to U.S. interests in Taiwan and elsewhere.

Anticipating possible departures in the PRC posture is complicated by a number of factors. One is that there is so much uncertainty today about the present trajectory of Chinese strategic forces. It is clear that China seeks better and bigger forces, but it is not clear how much of each it seeks, and how quickly. Another difficulty is that developments in the U.S.-Russian dimension may unfold along a trajectory different than that envisioned in the new strategic framework. Technological and/or economic factors could cause the United States to stumble in its pursuit of missile defenses; this would seem likely to have the effect in China of attenuating pressures to compete. Russia could lag far behind the United States in maintaining its forces, with the U.S. being seen clearly to have gained offensive superiority. This would seem to have the effect in China of stoking the debate about whether and when to replace Russia as the world's second nuclear power. Alternatively, Russia could choose to undertake a major renovation and rejuvenation of its strategic nuclear forces, in part as compensation for chronic conventional weakness. The impact on the PRC would be to reinforce increased reliance on its own theater-strategic forces; this would have a negative impact on various U.S. East Asian interests, including especially Japanese perceptions of the emerging nuclear environment.

Russia's Reactions to Developments in the U.S.-PRC Dimension

The second important driver of alternative nuclear futures among the three is possible Russian reactions to developments in the U.S.-PRC nuclear relationship.

In general, Russia has been more concerned with possible developments in the U.S. strategic posture than the Chinese one. As evident in its reticence to see the U.S. move away from the ABM Treaty, Moscow has been concerned the U.S. posture would develop in ways that were either unpredictable or would call into question the premise of mutual strategic vulnerability. Russian leaders are concerned also to continue to project an image of strategic equality with the United States at a time of sharp decline in Russian political and economic standing. The Treaty of Moscow appears to have provided some satisfaction on these points. For now at least, the United States seeks not to deploy defenses that would call into question the viability of the Russian deterrent, while also promising reductions below what Washington evidently considers necessary for “an

immediate contingency involving Russia.”³⁹ Given its fixed-term duration, however, the treaty may well be seen in Moscow as only forestalling some of the more problematic potential developments in the U.S. posture, as for example a move from a limited ballistic missile defense to a more comprehensive, robust one.

As noted above, Russia has also been concerned about the impact of Chinese strategic modernization on the overall Russian nuclear situation. A central Russian concern is to preserve some measure of balance as China deploys DF-31 missiles. After all, the DF-31 was originally conceived and designed as a replacement for first-generation systems targeted on Moscow. Defense planners in Moscow are also concerned with the prospect of a large increase in Chinese conventional military capabilities as its economy grows and with the possibility of Sino-Russian conflict over energy resources and competing territorial claims in Central Asia and elsewhere. Thus, China figures in the ongoing Russian military debate about the appropriate balance between tactical and strategic nuclear forces and between nuclear and conventional forces. The prospect of a Chinese capability to dominate the conventional battlefield and to control strategic nuclear escalation is of course disturbing to planners in Moscow.⁴⁰

Facing these prospects, Russian planners have expressed concern about the absence of restraints on the Chinese build-up at the same time that Russia accepts new restraints on its own forces. These new restraints come on top of Russian abandonment of those intermediate-range nuclear forces that had previously been targeted on “theater” adversaries in Eurasia. The decision to retain the SS-18 was taken in part out of a desire to retain a MIRV upload should Chinese modernization demand it. Some Russians appear to hold the view that reliance on SS-18 upload cannot suffice as a match to a robust build-up of Chinese nuclear forces and prefer a hedge in the form of a more substantial reserve production capacity for new intermediate and/or long-range systems.⁴¹ As noted earlier, the relaxed withdrawal clause of the Treaty of Moscow may also serve Russian interests here in dissuading such a Chinese move.

Given Russian concerns about the possibility that by 2012 the United States might be ready to move from a limited to a comprehensive, multilayered defense, it is hardly surprising that some Russian experts see developments in the US-PRC dimension as a

³⁹ From “Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review.”

⁴⁰ These perspectives were collected in a set of off-the-record interviews with Russian experts and defense planners in summer and autumn 2002.

⁴¹ Pikayev, “The Rise and Fall of START II.”

likely driver of a U.S. decision to fully exploit that technology. A U.S. defense large and capable enough to deal with a PRC first strike could be seen in Moscow as large and capable enough to deal with a Russian second strike. In this sense, a U.S.-PRC defense/offense “race” could generate significant consequences for Russia in its strategic relationship with the United States—while also generating significant new Chinese capabilities threatening to Moscow.

U.S. Choices

Future U.S. choices regarding its new triad also seem likely to play an important role in shaping nuclear relations among the three.

One of these choices has been elaborated above—the choice to tolerate or trump Chinese strategic modernization. As already noted, reassuring Moscow that the emerging U.S. missile defense will remain limited will be much more difficult if the United States seeks to trump China. This highlights the simple fact that the strategic interests of both Moscow and Beijing will be directly affected by the types of choices Washington has yet to make on the nature of the ballistic missile defense it will actually acquire and deploy. The capabilities it chooses to put into place and the options it chooses to foreclose will be closely read in both capitals.

Another choice is whether or not to resume nuclear testing as part of the strategy to bring a new triad into being. How the current moratorium ends—if it ends—would seem to be an important determinant of consequences. China seems unlikely to be the first to test; it seems quite unlikely to pay the political costs of breaking the moratorium. But it also seems quite certain to be the second to test. Deployment of a more compact and lightweight warhead would appear to be necessary if China is to proceed with MRV or MIRV responses to U.S. ballistic missile defense. Russia also seems unlikely to be the first to test—if indeed it is true, as some allege, that it is capable of making improvements to its nuclear forces with tests that are not detectable externally.

What if the United States were to be the first to test? If the United States were able to persuade the others that its tests are in service of restoration of the status quo ante, the tests might generate few negative repercussions (beyond a round of Chinese tests and the resulting deployments of modernized forces). This may be possible to the extent that U.S. policymakers can persuade others that the tests are needed to certify an essential fix to a critical component of the deterrent. But if others see testing as in service of not the status quo ante but some new advantage, their responses are likely to be less restrained.

One possibility here is that renewed U.S. testing would be defended as in service of certification of an improved nuclear earth penetrator. Some in China see this as a new nuclear capability being developed specifically to reach underground Chinese facilities. Another possibility is that U.S. testing would be defended as in service of broader transformation of the U.S. nuclear posture akin to the transformation envisioned in the conventional realm.

The United States should expect both China and Russia to respond to such an effort with parallel robust testing programs so as to be seen to be competitive with the United States as it seeks new advantages. Any scenario that leads to resumed nuclear testing by China would bring with it rising U.S. concern about the ability of the missile defense in development to cope with improving Chinese strike capabilities—concern that could fuel rising political interest in moving more quickly to more capable missile defenses.

A third U.S. choice lies potentially somewhere closer to 2012, when and if Russia falls behind in keeping a large standing nuclear force and when and if the United States succeeds at bringing into being a robust, adaptive force. By then if not before, some Americans are likely to argue that U.S. security requires that it posture its forces so that they are clearly superior to the sum of those of Russia and China and also the rogues. A U.S. choice to seek overt superiority of this kind could fuel reactions by decision-makers in Russia and China determined not to be left behind.

Exogenous Wildcards

Future nuclear relations among the three could also be dramatically affected by exogenous factors. Six are considered here. In creating such a catalogue of wildcards, no effort is made to rate their relative likelihood. But all can be rated as at least possible in the period 2002–2012.

First, transitions in Russia, China, or both could falter and fail. Fragmentation could follow, along with civil war and international crisis. Presumably this could also precipitate a dispersal of nuclear weapons and material. Clearly this would lead to a new framework of relations at the political level.

Second, space could emerge as a zone of intense competition among the United States, Russia, and China—and perhaps others. The United States appears poised to reap the full potential benefits of military operations in space. Both Russia and China have long-standing concerns about not allowing the United States to gain significant military-

operational advantages there. As China in particular explores potential asymmetric counters to U.S. advantages, space may appear an attractive zone of military competition.⁴² Presumably a highly competitive race to space would erode the willingness of the three to cooperate in matters of offense/defense balances. On the other hand, it might afford even more intense Sino-Russia military cooperation, given the combination of Russian technology and expertise and Chinese money.

Third, transitions in the “rogue” states could unfold in ways that teach powerful lessons about the ability of the United States to shape international events. The coming decade holds the possibility of major regime changes on the Korean peninsula, in the Persian Gulf, and Cuba. If the United States can help to shape outcomes in ways that promote regional peace and security, and does so in partnership with Russia and China, the foundations for deeper cooperation among the three may have been set. This would require finding some common cause, presumably in the context of the United Nations Security Council. If it fails to shape outcomes in this way, or fails to seek cooperation, Washington should expect resistance to American power to increase.

Fourth, the nuclear nonproliferation regime, along with the treaties on chemical and biological disarmament, could collapse in this period. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is under challenge from chronic noncompliance, disputes about how to remedy that situation, and the accelerating biotechnology revolution. The Chemical Weapons Convention seems to suffer from chronic underinvestment of political capital in its effective functioning by the international actors whose investment matters most—the major powers, especially the United States. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was extended indefinitely in 1995 (though many parties preferred a more conditional extension) with the understanding that the nuclear weapon states would implement the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) while also serving as effective guardians against additional nuclear weapon states. Clearly, the CTBT will not have entered into force by the 2005 review conference and indeed testing may have resumed. And the unfolding nuclear developments in India and Pakistan along with unresolved nuclear questions in North Korea, Iran, and Iraq are a direct insult to the guardian roles of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (the P-5)—as President Bush has argued in the case of Iraq. Collapse of the global NBC control regime would seem likely to precipitate a spate of proliferation in Southwest Asia, Northeast Asia, and

⁴² See appendix three, “Space Support for Strategic Modernization,” in Stokes, *China’s Strategic Modernization*, pp. 173-194.

potentially elsewhere. This would create new and potentially competitive interests among the United States, Russia, and China in emerging regional nuclear orders.

Fifth, nuclear weapons could actually be used. The nature of their use would be a significant determinant of repercussions for the United States, Russia, and China.

- Use by India and/or Pakistan could create significant new incentives for the three to act in concert globally to reduce nuclear risks.
- Use in the Middle East by local parties to a conflict there could fuel the perception of an unraveling nuclear order, with some blame attaching to the U.N. Security Council for failing to safeguard order and nonproliferation there—blame that might also induce greater concert. But if the nuclear user were Israel, some blame would seem likely to fall on U.S. shoulders in addition to Israel's.
- Use by al Qaeda or other terrorists in the United States, whether against civilian or military targets, would seem likely to fuel Russian and Chinese willingness to support subsequent U.S. policy preferences—especially if the device or its fissile materials were somehow to be traced back to a loss of control in one or the other country.
- Use of nuclear weapons by the United States would bring with it a distinct set of repercussions. First-use by the United States in an anti-rogue war could generate new political pressures in both Russia and China to somehow counterbalance the “nuclear cowboy.” Second-use that somehow effectively terminates an escalating regional conflict could reinforce the commitment of the three to address WMD proliferation risks.
- Threatened use of nuclear weapons by either the United States or China to cast a shadow over a conflict over Taiwan or actual use to secure military-operational outcomes in such a war would set U.S.-PRC nuclear relations on an entirely new, deeply negative trajectory.

Sixth and finally, the looming war by the United States against Saddam Hussein appears rich in potential implications for the nuclear order to follow. A war that goes well from the U.S. perspective—that sees the removal of Saddam quickly and at low cost and with the promise of stability to follow—would likely reinforce fears in Beijing and Moscow of America as a rogue hegemon, likely in their eyes sooner or later to use force

to infringe on vital interests of their own. A war that goes poorly from the U.S. perspective could also prove unhelpful to relations among the three. If the United States suffers large casualties, it is likely to resent Russia's and China's neutrality in the war and past complicity in the failure of the U.N.'s Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) and thus (in American eyes) Iraqi success in gaining the weapons of mass destruction that (in this scenario) have killed many Americans. A poor showing by the U.S. military could also lead to a readjustment of major power relations as others react to a perception that the United States is not as powerful as has been assumed. Of course, a war to remove Saddam could be precisely the situation evaluated above, in which the United States chooses to use nuclear weapons. In the 1991 war, Saddam apparently pre-deployed and pre-delegated Iraq's arsenal of biological weapons precisely for a regime survival mission; renewed war seems immediately to invoke questions about the use of these weapons to secure regime survival, or simply to punish the victors. The prospect of war seems also to invoke questions about whether and how Saddam and al Qaeda might make common cause in time of war against America, with the risk that one or both will bring the WMD war to the American homeland.⁴³ This reinforces the notion that nuclear questions are on the table in a war to remove Saddam.

Conclusion

The future of nuclear relations among the United States, Russia, and China seem likely to be driven by a variety of factors. Some of those are clearly in the nuclear realm, as decision-makers in each capital react to developments in the postures of the other two. Exogenous factors will also play an important role. At this writing, the anticipated war against Saddam looms as a potentially very significant turning point in the nuclear future.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES TO 2012

How might these drivers in the nuclear realm interact with political and economic factors to determine the pathway from the present to 2012? Four different scenarios are examined here to illuminate the possibilities:

⁴³ Saddam and al Qaeda would appear to have directly competing strategic ambitions—Saddam's to consolidate a form of secular, socialist totalitarianism, al Qaeda's to eject secular government from the Arab world and replace it with a form of theocratic totalitarianism. Moreover, Saddam has engaged in only limited support for terrorism over the last decade and any possible linkages to the attacks of September 11 have not been found. On the other hand, in a war against the United States that involves the use of weapons of mass destruction, Saddam and al Qaeda may make common cause on the argument that the enemy of my enemy is my friend—for now.

1. “The journey” continues smoothly.
2. “The journey” stumbles along, more or less on course.
3. “The journey” ends but without regenerating tripolar nuclear competition.
4. “The journey” is replaced by a return to major power nuclear competition.

In elaborating these alternative pathways, a question arises about what expectations might have formed along each pathway about the trajectory beyond 2012. As argued earlier, 2012 is more than a convenient milestone a decade hence. The Treaty of Moscow will expire that year. The new triad may be blossoming. Extensive debate can be expected about the kind of nuclear order likely to evolve post-2012. Will “the journey” have brought simply smaller U.S. and Russian forces and a new U.S. triad? Will it also have laid the foundations for deeper nuclear order, for further success in moving nuclear weapons into the background in international politics, and for further nuclear restraint by the major powers—along with enhanced cooperation on common responsibilities and common interests? Or will the journey have failed on one or more of these points, and with what consequences?⁴⁴

“The Journey” Continues Smoothly

The pathway to this future runs as follows. Russia and the United States continue on a steady path to nuclear reductions, with China acting in ways that do not induce either to abandon the reductions process. Strategic nuclear relations among the three evolve but in largely rational and pre-planned ways, with a general movement away from nuclear war-fighting strategies and toward minimum deterrence. Russia is steadily drawn in as a partner of the West. China emerges more convincingly as a status quo power, opting not to challenge the United States with either a major buildup of nuclear forces or asymmetric counters and cooperating in regional and global security regimes. Major power comity is reinforced by deepening economic interaction that is seen by all as mutually beneficial. Political comity is manifested in common action on common responsibilities, including especially effective implementation of global mechanisms on economics and security (including nonproliferation and disarmament). U.S. allies are reassured and do not seek independent nuclear capabilities—and see no need to hedge

⁴⁴ This exploration of alternative nuclear futures draws to a certain extent on the work of a study group sponsored by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. See Carl Poppe et al., “*Whither Deterrence?*” *A Brief Synopsis*, Report UCRL-ID-148557 (Livermore, Calif.: Department of Energy, May 2002).

against a breakdown of the major power order. Wildcards do not erupt or they erupt in ways that reinforce the perception that the major powers have the will and power to act to safeguard the general peace. Rogues see no gains to be reaped by challenging and indeed are compelled by circumstance to reform themselves.

In this journey, 2012 looms as a window of opportunity to deepen cooperation among the major powers, extend reassurance to others, and advance the effort to drive nuclear weapons further into the background of international relations.

“The Journey” Stumbles Along

Along this pathway, political and economic relations produce significantly more friction in the trilateral relationship but not significant defections from the effort to construct the nuclear peace envisioned in the new strategic framework. Russia is a weakly committed and erratic partner of the West, sometimes cooperating and sometimes competing. China festers as a major uncertainty in international politics, and Taiwan assumes growing importance as a potential nuclear flashpoint. Mutual strategic suspicions about the true intentions of the others guide policy choices, inducing stronger hedging behavior. Common interests seem few. But the common interest in mutual economic benefit inhibits strategic departures by Russia or China that might otherwise tempt them. The rogues remain but do not challenge. The wildcards unfold so as to fuel fears of a future catalytic breakdown in the prevailing order. On this pathway, strategic developments are increasingly competitive. The United States seeks global military presence with little regard to the interests of Russia or China. Medium powers grow increasingly wary of unpredictable major power relations and hedge more.

In this journey, 2012 looms as a potentially major turning point. Confidence is waning that threat and risk reduction will be sustained and that the nonproliferation regime will be stewarded effectively by the major powers. Among nuclear-capable states, there is significantly more hedging and a growing awareness of potential major defections from existing nuclear practices by non-weapon states.

“The Journey” Ends But Without Tripolar Competition

Along this pathway wildcards would be the dominant factor—especially a regional war in which the local power(s) use weapons of mass destruction. Such a war could lead one or more of the three (but probably the United States) to conclude that a significant refurbishment of its nuclear arsenal is required. That refurbishment is tolerated by the others as necessary but at the price of some comparable activity.

Economic and political interests militate against more competitive responses. But crisis also drives major power nuclear concert. Wildcards create incentives to cooperate in new ways to police volatile regions and the nonproliferation regime. Major power nuclear relations are a muddle but it doesn't really seem to matter. Triangular interactions intensify but tripolarity does not fully emerge as a structuring principle of nuclear relations or the interstate system.

In this journey, 2012 no longer looms as a significant milestone. Nuclear relations among the three are on a new trajectory to an uncertain destination. That uncertainty is itself a source of concern for nuclear-capable U.S. allies.

“The Journey” Is Replaced by a Return to Major Power Competition

Along this pathway political relations sour significantly, nuclear relations are increasingly tightly coupled, and major departures in strategic relations result. China adopts an aggressive stance toward the status quo in East Asia and elsewhere, builds up its conventional and strategic forces, threatens its neighbors so as to coerce them, and acts on Taiwan, bringing war with the United States, or in Central Asia, bringing war with Russia. In Russia, Putin's embrace of the West is overturned as new political forces react to the new strategic framework as a cynical American exploitation of Russian weakness. Two variants of this more competitive future seem possible. In one, tripolar machinations produce an odd man out. Either Russia and China cooperate at the expense of the United States, including aggressive cooperation to defeat its missile defenses, or Russia and the United States cooperate at the expense of China. In the other, tripolar machinations produce aggressive three-way counterbalancing, with the United States moving as quickly as possible to achieve a strategic posture of clear overall superiority.⁴⁵ Either way, tripolarity fully succeeds bipolarity not just as an organizing principle of nuclear relations among the three but within the international system more generally. Medium powers in East Asia and Europe react to perceptions of growing unpredictability in major power relations with new nuclear forces of their own. The Asian nuclear order is transformed for the worse, with substantial proliferation in conjunction with the eclipse of U.S. power there. Economic cooperation suffers, with scapegoating of the United States for the failures of others and U.S. loss of access to Russian energy and Chinese

⁴⁵ Such a push for superiority could produce four different outcomes: (1) success and with it complete freedom of maneuver, (2) an inconclusive race with the United States not gaining the upper hand, (3) a failure of defense efforts and U.S. reliance on the offense to gain superiority, and (4) a United States well protected by its defense but inhibited from projecting power abroad.

markets. The rogues look opportunistically at the falling out among the three and act to remake local regional orders.

In this journey, 2012 again does not loom as a significant milestone. Nuclear weapons play an increasingly central role in international politics, shaping the ability of each of the major powers to act and to take risks. The trajectory of competitive nuclear (re)armament helps precipitate collapse of the NPT. New nuclear anxieties unfold in Europe and East Asia, among other regions, with a heightened expectation of nuclear war somewhere, sometime. Unless this trajectory is somehow clearly attributed to a wildcard, the United States seem likely to get the lion's share of the blame. As the most powerful actor, could it not have acted to prevent this turn of events?⁴⁶

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEW STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

How might this analysis of tripolarity inform thinking about the new strategic framework and the strategy for stability being pursued by the administration? As the Bush White House stated in July 2001 in making its case for ballistic missile defense and the then pending Nuclear Posture Review, “We intend to continue working with friends and allies to create a new framework for security and stability that reflects the new strategic environment.”⁴⁷ The “new strategic framework” has come into use as shorthand to describe the changing strategic relationship with Russia, the post-ABM world, and the strategic capabilities envisioned in the Nuclear Posture Review. The “strategy for stability” has come into use as shorthand to describe administration efforts to persuade allies, friends, and others of the benefits of the new strategic framework and to secure the intended benefits of assurance, dissuasion, and deterrence. This section of the paper focuses on implications for the “new strategic framework.” The following section focuses on implications for the “strategy for stability.”

The “new strategic framework” focuses heavily on the U.S.-Russian strategic relationship. This is natural and appropriate for an administration that has made transformation of this bilateral relationship one of its top foreign policy objectives. China seems to figure in this new framework very little. To be sure, U.S. concerns about

⁴⁶ This argument is drawn from Herman Kahn, whose ‘thinking about the unthinkable’ encompassed the argument that the United States would be held to a higher political standard even in a war forced upon it by a malevolent and aggressive regime—because of American military and political strength and its moral claims to leadership. See descriptions of his thinking on this point in William T.R. Fox, ed., “How Wars are Ended,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November 1970, p.10.

⁴⁷ “Administration Missile Defense Papers,” White House, July 11, 2001.

China have shaped the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Nuclear Posture Review, and the president's strategy for the war on terror. But thinking about China's place in the new strategic framework appears much less fully developed than thinking about Russia's place. The importance of developing that thinking is underscored by the potential for Chinese departures from nuclear minimalism in ways that disrupt the U.S.-Russian journey to reductions.

A central question, and one certain to be fundamental in thinking about implementation of the Nuclear Posture Review, is how to avoid falling into with China the kind of nuclear standoff from which the United States and Russia are now escaping. In the U.S.-Russian relationship, Washington seeks to move away from mutually assured destruction and toward common responsibilities, common interests. In the U.S.-PRC relationship, it faces a choice between accepting or trying to negate Chinese efforts to preserve mutual vulnerability. A defense/offense arms “race” propelled by a U.S. seeking to close out China’s strategic leverage would seem unlikely to produce improved Chinese willingness to cooperate on common responsibilities and common interests as the United States perceives them.

In facing this strategic dilemma, the NPR offers a first-cut answer: dissuasion. In choosing to maintain a deployed arsenal at least four times the size of China's, Washington (and Moscow) is signaling in part its intent to stay ahead of any future developments in China's strategic posture. But it is of course the defense component of the new triad that most directly touches Chinese strategic interests, and here the NPR appears to add little new. Moreover, if public reporting accurately reflects the content of the NPR, the review has even less to say about the deterrence challenges of a U.S.-PRC confrontation under the nuclear shadow over Taiwan—another area where further thinking is needed.⁴⁸

A second-cut answer will ultimately come together around the question of whether to try to “capture” modernizing Chinese forces with the ballistic missile defense. As argued above, it appears that the Bush administration has chosen not to choose between tolerate and trump, preferring instead to hedge against future possibilities and requirements. Having made this choice, the United States now faces the dilemma of somehow persuading Beijing that it will not exploit its strategic advantages to China's

⁴⁸ Some preliminary work on this question can be found in Roberts, *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations*; and Keith B. Payne, *China 2010: Deterrence in Transition*, paper prepared by the National Institute for Public Policy for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, August 2000.

disadvantage unless China acts aggressively, in the context of deep Chinese cynicism on this matter. Chinese policymakers and experts have convinced themselves, with a good deal of encouragement from Russians and some BMD enthusiasts in the United States, that once the United States commits itself to defense it will not stop before it has fielded the best technologies that money can buy. In other words, most Chinese policymakers and experts are prepared to believe that the policy of “hedging” is in fact a cover for a surreptitious commitment to proceed with development of the BMD “trump.”

Persuading China on this point would seem important because, in choosing not to choose, Washington has effectively chosen to put the onus on China. If on the one hand China’s modernization and other policies do not unsettle the status quo, then the United States is likely to be able to cope with China’s growing force without military-operational responses. But if on the other hand China continues or intensifies its proliferation and other assistance to challengers to the status quo or otherwise acts to unsettle regional orders, threaten U.S. and Western interests, and challenge global stability, then necessarily the defense like the rest of the strategic posture of the United States and other countries would orient itself increasingly in China’s direction. Essentially, whether the future U.S. defense trumps or tolerates Chinese modernization is up to China. Washington’s strategic intention vis-à-vis China will be shaped by China’s own behavior. This seems to be the logic of administration thinking, though if public reporting is accurate, it has not so far found its way into the “new strategic framework.”

Looking backward to the Cold War past and also to Russia’s present potential as a spoiler of U.S. ambitions in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere, the U.S. emphasis on Russia and the desire to bring into being a political relationship with it based on common interests and common responsibilities is obviously sound. But looking forward to China’s more influential role in East Asia and globally, and also to its potential as a spoiler of U.S. ambitions, creating the desirable political relationship with China is also a strategic priority for the United States. Finding common interests and responsibilities in the U.S.-PRC relationship is as important as in the U.S.-RF one. In Washington’s vision, is China partner or object in the new strategic framework? China is a key pivot point in the journey to the preferred nuclear future, with its uncertain strategic ambitions, growing economy, and strategic modernization program. Agreeing domestically to just what that relationship might be and where U.S.-PRC interests might be common is no small challenge.

But despite many frictions and suspicions in the bilateral relationship, there is also a foundation for some limited forms of security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

China also appears increasingly inclined to follow U.S. initiatives in multilateral settings such as the U.N. Security Council. It is essential to note, however, that for some advocates of ballistic missile defense, disrupting the political relationship with China is a price worth paying to gain the improved protection of the American public that would come with a more robust ballistic missile defense.

This analysis suggests further that Washington might more aggressively court Moscow as a partner in eliciting from Beijing the types of behaviors from China that will help accomplish the journey. Moscow can reinforce some of Washington's messages, especially on technology transfer, treaty compliance, and collective security. It can also be more restrained in strategic technology assistance to Beijing.

This tripolar analysis has also illuminated the ways in which Washington's own pursuit of the new triad might generate unwelcome reactions because of the interactive character of Sino-Russian interests. If America's answer to Chinese modernization is not tolerate but trump, expect new forms of arms racing, including the possible future Russian departures noted above. Russian acceptance of U.S. missile defense as not threatening to its deterrent will be put in jeopardy if a defense/offense “race” between the United States and China unfolds. If America seeks overt superiority later in the journey, expect Russian and Chinese responses in both the military and foreign policy realms. If America resumes testing, expect repercussions. If testing occurs along pathways one or two above and is seen in Moscow and Beijing as a necessary fix to a critical system that preserves the status quo ante, those repercussions are likely to be limited to the advances China might reap in a quick response. If U.S. testing is seen as a resumption of the search for competitive advantage, it may well be a catalyst for the less attractive futures. The potential for nuclear weapons to reemerge from the background and to become a source of competition in themselves would likely increase with any of these U.S. actions.

There is one further implication of this tripolar analysis for the new strategic framework. The envisioned U.S. strategic posture includes a significant hedge against the possibility that the desired future is not achieved and that unexpected contingencies, whether immediate or longer term, come to dominate planning requirements. That hedge is in the form of a large operationally deployed force, a responsive force of downloaded warheads and uploadable force structure, and an infrastructure capable of producing new capabilities commensurate with a broad spectrum of potential demands. This hedge provides comfort to U.S. decision-makers highly motivated by the possibility—indeed, in their view, near certainty—of future strategic surprise.

But this hedge provides discomfort to those with whom Washington is attempting to move toward common interests and common responsibilities. It fuels debate about America's "true" strategic intentions—especially about whether it intends strategic superiority at some later time, including the freedom to intervene in affairs deemed vital to decision-makers in Moscow and Beijing. And this hedge comes at a price—hedgies of their own, to the extent they can afford them. This includes deeper strategic cooperation between Russia and China in ways that hold out the potential to deny the United States some of the advantages it seeks in the long term. In eschewing transparency and other arms control measures in the new strategic framework, the administration may well have magnified the very unpredictability that it and others worry so much about.

By providing a place for a hedge in the new strategic framework, the administration deserves credit for attempting to anticipate and prepare for possible departures from its preferred nuclear future. But by giving such a significant place to that hedge, one wonders about the risks that the worst case may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The need to hedge against departures and worst-case outcomes leads to an emphasis on strategies that maximize U.S. freedom of maneuver. But these will be purchased at the price of a perception of increased unpredictability in major power relations, greater suspicion in Russia and China of American strategic intentions post-2012, and rising hedging by allies. These are sharp trade-offs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STRATEGY FOR STABILITY

The "strategy for stability" is shorthand encompassing administration efforts to persuade allies, friends, and others of the benefits of the new strategic framework and to secure the intended benefits of assurance, dissuasion, and deterrence. How might this strategy best be informed by the tripolar analysis here?

The strategy appears to place heavy emphasis on strategic dialogues with Moscow and with U.S. allies, principally those in Europe. With conclusion of the Treaty of Moscow, the administration has concluded a significant opening phase in this strategy. But a new phase has begun, where the work must focus on consolidating gains in the relationship with Russia but also looking beyond Russia to other interested parties. The dialogue with U.S. allies in East Asia has not proceeded nearly as far as that with U.S. allies in Europe. In East Asia, the case has been made less actively than in Europe that the "new strategic framework" is attuned to the local requirements of stability.

The promised dialogue with China is also an important component, one that has been slow to unfold. Strategic dialogue with China must encompass political-military as

well as political-economic agendas, as with Russia. A significant barrier to effective dialogue is the simple fact that, unlike in the U.S.-Russian relationship, the two sides have not had years of dialogue about strategic matters. Accordingly, they have nothing like the shared vocabulary and shared experiences that have facilitated the rapid evolution of the U.S.-Russian strategic relationship.⁴⁹ Moreover, China remains deeply committed to military secrecy and indeed to concealment, deception, and denial. It is also committed to the notion that restraints on its strategic posture can hardly be warranted, as it is by far the junior nuclear power.

The Bush administration appears ambivalent about strategic dialogue with China. As argued earlier, there is no consensus in Washington about how to manage the relationship with China or about whether the futures that we might prefer with China are actually within our reach. Some American analysts emphasize the desirability of enhanced transparency from China in the nuclear realm, though there are no signs that China is willing to proceed further in this direction.⁵⁰ China may be more willing to offer transparency in a multilateral setting than a bilateral one—as for example mutual undertakings of the five nuclear weapon states.

Persuading China that it is ultimately up to China whether the defense is oriented to capture its offense is a challenge analogous to the challenge of persuading Moscow that America's limited defense will in fact remain limited. In the U.S.-Russian strategic framework, reassurance of America's strategic intentions exists in the form of deep cuts, limited arms control, and cooperation on ballistic missile defense technology. In the U.S.-Chinese context, these measures offer far fewer reassurance benefits. Deep cuts are not a palliative to Chinese reactions to U.S. missile defense in the way they are to Russia's because the force imbalances are profound in the U.S.-PRC relationship. Arms control with China, even of the form of a paragraph-long measure, seems anathema in Washington; in any case, today there seems no prospect of an arms control measure

⁴⁹ To help define the necessary scope and content of such a U.S.-PRC strategic dialogue, policymakers in both Washington and Beijing have used informal "Track 2" processes to stimulate new thinking and test preliminary approaches. The author participated in one such meeting in Washington in March 2002, where various notions of stability and a dialogue agenda were evaluated in detail. See Evan S. Medeiros and Phillips C. Saunders, *Building a Global Strategic Framework for the 21st Century* (Monterey, Calif.: Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, May 2002).

⁵⁰ The Chinese government issued a white paper on nuclear matters in 1995, which provides some limited but useful information. See *White Paper: China, Arms Control and Disarmament*, State Council of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, November 1995. See also Pan Zhenqiang, editor, *International Disarmament and Arms Control* (Beijing: National Defense University Publishing House, 1996).

promising Chinese restraints on its missile programs or American restraints on missile defenses vis-à-vis China.⁵¹ On joint technology development, there seems no basis for thinking that policymakers in Washington today would consider the exploration of defense technologies jointly with China in the way that the United States does with Russia. This leaves reliance on strategic dialogue as a tool for managing perceptions and misperceptions in the U.S.-PRC strategic relationship.

A central question in the U.S.-Chinese strategic dialogue, as in the U.S.-Russian one, is whether common interests and common responsibilities can be clearly identified and jointly pursued. As in the U.S.-Russian relationship, there are many competitive interests. Moreover, there is the real possibility of war over Taiwan as well as the potential that at some future time China may aggressively contest the U.S. military presence in the region. On the other hand, as already argued, the two countries have common interests in a stable East Asian security environment, the management of nuclear proliferation threats in Northeast and South Asia, and preservation of the global treaty regime on nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. They also have a substantial common interest in a healthy economic relationship and a stable global trading and financial system. Thus the strategic dialogue must balance competing and common interests.

The U.S.-PRC strategic dialogue will inevitably encompass some discussion of how the U.S. open-ended pursuit of defenses may be channeled as technical options take clearer shape. U.S. interests would be well served by developing a clearer understanding of which technical options serve which sets of interests vis-à-vis China. Knowing which missile defense architectures protect and which foreclose various options for China would seem essential to coming to some greater understanding of actual strategic intent on both sides.

The triangular model raises a question about whether a triangular strategic dialogue might offer some utility. At this time, a trilateral process does not seem promising. The essential problem would be that each would fear that the others are ganging up on it. A dialogue among the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (the P-5) might offer a way to get at some of the main stability issues in a way that might not also invoke many of the disparate issues on the separate bilateral agendas.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the possible role of arms control in supporting U.S. strategic objectives vis-à-vis China, see Roberts, *East Asia's Nuclear Future*.

U.S. interests would also be well served if Washington were to take a stronger interest in the strategic dialogue between Moscow and Beijing. In general, Washington has perceived itself as a likely victim of that dialogue—a perception fueled by the frequent complaints it produces about American hegemonism. It might also look opportunistically at that dialogue. Moscow and Beijing might both be encouraged to send messages consistent with their own dialogues with Washington.

The strategy for stability does not appear to include a component specifically focused on nonproliferation, except to the extent that Washington presses both Moscow and Beijing to bring their nonproliferation practices into closer alignment with its preferences. Yet for many other states, stability is nearly inseparable from the absence of incentives for significant defections from existing nuclear practices—and thus expectations for an effective functioning of the nonproliferation regime, including the role of the nuclear weapon states as guarantors. The last decade clearly has put such expectations under stress. Moreover, the commitment to pursue common interests and common responsibilities as the foundation for major power relations points directly to their common responsibilities in effective enforcement of the existing multilateral treaty regimes and to their common interests in preventing a breakdown of the existing nuclear order.

During the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union agreed on the importance of nuclear nonproliferation and cooperated toward that end. The PRC disagreed but did not act to upset the regime, with the important exception of the Pakistani program. Today, Washington and Moscow still agree. And they cooperate extensively in dealing with the risks of “leakage” of fissile materials, nuclear expertise, and nuclear weapons from the territories of the former Soviet Union. Of course, Russian nuclear trade with Iran remains a prominent irritant in the U.S.-Russian relationship. To a significant extent, Beijing has joined the consensus that nonproliferation is important, as reflected in its membership of the NPT and various efforts to bring its export performance into line with agreed international norms and U.S. preferences. But its cooperation also remains limited in at least one important respect: its performance falls short of its promises whenever decision-makers in Beijing seek to elicit Washington’s attention and concern over the Taiwan strait. For many in China, Washington’s continued sales of high-technology weapons to Taiwan is a violation of previous U.S. commitments to Beijing and a form of proliferation in its own right. Moreover, in both Russia and China, the motivations to limit nonproliferation cooperation include also considerations of personal, industrial, and national enrichment. On the other hand, the

risk that al Qaeda might employ nuclear terror has seemed to increase their incentives to cooperate.⁵²

This pattern of incomplete cooperation on nonproliferation obscures the necessity of coming to terms with two major future challenges. The first is the likelihood of a regional WMD-armed challenger. As argued above in the discussion of wildcards, this may very well prove to be the problem faced in a war to expel Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. The next use of nuclear weapons, or the first use for mass casualty effects of chemical or biological weapons, will prove a critical test of the roles of the major powers and their potential to cooperate to safeguard the peace. Will that test cast them as in concert or disarray? Will that test teach the “right lessons” about WMD—that they are not useful for committing aggression and cannot be used to secure such aggression, especially against the major powers in their guarantor roles? More thinking needs to be done on what could prove to be a pivotal point in the nuclear future.⁵³

The second challenge is sustaining the nonproliferation regime in the context of the new strategic framework. The United States has done its best to make the case that the new strategic framework will reduce the incentives for rogues to proliferate while also ensuring that they cannot use illicit capabilities for strategic gain—which should greatly reinforce the nonproliferation effort. But neither Washington nor Moscow has made a case that the new framework supports and reinforces the NPT regime. These questions will be cast into starker relief if the United States resumes nuclear testing.

Questions about the potential role of arms control naturally follow this discussion of nonproliferation. The new strategic framework clearly moves away from traditional arms control approaches as tools for managing relations between the United States and Russia. But does the lesser importance of arms control in the U.S.-Russian relationship necessarily mean also that arms control is no longer important in the strategy for stability? As triangular dynamics come into better focus in policy circles, it seems reasonable to anticipate rising interest in how arms control might serve U.S. and Russian interests in restraining Chinese responses to missile defense. This will inevitably invoke

⁵² Shirley A. Kan, *China's Compliance With Its Arms Control Obligations and Chinese Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Current Policy Issues*, both Issue Briefs prepared by the Congressional Research Service and periodically updated. See also “China and Proliferation: Encouraging Developments and Continuing Concerns,” available at the website of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute, <http://cns.miis.edu/cns/projects/eandp/fact/posconc.htm>.

⁵³ Victor Utgoff, ed., *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Interests, and World Order* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

questions about what defensive options the United States might be prepared to foreclose, questions it is not prepared to answer at this time without a firmer understanding of its real technical options. As 2012 draws nearer, those options will become much more clearly defined. Moreover, as the termination of the Treaty of Moscow looms, Moscow and Beijing seem likely also to grow increasingly concerned with predictability of the U.S. strategic posture and with their need to hedge against U.S. “break-out” post-2012.

Such concern and hedging will fuel perceptions of unpredictability in major power relations generally, perceptions shaping the hedging behaviors of many other international actors. In many countries of Eurasia, latent nuclear capabilities have come into being with the pursuit of civilian nuclear energy and in some cases it would appear that these latent capabilities have been cultivated in part as a hedge against a future requirement for nuclear weapons that might be generated by a cataclysmic remaking of the Eurasian security environment. This form of hedging is not in the U.S. security interest, as it portends a possible wildfire-like spread of nuclear weapons in response to some catalytic event. If and as nuclear weapons are acquired by current U.S. allies and friends in East Asia and Europe, such proliferation would presumably be attendant also to a sharp delegitimization of American credibility and power. These are situations that it would seem the United States ought to avoid.⁵⁴

Whatever happens in bilateral/trilateral arms control processes, it is important also to recall common roles and responsibilities in implementation of the existing treaty regimes. Formal compliance and enforcement responsibilities for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and the Chemical Weapons Convention all clearly reside with the U.N. Security Council and, accordingly, its five permanent members.⁵⁵ The coming years will prove a test of whether those arms control roles and responsibilities can be sustained in the absence of the political energy invested in arms control at the bilateral level. Indeed, the strong opposition of many members of the Bush administration to arms control of any kind suggests that the administration will muster little if any sustained enthusiasm for actively leading the effort to sustain and strengthen these three regimes.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ For a discussion of latent nuclear capabilities in East Asia, the nuclear proliferation risks there, and U.S. policy interests, see Roberts, *East Asia's Nuclear Future*.

⁵⁵ For more on this problem, see Brad Roberts, “Revisiting Fred Iklé’s 1961 Question: ‘After Detection, What?’,” *Nonproliferation Review* (Spring 2001).

⁵⁶ For a review of administration policy and strategy in this regard, see “Strengthening Multilateral Non-Proliferation Regimes,” Testimony of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Marshall Billingslea,

Is Stability Still the Right Organizing Principle?

In elaborating its commitment to a strategy for stability, the Bush administration seemed to be trying to recapture the debate about the consequences of U.S. actions from those who use the term “destabilizing” as a generic strategic pejorative for any U.S. policies that they find objectionable. It also made its case forcefully that the greatest threat to stability today is not found in nuclear relations among the major powers but in the WMD ambitions of regional actors with a demonstrated willingness to challenge established orders and flaunt international norms. Its strategy appears aimed at inoculating the world from these challengers through an improved ability to deter and defeat them. It also seeks the dissuasive effects of being seen to have such capabilities—i.e., the effect of persuading prospective proliferators that there are no benefits to be reaped by pursuing and exploiting illicit weapons programs. Moreover, the administration's strategy seeks also the reassurance benefits of the new framework, in the sense that U.S. allies are reassured that there are no looming challenges to stability and thus they need not consider more hedges or independent nuclear forces of their own.

In elaborating this strategy, the administration has consciously set aside the traditional benchmarks of stability in the nuclear era—crisis stability and arms race stability. An underlying aspect of the strategy is the conviction that a more secure America is good for international stability because it reduces the likelihood of challenges to the status quo.

Russia and China have been conspicuously reluctant to set aside traditional notions of stability. The source of their reluctance lies in part in the fact that they are not guarantors of regional security arrangements in Europe and East Asia and the Middle East in the way that the United States is, and thus do not share the U.S. vision of the dire consequences of a successful WMD challenge in terms of the loss of American credibility and its ripple effects among U.S. allies and friends. As relatively weak powers who perceive themselves to be vulnerable and insecure, they are not made to feel more secure by a vision of broad U.S. freedom of maneuver, especially in their areas of vital interest, and especially also in service of the American ideological commitment to freedom and liberty. Accordingly, they are reticent to abandon the balance of power as the basic guarantor of major power stability. In explaining that reticence, they sometimes make broad historical claims about the balance of power and the nuclear revolution in

before the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services of the Senate Committee on Government Affairs, July 29, 2002.

world affairs, citing for example the works of American strategists of the cold war era on the stabilizing effects of the balance of nuclear terror.⁵⁷

Can Russia and China be persuaded that their interests in peace, prosperity, and stability are best served by a preponderance of American power? Is there a viable argument that stability will be preserved and exploited for common purposes if the United States succeeds in maximizing its flexibility through an escape from the balance of power? More work needs to be done on both these points. So far at least, it would appear that the best answer from Washington is that friendship with the United States pays more economic and political dividends than enmity. There may be some basis for accommodation on the argument that Washington seeks “sufficient” freedom of maneuver to honor its security guarantor obligations. Or there may be acceptance of the notion that a preponderance of power brings with it special responsibilities internationally. Agreement on either point would seem to require some clearer recommitment of the United States to the use of its power for purposes and in ways codified in the United Nations Charter, so that its power is seen in service of international law, not above the law. In making his case to the United Nations on Iraq, President Bush has framed some of the necessary issues. But absent some further political work on these questions, it would seem that Washington should expect Moscow and Beijing only to tolerate American preponderance as an unavoidable fact of life for the interim, one to be remedied in the longer term as power in the international system somehow equalizes, presumably as they grow wealthier.

Given the inevitability of adjustments in the U.S. strategic posture that some consider destabilizing, a new notion of strategic stability has come into increasing usage, one emphasizing predictable change. A desire for predictability fueled the Russian and allied interest in making planned U.S. and Russian nuclear reductions relatively irreversible and verifiable. Predictability is also valued by those who live on major power peripheries. Medium powers can get trampled in major power competitions. These powers are generally nuclear capable and generally hedge against a breakdown in their security environment with some latent capabilities. Heightened unpredictability in major power relations fuels their hedging. The potential for more competitive nuclear interactions among the three and seeming U.S. disengagement from the global nonproliferation treaty regime fuels the perception that such cooperation may end—

⁵⁷ There is a certain irony in Chinese strategists quoting to Americans the works of Albert Wohlstetter, Henry Kissinger, and others to the effect that the balance of nuclear terror is the only guarantor of major power stability, given their long contempt for the word and practice of “deterrence.”

precipitating the kind of cataclysmic breakdown in regional security orders against which the medium powers have been hedging.

In reacting to these concerns about predictability, the administration seems to be of two minds. On the one hand, its leaders expect and to an extent fear strategic surprise and want to take steps to minimize it. On the other hand, they also want to maximize U.S. flexibility and freedom of maneuver to meet future strategic surprise. Moreover, it is a strategically ambitious administration, seeking to be proactive rather than reactive in exploiting the U.S. strategic posture to promote fundamental transformations in regions threatened by rogues and in major power relations more generally. The dilemma is that maximizing freedom of maneuver may have the result of increasing the likelihood of surprise.

The elaboration of alternative pathways and 2012 futures provides some additional insights into this discussion of stability. Each future presents distinct problems of stability and different stability values.

If the journey to 2012 continues smoothly, the stability of most concern to the United States will be in the political relations among the major powers and vis-à-vis the rogues. Stability will flow from success in reorienting political relations onto a new framework of common interests and common responsibilities. The reality of concert among the three and the expectation of deepening concert will help to dissuade challengers, reassure medium powers, and focus political energy on the common political and economic agenda. To the extent nuclear stability remains a modest priority in the overall, it is likely to be described and assessed increasingly in the vocabulary of minimum deterrence.

If the journey to 2012 only stumbles along, with some progress in nuclear reductions but little progress in transforming political relations, political stability is likely to remain of paramount interest, but in conjunction with a greater concern about the potential of developments in the nuclear realm to aggravate desired political relations. The measure of stability will be whether it enables the successful transformation of nuclear postures and political relations.

If the journey ends but in a way that does not regenerate tripolar nuclear competition, stable nuclear relations among the three seem unlikely to be the primary preoccupation. The stability of concern will be proliferation stability and with it the attendant fears of wars of preemption and the uncertain competitive development of assured deterrence capabilities. Many U.S. experts speculate about this future with the

Indo-Pakistani nuclear model in mind—but it may prove a poor analogy. In no other region of proliferation concern are potential nuclear powers tightly coupled in a dyadic relationship. In the Middle East and Northeast Asia, for example, the effects of nuclear proliferation would ripple among three or more states. Moreover, in East Asia the defections from present nuclear practice of most concern are among U.S. friends and allies; their defections would portend a basic political realignment within these regions and for U.S. power more globally.

If the journey ends with tripolar competition, classic stability concerns about crisis and arms race behavior would likely be resurrected. But in this scenario, there is an important new feature on the stability landscape. In this future, the United States would be eager to escape the emerging balance of power and would enjoy far better means than either Russia or China to maximize its freedom of maneuver. Stability in the nuclear relations among the three could be much less highly prized by the United States than superiority. An interesting speculative question is what price the United States might be prepared to pay to secure such superiority. If its competitive pursuit of superiority were to lead allies in Europe and Asia to pursue nuclear independence, would Americans feel more or less secure?

In sum, then, is stability the right organizing principle for strategy? Yes, there are both classic and new stability concerns that deserve U.S. attention. Over the next decade the destabilizing effects of potentially increasingly coupled offense/defense interactions among the three could have wide-ranging negative repercussions. So too would the defection of U.S. friends and allies from their present nuclear practices. In major power relations, the United States must still be concerned about the potential for political crises giving rise to armed confrontation and for U.S. adversaries to choose escalation strategies as confrontation unfolds. Although nuclear risks in major power relations are much diminished relative to the Cold War, they have not disappeared.

But stability is not the only value. Stability is a means, not an end. It is prized for the challenges and aggression it prevents but it must also be prized for what it makes possible. Stability that makes possible a continued expansion of U.S. power at the expense of the other major powers—and the exploitation of that power in areas of vital concern to those powers—is qualitatively different from a peace that makes possible desirable changes in international politics and progress toward rightly ordered political relations internally.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This speculative inquiry into the unfolding strategic relationships among the United States, Russia, and China points to a number of conclusions. They are listed here and elaborated in the ensuing discussion.

1. Think triangular, not tripolar. For now.
2. September 11 and the war on terror will not help to transform relations between the United States and China in the way they have transformed U.S.-Russian relations.
3. Offense/defense interactions *are* coupled.
4. The “journey” to 2012 may be a surprise.
5. The “journey” to 2012 will shape expectations about the nuclear order to follow—with implications for pre-2012 hedging.
6. The “new strategic framework” must get on to common interests, common responsibilities for the three.
7. The “strategy for stability” must not stop with the Treaty of Moscow.
8. Stability’s value is changing.

Think Triangular, Not Tripolar—For Now

Tripolarity is a helpful concept in that it attracts attention to strategic interactions between the three countries that generally attract little attention among U.S. experts largely focused on the U.S.-Russian dimension or, in a much smaller community, on the U.S.-Chinese dimension. Tripolarity encompasses not only nuclear aspects but also political and economic ones in a complex system of interactions and interests.

But the systemic couplings remain weak. Moreover, tripolarity has not replaced bipolarity as a core organizing principle of the international system. Because the triangular interactions are not tightly coupled, they do not give significant shape to the larger international system. In time, triangular interactions may become more tightly coupled and security and nuclear matters may come increasingly to dominate political and economic interactions. This could lead to the emergence of a genuinely tripolar world, with broad repercussions for others in Eurasia.

September 11 and the War on Terror Will Not Transform US-PRC Relations in the Way They Have US-RF

The war on terror has had a positive short-term effect on major power concert. For Russian President Putin, al Qaeda's attacks were a strategic opportunity. For the Chinese leadership, those attacks were merely a tactical opportunity, with the U.S. response to them raising some major longer-term questions about the U.S. role in Asia.

What about the longer term? Time will tell if Putin's embrace of the West takes firm hold as a fundamental realignment of Russian interests. It may prove more superficial or contingent reciprocity than has been obvious so far. Time will also tell if the new generation of leadership in Beijing will perceive greater strategic accommodation of the United States as in its interests, or will take an even more nationalistic line. Economic factors work in favor of deeper political and security cooperation, though they do not ensure it. A concert of power in the broader sense, one that would see the three committed to joint pursuit of a common international agenda beyond the war on terror, clearly does not exist.

Offense/Defense Interactions *Are* Coupled

If the tripolar system exhibits at most loose coupling in complex military, political, and economic interactions, one place where coupling clearly exists is in the realm of strategic offense and defense. Decisions in Washington, Moscow, and Beijing about future force posture requirements are made with an eye toward expected reactions by the other two. U.S. missile defense is a primary driver of these interactions. But it is certainly not the only one, as China modernizes its strategic forces and as Russia explores how nuclear weapons might compensate for chronic conventional weakness.

This systemic coupling holds the potential to disrupt the intended "journey to reductions" and the effort to build new political relations on common interests and common responsibilities. The interaction of Chinese and Russian nuclear forces appears little understood in the United States. China's potential responses to U.S. ballistic missile defense could lead to Russian abandonment of the reductions process and even to renewed arms racing. The Bush administration has accommodated itself to these possibilities with a robust hedge in its intended nuclear posture and a relatively uncomplicated process for withdrawal from the Treaty of Moscow. But it is difficult to see that a resumption of more competitive nuclear relations among the three would be in the U.S. interest. U.S. allies and friends in both Europe and Asia would certainly find it

disquieting. The impact on the nuclear non-proliferation regime would likely also be unhelpful.

The “Journey” to 2012 May be a Surprise

Multiple drivers and wildcards could set major power nuclear relations off on a variety of trajectories. These range from benign to highly conflictual.

Many of the factors shaping alternative nuclear futures are beyond U.S. control. A major source of uncertainty is the fate of domestic transitions in both Russia and China. Their progress over the coming decade in restoring themselves as great countries will have much to do with their capacity to act as partner great powers in promoting peace and stability. The United States shares with them a strong interest in successfully navigating this transition.

Some of the potential drivers of the less desirable alternative futures flow from U.S. choices not yet made. Informing those choices with a view of the potential tripolar dynamic can help to minimize the risks of unwelcome developments—and of strategic surprise. The United States may take steps that tighten nuclear coupling and transform triangularity into tripolarity. U.S. resumption of nuclear testing could be one such step, precipitating responses by China and Russia that Washington would not welcome. A U.S. decision a decade hence to build the biggest and best ballistic missile defense within its reach (something more than the limited one envisaged in the medium term today) would be another such step.

Recognizing the potential for surprise, the administration has emphasized the need to hedge against unexpected strategic requirements. But there is some risk that in guarding against the worst case it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The administration rightly seeks the best case but does not count on it. While guarding against the worst case, it is important to resist steps that substantially increase the likelihood of strategic surprise. The United States should be willing to accept some tolerable risks where doing so substantially increases the chances of improved outcomes.

The “Journey” to 2012 Will Shape Expectations About the Nuclear Order to Follow—and Pre-2012 Hedging

The year 2012 is likely to loom as a major turning point, assuming that there have been no major departures from the “journey” before then. What expectations will have formed about the likelihood of continued reductions beyond the currently agreed target? Will those seem likely and predictable, or will they seem likely to give way to an era of

renewed competition—or something else? What expectations will have formed about U.S. missile defense? Will it be seen as blossoming, including into space, or will a limited defense be seen as both viable and sufficient to American need? And what expectations might have formed about nuclear developments in Asian subregions? Will they be seen as zones of stability or zones of major nuclear uncertainty and risk?

As a turning point, 2012 could point toward the possibility of deeper nuclear order among the major powers and more generally. But it could also point to the possibility of nuclear chaos. Washington should want to navigate the journey in ways that maximize expectations of order.

This is especially so if Washington wants to minimize hedging by others and the surprises these practices might present. The development of strategic postures, both offense and defense, requires long lead-time investments and major sustainment efforts. States also tend to hedge against worst-case outcomes if they see them as a realistic possibility. There is a risk that hedges themselves become a driver of undesirable futures. In Moscow and Beijing, Washington is perceived as laying the foundation to win at the game of competitive hedging. The interaction of hedging strategies may begin to foreclose some of the preferred 2012 futures while also casting a long shadow over the past-2012 environment.

The “New Strategic Framework” Must Get on to Common Interests, Common Responsibilities for the Three

Moving to the desired cooperative agenda on “common responsibilities and common interests” is a priority. Those interests appear numerous. In addition to the war on terror, these would seem to include regional security problems in Northeast, Central, South, and Southwest Asia; the risks of WMD wars in one or more of those regions; nonproliferation; and economic growth, energy access, and environmental protection. To secure the potential longer-term benefits of the present major power concert will require active leadership from Washington. A dilemma is that such leadership must be exercised in part in the institutions created to work on these problems, institutions that are by definition multilateral, and thus for which the administration has but limited enthusiasm.

As so far pursued, the desired cooperative agenda seems to reflect a vision that is largely U.S.-Russian and transatlantic and strategic-nuclear in focus. There is little to suggest it also encompasses U.S.-Chinese, transpacific, and theater-nuclear matters. China’s role as a potential spoiler of the preferred vision—with robust responses to U.S. missile defense that also derail Russian reductions—raises a strategic question about how

to keep nuclear weapons in the background as offense/defense relations among the three evolve.

Long-term implementation of the Nuclear Posture Review will be one significant measure of how China fits into America's picture of the new strategic landscape. As the United States builds up its missile defense and China deploys more—and more modern—intercontinental missiles, the United States will face the choice between tolerating China's effort to sustain its deterrent without countervailing defense deployments or trumping it. This remains a basic unanswered strategy question—and one with large implications for the journey ahead. The United States should also expect that China would resume testing if and when the United States does. Its purpose in doing so would be to gain confidence in precisely the kinds of improved forces necessary to best America's defense. A net assessment of U.S. interests would be useful.

The “Strategy for Stability” Must Not Stop With the Treaty of Moscow

U.S. interests in a stable security environment are not well served by a narrow focus on securing Russia's approval of the post-ABM Treaty agenda. A broader approach is necessary.

In the strategic dialogue with Russia, it is essential to advance and sustain the promised exploration of common interests and common responsibilities, as already argued. The possibility of U.S.-Russian division over a U.S. war against Saddam provides an early test. Such division may derail that exploration.

As argued above, the dialogue about common responsibilities and interests must also encompass China. Transparency and trade/investment are good starting points—but only that. The strategic dialogue must at the very least lead to a common vocabulary for discussing the unfolding strategic relationship. The challenges of dissuading and persuading China need to be clearly defined and firmly addressed, given the common U.S.-PRC interest in not seeing a defense/offense “race” unfold.

On the agenda of common responsibilities and interests, nonproliferation and arms control cooperation have an important place. Common stewardship of the existing treaty regimes offers areas of work, opportunity, and challenge. Without progress in strengthening these regimes and securing compliance by the unwilling, 2012 may loom more as a harbinger of chaos than order.

The United States should consider approaches to force planning, declaratory policy, and arms control that minimize perceptions of unpredictability among those

hedging against breakdown of order. Doing so would help reduce the risks of strategic surprise. Especially urgent is finding the right arguments to link the means and ends of the new U.S. strategic posture to the purposes and provisions of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. The case has not so far been made that the intended “journey” will help sustain the nonproliferation bargain.

Stability’s Value is Changing

Stability as classically defined remains a useful guiding principle. Arms race and crisis stability issues may again take a central place in U.S. strategic concerns if the pathways ahead take us to some of the less desirable alternative futures.

Some additional definitions of stability have become increasingly important. Stability as predictable change is valued by Russia, China, and U.S. allies in Europe and East Asia. Given rising concern in Washington about strategic surprise, it would seem that the United States also has an interest in enhancing predictability. Hedging stability also deserves increased attention. Washington values its own ability to hedge against future surprise. It seems unconcerned by the types of hedges Moscow has so far chosen. But whether hedging by China and/or U.S. allies and friends in East Asia and Europe might also be un-troubling remains an open question. How the “hedge postures” of different nations interact is a topic worthy of further exploration.

But stability is not the only important guiding principle. There are other values that the United States seeks to promote. These include for example change in ways that promote peace and security (change that we and others can adjust to and tolerate and see as being, on balance, good) as well as change that promotes a more just and rightly ordered peace.

A fundamental question for the decade ahead relates to the role of the balance of power in maintaining global stability. If the means prove to be within its reach, the United States may be tempted to lock in dominance with the hope that this ensures complete freedom of action. This equates with an escape from the balance of power. Those who see an unfettered America—or any unfettered power—as something to be feared would certainly see this form of stability as unacceptable and thus work to make it unviable. Alternatively, there is the more classic form of stability in which several powers coexist in a state of rough equality (at least in terms of their ability to inflict unacceptable damage on others). But this type of stability requires cooperation to solve vital common problems. The central question for the United States is which type of stability best serves U.S. interests. Without clear capabilities or intentions at this time,

the United States has itself become a major source of potential strategic surprise in the global landscape. If its leaders are interested in preserving for as long as possible American leadership, influence, and freedom of maneuver, then they must be concerned with how to act and structure international relations so as not to motivate surprises by counterbalancers to its power.

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