

**TESTIMONY FOR THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats

**China's Rapid Political and
Economic Advances in Central Asia
and Russia**

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John J. Tkacik, Jr.
Senior Fellow, Director Future Asia Project
International Assessment and Strategy Center

Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today.

I submitted some written remarks, Mr. Chairman, and I ask that they be submitted for the record.

Future Asia will not look like today's Asia. Eurasia in ten years -- by 2023 -- is on a trajectory toward Chinese preeminence, and China is now being helped along that trajectory by a strategic alignment with the Russian Federation. Why does Russia side with China in a relationship that makes little apparent geopolitical sense in 2013? Might it be a prudent strategy for the United States to tip the scales in the Russia-China relationship once again, as we did 44 years ago, to prevent the emergence of a new hegemonic power in Eurasia?

Remember: in 1969, China and the Soviet Union were the bitterest enemies on earth. Through the summer of 1969, 488 premeditated Chinese military violations of the Soviet border provoked armed clashes between Soviet army and brigade-level units of the Chinese Army. Moscow regarded Communist China as run by dangerous madmen in

much the same way that Washington today regards Pyongyang. The difference then was that the Soviets were in a position to do something about it.

I. Factors in Russia-China Hostility: "For You, 9,000 years!"

Let me tell you an amusing story about nuclear war.

On September 11, 1969, following the funeral of North Vietnam leader Ho Chi-minh, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin – still seething about China's unrelenting summer attacks along the border – made a sudden, unannounced, and apparently uninvited flight into Peking's Capital Airport where he was met by Mao Zedong himself. The visit was not friendly.

Kosygin warned that the USSR's patience was at an end.

Mao Zedong replied to Kosygin:

*"I have always said that the struggle between China and the Soviet Union will last for ten-thousand years, but on the merit of your coming to see me in person, I will cut it down to nine thousand years."*¹

Kosygin was not amused. Five days later, Moscow's top KGB journalist in Europe, Victor Louis, wrote an authoritative commentary in London's *Evening News* alerting readers that if the Soviet Union were to strike China, "the world would only learn about it afterwards."² Louis described a Soviet nuclear strike against China's nuclear weapons facilities in Lop Nor, and averred that the Chinese Army would rise up in a coup against Mao and ask for outside assistance. Louis, alluding to the Soviets' armed invasion of Czechoslovakia just a year earlier, reminded the world that "the Soviet Union is adhering to the doctrine that socialist countries have the right to interfere in each other's affairs in their own interests."

It was a credible threat, and the Soviets had already approached secretly several U.S. government officers asking what the U.S. reaction would be to a Soviet attack on China's nuclear weapons factories and bases. These probes convinced President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor Henry Kissinger that the Soviets meant business. As Kissinger explained in his memoirs, America's strategy in Eurasia was set:

¹ Mao took great delight in telling this story to Henry Kissinger in November 1973. Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little Brown, Boston, 1982, p. 689. The story is coherent in Kissinger's telling. But in the declassified transcript of Kissinger's November 12, 1973, conversation, Mao clearly states he loosed the quip during Kosygin's 1960 visit to Peking in the middle of the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute. In the ensuing years, Mao told Kissinger, Romania was the main mediator between Moscow and Peking and by the fifth Romanian intercession, Mao said he could reduce the length of the "struggle" no fewer than 8,000 years. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume XVIII China 1973-1976*, p. 381.

² Victor Louis, "Will Russian Rockets Czech-mate China?", *Evening News*, London, September 16, 1969. Kissinger refers to this commentary in his memoir, *White House Years*, p. 185.

*A Soviet attack on China could not be ignored by us. It would upset the global balance of power; it would create around the world an impression of approaching Soviet dominance . . . the Soviets may be using us to generate an impression in China and the world that we are being consulted in secret and would look with equanimity on their military actions . . . I believe we should make it clear that we are not playing along with these tactics.*³

Just as Britain's strategy for centuries had been to align against any rising hegemonic power in Europe, it was a central tenet of twentieth-century American foreign policy that no power should achieve hegemony in Eurasia.

II. Russia and China in America's Eurasia Strategy

All this was integral to America's balance of power in Eurasia. As a hegemonic power rises, the United States would align itself with other powers in Eurasia to balance and contain the hegemony. Through the 1950s, as the Soviet Union, China, Indonesia and India emerged as partners in post-World War II decolonization, the United States aligned with Pakistan, French Indo-China and "Island Asia" (Japan, Taiwan, Philippines). The Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s pushed India and North Vietnam into alignment with the Soviet Union, while "pro-America" Pakistan aligned with China against India and the USSR. By the beginning of the 1970s, America had thrown its weight behind China, and China quietly abandoned support for the USSR's North Vietnamese ally. In 1979, the United States calmly averted its eyes while China attacked Vietnam, and by the 1980s the United States openly colluded with China to supply arms to anti-Soviet fighters in Afghanistan.

Nixon and Kissinger had embarked on a strategy to counterbalance Soviet domination of Asia by a counter-alignment with Communist China. It was a strategy that the United States followed for twenty years (from 1971 to 1991) until the collapse of the Soviet Union. But it is the grave misfortune of the United States that neither its political leaders nor its professional diplomats appreciated its substance after 1992 – with the Soviet Union gone, and China not yet coalesced into an economic superpower more politically repressive than the Soviets were in the years before its disappearance.

China did not have to struggle for Mao's 8,000 years for its victory over the Soviet Union. In two decades since the USSR's collapse, and since the collapse of China's democracy movement, the Chinese Communist Party has embarked on a single-minded strategy to re-incarnate the communist state in China's ancient grandeur of economic, demographic, political, military and intellectual predominance in Eurasia.

Today, the United States is confronted by Eurasia's new hegemon: China. "Island Asia," most of Southeast Asia (most importantly Vietnam), and India now look to the United States to coordinate a new global order to balance China. But Russia remains the pivotal power. India still relies on Russia for weapons systems to deter China. Central Asia and Mongolia hope that Russian influence can balance China's tightening grip on their

³ Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little Brown, Boston, p. 186.

economies and resources, but hope that America can moderate both Russian and Chinese demands. Even Vietnam has been heartened by renewed Russian interest in a maritime presence in the South China Sea.⁴

Russia maintains obviously friendly ties with most of the countries on China's periphery, countries which also look to the United States for leadership in a new "Chinese Century." But this does not necessarily translate into Russian competition with China. Russia's leadership has deeper concerns that inhibit it from balancing China with an American alignment.

The new Russian state, its own democratic legitimacy in tatters, seeks to justify its new oligarchy by rebuilding its influence over a lost Eurasian empire; it rationalizes political repression at home by rebuilding its Eurasian military power; and, it enhances its global prestige by leveraging its resource exports, oil, natural gas, metals and minerals, lumber and energy for political acceptance among the democracies.

In all this, Putin's Moscow seems to have fixed on the United States as a dire threat to Moscow's great-power legitimacy. Whatever America and the democratic West want must perforce be bad for Russia.

How did this dynamic overcome Mao's 8,000 years of "struggle"?

III. Factors in Russia-China cooperation

By removing the two proximate causes of Sino-Soviet confrontation: territorial disputes and competing ideological legitimization. What was a 12,193-kilometer border in 1988 (including Mongolia), shrank to 3,645 kilometers in 1992. Huge territorial expanses of Kazakhstan and Mongolia, once on the frontlines, suddenly were interposed to buffer the two Eurasian empires. What was once a struggle of two ideologies both claiming to spring from the "universal truth of Marxism-Leninism" resolved itself with the disappearance of one of the protagonists.

By 1992, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) had embarked upon a massive modernization effort and had the money to pay for it; Russia had an advanced-technology military-industrial base in collapse and needed money to preserve what was left. Over the next two decades, the PLA would procure roughly \$50 billion in Russian conventional and nuclear weaponry, research and manufacturing infrastructure and space systems, and hire hundreds of former Soviet scientists and engineers to staff them. In the past two years, Russia has renewed its advanced-technology arms shipments to China, and the Chinese People's Liberation Army has begun subsidies for Russian armaments works to develop new systems for the PLA.

⁴ "Russia, Vietnam agree on submarine fleet deal," *Russia Today*, March 6, 2013, at <http://rt.com/politics/russia-vietnam-agree-on-submarine-fleet-deal-891/>; Rachel Vandenbrink, "Vietnam Boosts Defense Ties With Russia," *Radio Free Asia*, March 5, 2013, at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/russia-03052013194408.html>.

Since 2000, Russia has supplied China with a number of weapons systems that certainly have relevance to U.S. force postures in the Western Pacific. My colleague at the IASC, Rick Fisher, has written extensively on some of the more significant ones.⁵

Over the past seven years, Chinese and Russian military, naval and air units have held joint field exercises demonstrating their desire to coordinate defense operations both in Central Asia as well as in Chinese and North Korean coastal maritime spaces.

The signing of the multilateral “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (SCO) pact in June of 2001 formally joined China and Russia with the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in a security bloc explicitly intended, in part, to enhance global “multi-polarity” – a Chinese euphemism for balancing the United States’ then-unchallenged global weight.

While the SCO also has economic, trade and counter-terrorist agendas, the organization’s primary focus has been the sophisticated annual “Peace Mission” military exercises starting in 2005. The 2005 exercise featured coordinated PLA-Russia naval, air and amphibious assault maneuvers on China’s Pacific Ocean coast, far from Central Asia and seemingly irrelevant to the SCO charter. The “Peace Mission 2007” exercise in Russia permitted the PLA to deploy mechanized forces abroad for the first time. The 2011 “Peace Mission” exercises in Kazakhstan featured the PLA Air Force deployment of operational squadrons abroad for the first time. This range of activities will likely be repeated for the “Peace Mission 2013” exercises now in advanced planning. These have been very important for the PLA. For many years Iran has been pressing for full SCO membership (it is now an observer). If this happened, one would expect that PLA and Russian multi service force missions would go to Iran and conduct sophisticated exercises that would enormously benefit Iran's military.⁶

⁵ Papers are available at Richard Fisher’s IASC page:

http://www.strategycenter.net/scholars/scholarID.4/scholar_detail.asp. Key arms exports from about 2000 to 2008 relevant to US forces in Asia include: Leninet Radar for radar satellites; Podsolnukh-E surface wave over-the-horizon (SW-OTH) radar; 1,000 to 2,000 Almaz S-300PMU/PMU-1/2 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs); 100 Su-30 fighter bombers; 80+ Sukhoi Su-27SK/UBK fighters (and advanced air-to-air and ground attack weapons); 12 “Kilo” class conventional submarines (ten Project 636 boats and two Project 877) and various Novator “Club” submarine weapons systems for eight of the Kilos; Aircraft Carrier technical assistance for the Ukraine-built Varyag hull (now renamed the “Liaoning”); Technical assistance for carrier basing of Su-27 jets; Potential future procurement still under discussion between Russia and China include:
24 Su-35 fighters with upgraded engines and avionics; unknown number of S-400 SAM batteries;
10 Il-76MD military transport aircraft (China is said to have a requirement of 100 heavy military transports by 2017). See also Stephen Blank, “Shared Threat Perceptions Begin Renewal of Sino-Russian Arms Trade,” *Jamestown China Brief*, February 15, 2013, at http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/archivescb/2013/?tx_publicationsttnews_pi2%5Bissue%5D=4.

⁶ The Russian representative to the SCO stated in June 2012 that the Organization’s rules prohibit countries under United Nations Security Council sanctions from full SCO membership. “Russia Rejects SCO Membership for Iran Until UN Sanctions Lifted,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 6, 2012, at <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-rejects-sco-membership-for-iran-until-un-sanctions-lifted/24605453.html>. Apparently, Russia came up with this rationale, not China.

It is also noteworthy that when PLA naval forces make high profile deployments near or around disputed regions with Japan, that Russian will also deploy probing air or naval forces to add to Japan's defensive burden, to test Japan's defenses.

Would this kind of seemingly informal coordination, on top of their history of “Peace Mission” exercises, indicate that China and Russia may have agreements for military cooperation in the event of military crises in Korea, the Taiwan Strait or in Japan’s East China Sea waters? This is a valid question to ask.

The China-Russia partnership may also extend to cyberespionage cooperation. This is suggested by the lack of target Russian IP addresses in any of the Chinese cyber espionage servers monitored by Mandiant, the Munk Center, or Northrop Grumman.

There is also a curious China-Russia coordination of United Nations policies aimed at easing pressures on North Korean and Iran nuclear weapons proliferation, and on international pressures on Syria.

Moreover, there was China-Russia policy coordination on the Russian invasion of Georgia that came – puzzlingly – during the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao met in Beijing two days after the Georgia invasion. Without a trace of irony, Hu praised China's relationship with its Russian "strategic cooperative partner" as "advancing across the board precisely in accordance with our commonly declared goals" – a full-throated endorsement if ever there was one.⁷

The consolidation of the newly independent Central Asian states and Mongolia as buffers between the two Eurasian superpowers in the 1990s gave both Moscow and Beijing a common strategic interest in managing the new states. The mutuality of that strategic interest intensified as the United States abruptly appeared in Central Asia almost overnight after September 11, 2001.

By 2013, Russo-Chinese strategic cooperation has transformed China into a global superpower second only to the United States. China and Russia are capable of holding the United States Navy at bay in the South and East China Seas, and, in virtual alliance with Pakistan, can cut supply lines to U.S. ground forces in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

IV. Factors dividing Russia and China

Let me conclude with the observation that Russia’s relationship with China is not one of unalloyed affection. Just in the past few weeks, we’ve seen some tensions between Russia and China on an issue of vital importance to Moscow – the gas pipeline to the Far

⁷ In Chinese, the phrase reads: "Zhong E zhanlue xiezuo huoban guanxi zheng anzhao women gongtong quedingde mubiao quanmian xiang qian tuijin." See "Hu Jintao meets Russian Premier Putin," *Renmin Ribao*, August 10, 2008, p. 1, at http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2008-08/10/content_76859.htm.

East. And for several years, we have seen Russia insulate its border with Manchuria with great protectiveness, keeping out Chinese investment, controlling Chinese immigrants. We have seen Russia's navy renew its presence in the Pacific seemingly to show China and India – not America – that it is still a player, whether in the Sea of Japan or the South China Sea. Russia's arms supplies to India appear to be more technologically-advanced than its sales to India's rival, China. And Russia's seeming condominium with China in Central Asia seems designed more to keep Russia in the Central Asian "Great Game" than to cede influence to China.

Russia also faces major demographic, resource and environmental challenges from China. What can Russia do to lessen its dependence on Chinese agricultural labor to keep Russia's farms from collapse? What can Russia do to control the more than 100,000 Chinese shopkeepers, construction workers, and illegals now residing in Moscow alone, much less mitigate their influence in all of Russia's major urban centers? In the coming decades, what can Russia do to discourage China from taking over Russia's mining, energy and fresh water resources?

V. Conclusion: Russia, Heal Thyself

Russia must rebuild itself from the ground up. It must rebuild its agricultural, industrial, scientific and resources infrastructure; rebuild its atrophying population; and rebuild its defenses before it can afford to challenge China's hegemony in Eurasia. And Russia's leadership must rebuild its own legitimacy on a foundation of popular support among Russia's jaded and disillusioned citizens. Clearly, this will have to await a new core leadership.

Until then, Russia must accommodate China without jeopardizing its own future. And until then, the United States must be hyper-vigilant of the balance of power in Eurasia. Russia may now be entering a period of instability which America has insufficient resources to affect. As the new Chinese superpower demonstrates, the United States has few permanent friends or enemies in Eurasia, but it does have a permanent interest in preventing any one power from dominating the landmass.