



THE FLETCHER SCHOOL
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China-Russia 2030: Entangled Futures

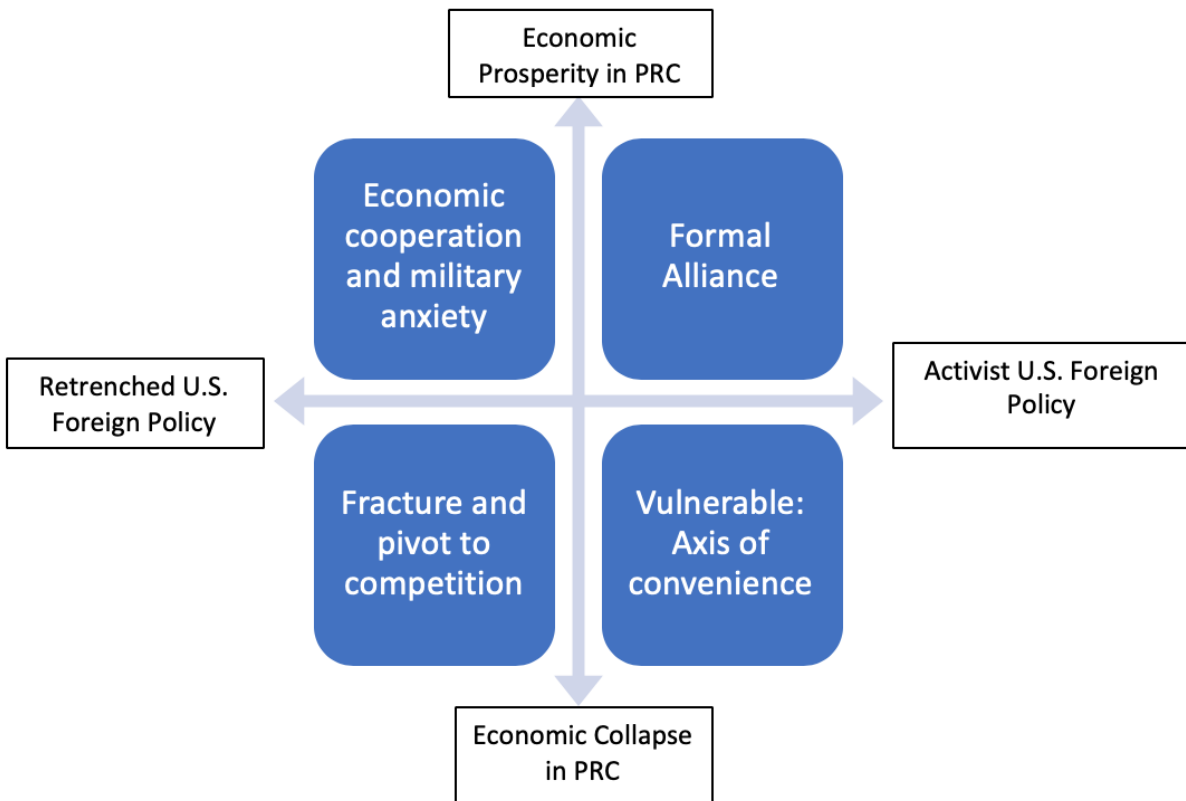
By Max Loebel
Capstone Advisor: Professor Chris Miller
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China-Russia 2030

This paper will analyze potential scenarios of the trajectory of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership. Existing forecasts of Sino-Russian relations are mired by shallow understandings of the historical partnership and misunderstandings of drivers and detractors in Sino-Russian relations. This paper identifies two critical uncertainties in Sino-Russian relations: First – China’s economic resilience and second – the degree of evolution in U.S. foreign policy to recognize China and Russia’s respective regional influence. The nexus between China’s economic prowess and United States foreign policy offers four different scenarios for the future of Sino-Russian strategic partnership. This paper will examine the catalysts behind each of these scenarios and their effects on the relationship.



This paper will first define the Sino-Russian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This definition will closely examine historical texts such as the 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship and Shanghai Cooperation Organization charter to gain an accurate understanding of past drivers for Sino-Russian cooperation. There will also be close examination of joint statements released by foreign policy executives including Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Sergey Lavrov, and Wang Yi. An understanding of historical motives, past treaties, and motives of current political operatives will inform a classification of the present Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership. Ultimately, this partnership along economic, political, and diplomatic lines is malleable and will evolve or deteriorate in response to U.S. foreign policy and China's economic stability.

4 Scenarios

- 1) Economic Prosperity in PRC and Activist U.S. Foreign Policy in Sino-Russian Frontiers
- 2) Economic Prosperity in PRC and Retrenched U.S. Foreign Policy in Sino-Russian Frontiers
- 3) Economic Pitfall in PRC and Activist U.S. Foreign Policy in Sino-Russian Frontiers
- 4) Economic Pitfall in PRC and Retrenched U.S. Foreign Policy from Sino-Russian Frontiers

Scenarios projecting economic prosperity in China rely on world bank projections indicating healthy economic growth for the PRC over the next decade. Scenarios envisioning a faltering PRC economy will extrapolate from a variety of economic forecasts published in the wake of the Coronavirus epidemic. Activist U.S. foreign policy scenarios will follow foreign policy plans of presidential candidates like Joe Biden along with domestic political factors pushing and security apparatuses pushing for continued containment of Russia and China. Under this continued activism, the United States will pressure China and Russia in their frontier zones. A retrenched U.S. foreign policy is captured by domestic popularity of interventionism dropping and rising debates among foreign policy executives on the United States strategy vis a vis Russia and

China. Figures like President Donald Trump, Senator Sanders, and a coming generation of populist candidates could embody this shift. This will lead to yielding regional influence to Russia and China. The United States could adopt a more creative approach where it cedes spheres of influence to Russia in an attempt to isolate China or vice-versa. These foreign policy changes may not mark outright retrenchment, but they entail concession of Russia and/or China's preeminence in their respective corners of the world.

The paper will discuss how Russian and Chinese leaders will behave given the aforementioned circumstances. Although it is difficult to predict behavior, previous decisions and present statements by foreign policy leaders in each state are useful data points for extrapolation. Based on the primary actors' statements on the current Sino-Russian partnership and the United States, I will determine varying outcomes for the scenarios. A future where China continues to surge economically, and the United States becomes more aggressive in the Asia-Pacific and Eurasia will drive China and Russia toward a formal alliance. Conversely, an economic pitfall for China causing oil prices to drop and consumption to slow, coupled with a retrenched U.S. foreign policy and an American executive focused on domestic politics will lead to a fragile partnership.

Though it is difficult to holistically depict variables in these hypothetical scenarios, the paper will provide key signposts to identify directions where the Sino-Russian partnership is heading. Projections for the partnership provide insight to a new era of international relations and the futures of China, Russia, and the United States. Additionally, the succession after Vladimir Putin is a mercurial variable in this mix. Ultimately, the outlined hypotheticals will affect the succession processes in Russia and how Putin's replacement sketches their image of Russia's foreign relations.

Defining the Partnership

Yeltsin-Jiang: Juxtaposed to the United States

Sino-Russian relations oscillate through their entangled histories ever since the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689. The tumultuous history of their relations is spotted with contradictions. Periods of intense conflict, mistrust, and animosity are followed by phases of friendship, partnership, and praise. The most recent notable fissure stemming from the Sino-Soviet Split and border conflicts in Xinjiang and the Amur River. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, China and Russia have been growing closer together while resolving border disagreements. The foundation of this chapter of the relationship is their shared alignment against the United States coupled with China's ability to foster economic interconnectivity, especially in the realm of energy.

As thawing began after the Cold War, relations between China and the Russian Federation began to rekindle. A Sino-Russian rapprochement blossomed with a backdrop of U.S. President Ronald Reagan hardening American Foreign Policy towards the Soviet Union and PRC. President Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping were able to catalyze normalization with an understanding that China and Russia would be equals in the partnership. After the unraveling of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's resignation, the Sino-Russian relationship was at a tenuous crossroads. Ultimately, the new Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, pivoted from his long-standing attachments to human rights and refrained from turning his back on the East.

Yeltsin made his first presidential visit to Beijing in December 1992. Though there were an abundance of agreements signed, the meeting ended abruptly due to Yeltsin's prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, being ousted. At the sudden conclusion of the visit Yeltsin announced, "We agree that the long period of artificial cold war is now over, and we are now entering a new stage of

ideologized relations”¹. Both sides pledged not to enter into alliances or treaties that would hurt the other’s “state sovereignty and security interests” setting the foundation for the modern Sino-Russian relationship. During the Yeltsin era, Sino-Russian relations focused on economic ties, mitigating border issues, and mutual respect for each other’s domestic affairs. Both dealt with separatist campaigns – Tibet and Xinjiang for China and Chechnya for Russia. While western leaders instrumentalized human rights abuses by both China and Russia, Beijing and Moscow provided tacit understanding and support for one another.

Sino-Russian relations were and continue to be driven by fluctuating relations with the west and in the 1990s providing a counterbalance to the United States. The anti-U.S. dimension simmered to the surface as Yevgeny Primakov became Russia’s foreign minister. Primakov championed an effort to create a new “strategic triangle” with Moscow, Beijing, and New Dehli, to offset the United States. In 1997, Jiang Zemin and Yeltsin signed the Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order. The declaration contains thematic elements that remain relevant in today’s strategic partnership: equal partnership, strategic cooperation, a multipolar world, and the necessity of developing a “new and comprehensive form of security”.² Even though the United States and NATO are not mentioned, the declaration is undoubtedly directed at a western-led security bloc. Evidence of this anti-U.S. tint arises from Russia and China’s shared grievances of the NATO bombing campaign in Serbia. Moreover, the bombing of China’s Embassy in Serbia resulted in a tremendous outcry in China and protests outside of the American Embassy in Beijing. The Chinese did not believe the five bombs were an accident.

¹ Sun, Lena H. “RUSSIA, CHINA SET CLOSEST TIES IN YEARS.” Washington Post, 19 Dec. 1992. [www.washingtonpost.com, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/12/19/russia-china-set-closest-ties-in-years/b6f50553-60e8-479d-bfb5-8e5f8aeece72/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/12/19/russia-china-set-closest-ties-in-years/b6f50553-60e8-479d-bfb5-8e5f8aeece72/).

² Rossiskie Vesti, April 25 1997

Solidifying this anti-American dimension, Yeltsin lashed out at President Bill Clinton. In the dying embers of Yeltsin's presidency, he took a final presidential visit to Beijing where he criticized Clinton, "He evidently forgot for a second, a minute, or half a minute just what Russia is, and that Russia possesses a full arsenal of nuclear weapons... A multipolar world-that's the basis of everything. That's what we agreed upon with Jiang Zemin"³. Jiang was less bombastic. Nevertheless, after 9/11 he signaled the importance of building economic relations, strategic cooperation, border mitigations, and military collaboration, especially in the technological realm.⁴

Putin and Xi: The Economic Lure

The bilateral and multilateral agendas of the Sino-Russian partnership expanded under President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterparts. Since 2009, China has been Russia's largest trading partner. Although this was still only one tenth the size of U.S.-China trade prior to President Trump's trade war, it demonstrates just how vital China's economic prowess is for Russia. China is clearly the dominant force in the economic dimension of the relationship. Trade between the two powers resembles standard trade relations between a developed and developing economy. The exception in the relationship is Russia's transfer of advanced military technology to China.

Energy is by far the most important factor in the bilateral economic relationship. China's modernization led to an increasing demand for energy. Russia's plentiful oil and gas reserves make it a prime partner in filling China's energy requirements. Russian crude oil deliveries to China began in 2011 as part of a "loans for oil" deal where Russia would provide oil deliveries

³ Washingtonpost.Com: Missiles Hit Chinese Embassy. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/balkans/stories/belgrade050899.htm>.

⁴ Khan, Sulmaan Wasif. *Haunted by Chaos : China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*. 2018. Print.

until 2030 in exchange for the provision of \$25 billion in loans from Beijing.⁵ While many states slapped Russia with sanctions for the annexation of Crimea and aggression in Donbas, Beijing inked a \$400 billion-dollar deal to build a gas pipeline. Accordingly, construction of the Power of Siberia began in 2019.

As China enjoys unprecedented economic growth, Xi Jinping pushes for a global Chinese presence. This manifests through the Belt and Road Initiative, a massive project to promote globalized trade, financing, infrastructure, and market development for Chinese goods. President Xi invited Putin to keynote the first Belt and Road Initiative where Putin vigorously praised the project and Russia's "collaboration" in the initiative.⁶ Moreover, the Russian ambassador to China, Andrey Denisov, was adamant that China and Russia were equal partners in the initiative and that it posed no threat to Russia's immediate interests.⁷ Though there is some tension between Russia's inward-facing Eurasian Economic Union and China's outward extending BRI, the two powers seem content at present to strive for symbiotic economic relations.

The two most pertinent variables in forecasting Sino-Russian relations are the degree of U.S. willingness to cede interests in Russia and China's spheres, along with China's economic prosperity. Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin clarify this as Russia and China bonded over distrust with the United States. Putin and Jiang further this relationship by growing economic interconnectivity between the two powers. Xi and Putin are solidifying the relationship with their overt positioning against the United States and China's commitments to purchasing Russian energy. The partnership will progress or devolve depending on the fluctuating role the United

⁵ Statistics | Ministry of Energy. <https://minenergo.gov.ru/en/activity/statistic>.

⁶ Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia. "Belt and Road International Forum." President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54491>.

⁷ "«Ничего, Что России Невыгодно, Она Делать Не Будет»." Коммерсантъ. Kommersant, March 6 2017, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3235889>.

States plays in the world along with China's mercurial economic future. China and Russia will experience synergies and tensions in economic, territorial, military, and cultural arenas. These flashpoints will be determined by the two driving factors – U.S. foreign policy and China's economic status.

Scenario 1

Economic Prosperity and Activist U.S. Foreign Policy

A New Alliance

A robust Chinese economy and an activist U.S. foreign policy will lead to a strengthened, potentially formalized, alliance structure between Moscow and Beijing. In this scenario, China's economy continues to surge at over 5% annual GDP growth while the United States refuses to cede spheres of influence to Russia and China within their respective frontiers. A Democrat or Republican U.S. President pursuing an active foreign policy will result in recommitments to NATO with an enhanced presence in Pacific bolstering cooperation with South Korea, Japan, Australia, and even Taiwan. The combination of China's economic resilience and an aggressive, global American posture will push China and Russia even tighter together. Under these threatening circumstances, a joint security agreement becomes an increasingly viable option for both powers. Present Sino-Russian military cooperation, trade patterns, and diplomatic relations indicate China and Russia will move closer together in this scenario.

Vice-President Biden secured the democratic nomination. Based on polling averages in key swing states, Biden is the favorite to win the electoral college and defeat President Trump in 2020.⁸ Accordingly, Biden's foreign policy will play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Sino-Russian relations. Biden is adamant about increasing steel tariffs imposed by the Trump

⁸ RealClearPolitics - Election 2020 - General Election: Trump vs. Biden.
[/epolls/2020/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_biden-6247.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_biden-6247.html).

administration while fleshing out alliance structures in the Pacific to address economic and security threats posed by China. He asserts that the Trump administration is “coddling Russia” and that he will reinvigorate sanctions.⁹ As a result of a more hawkish United States, China will be inclined to purchase more Russian weaponry and support Russia in condemning destabilizing NATO enlargement in Eurasia. Biden’s election will lead to a reinvigorated American foreign policy with prioritized great power competition with Russia and China.

Looking forward to 2024 and even 2028, obvious potential presidents include figures like Nikki Hayley, Pete Buttigieg, Mike Pence, and Amy Klobuchar. Regardless of party, these political figures are representative of standard American foreign policy views. Nikki Hayley writes extensively on combatting “the China threat” and will apply a similar foreign policy as Joe Biden in terms of great power competition.¹⁰ Amy Klobuchar’s stances on Russia and China also mirror Vice-President Biden. She takes a similar posture on trade-protectionism to assist Midwestern workers while simultaneously advocating the application of political and economic pressure on Russia.¹¹ Vice-President Pence is a likely contender in 2024. He has held a role in an administration pushing foreign policies slightly different from his own. Based on speeches Pence delivered at the Hudson Institute on China and his speech in Tallinn on taming an ‘unpredictable’ Russia, a Pence administration would escalate great power competition.¹²

Following his remarks in Tallinn the United States levied steep, targeted sanctions against Russia

⁹ Biden, Joseph R. *Why America Must Lead Again*. Mar. 2020. www.foreignaffairs.com,

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>.

¹⁰ As a result of a more hawkish United States, China will be more inclined to purchase more Russian weaponry and support Russia in condemning destabilizing NATO expansion in Eurasia.

¹¹ National Security - U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar. <https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/national-security>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2020.

¹² User Clip: Vice President Pence Remarks on China at Hudson Institute | C-SPAN.Org. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4753546/user-clip-vice-president-pence-remarks-china-hudson-institute>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2020.

as well as an increase in lethal aid to Ukraine.¹³ These foreign policy measures signal a refusal to yield spheres of influence to China and Russia in their respective regions. The above-mentioned administrations will be more present, more engaged, and will attempt to extend American influence in Russia and China's frontiers through economic, political, and security levers.

There are key differences between Republican and Democrat foreign policies. Within conservative foreign policy, there are variations. To simplify these characterizations, conservative foreign policy can be split into four categories: hawks, anti-interventionists, nationalists, and realists. Republican presidents rarely fall cleanly into one category, but it is a useful rubric to categorize political actors and potential presidents. Conservative hawks advocate ample military spending and foreign intervention. Nationalists will aggressively protect state sovereignty and staunchly position themselves against identified adversaries.¹⁴ Accordingly, conservative hawks and nationalists like Nikki Haley and Mike Pence will lead to enhanced great power competition with China and Russia. Liberal foreign policy largely follows the same trends. However, there are differences in tactics and competing policy prescriptions regarding more granular geopolitical questions. Ultimately, hawks and nationalists exist on both sides of the aisle and will pursue similar foreign policies. Libertarian isolationists exist on both sides and could dramatically shift policy if they control the White House in 2024 and beyond.

Congress also plays a crucial role in molding U.S. Foreign Policy. Like the executive, the trend towards hawks and nationalists is maintaining momentum on both sides of the aisles. China and Russia are being painted as existential adversaries and extreme threats to the United States by Republican and Democrats alike. Anti-China rhetoric will only be exacerbated by the

¹³ Nicholas, Peter. "Pence Delivers Tough Speech on 'Unpredictable' Russia." Wall Street Journal, 31 July 2017. [www.wsj.com](https://www.wsj.com/articles/pence-delivers-tough-speech-on-unpredictable-russia-1501521198), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pence-delivers-tough-speech-on-unpredictable-russia-1501521198>.

¹⁴ DUECK, COLIN. "Introduction: Conservative Traditions in U.S. Foreign Policy." Hard Line, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 1–10. JSTOR, JSTOR, doi:10.2307/j.ctt7tc91.4.

COVID-19 crisis. Take rising Republican Congressman Mike Gallagher from Wisconsin, who celebrated his birthday with a Winnie the Pooh cake with text reading “生日快乐” (happy birthday in Mandarin).¹⁵ The cake’s not so subtle message to Xi Jinping is accompanied with a series of tweets and essays decrying an “odious Chinese regime” and a “corrupt CCP” responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang, barbarism in Tibet, spreading the “Wuhan virus” around the world, and a litany of other evils.¹⁶ Representative Gallagher is far from an outlier. Representative Tom Cotton tweeted out an ominous warning that “China will pay for this” in reference to the current COVID-19 crisis. Senator Sasse of Nebraska declared that “Chairman Xi and his henchmen are evil despots”. Senator Chuck Schumer is adamant that President Trump needs to “hang tough” on China. On Russia, potential successor to Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer, consistently advocates for political protests and challenges to Putin and his regime’s “rampant corruption”. Congress largely condemned Russian meddling in the 2016 election and is generally uniform in maintaining pressure on Russia regarding Ukraine. This rhetoric leads to legislation that increases America’s footprint abroad. In 2019, there were defense spending increases, totaling to a \$700 billion budget with direct references to competing with Russia and China.¹⁷

Maintaining a global presence is expensive for the United States. The United States maintains treaties obligating it to the defense of about 51 nations across four continents. This

¹⁵ Choi, David. “Republican Lawmakers Celebrate Birthday with a Winnie-the-Pooh Cake and a Not-so-Subtle Message for Chinese President Xi Jinping.” Business Insider, <https://www.businessinsider.com/mike-gallagher-birthday-cake-of-xi-jinping-2020-3>.

¹⁶ Gallagher, Mike. “The Sources of CCP Conduct.” The American Interest, 9 May 2019, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/05/09/the-sources-of-ccp-conduct/>.

¹⁷ U.S. Lawmakers Reach Deal on Massive Defense Bill, Eye Russia, Turkey, China - Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-defense-congress/us-lawmakers-reach-deal-on-massive-defense-bill-eye-russia-turkey-china-idUSKBN1YE07K>.

could be politically expensive if domestic opinions on defense spending sour. However, the massive military budget will only continue to balloon. Even with a COVID-19 recession, military spending will increase, and the U.S. will be back to business as usual in two quarters. Biden balks on lowering defense spending. He advocates for reassessment of the budget but did not commit to any specific cuts. Looking at the last decade of defense spending, it seems to either stay about the same or increase, regardless of which party controls the White House and Congress.

Russia and China are willing to align against the United States over contentious geopolitical questions such as Taiwan, North Korea, and disputed claims in the South China Sea. Hence, if the U.S. takes more aggressive stances on these geopolitical disputes, China and Russia will stand closer together. Simultaneously, China appears indifferent to Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia. A formal military alliance would have severe implications for American national security, as the Sino-Russian alliance would pose an extreme military threat in the Pacific, in Eurasia and Eastern Europe, and in the Arctic. According to the American National Security Strategy, Russia and China are revisionist powers with designs for territorial expansion. Russian and Chinese foreign policy strategies share contempt for perceived American encirclement and promoting new world orders free of hegemony. This desired rollback of American hegemony signals a desire to play dominant roles in their respective near-abroads. Unbridled territorial revisionism in Eurasia and Southeast Asia will come at the expense of U.S. security and economic interests.

Military collaboration is an important tenet of Sino-Russian partnership. However, this military cooperation is conducted as security measures juxtaposed to the United States and NATO. Sino-Russian military cooperation includes joint military drills, technology sharing and

trade, information and intelligence collaboration, and the potential for a military alliance. Russia and China have traded military technology and weaponry since 1992 and their militaries have been training together for over a decade.¹⁸ Since 2014, this military cooperation dramatically increased. Russia and China completed joint military exercises in the Baltic Sea in 2017.¹⁹ Vostok 2018 is another joint military exercise that demonstrated significant increases in Sino-Russian military collaboration. This massive exercise in Russia's eastern district signifies increasingly overlapping military agendas and demonstrates that China and Russia are strategically planning around American or American led security structures leading incursions into their respective regional spheres.

Russia-China military cooperation swings the security balance in the Asia-Pacific. Russia has transferred more than five hundred aircraft to China since 1990. These included large military transports, early warning aircraft, refueling aircraft, attack jets and fighter interceptors.²⁰ China also purchased two dozen Su-35s from Russia to modernize the Chinese Air Force. Russian Warships have also begun appearing in the East China Sea and have come dangerously close to ramming American ships. This leads to speculation that the Russian Federation is working in close concert with Chinese naval forces.²¹

If China's economy continues to expand so will demand for energy. Researchers at the World Bank predict a Chinese economic slowdown in the next decade. "Slowdown" is a

¹⁸ Trenin, Dmitri. "Russia Analyst: China and Russia Are Partners, but Not Quite Allies." *Defense News*, Defense News, 26 Nov. 2019, www.defensenews.com/outlook/2019/12/02/russia-analyst-china-and-russia-are-partners-but-not-quite-allies/.

¹⁹ O'Dwyer, Gerard. "Russia-China Exercises: Kremlin Moves to Calm Nordic-Baltic Fears." *Defense News*, Defense News, 2 Oct. 2017, www.defensenews.com/smr/european-balance-of-power/2017/08/04/russia-china-exercises-kremlin-moves-to-calm-nordic-baltic-fears/.

²⁰ Goldstein, Lyle. "China Is Prepared to Reap the Strategic Rewards of Its Relationship With Russia." *The National Interest*, The Center for the National Interest, 29 Feb. 2020, nationalinterest.org/feature/china-prepared-reap-strategic-rewards-its-relationship-russia-128037.

²¹ Cohen, Zachary. "'Unprecedented Level' of China-Russia Cooperation Threatens US Dominance." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 8 June 2019, www.cnn.com/2019/06/08/politics/russia-china-partnership/index.html.

misleading diagnosis, as China would be moving from 8.5% annual GDP growth to 5%.²² This is rapid growth that countries around the globe will envy. Continued economic growth and increased wages will swell the Chinese middle class. As such, China's consuming class will grow and there will be a higher demand for Russian energy. Since Russia occupies 20% of the world's natural gas reserves, the Sino-Russian energy partnership provides mutual benefits.

Russian gas exports used to solely refer to Gazprom deliveries to Europe via pipeline. Infrastructure built during the Soviet era transported rising amounts of Russian gas to Europe, culminating in record sales of over 200 billion cubic meters in 2018. The emergence of LNG dramatically shifted the global energy market and the Kremlin's energy calculus. Additionally, recent debates over gas transit through Ukraine to Western Europe underscore a tenuous environment for Russian-European gas exports. Russia's solution is market diversification. This takes the form of a pivot to the east through the Power of Siberia pipeline coupled with goals of becoming a major player in LNG. Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev further underlined Russia's energy aspirations, stating in late 2018 that "global competition in the liquefied gas market is very tough. Qatar, Australia, Malaysia, and a number of other countries are actively competing, as is the United States with its aggressive and sometimes 'breaking-all-the-rules' strategy to promote its gas to the European market. Therefore, the situation requires maximum attention and decisive actions from us." In addition, he stressed that the country's LNG global market share should reach 17-20% within fifteen years.

LNG has emerged as a theme that is now discussed at the highest levels of Russian politics. President Vladimir Putin, speaking during Russia's Energy Week in Moscow in October, was particularly upbeat, stating that the country's LNG production will reach 120-140

²² <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/China-2030-overview.pdf>

metric tons by 2035.²³ This would make Russia one of the world's top three LNG producers and enhance the country's position as the world's number one natural gas exporter.

Although China is planning to make strides in renewables and clean energy, oil and gas will remain crucial for the Chinese energy market in the next decade, especially as China pivots away from coal. As long as China maintains the economic capacity and the appetite, Russia will remain a core supplier of energy resources. Russia provides China with 14.6% of its crude oil (just behind Saudi Arabia).²⁴ China and Russia recently finalized a natural gas agreement that allows China to purchase and transport gas from eastern Russia through a proposed pipeline. The deal, valued at approximately \$400 billion, will supply China with up to 1.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year from 2018 onwards.²⁵

Energy is a key link in the Sino-Russian partnership that simultaneously hinders American interests. Energy is also one of Russia's most potent foreign policy tools. Beyond economic gains, Russia uses its vast energy resources to maintain, increase and exert its political influence in its perceived sphere of influence and to exert political pressure on consumer states. For instance, Nord Stream II is seen as an attempt to gain geopolitical influence over Ukraine and Western Europe. Additionally, in 2008 Russia decreased Czech energy supplies in response to the Czech Republic hosting American anti-missile radar.²⁶

²³ "Форум «Российская энергетическая неделя»." Президент России. kremlin.ru, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61704>.

²⁴ The Strategic Upside Behind Russia's \$55 Billion 'Power Of Siberia' Pipeline To China. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2019/12/06/is-there-strength-behind-russia-and-chinas-new-power-of-siberia-pipeline/#415ebf331faf>.

²⁵ Natural Gas Serves a Small, but Growing, Portion of China's Total Energy Demand - Today in Energy - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=17591>.

²⁶ Czechs See Oil Flow Fall and Suspect Russian Ire on Missile System - The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/12/world/europe/12czech.html>. Accessed 28 Apr. 2020.

Presently, Russia is pivoting to the East to deliver its massive oil and gas reserves. Russian oil and gas giant, Gazprom, and China National Petroleum Corps collaborated on the Power of Siberia Pipeline. This is a bet for Russia against European energy consumers who are subject to closer political links to the United States. Moreover, China is the world's largest energy consumer. This collaboration around energy undermines the United States and Europe's ability to strong arm Russia by leaning on their oil-based economy. It is a hedge against a declining gas market in Europe for Moscow, especially as diplomatic relations sour in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression in the Donbas. As Western Europe's consumption of Russian hydrocarbons dips, the novel point-to-point Power of Siberia provides Russia with a reliable stream of gas exports.

The United States seeks energy independence and security by investing in liquefied natural gas (LNG). LNG will not be as price competitive as Russia's oil and gas exports, but it provides a ceiling for Russian energy prices. Sino-Russian cooperation on energy provides much needed capital Russia's resource-based economy. China and Russia are developing a symbiotic relationship around oil, gas, coal, and electricity. Putin said in Beijing that his country is already helping China build nuclear power plants. Hence, the United States and its allies are unable to curtail Russian preeminence in energy nor use energy to punish Chinese aggression in the South and East China Seas.

Russia is a petro-state, hence its economic success is largely dependent on rising oil prices. Outside of black swan events, as long as Chinese demand remains high, then Russia can count on an economic buffer. These oil and gas sales are critical to maintaining political stability in Russia as well. A stable political situation in Russia where Putin continues to lead is promising for the Sino-Russian partnership. Coupling the economic closeness with even

friendlier diplomatic relations in the face of a domineering and aggressive United States will likely lead to a full-on military alliance between the two great powers.

Scenario 2

Economic Prosperity in PRC and Retrenched U.S. Foreign Policy

Money Flow with Misgivings

China will rebound from COVID-19 and resume GDP growth at over 5% per year. However, U.S. foreign policy will continue to retrench, ceding Russia and China their near-abroad, and leaving a vacuum in both Eurasia and the Pacific. A vacuum Russia and China will both be happy to fill. The economic component of the relationship will hold their partnership together, but considerable skepticism will grow among policy makers and the populace as China and Russia compete to fill vacancies in overlapping frontiers with a retrenched United States. Without the mutual mistrust of the United States, security interests underpinning the strategic partnership become insubstantial.

The positives of this scenario are centered on energy. Russia's oil and natural gas will continue to be in high demand, perhaps even higher demand, by China. The trade relationship will flourish benefitting both Beijing and Moscow. As discussed in Scenario 1, Russia's energy supply and China's energy demands make the two great powers a happy match. Putin can continue pursuing his energy strategy fostering positive trade and economic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. Beyond economic synergies, mistrust will grow in Central Asia, along China and Russia's shared borders, and there will be grievances on both sides as China and Russia become emboldened by America's absence. China will ramp up security architecture in Central Asia to combat potential instability, a move that will stoke anxiety in Moscow. Moreover, soft power measures include sweeping scholarships for Central Asian students to

study in China is part of long-term strategic plays by China in the region. Without a unified agenda to counter western influence in Central Asia, China could be bolstered to flex geo-economic eminence in the region.

As the United States signals an unwillingness to intercede along China and Russia's frontiers, China and Russia will be more willing to push their territorial aspirations. At a minimum, this would involve additional incursions in Ukraine by Russia and a harsher crackdown in Hong Kong by China. Furthermore, hybrid war in the Baltics becomes a plausible option in testing a rickety NATO's resilience while protecting the persecution of Russophiles. For the PRC, reunification with Taiwan starts to seem less unreasonable. Despite China and Russia supporting each other in past, both Beijing and Moscow have been quietly nervous about violations of state sovereignty by the other. China demonstrated reticence about Russia's involvement in Donbas and in annexing Crimea. Moscow displays similar unease in response to Chinese aggression in the South and East China Seas. A mutual fear that these revisionist adventures could spill into historical points of contention along China and Russia's borders will further feed these anxieties.

Scenario 3

Economic pitfall in PRC and Activist U.S. Foreign Policy

Axis of Convenience

This scenario leaves room for continued security cooperation as a counterbalance towards the United States. Nonetheless, without China's economic clout, economic interconnectivity along energy and bilateral trade between Beijing and Moscow will splinter. There will be additional anti-western rhetoric towards the United States providing room for continued security collaboration. However, economic interaction will dissipate. Without the economic glue, projects

like the Eurasian Economic Union and Belt and Road Initiative may turn more competitive than cooperative. EEU and BRI are already out of sync, and this will exacerbate already existing competitive points of BRI.

China aims to build amicable relationships within its area of influence through the new silk road initiative. China signed 8 treaties of good neighborliness and friendship with frontier countries and aims to sign one with ASEAN. Xi notes these ambitions and actively promotes stability through interconnectivity, “Close neighbors are better than distant relatives. This is a simple truth that the Chinese people got to know in ancient times. That explains China's firm commitment to building friendship and partnership with its neighbors to foster an amicable, secure and prosperous neighborhood.”²⁷ It is important to note that Russia was not mentioned in this speech. Though Russia has a strategic partnership with China, Beijing is probing for companionship across all of its frontiers. When China no longer makes significant purchases of Moscow’s energy resources, the partnership will certainly diminish.

As the economic synergies between Beijing and Moscow falters, competition in their immediate frontiers will become likely. Frontier arenas like Central Asia are prime for Sino-Russian competition. Though both China and Russia will align over security interests and combatting extremism in Central Asia, economic slowing in China will create space for the Eurasian Economic Union to deepen roots in the region. Tangibly, this allows for Russia to assert a dominant role in security provision while increasing infrastructure investment and development aid. The Central Asian states are mostly authoritarian, purporting commitment to preventing Islamic color revolutions, and maintaining their regimes. They historically find ways to manipulate their great power neighbors to their economic benefit. With an economically

²⁷ Full Text of Chinese President’s Speech at Boao Forum for Asia - Xinhua | English.News.Cn. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-03/29/c_134106145.htm.

weakened China, Russia will be able to take a more aggressive economic approach to maintain eminence. The region has long standing historical ties to both Russia and China, but familiarity favors the Russians. Russia will seize the opportunity to assert equal footing in the Sino-Russian Partnership and this will lead to a rivalry in Central Asia.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded in 2001 to mitigate these potential tensions. The United States is excluded from the organization, plus the SCO has expanded to include 80% of the Eurasian landmass and a quarter of global GDP. In terms of population and geographic coverage, it is the largest regional organization in the world.²⁸ SCO enlargement will fuel friction between China and Russia given their respective relations with SCO member states. China partners with Pakistan while Russia is devoted to deepening ties with India. As a result, competing blocs within the SCO could form along these lines.

Despite the budding economic friction, convenient rhetoric pitting China and Russia as a potential block against U.S. hegemony will remain. China and Russia will continue to partner against western liberal interventionism and military collaboration will linger. With an imminent threat from the United States, Sino-Russian joint military exercises like Vostok 2018, the largest joint military drill for Russia since Zapad in 1981, will become regular. In the leadup to the drills one Chinese official remarked that China “has come to show the Americans the close ties between the armed forces of China and Russia.”²⁹ These demonstrations send a clear counterbalancing signal to Washington. The convenient security aspects of the Sino-Russian

²⁸ “The Evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.” IISS, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/shanghai-cooperation-organisation>.

²⁹ “Russia and China Hold the Biggest Military Exercises for Decades.” The Economist. The Economist, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/09/06/russia-and-china-hold-the-biggest-military-exercises-for-decades>.

strategic partnership will remain, while economic jockeying in their shared frontier zones becomes the norm.

Scenario 4

Chinese Economic Pitfall and Retrenched U.S. Foreign Policy

Rediscovered Rivalry

This is the worst scenario for Sino-Russian strategic partnership. In this scenario, China experiences an extreme slowing of GDP growth and potentially a recession. A hard-economic landing would reduce China's GDP growth to 2% or below. In the United States, hard economic, security, and political factors could lead to a pivot to domestic politics and an American foreign policy that leaves room for Russian and Chinese spheres of influence. This can manifest itself through the election of a president who downscales American resources abroad. This brand of populism exists on both ends of the American political spectrum. Additionally, economic circumstances in the United States could limit global reach and force a foreign policy retrenchment. These conditions will erode the symbiotic relationship and increasingly competitive, pragmatic practices in the Arctic, Central Asia, and along the Sino-Russian borders.

Despite China's meteoric economic rise, there is strong potential for an impending fall. Though China records tremendous GDP growth, consistently above 6%, its economic risk ratings, a measure of macroeconomic conditions including exchange rates, government regulation, and political stability, sky rocketed in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.³⁰ COVID-19 has had nightmarish effects on China's GDP growth, as it has been downgraded from 6% to 1%

³⁰ CountryData | The PRS Group. <https://epub-prsgroup-com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/customer/countrydata/getonline/?key=icrg&countries=16&variables=102&years=2020&months=>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2020.

or lower for 2020.³¹ Even before COVID-19, China was experiencing a notable economic slowdown. As a result of the trade war with the United States Chinese consumers appeared spooked by uncertainty over jobs and were significantly reducing retail and travel spending.³² China may not return to its regular 6% GDP growth and will have to adjust to a slowing, or even shrinking, economy.

An economic slowdown in China has dire consequences for the Sino-Russian partnership. Since the partnership is in part hinged upon Chinese consumption of Russian energy products, declining consumption rates in China are ominous markers for the decline of China and Russia's economic partnership. If Chinese demand for energy takes a sudden drop, oil and gas prices are going to fall. In turn, Russia's economy will falter as it is a petro-state largely dependent on selling its energy resources. As a result, China will renege on energy agreements with Russia, jolting this dimension of the partnership. There are preexisting frustrations, namely Moscow's reluctance to allow Chinese companies substantial equity in energy projects. Their strategic partnership will remain in name only as Russia searches for additional options to off-load energy resources.

The United States is already seeing a pivot to "America First" foreign policy under the Trump administration. The reelection of Donald Trump will accelerate this foreign policy retrenchment, as domestic political issues take center stage. A logical conclusion to "America first" policy is a cession of China and Russia's apparent spheres of influence. As the American electorate shows increasing disdain for foreign intervention and policy makers pivot to pragmatic

³¹ Coronavirus: Downward Revisions to China's 2020 GDP Forecast. <http://country.eiu.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/article.aspx?articleid=1479229331&Country=China&topic=Economy&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Economic+growth>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2020.

³²"China's Economic Slowdown Deepens, Weighing on Global Growth." *AP NEWS*, 18 Oct. 2019, <https://apnews.com/a776f7a522014679a40964dc4d1eed58>.

foreign policy, China and Russia will be gain their de facto spheres of influence. The “America First” doctrine is encompassed by President Trump’s guarded approach towards NATO commitments, scaling back troops in the Middle East. Plus, the current peace deal with the Taliban should lower troop levels in Afghanistan to numbers around 8,000 which is slightly lower than when Trump assumed office.³³ Additionally, President Trump does not offer the same staunch critique of Russia that many of his traditional democratic competitors forward. A strain of retrenched foreign policy and balancing with Russia and China is blossoming within the democratic party as well.

Though Bernie Sanders is unlikely to win the nomination, his movement makes headway for future populist, progressive, potential contenders. A Sanders Presidency would have delivered figures like Russ Feingold (D-WI) as Secretary of State and Matt Duss as National Security Advisor. Reading Duss, it seems like a Sanders administration would step down in Russia and China’s frontiers. Duss seems to care more about labor rights and environmental justice. Beijing would be content with this pivot. Rising stars in the democratic party like Andrew Yang and Tulsi Gabbard have serious prospects for a 2024 bid. Both are inordinately focused on domestic issues and anti-interventionism. Yang prescribes ending foreign “military misadventures” and economic connectivity and balancing with China.³⁴ Like Yang, Gabbard aims to “end the forever wars” and swiftly bring American soldiers home. She also proclaims she would meet and negotiate with international actors typically categorized as adversaries like President Assad or President Putin. It is also of note that Gabbard does not address great power

³³ Ill, Leo Shane. “Trump Says US Will Sign Afghanistan Peace Deal with Taliban, First Step in Bringing Troops ‘Home.’” *Military Times*, 29 Feb. 2020. [www.militarytimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/28/trump-says-us-will-sign-afghanistan-peace-deal-with-taliban-first-step-in-bringing-troops-home/), <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/28/trump-says-us-will-sign-afghanistan-peace-deal-with-taliban-first-step-in-bringing-troops-home/>.

³⁴ Yang, Andrew. “Foreign Policy First Principles.” *Yang2020 - Andrew Yang for President*, <https://www.yang2020.com/policies/foreign-policy-first-principles/>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2020.

competition, nor threats from Russia or China in her presidential platform.³⁵ On the topic of great power competition, both shy away from direct confrontation and offer opportunities to cooperate and further entangle economies. If figures like Gabbard, Rand Paul, Yang, or Donald Trump Jr. ascend to the U.S. Presidency, there may not be staggering retrenchment of U.S. foreign policy around the globe, but there will be cession of spheres and influence to China and Russia.

Structural economic factors could limit U.S. foreign policy projection as well. COVID-19 will leave a lasting deleterious mark on the U.S. economy. The United States will likely experience a recession as a result of the virus. Though the virus should be curbed by the end of 2020, economic ramifications could be felt through the next decade. Even if a president with a traditional foreign policy wins the oval office, economic constraints could limit exuberant military spending and impede America's role abroad.

Domestic moods are prone to swing against American activity abroad, especially in the wake of a recession. Champions of slashing defense budgets, such as Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, may see their dreams realized even without winning the Presidency. These domestic factors would manifest in congress as well. Though some anti-Russia and anti-China rhetoric would continue, representatives and senators may think twice about putting foreign policy at the top of their portfolios in an "America first" environment.

Without the United States as a threatening force, Russia and China's bonds are less cohesive. The United States currently plays a geopolitical boogeyman in the relationship. So, without an imminent threat from NATO in Eurasia or the United States in the Pacific, Russia and China have dwindling security incentives for alignment. Additionally, we would see China and Russia scrambling to fill the void created by U.S. retrenchment. In turn, this would lead to

³⁵ "Foreign Policy." TulsiGabbard.Org, <https://www.tulsigabbard.org/tulsi-gabbard-on-the-issues/foreign-policy>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2020.

economic competition between the two powers in spheres like Central Asia, the Arctic, and the South China Sea. Without the United States as a counterbalance, the strategic triangle will be thrown radically out of balance.

A downturn in energy demand and China's economic recession will further impair relations between China and Russia. As Russia will have to look back to Western Europe and even the United States as energy consumers to replace China. China and Russia will face new economic realities that are no longer conducive to partnership. In fact, tightened purse strings in China will lead to more economic pragmatism in trade and infrastructure development. Thus, appeasing Russia becomes increasingly awkward and untenable.

Conclusion

The Sino-Russian Partnership is strong, but vulnerable given that U.S. foreign policy and China's continued economic success are the main drivers of the entente. As both powers embrace Jiang Zemin's and Yeltsin's push for a multipolar world, they found each other to be beneficial partners against the United States. Closer examination reveals that though multipolarity is the basis of their partnership, Beijing and Moscow have differing perceptions of their place in the new world order. Moscow is concerned about playing a little brother role to Beijing while Beijing seems more at ease with the notion of a bipolar world. Russia also faces a number of domestic issues impacted by sinking oil prices which has seen Putin's popularity slip amid stagnant wages, controversial changes to national pension rules, a tax increase, and general pessimism among middle-class Russians. These domestic factors and the status of the Sino-Russian partnership will play a crucial role as Putin's successor assumes power. If the relationship flourishes, we could witness continuity of Putin and Xi's rhetoric. If the relationship falters, Russia may embrace a more nationalist leader pivoting away from the Sino-

Russian entente. Still, perceived interference and disrespect by the United States coupled with economic synergy allows Beijing and Moscow to shelve any potential grievances with each other. As the United States recedes and China's economy wanes, the honeymoon period of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership will come to a spiraling close.