

The Dynamics of Sino-Russian Relations*

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When Russia emerged in early 1992 as the successor to the Soviet Union in the international arena, its foreign policy favored the West, but at the end of the year, it had shifted attention to the "near abroad" and the East. From that time on, relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia have dynamically developed. Border problems have been largely resolved; economic ties have improved; and the military connections are not only substantial, but also alarming. Along with these obvious achievements, difficulties and problems still remain. However, Sino-Russian relations are by and large moving from full normalization to "constructive partnership." This improved relationship will certainly influence the Asia-Pacific region as well as the rest of the world.

Keywords: full normalization, constructive partnership, new stage, border agreement, kitayskaya karta

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The normalization and improvement of relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation, which was started by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the last Soviet political leader, has not been interrupted by the Soviet Union's disintegration. Despite occasional mistrust and disagreement between PRC leaders and Boris Yeltsin, the president of Russia, Beijing-Moscow relations have steadily improved in the post-Soviet era.¹

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¹*Izvestiya* (Moscow), January 2, 1992, 3; *Diplomaticheskiiy vestnik* (Diplomatic Herald) (Moscow), 1992, no. 8:4.

This paper will discuss what has taken place and what is developing between the two neighboring powers, which share one of the longest border lines in the world; review their achievements in improving relations; examine what problems and difficulties remain; and, more significantly, assess the outlook for relations in the 1990s and beyond, and its possible influence on the Asia-Pacific region.

Objectives

In early 1992, when Russia emerged in the international arena as the successor to the Soviet Union, President Yeltsin made it known that Russian foreign policy preferred the West. Developing relations with the United States was the top Russian priority because of its necessity in winning Western countries' confidence, gaining their recognition as the successor to the Soviet Union in world politics and international organizations, and earning aid for its economic reforms. To a certain extent, the Russian Federation did succeed in this regard. However, the orientation of such a policy roused domestically fervent debates between two major rival groups, Atlanticists and Eurasians.

The Atlanticists wanted Russia to join the West European community as soon as possible, while the Eurasians argued against rapid Westernization, favoring a specific geopolitical role for Russia as a bridge between Europe and Asia. According to the Eurasians, Russia could not afford to allow its relations with the PRC and the Muslim world to deteriorate at a time when it was itself on the brink of economic collapse.² In late April 1993, the Russian president signed a document titled "The Concepts of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" which apparently resulted from the debates and symbolically and at least temporarily put an end to the disputes.³

According to the document, the basic goals of Russian foreign policy include:

- ensuring by political means the security of Russia in all areas, including sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity,

²Alexander Rahr, "Atlanticists versus Eurasians," *FE/RL Research Report* 1, no. 22 (May 29, 1992): 17-22.

³"The Concepts of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," *Diplomaticheskii vestnik*, Special Issue, January 1993, 5-6.

- and strengthened stability along its perimeter, the closest regions, and the world as a whole;
- defending the rights, freedom, dignity, and well-being of Russia;
 - securing favorable foreign conditions for promoting democratic reforms toward forming a civil society;
 - mobilizing financial and technical supports for creating an effective market economy, developing the competitive capabilities of Russian producers and ensuring their interests in the world markets, and helping resolve domestic social problems;
 - forming basically new, equal, and mutually beneficial relations between Russia and the member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other “near abroad” states, thus continuing the strategic partnership and allied relations with these countries; and
 - ensuring Russia’s influence in the world balance through the processes of regulating the world economy and international relations.

In November 1992, during his official visit to Seoul, President Yeltsin announced that the priority of Russian foreign policy was shifting from Western Europe and the United States to the Asia-Pacific region. He also proposed setting up a multilateral negotiating mechanism or security organization in the region.⁴ The visit itself and his later tour to Beijing were already indicative of the shift.

On the other hand, the PRC has recently reiterated that it is possible to strive for a longer period of peace in the post-Cold War era. Therefore, it has conducted an independent and peaceful foreign policy, persistently developing friendly and cooperative relations with other countries based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, actively participating in international as well as regional affairs, and willingly making its own contributions to world peace and development.⁵ Presumably, the PRC’s foreign policy objectives would cover:

- creating peaceful international conditions favorable to its reform and opening-up policies;

⁴*Rossiyskie vesti* (Russian News) (Moscow), December 21, 1992, 10.

⁵*People’s Daily* (Beijing), January 10, 1993, 1; Qian Qichen, “Persistently Implementing Independent and Peaceful Foreign Policy,” *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth) (Beijing), 1995, no. 12:2-6.

- preventing “peaceful evolution” from occurring in mainland China;
- promoting the “reunification of China” under the formula of “one country, two systems”;
- improving relations with all neighboring countries to reduce or eliminate foreign threats to its security; and
- developing and improving relations with other major countries so as to increase its role in the course of shaping a new world order.

Achievements

Immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the PRC announced its diplomatic recognition of the Russian Federation. Both sides signed a document which laid a foundation for developing bilateral relations by affirming the principles covered in the 1989 and 1991 Sino-Soviet joint communiqués.⁶ Early in 1992, Yeltsin stated in a meeting with Premier Li Peng of the PRC at the United Nations that the differences in the social systems of the two countries should not prevent them from developing relations and cooperation in all fields.

From that time on, relations between the PRC and Russia have steadily developed. In December 1992, Yeltsin went to Beijing for an official visit and signed twenty-three documents and a “Joint Declaration on the Basis of Sino-Russian Relations.” As some Russian experts pointed out, this declaration contains some features of a political treaty. For instance, according to the document, the PRC and Russia are obliged not to take part in any military-political alliance against the other side or allow a third country to use its territory to the detriment of the other side’s security. This article in fact characterizes the declaration as a nonaggression pact.⁷ Using their own words, Yeltsin’s visit to Beijing ushered the two countries to a new stage of de-ideological relations.⁸

Politically, Yeltsin’s visit to mainland China emphasized the change in Russian foreign policy, especially in upgrading the PRC’s

⁶*People’s Daily*, December 31, 1991, 6.

⁷*Izvestiya*, December 21, 1992, 4.

⁸*International Herald Tribune*, December 12, 1992, 1.

priority. In the wake of the Soviet Union's disintegration, the influence of the Western countries, especially the United States, had become so dominating that Russia could almost say nothing against any resolution made by the West regarding international affairs. Now, Russia seemingly was determined to act as a big power should, as its strengthened and consolidated relations with Asian countries in the East and of the "near abroad" could render it leverage in dealing with the West.

In keeping with their improved relations, both sides have worked to solve their longstanding border disputes. In 1991, the Soviet Union and the PRC signed an agreement on the eastern section of the Sino-Soviet border,⁹ which stretches from Mongolia to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) and is about 4,300 km long. In February 1992 the agreement was ratified by both sides.¹⁰ However, the Chinese claims to the Ussuriyskiy (Heixiazi) and Tarabarovski islands in the region of Khabarovsk, and Bolshoy Island in the upper reaches of the Argun River have yet to be settled. In early 1992, negotiations began on the unsettled islands and the western sector of the border which, after the fall of the Soviet Union, was shared by the PRC with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. An agreement is expected to be worked out by the end of this century. An agreement on the demarcation of the western part of the Sino-Russian border (about 55 km long) was signed when Jiang Zemin, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and president of the PRC, visited Moscow in September 1994, and was subsequently ratified in June 1995. In July 1994, during a visit of the PRC defense minister to Moscow, the defense ministers of the two countries signed an agreement to avert military accidents such as unintentional border crossings, radar jammings, inadvertent missile launches, and violations of airspace. Thus, border tensions which had been sustained for more than two decades finally subsided.

With the subsiding of border tensions has come the subsiding of military tensions. During Jiang's stay in Moscow in 1994, he and Yeltsin agreed not to aim nuclear missiles or use force against at each other, and to sharply limit the number of troops stationed along their

⁹*Pravda* (Moscow), April 30, 1991, 5.

¹⁰Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: China-92-051* (March 16, 1992): 8.

border.¹¹ Thus, they formally ended an era of tension between two of the world's most powerful countries and shifted relations to a new type of partnership, without alliance.

In terms of trade and economic ties, the two nations have also done very well in recent years. Bilateral trade totaled US\$7.68 billion in 1993, in comparison with some US\$5 billion in 1992.¹² The PRC has become Russia's second largest trading partner (after Germany) while Russia is the seventh largest trading partner of the PRC. About 80 percent of the total trade volume was the result of direct border trade. In 1994, bilateral trade between Russia and the PRC suffered a setback (down to about US\$5 billion) due to noneconomic reasons.¹³ However, both sides consider this a temporary phenomenon; they optimistically expect that at the end of this century the annual sum of their bilateral trade will hopefully reach US\$10 billion.¹⁴ It is expected to reach US\$6.1 billion in 1995.

In addition, both sides are also carrying out various types of economic cooperation, such as joint ventures (currently at least thirty of them are in operation, with more than two hundred under organization), cross-border economic cooperation zones, and service exchanges. According to statistics, in 1994 there were about five hundred Russian enterprises registered in the PRC.¹⁵ These enterprises include a US\$10 million joint venture, the China-Russia Nuclear Company, which has been established in Shenzhen just across the border from Hong Kong by the two countries' nuclear industry monopolies.¹⁶ A Sino-Russian Commission for Economic, Trade, and Scientific-Technological Cooperation was set up in 1992 to promote cooperation in these and other fields.

As for military ties, the achievements are not only substantial, but also, to some extent, alarming. With increasingly closer political relations and economic cooperation, Sino-Russian military ties and cooperation have resumed after decades of interruption. The shift began with an official visit to the PRC in 1992 by the Russian chief of general staff of the CIS Unified Armed Forces, V. Samsonov.

¹¹*People's Daily* (Overseas edition), September 5, 1994, 3.

¹²*People's Daily*, May 28, 1994, 1.

¹³*Sing Tao Jih Pao* (Hong Kong), December 12, 1994, A3.

¹⁴*Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), January 8, 1995, A2.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*China News* (Taipei), December 1, 1994, 4.

During the visit, he confirmed (officially) for the first time that the PRC wanted to obtain not only Su-27 fighters, but also other types of arms from Russia.¹⁷ The PRC is concentrating on a so-called “buildup of military quality,” which requires a large amount of modernized military hardware and technology; on the other side, Russia wants desperately to sell quantities of arms and military equipment to reduce its budget deficit and earn hard currency.

The PRC is interested in various levels of military cooperation, including hiring out-of-work Russian scientists. Much of the PRC’s military hardware has arisen from earlier Soviet models acquired during the 1950s. Follow-on technology which would be developed in mainland China is by far the cheapest way of modernizing its defense industry. For this purpose, the “Agreement on Sending Experts by Russia to Work in China” was signed during Yeltsin’s stay in Beijing in December 1992, when he also made it clear that arms sales would be an important component for developing bilateral relations based on economic benefit, not ideology.¹⁸ Less than a year later, in November 1993, Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev paid his first visit to the PRC and signed a five-year military cooperation accord between the two defense ministries.¹⁹ Among other things, the accord provides for consultations at ministerial and military regional levels and exchanges of information and experience in the military field. Military cooperation also allows the PRC to learn about new military doctrines and management methods of the Russian Federation.

In May 1995, Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev once more came to Beijing with a military delegation, including nine generals, in order to strengthen mutual understanding, promote cooperation, build confidence, and develop friendship between the armed forces of the two countries. It appears that the Russians are very interested in intensifying military relations with the PRC.²⁰ Reportedly, during his visit to Beijing Grachev proposed to the PRC leaders “to solve the problems of security together.” To answer this proposal, Chinese leaders said that they “would never enter into any alliance or bloc and would not create such an alliance,”²¹ and reiterated that the two

¹⁷*Izvestiya*, March 3, 1992, 6.

¹⁸*International Herald Tribune*, December 19-20, 1992, 5.

¹⁹*Lianhe bao* (United Daily News) (Taipei), November 12, 1993, 10.

²⁰*The Japan Times* (Tokyo), May 18, 1995, 4.

²¹*Izvestiya*, May 20, 1995, 1.

countries would become "good neighbors, good partners, and good friends."²²

In the long term, military contacts and cooperation might bring forth more far significant outcomes for the PRC's military buildup. However, the world is growing concerned about Beijing's arms purchases from Russia, including Su-27 fighters, S-300 surface-to-air missile systems, and Kilo-class diesel submarines, because they might bear an immediate impact on the Asia-Pacific region's strategic configuration. It is no surprise that these deals have already provoked nervous reactions in Japan and Southeast Asia and made the United States unhappy.²³

Difficulties

Along with the obvious achievements in Sino-Russian relations, there remain some difficulties and problems, both overt and latent. Put briefly, they are as follows:

1. There is still latent mistrust and disagreement between the leaders on both sides. For instance, the way the PRC leaders put down the student movement in Beijing in 1989 and the status of human rights in mainland China have hardly aroused sympathy from Russian leaders; in turn, Beijing leaders can never at heart forgive Yeltsin for his anticommunist statements and his ban on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).²⁴

2. Although disputes and conflicts concerning borders, such as the claims to the unsettled islands on the eastern sector of the Sino-Russian border, are not very serious at the present time, they still exist. Beijing proposed to trade Bolshoy Island in the Argun River with two islands in the Amur River near Khabarovsk, but the proposal was rejected by Moscow. On the other hand, some local Russian political leaders have demanded more than once that the agreement on the eastern sector of the Sino-Russian border be denounced.²⁵ Even some members of the State Duma of the Russian Federation wished the agreement to be annulled. However, the Russian Foreign Ministry has warned that if the agreement is denounced, Russo-Chinese relations

²²*China News*, May 18, 1995, 4.

²³*Izvestiya*, August 12, 1994, 3; *Lianhe bao*, January 12, 1993, 10.

²⁴*Izvestiya*, March 24, 1992, 6.

²⁵*Ibid.*, May 17, 1994, 4; *Lianhe bao*, February 14, 1995, 10.

will suffer a serious setback. If the border confrontation is waken from the dead, the consequences and price for Russia could be very serious.²⁶ In other words, the Sino-Russian border situation contains differences which have postponed a rapid and final resolution.

3. The issue of illegal Chinese immigrants living in Russian border regions has also become prominent. No precise figure is available, but as Russian Minister of Nationalities Sergey Shakh-ray has pointed out, in some settlement points, the Chinese outnumber the local population. The unofficial estimates of the number of Chinese range from 300,000 to 2 million, including 50,000 in Moscow. Both central and local Russian authorities are worried about the demographic situation in the Russian Far Eastern regions.²⁷ Russian border guards together with local police are carrying out an operation code-named "Foreigner," rounding up Chinese people with overdue visas or forged passports.²⁸ On the other hand, during his visit to Moscow in 1994, Jiang Zemin announced that the PRC government consistently opposes illegal immigration and other criminal activities across the border and hoped that both countries could solve these problems through consultation and cooperation.²⁹ Nevertheless, the problems remain. Occasionally, incidents have occurred along the Sino-Russian border. For example, in April 1995, during a clash between Russian border guards and a gang of armed men from mainland China, a Russian border guard officer was shot dead.³⁰

4. There have also been complaints regarding economic and trade ties at the border, particularly on the Russian side. They have complained that the exchange remains unequal: Russian fertilizer, metals, and machinery are being traded for extremely low-quality goods produced by mainland China's light and food industries. The PRC side encourages "shuttle" trade, which the Russian side regards as a negative factor, since shuttle operations contribute to the outflow of hard currency from Russia. Moreover, fixed exchange rates have been artificially lowered vis-à-vis the PRC's *yuan*. The Swiss franc is the currency in which accounts are traditionally settled between the PRC and Russia, and currently the exchange rate is 1.8 francs to the *yuan*,

²⁶*Izvestiya*, February 25, 1994, 3.

²⁷Sergey Shakh-ray, "An Indispensable Strategy," *ibid.*, May 15, 1994, 4.

²⁸*China News*, January 26, 1995, 6.

²⁹*People's Daily* (Overseas edition), September 5, 1994, 3.

³⁰*Izvestiya*, April 19, 1995, 1.

compared to black market rate of 0.1 franc to the *yuan*.³¹ Both sides are making efforts to overcome the disorderly situation.

5. Russian regional leaders have opposed the Tumen River Development Project in the undeveloped area where the borders of North Korea, the PRC, and Russia merge, indicating their fear that they will lose control of the zone to the Chinese. The project has been pushed by the PRC and has gained support from many Pacific rim nations and Russian officials in Moscow. It is also backed by the United Nations. However, local Russian leaders are deeply fearful of the PRC's economic might and huge population and afraid that the trade zone will allow Chinese traders to flood into Russian territory. They also maintain that the new zone would lure away foreign trade and investment from Russia's main Pacific ports, Vladivostok and Nakhodka, thus enriching the PRC while crippling Russia's economic growth. Mindful of this opposition, PRC and United Nations officials have modified the project, but Russian regional leaders, worried about expanding Chinese influence, are still wary of the plan.³²

6. Many Chinese privately believe that the Far Eastern sections of Russia have historically belonged to China and were seized by Russia, whereas some Russians believe that Chinese, by means of the "human sea" strategy, are trying to penetrate this area in order to expand "kitayskaya karta."³³ Many Chinese historians argue that the history of Sino-Russian relations is in essence a history of criminal aggression by Tsarist Russia against China.³⁴ This conception was recently and incidentally confirmed by former Russian acting premier Egor Gaidar, who states in an article that one dominating concept of Russian foreign policy is "imperial," i.e., imperial expansionist thinking.³⁵ He also contends that the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the PRC in the 1960s and 1970s was not caused by ideological differences or by different interpretations of Leninism or Stalinism. In his opinion, the reason behind the conflicts is more

³¹*Sevognya* (Today) (Moscow), January 28, 1994, 3.

³²*China News*, June 17, 1995, 6.

³³Valeriy Sharov, "Chinese Map," *Literaturnaya gazeta* (Literary News) (Moscow), October 21, 1993, 13.

³⁴*Sha E qin Hua shi* (The history of aggression against China by Tsarist Russia), 4 vols. (Beijing: Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1978), 1:1.

³⁵Egor Gaidar, "Russia of the Twenty-first Century: Not a Gendarme, But an Outpost of Democracy in Eurasia," *Izvestiya*, May 18, 1995, 4.

serious than that. Gaidar points out that the density of Russian population in the territory adjacent to China is one hundred times less than that of China and proposes that Russia should find Far East allies other than China, including Japan. At the same time, as a typical Atlanticist, he advocates Russia strengthening its military alliance with the West.³⁶

Trends and Influences

Judging from what has already occurred, relations between the PRC and Russia have moved forward and upward in the 1990s, despite overt and latent difficulties existing between them. In May 1994, Russian government chairman Viktor Çernomyrdin paid his first official visit to the PRC. During the visit, the two countries signed seven documents, mostly concerning economic and trade affairs, and published a joint communiqué expressing their satisfaction over effective cooperation in the political, economic, scientific, cultural, and military spheres and maintaining public order over recent years, and wishing to further and deepen cooperation in all these fields.³⁷ Both sides will also continue to strengthen their military technology-related cooperation under the conditions of international obligations. In addition, both sides in various speeches and statements have mapped out a bright outlook for their improving ties. More often than not, Moscow has stressed that Russo-Chinese relations are one of the top priorities of Russian foreign policy, while Beijing has emphasized that much of its focus is on relations with Russia. In effect, it has been to their mutual interests to keep a good-neighbor relationship.

In September 1994, Jiang Zemin went to Moscow and held a summit meeting with Yeltsin. During the visit, both sides signed several documents of great significance, but the summit meeting itself has become another big step forward in bilateral relations. In fact, high-level official visits have become a tradition between Beijing and Moscow in recent years. For instance, in 1993, there were thirty delegations headed by the vice president, ministers, and deputy ministers from Russia to mainland China, and in June 1995, PRC Premier Li Peng went to Moscow only one month after Jiang Zemin's participa-

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷*People's Daily*, May 28, 1994, 1; *ibid.*, May 30, 1994, 1.

tion in the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the victory of World War II and Yeltsin was prepared to visit Beijing in December 1995 (the visit was postponed to March 1996 due to his heart attack in October 1995). This trend seems likely to continue.

The political ties between the two nations will become closer in the foreseeable future, as they intend to establish a “constructive partnership” by the beginning of the next century and are ready to intensify mutual consultation on Asia-Pacific matters as well as on the rest of the world. As mentioned by both sides, the two countries’ leaders hold very similar views on major international issues. In addition, they have agreed to reinforce multidirectional and constructive cooperation and support in regional and international affairs.³⁸ Russia’s attempts to organize a “Eurasian Union” or a “Confederation of Eurasian States” require good relations with the PRC, as Sergey Shakhrai insists.³⁹ In turn, the PRC needs Russia’s assistance in restricting separatist activities in Central Asian states being held by Chinese ethnic minorities escaped from Xinjiang, northwestern China.

Though there was a setback in 1994, trade and economic prospects are bright, and both sides anticipate being major trading partners for many years to come. In the near future, priority will be given to the development of bilateral trade and economic cooperation through improving means of payments and settling accounts by actively adopting modern practices. The PRC and Russia are also willing to promote mutual investment and to work out new modes of cooperation in border areas.⁴⁰ All in all, economic relations have been and will be the main axis of the two sides’ overall relationship.

In addition, the scale of military contacts and cooperation will be gradually expanded, exchange of military personnel will be more frequent, and arms sales will continue between the two sides. The two countries have stated that they will continue their discussions on military technology-related cooperation.⁴¹ Currently, they are still working hard to build up a confidence system in the military field along the Sino-Russian border on the basis of the “Agreement on Guiding Principles for the Mutual Reduction of Military Forces along

³⁸*China Daily* (Beijing), June 29, 1995, 4.

³⁹See note 27 above.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

the Sino-Soviet Boundary and for Strengthening Confidence in the Military Field” signed in 1990.

The more important question is: How far can Sino-Russian relations go? Is it possible that the PRC and Russia will become military allies? The answer is a definite “No,” as it is neither necessary nor feasible for them to do this under present conditions. However, Russia intends to raise its relations with the PRC to the level of a “strategic partnership.”⁴² Whereas a constructive partnership, which has yet to be built, entails strengthening of mutual trust, cooperation in the UN Security Council, and a qualitative shift in trade and economic cooperation, including cooperation in the border provinces, the strategic partnership formula is still an ambiguous notion. PRC leaders are in no hurry to embrace this formula and prefer to move more cautiously; nevertheless, Jiang Zemin, referring to future relations with Russia, said to Russian guest Chairman Viktor Chernomyrdin during a 1994 visit to Beijing that the PRC will look at their relations from a strategic point of view. The leaders in Beijing are especially interested in Chernomyrdin’s personality, as for the first time in recent years, they see a man at the top of the Russian governmental pyramid whom they understand and feel close to in spirit. Therefore, it is no wonder that Li Peng said during his latest visit to Moscow that the PRC and Russia are great powers, and they cannot let anyone to teach them how to behave and live. Chernomyrdin agreed, saying: “We will decide how we should live. We have everything for this.”⁴³

By and large, Sino-Russian relations, moving from full normalization to “constructive partnership” (or strategic partnership?), have already influenced the Asia-Pacific situation by making contributions to regional economic development and integration, and exerting positive influence on regional peace and security. On the other hand, military cooperation and Russian military sales to the PRC might fuel an unnecessary arms buildup in the region and create new tensions, especially among the countries around the Spratly Archipelago in the South China Sea. But according to the Australian Defense Studies Center, there is so far no evidence of a regional arms race.⁴⁴

⁴²*Izvestiya*, January 29, 1994, 4.

⁴³*The Japan Times*, June 28, 1995, 4.

⁴⁴*China News*, June 9, 1995, 4.

With a stable and silent border situation, both the PRC and Russia might be able to focus their efforts on economic reforms and solve other domestic problems. Furthermore, any closer political and military relations between them will increase the weight of their roles in regional affairs, and change the regional strategic configuration, tipping the balance of power among the four major players in the Asia-Pacific region—the United States, the PRC, Russia, and Japan—in their favor.

It is interesting to note that Russian scholar Dr. B. Zanegin stated in 1994 that it is impossible to close one's eyes to the fact that the "natural, traditional, and geopolitical movement of Moscow to the East" has been confronted with resistance from the Pacific naval powers, the United States and Japan, who are by no means interested in the appearance of any new strategic power in the Pacific. Consequently, there is no doubt of the significance of Russia's good-neighbor relations with the PRC.⁴⁵

In Zanegin's opinion, Washington, which is obviously worried about the growing strategic weight of the PRC, is looking for geopolitical leverage to contain Chinese communism. The basic load of this mission has been placed on Russia. It is not difficult to assume that some people in Washington believe that Russian radical democrats would like to cooperate with the United States in destroying Chinese communism and planting East European or Soviet models in mainland China. If the plan fails, Russia would attract the bulk of the PRC's armed forces and fight with the PRC for its allies' interests. The United States, with its mighty naval force, would stand far from the Asian continent and avoid bloodshed. Here, an analogy inevitably rises to mind: in the beginning of the 1970s, the United States endeavored to gain supremacy over the Soviet Union by playing the "China card." Now, in precisely the same manner, Russia is assigned the role of a "trump card" in the game organized by Washington to get rid of the PRC in a strategy of killing two birds with one stone.⁴⁶

However, both the PRC and Russia have not bought this model. On the contrary, they are realistically speeding up the improvement of their bilateral relations for their own good.

⁴⁵B. Zanegin, "Trump Card," *Pravda*, February 15, 1994, 3.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*