

Assessing Russia's Role in Cross-Taiwan Strait Relations*

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The role of Russia in cross-Taiwan Strait relations has been downplayed, if not ignored. This article attempts a systematic study by reviewing Russia's Taiwan policy in different eras, discussing the importance of Russia to cross-Strait relations, and presenting three options Russia might face in a cross-Strait conflict. Three conclusions are drawn. First, Taiwan has never figured prominently in Russian foreign policy, which is true for Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. Second, Russia has an important role in Beijing's Taiwan policy for international, geopolitical, economic, and military reasons. Finally, Russia has a wide range of options in the event of a cross-Strait conflict. In ascending order of possibility, Russia could side with the pro-Taiwan alliance against China, side with China against the pro-Taiwan alliance, or maintain benign neutrality.

KEYWORDS: Russo-Chinese relations; Russo-Taiwanese relations; cross-Taiwan Strait relations; Sino-American relations.

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Since the end of the Cold War, the Taiwan independence movement has put Taiwan and China on a collision course. In early 2007, President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of Taiwan told a pro-independence group that Taiwan must seek independence. Several months later, he proposed a referendum on whether the island should seek to rejoin the United Nations under the name "Taiwan." A declaration of independence by Taiwan would provoke military action by Beijing, invite American intervention, and probably drag Washington's regional allies, such as Japan, into the conflict.

Scholars have scrutinized the role of the United States and even Japan in cross-Strait relations, but have downplayed, if not ignored, the role of Russia.¹ Given the extensive studies that have been carried out on Russia's China policy, the lack of attention given to this subject is woeful and even puzzling.² Such deficiency may be attributed to Moscow's seemingly unequivocal pro-Beijing policy, Russia's loss of superpower status, and the lack of close ties between Russia and Taiwan.³ Whatever the reasons, the deficiency should be addressed, because Russia is both a global and a regional power, and because the policy differences between Russia and all other major powers demand explanation. This article attempts a systematic

¹For example, Taiwan is mentioned in passing in Jeanne L. Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004). Gorbachev and Yeltsin do not mention Taiwan in their books. See Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); and Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).

²Take Russian scholars for example. Lukin identifies three Russian groups, which advocate an alliance with China, a balanced policy, and the China threat, respectively. Voskressenski divides the Russian foreign policy elite into optimists, pessimists, alarmists, and pragmatists. See Alexander Lukin, "Russia's Image of China and Russian-Chinese Relations," *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 17 (Spring 1999): 19-31; and Alexei D. Voskressenski, "The Perceptions of China by Russia's Foreign Policy Elite," *Issues & Studies* 33, no. 3 (March 1997): 1-20.

³A good indicator is their bilateral trade. For example, in 2005, "Taiwanese exports to Russia accounted for only 0.27 percent of its overall volume; Russia imports accounted for only 1.2 percent of the whole." See Sergey Vradiy, "Russia's Unofficial Relations with Taiwan," in *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia*, vol. 2: *Russia and Its Eastern Edge*, ed. Iwashita Akirihito (Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007), 229.

study of the Russian factor in cross-Strait relations. What form has Russia's Taiwan policy taken in different eras? How important is Russia to Beijing's Taiwan policy? What options might Russia have in the event of a cross-Strait conflict? These are the questions I seek to answer.

The Evolution of Russia's Taiwan Policy

A review of Russian foreign policy helps us understand the present and anticipate the future. Russian leaders have not created their foreign policy out of the blue, but rather formulated it under given geographical and historical circumstances. No matter how changeable and complex history is, we may still be able to identify some key historical patterns. That scholars find a high degree of continuity in Russian foreign policy makes it even more important to familiarize ourselves with the past.⁴ In addition, Russian foreign policy may be path-dependent in that the past heavily influences the present.⁵

Russian policy toward Taiwan can be traced back to the late seventeenth century, after Imperial Russia came into contact with China under Manchu (滿族) rule (1644-1911). Although it was first mentioned in Russian sources in 1670, Taiwan did not attract Russian attention until the era of Japanese imperialism more than two centuries later. In May 1874, Japan launched an expedition to punish Taiwanese aborigines who had murdered a party of shipwrecked Ryukyans. Russia lodged a protest against Japan, and sent a gunboat to Taiwan in July of that year, which

⁴See, for example, Igor S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy: Ten Years of Moscow's Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 7-37; George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," chap. in *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 89-106; Ivo J. Lederer, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspectives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962); and Karl Marx, "Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century," in *The Unknown Karl Marx: Documents concerning Karl Marx*, ed. Robert Payne (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 225-323.

⁵For the notion of path dependence, see Paul A. David, "Understanding the Economics of QWERTY: The Necessity of History," in *Economic History and the Modern Economists*, ed. William N. Parker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 30-49.

provided some of the earliest firsthand accounts by Russians of Taiwan.⁶ One reason why China refrained from fighting Japan at that time was the Russian occupation of the Ili (伊犁) area of Northwest China.⁷ During the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, Japan decided to annex Taiwan partly because the Russian minister in Tokyo expressed no objection to such an action.⁸ Later Russia rallied the support of France and Germany to prevent a victorious Japan from annexing the Liaodong Peninsula (遼東半島), the strategically and economically important southern part of Manchuria. Russia did accept Japan's annexation of Taiwan after Japan promised to respect freedom of navigation through the Taiwan Strait. The different attitudes Russia adopted toward Manchuria and Taiwan reflected its geopolitical interests. As early as 1874, a Russian diplomat in Beijing remarked that a Sino-Japanese conflict could barely hurt Russian interests in China, but if Japan had to quit Taiwan, it would seek a sphere of influence near Russia.⁹ In 1896 Russia followed advice from its ally France and allowed a German to head the first Russian consulate in Taiwan.¹⁰ During the Boxer rebellion, Japan and Russia sent two of the largest contingents of foreign troops to China. The subsequent Russian retreat into Manchuria threatened Japanese ambitions in Korea, and unintentionally foiled Japan's effort to consolidate its sphere of influence in the Chinese provinces across the Strait from Taiwan.¹¹

The Soviet Union paid little attention to Taiwan, which was a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945. Very few Russian books on Taiwan were

⁶Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 251-52.

⁷Leonard Gordon, "Japan's Abortive Colonial Venture in Taiwan, 1874," *Journal of Modern History* 37, no. 2 (June 1965): 185.

⁸Edward I-te Chen, "Japan's Decision to Annex Taiwan: A Study of Ito-Mutsu Diplomacy, 1894-95," *Journal of Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (November 1977): 69-70.

⁹Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon*, 253.

¹⁰Michael Share, "From Ideological Foe to Uncertain Friend: Soviet Relations with Taiwan, 1943-82," *Cold War History* 3, no. 2 (January 2003): 3.

¹¹H. Nish, "Japan's Indecision during the Boxer Disturbances," *Journal of Asian Studies* 20, no. 4 (August 1961): 449-61.

published during the entire Soviet era, and the only one dating from before Communist China was established in 1949 was translated from the Japanese.¹² After the end of World War II, Taiwan was returned to Chinese sovereignty, and later became a refuge for the Nationalist government after its defeat in the civil war on the mainland. The Soviet Union was the first country to recognize Communist China, and when it did so it severed all contact with Taiwan. The outbreak of the Korean War saved Taiwan from a mainland invasion, because President Harry S. Truman immediately sent the U.S. Seventh Fleet to patrol the Taiwan Strait. Stalin's policy toward Taiwan lent itself to different interpretations. While some argue that he did not oppose a possible Chinese invasion and even helped modernize the Chinese military, others maintain that Stalin feared a war with the United States and rejected any direct military assistance. He allegedly suggested to Mao Zedong (毛澤東) that Beijing should liberate Hong Kong rather than Taiwan.¹³

Taiwan loomed larger in Soviet foreign policy after Stalin's death and the subsequent end of the Korean War. The year 1954 witnessed two important events. On July 23, Taiwan seized a Soviet oil tanker for violating the UN embargo against China. All but three of the Soviet crew members were set free in 1955, but the tanker was never returned. What caused this incident to be blown out of all proportion was that it became the subject of a Soviet blockbuster movie in the late 1950s. The first Taiwan Strait crisis occurred in mid-1954 when Chairman Mao launched a massive artillery bombardment of two of Taiwan's offshore islands—Quemoy (Jinmen, 金門) and Matsu (Mazu, 馬祖), which could have served as stepping-stones for a future invasion of the mainland. The December 1954 Treaty of Mutual Defense committed Washington to defend Taiwan and President Dwight Eisenhower even threatened the use of tactical nuclear weapons if Beijing invaded the offshore islands. In his February 1955 letter to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Eisenhower said he doubted a

¹²Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon*, 253.

¹³Czesław Tubilewicz, "Taiwan and the Soviet Union during the Cold War: Enemies or Ambiguous Friends?" *Cold War History* 5, no. 1 (February 2005): 77.

Soviet military intervention would occur even if the United States fought along the Chinese coast.¹⁴

Soviet policy toward Taiwan partly contributed to the Sino-Soviet split.¹⁵ After Washington deployed nuclear-capable cruise missiles in Taiwan in May 1957, Moscow finally agreed to help China's nuclear program. Without informing Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev during their meeting in Beijing, Mao later provoked the second Taiwan Strait crisis by bombarding the offshore islands on August 23, 1958. After Washington sent two more aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Strait, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko went to Beijing to express concern over a possible major war. In his memoirs, Khrushchev claimed that Moscow had satisfied Mao's 1958 request for military assistance, and was even puzzled by Mao's suspension of the bombardment, but Zagoria convincingly highlights the Soviets' reluctance to help.¹⁶ In fact, after the second crisis, Moscow abrogated its nuclear aid agreement and recalled its experts from China. Khrushchev's visit to the United States and the Sino-Indian border skirmish of 1959 played a part in the failure of Khrushchev's third and final trip to China. During his stay in Beijing, he stressed the importance of peaceful coexistence.¹⁷

The Sino-Soviet split and especially the Sino-American rapprochement created some incentives for Russia to improve relations with Taiwan. Occasionally Moscow printed the flag of the Republic of China, mentioned Taiwan as a country, provided favorable coverage of the island, permitted

¹⁴Michael D. Pixley, "Eisenhower's Strategy in the Taiwan Strait Drove a Wedge between the Soviet Union and China," *Military History* 21, no. 6 (January/February 2005): 14.

¹⁵A good analysis is provided by Shen Zhihua, "Shilun Zhong-Su tongmeng polie de neizai yuanyin" (A preliminary analysis of the internal causes for the Sino-Soviet split), <http://www.shenzhihua.net/zsgx/000167.htm> (accessed August 23, 2007).

¹⁶Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, translated and edited by Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 262; and Donald S. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 200-221.

¹⁷Two Chinese memoirs are helpful in understanding Sino-Soviet relations: Liu Xiao, *Chushi Sulian bantian* (Eight years as ambassador to the Soviet Union) (Beijing: Zhonggong dang-shi ziliao chubanshe, 1986); and Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan, 1956-1966: Zhong-Su guanxi huiyilu* (A decade of polemics, 1956-1966: memoirs of Sino-Soviet relations) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999).

Taiwanese to attend conferences in the communist bloc, and hinted at the possible admission of two Chinas to the United Nations.¹⁸ Some Soviet groups sought to use Taiwan to balance China. In October 1968, Victor Louis, a Moscow-based freelance reporter for the *London Evening News* who had long been known for his KGB connections, made the first visit by a Russian to Taiwan since 1949. After the border skirmish on the Ussuri River (烏蘇里江), the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, told Henry Kissinger that "it seemed to many in the Soviet Union that Taiwan might well become an independent state."¹⁹ The skirmish also prompted President Richard Nixon to end Seventh Fleet operations in the Taiwan Strait in late 1969. Just before Ambassador David Bruce's arrival in Beijing to head the first American Liaison Office in May 1973, Soviet warships passed through the Strait and then circumnavigated Taiwan, which probably indicated Taipei's knowledge, if not its permission. In 1978, when Beijing and Washington were working for the normalization of relations, Soviet ships were repaired in Taiwan and there were rumors that Moscow would soon recognize the government there.²⁰

Moscow might have considered allying with Taipei, which could be seen as killing two birds with one stone: threatening China with a two-front war and undermining American interests in East Asia. Taipei also toyed with using the Soviet Union to balance China. Unlike his father Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), who had adopted an anti-Soviet foreign policy,²⁰ Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) understood Russia rather well, having lived there from 1925 to 1937, being married to a Russian and later representing his father in occasional dealings with Stalin. In November 1971 the Taiwanese foreign minister mentioned that Taipei intended to start trading with communist countries, although he resigned soon after.²¹ A Soviet-

¹⁸John W. Garver, "Taiwan's Russian Option: Image and Reality," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 7 (July 1978): 754-56.

¹⁹Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 173.

²⁰Chiang Kai-shek, *Soviet Russia in China: A Summing-up at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957).

²¹Czeslaw Tubilewicz, "Taiwan and the Soviet Union during the Cold War," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 2005): 467-68.

Taiwanese alliance would have increased Beijing's hostility toward both Russia and Taiwan, and might have expedited a Sino-American rapprochement. If it had happened, it would have resembled the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756.²² However, Taiwan was not as important as eighteenth century Austria had been in the regional balance of power. In January 1978, Chiang Ching-kuo declared that he had no intention of establishing ties with any communist country. In November 1979, Taipei divided the communist countries into two categories, allowing direct trade with non-hostile countries, but classifying the Soviet Union as a hostile regime. Beijing's displeasure with President Ronald Reagan's arms sales to Taiwan prompted Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to propose better relations with China in his Tashkent speech of March 1982.

The late 1980s saw the Soviet Union improve its relations with both Beijing and Taipei. Mikhail Gorbachev's 1989 visit to Beijing ended the hostility between the two communist giants, but he did not block unofficial relations with Taiwan. A combination of Chiang Ching-kuo's death in 1988, Taiwan's economic clout, and the easing of global tensions facilitated economic and cultural relations between the Soviet Union and Taiwan. Some members of the Soviet elite, such as Moscow mayor Gavril Popov, visited Taiwan. However, the joint communiqué issued at the end of Chinese president Jiang Zemin's (江澤民) visit to the Soviet Union in May 1991 leveled criticism at Taipei's "flexible diplomacy." In September 1991, Taipei signed its largest trade deal ever with the Soviet Union, bartering consumer goods for Soviet raw materials. In 1991, Russia allowed the semiofficial China External Trade Development Council (CETRA, 外貿協會) to open an office in Moscow.

The demise of the Soviet Union seemed propitious for Russo-Taiwanese relations. Taipei made diplomatic breakthroughs in the Czech Republic, which supported Taipei's global presence, and in Macedonia,

²²During the War of Austrian Succession (1740-48), France and Prussia were pitted against Britain and Austria, but during the Seven Years' War (1756-63), France and Austria fought with Britain and Prussia.

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which even recognized Taipei in January 1999.²³ Russo-Taiwanese relations, however, did not develop as well as Taipei wished, which may have had something to do with public opinion and interest groups in Russia. The average Russian knew little about Taiwan. According to one survey conducted in the late 1990s, 90 percent of Russians did not know about the cross-Strait confrontation; 20 percent had never heard of Taiwan; and only 5 percent were aware of Taipei's efforts to rejoin the United Nations.²⁴ There was, however, a Taiwan lobby in Russia, consisting of politicians, businessmen, and academics. In December 1995 Chen Shui-bian, the leader of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) and mayor of Taipei, received an honorary doctorate from the Plekhanov Russian Academy of Economics in Moscow. The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia led by Vladimir Zhirinovskii tried but failed to do two things: have President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) of Taiwan attend a conference in Moscow in 1994, and pass a federal law on relations with Taiwan in 1997-98. As a whole, the Taiwan lobby is small in number and limited in influence.

Initially, President Boris Yeltsin was wary of Beijing, which had snubbed him as a challenger to Gorbachev and later sympathized with the abortive coup.²⁵ In April 1992, the former Russian deputy premier Oleg Lobov signed a protocol on exchanging semiofficial representation between Russia and Taiwan, and even convinced Yeltsin to agree. However, after protests from Beijing and from within the Russian government, Yeltsin endorsed the "one China" policy in his September decree, which stressed the unofficial character of relations with Taiwan and banned reciprocal visits by high-ranking officials. During his first visit to Beijing in December 1992 Yeltsin reiterated this commitment. Yeltsin's policy toward Taiwan reflected a new orientation of Russian foreign policy, which

²³Czeslaw Tubilewicz, "Breaking the Ice: The Origins of Taiwan's Economic Diplomacy toward the Soviet Union and Its European Allies," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 6 (September 2004): 891-906.

²⁴Czeslaw Tubilewicz, "The Little Dragon and the Bear: Russian-Taiwanese Relations in the Post-Cold War Period," *The Russian Review* 61, no. 2 (April 2002): 286.

²⁵For an insider's view of Sino-Soviet relations, see Qian Qichen, *Weijiao shiji* (Ten stories of a diplomat) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2003), 1-39, 203-41.

distanced itself from the West. Since then, Russian policy toward Taiwan has been consistent.²⁶ During the March 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, Yeltsin urged peaceful reunification, but did not criticize Beijing. His visit to China in April transformed the "constructive partnership" between the two countries into a "strategic partnership."²⁷ Not long after President Bill Clinton enunciated his "three no's" policy during his 1998 trip to China,²⁸ Yeltsin went a step further by announcing his "four no's" policy, which included no arms sales to Taiwan.

Generally speaking, President Vladimir Putin has not deviated from his predecessor's Taiwan policy. In 2001 two new developments further strengthened ties between Moscow and Beijing. In June, Russia, China, and four Central Asian countries created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to combat Islamic fundamentalism and to promote economic development. The following month, Moscow and Beijing concluded the Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation. Reminiscent of the treaty they had signed four months before the outbreak of the Korean War, this document adhered to the principles of "no alliance, no confrontation, and no targeting of third countries." As far as Taiwan is concerned, Putin has reiterated the "one China" policy. Russia expressed support for Beijing's anti-secession law in 2005, and denounced President Chen's proposed abolishment of the National Unification Council and the Guidelines for National Unification in 2006.

²⁶For Yeltsin's policy toward China, see, for example, Bilveer Singh, "East Asia in Russia's Foreign Policy: A New Russo-Chinese Axis?" *Pacific Review* 11, no. 4 (1998): 485-503; and Gilbert Rozman, "Sino-Russian Relations in the 1990s: A Balance Sheet," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14, no. 2 (April-June 1998): 93-113.

²⁷For an assessment of the strategic partnership, see, for example, Sherman Garnett, "Challenges of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership," *The Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 41-54; Bobo Lo, "The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia's Evolving China Policy," *International Affairs* 80, no. 2 (2004): 295-309; Vasily V. Mikheev, "Russian-Chinese Strategic Cooperation: Scenarios, Perspectives, and Consequences for Global and Asian Security," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 9 (Winter 1997): 165-90; and Elizabeth Wislneck, "Prospects for the Sino-Russian Partnership: Views from Moscow and the Russian Far East," *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 12 (Summer-Fall 1998): 418-51.

²⁸Clinton's "three no's" were: no support for an independent Taiwan; no recognition of "two Chinas" or one China and a separate Taiwan; and no support for Taiwan's admission to any international organization whose membership required statehood.

Russia's Importance to Beijing's Taiwan Policy

One can hardly exaggerate the importance of Russia in Beijing's Taiwan policy for diplomatic, geopolitical, economic, and military reasons. Contrary to Beijing's expectations, Taiwan is an international issue, not a domestic one. The global balance of power is not in Beijing's favor. Washington's adherence to the "one China" policy is offset by its insistence on a peaceful solution of the cross-Strait conflict and by its arms sales to Taiwan. While it is debatable whether Taiwan constitutes a vital American interest, the balance-of-power logic indicates that the separation of China and Taiwan serves American interests. In 2001, President George W. Bush even declared his willingness to help defend Taiwan.²⁹ For a long time after the end of World War II, Tokyo minimized its involvement in Taiwan affairs, partly because it had created the Taiwan problem in the first place. With the rise of China, Tokyo has seemed tempted to treat Taiwan as a counterweight to China.³⁰ The European Union appears more neutral than Washington and Tokyo, but its policy can hardly be categorized as pro-Beijing. It would be a safe bet that the European Union would side with the United States against China in a cross-Strait conflict, because they

²⁹Ted Carpenter does not think that Taiwan constitutes a vital American interest, and Michael Lind argues, "Most of the world would view a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, however deplorable, as the last step in Chinese territorial unification, not as the first step in a career of regional or global domination." John Mearsheimer, however, views the prevention of China from becoming a regional hegemon as the central aim of American foreign policy, and singles out China as the most dangerous threat to the United States in the early twenty-first century. This author has held a pessimistic view of the possibility of averting a first-century American confrontation over Taiwan. See Ted Galan Carpenter, *America's Coming War with China: A Collision Course over Taiwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 196; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), chap. 10: "Great Power Politics in the Twenty-first Century," 360-402; and Shaohua Hu, "Prospects for a Cross-Straits Conflict," in *Interpreting U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations*, ed. Xiaobing Li, Xiaobo Hu, and Yang Zhong (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1998), 233-56. For Washington's Taiwan policy, see Richard C. Bush, *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

³⁰For Tokyo's Taiwan policy, see Shaohua Hu, "Japan and the Cross-Taiwan Strait Conflict," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 83-104; and Soeya Yoshihide, "Taiwan in Japan's Security Considerations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 165 (March 2001): 130-46.

share similar strategic, economic, and ideological interests.

Faced with such a formidable alliance, Beijing dreams of help from Russia. There is no denying that today's Russia is a shadow of its former self during the Cold War era, but it is a mistake to underestimate Russia, a country that occupies the world's largest territory, boasts the world's second most powerful military forces, and possesses the tenth largest population. According to the World Bank, even its lackluster economy ranked eleventh in the world in 2006. If Moscow adopted a pro-Taiwan policy, Beijing would feel isolated if not threatened. During Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来) raised the possibility that the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and Europe might consider carving China up. After Nixon's visit to China, Beijing still worried about a U.S.-Soviet condominium and about the West's attempt to encourage Russian threats against China.³¹ Among today's major powers, only Russia takes a pro-Beijing stance on the Taiwan issue. Even though Russia only pays lip service to the "one China" policy and has lost its superpower status, its pro-Beijing stance means a great deal to Beijing. For Beijing, Taiwan is of primary importance, since territorial integrity constitutes a vital national interest. For Washington and Tokyo, Taiwan is of secondary importance, because they are sea powers and closer to Taiwan. For Moscow, Taiwan is of tertiary importance, because China is Russia's largest neighbor and Taiwan is a remote island.

Russia's role in Beijing's Taiwan policy is of geopolitical importance. Before modern times, China's security was threatened mainly by nomads from the north, but more recently, major threats have been posed by the seaborne powers of Europe, America, and Japan. Beijing has lacked the amphibious capability to occupy Taiwan, even without foreign intervention, and a two-front war would be unimaginable for Beijing. Nixon knew this well. To alleviate Russian pressure on China, he decided to withdraw two destroyers from waters around Taiwan in late 1969.³² Later, a common

³¹Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 49-52.

³²Kissinger, *White House Years*, 186-87.



interest in opposing Soviet hegemony motivated Beijing and Washington to sidestep the Taiwan issue.³³ A hostile Russia would leave China little energy for handling the Taiwan issue. A friendly Russia will enable China to direct its attention to Taiwan by obviating the need to defend the long Russo-Chinese border, and even providing China with a strategic rear. It is safe to say that any military action taken by Beijing against Taiwan would presuppose at the very least Russian neutrality.

The specific reasons for Russia's geopolitical significance to China are as follows. First, Russia and China share a 4,300-kilometer-long border. Russia controls the bulk of what Halford John Mackinder calls the heartland, and its rivers offer easy access to the entire country.³⁴ The trans-Siberian railway, some sections of which are only 50 miles from the Chinese border, expedites Russian military deployment in the Far East. The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) railway, which was built more than 500 miles north of the Chinese border partly in response to the Sino-Soviet split, provides Russia with strategic depth and more resources. After the Sino-Soviet split, Russian troops were within striking distance of Beijing and threatened to cut off China's northeast provinces from other parts of China.³⁵ Of Deng Xiaoping's (鄧小平) so-called three barriers to the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1980s—the Soviet military presence along China's frontier, its intervention in Afghanistan, and its support for Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia—none was ideological; all were geopolitical. Even today, Russia could still pose a great threat to China's economic and political centers, whereas even a willing and capable China could only threaten the vast, underdeveloped, and sparsely-populated areas of Russia.

³³Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 47.

³⁴W. H. Parker, *An Historical Geography of Russia* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 25.

³⁵Green and Yost identify four possible military options for Russia against China in ascending order of belligerence: annexing Chinese borderlands or creating buffer states; a preemptive nuclear strike; a major invasion; and massive disruption of Chinese society. See William C. Green and David S. Yost, "Soviet Military Options Regarding China," in *China, the Soviet Union, and the West: Strategic and Political Dimensions in the 1980s*, ed. Douglas T. Stuart and William T. Tow (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982), 135-44.

The second factor that accentuates the geopolitical importance of Russia to China is the fact that China has land borders with fourteen countries. If Russia and China are hostile to each other, Moscow will seek an alliance with China's rivals. Balance-of-power thinking has long been embedded in Russia's China policy.³⁶ As early as 1722, the Russian ambassador in Beijing advocated that good relations should be maintained with Djungaria (準噶爾), since it might in the future become Russia's ally against China.³⁷ For Khrushchev, the reason why the Soviets supported Nationalist China during World War II was that Moscow wanted to prevent China from being defeated by Japan, the Soviets' archenemy in the East.³⁸ The Cold War era was famous for the strategic triangle of the United States, the Soviet Union, and China, and other triangles were formed that involved the two communist giants and one of China's neighbors, such as Japan, India, North Korea, or Vietnam.³⁹ Actually, Moscow proposed a "system of collective security in Asia" directed against China after the 1969 border skirmishes, encircled China by allying with India after the Sino-Soviet split, and sided with Vietnam against China after the Vietnam War.

Finally, much of China's northern and western border regions are populated by ethnic minorities, such as Tibetans (藏族) in the west, Uighurs (維吾爾族) in the northwest, and Mongols (蒙族) in the north. Imperial Russia encroached on Xinjiang (新疆), where some Turkic-speaking people were pushing for independence, and the Soviet Union kept the area from China during World War II. After the end of the Cold War, five former

³⁶Lo remarks that Russian geopolitical thinking was based on three concepts: a zero-sum mentality, the balance of power, and spheres of influence. See Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion, and Mythmaking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 99.

³⁷Victor E. Louis, *The Coming Decline of the Chinese Empire* (New York: Times Books, 1979), 186.

³⁸Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 237-38.

³⁹See, for example, Lowell Dittmer, "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (July 1981): 485-515; Robert Legvold, "Russia and the Strategic Quadrangle," in *The Strategic Quadrangle: Russia, China, Japan, and the United States in East Asia*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1995), 16-62; Sheldon W. Simon, "The Japan-China-USSR Triangle," *Pacific Affairs* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1974): 125-38; and John W. Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 125 (March 1991): 55-85.



Soviet republics in Central Asia achieved independence. Separatist forces became active in Xinjiang, and some even developed connections with radical Islamic movements in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Inner Mongolia borders Mongolia, an independent country which was a Soviet protectorate until the Soviet Union's demise. If Moscow wanted to give Beijing a hard time, it would support separatist forces in the border regions.

Russia's economic importance to Beijing's Taiwan policy does not seem obvious at first sight. China's current economic relations with Russia are insignificant in comparison to the 1950s. As the Soviet Union's largest trading partner, China accounted for 27 percent of total Soviet trade in 1956, 17 percent in 1958, and dropped to 4 percent in 1963.⁴⁰ In 2006, China was Russia's fourth largest export partner, with 5.4 percent of total exports, and its second largest import partner (9.7 percent). By contrast, Russia is not among China's top five trading partners in imports or exports.⁴¹ All these figures, however, should not blind us to Russia's economic importance to Beijing's Taiwan policy. Right now, China's access to markets in the developed world has reduced the attraction of Russian industrial products, but any escalation in cross-Strait tensions would increase Chinese dependence on the Russian economy. More likely than not, a cross-Strait conflict would lead to international economic sanctions against China. To the extent that almost all China's major trading partners are American allies, and Washington controls all the sea lanes, economic ties with Russia would wax important in the event of a cross-Strait conflict.

China's voracious demand for raw materials makes Russia even more important to Beijing's Taiwan policy. Energy supplies have become a great concern for Beijing since China became a net oil importer in 1993. China is the world's second largest oil consumer, and will continue to need oil supplies in the future. It is estimated that by 2010, half of China's oil consumption will depend on imports. Much of China's oil comes from the troubled Middle East; a crisis in the Persian Gulf or along the straits of Hor-

⁴⁰Parker, *An Historical Geography of Russia*, 369.

⁴¹See the Russian and Chinese entries in *The World Fact Book 2007* on the CIA website.

muz or Malacca could disrupt the oil supply; and Washington dominates the sea lanes. All of these factors are encouraging Beijing to diversify its energy sources. Overland sources of oil from Russia and Central Asia could be essential to China in the event of a cross-Strait conflict.⁴² Beijing plans to construct a 4,200-kilometer gas and oil pipeline from Xinjiang to Shanghai and to establish a 30-day oil reserve by 2010. In May 2004, oil was pumped directly into Xinjiang from Kazakhstan for the first time along a newly-constructed 960-kilometer international pipeline.⁴³ It is difficult to predict to what extent Moscow will be willing and able to satisfy Chinese needs, and Beijing is far from Pollyannaish about it. After all, Russia pressured a Chinese company to relinquish its successful bid to take over an American firm that controlled a natural gas field in southern Russia. Russia also abandoned plans to build the Daqing (大庆) route to carry oil into China, which seemed more realistic and economic than the Nakhodka route which would facilitate Russian oil exports to the Pacific. Nonetheless, Russia can and does help alleviate China's oil shortage. Russia has the world's largest reserves of natural gas and at least the fourth largest oil reserve;⁴⁴ Russia also possesses hydropower and nuclear power stations. More important, it is in Russia's best interests to diversify its market. Russia has delivered oil to China by rail, and promised three pipelines—two for gas and one for oil to China.

Last but not least, military cooperation with Russia is crucial to Beijing's Taiwan policy.⁴⁵ The fact that the Taiwan Strait and the United States'

⁴²Amy Myers Jaffe and Kenneth B. Medlock III, "China and Northeast Asia," in *Energy and Security: Toward a New Foreign Policy Strategy*, ed. Jan H. Kalicki and David L. Goldwyn (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 276.

⁴³A brief overview of Chinese and Russian oil strategies is contained in Irwin M. Stelzer, "The Axis of Oil: China and Russia Find a New Way to Advance Their Strategic Ambitions," *The Weekly Standard*, February 7, 2005, 25-28.

⁴⁴Julia Nanay, "Russia and the Caspian Sea Region," in Kalicki and Goldwyn, *Energy and Security*, 127-47.

⁴⁵For Sino-Russian military relations, see, for example, Michael J. Barron, "China's Strategic Modernization: The Russian Connection," *Parameters* (Winter 2001-02), 72-86; Stephen J. Blank, "Russo-Chinese Military Relations and Asian Security," *Issues & Studies* 33, no. 11 (November 1997): 58-94; Alexander A. Sergounin and Sergey V. Subbotin, "Sino-

advanced weaponry deter Beijing from launching an invasion underlines the importance of Russian arms sales to China. Indeed, Russian military technology and weapons lag behind those of the Americans, and Russian strategic suspicions limit the sale of weapons and military technology to China.⁴⁶ Strategic weapons, such as long-range bombers and ICBMs, or the most advanced weapons, are unavailable to China. In fact, Russia sells better quality hardware to India than it does to China. Nevertheless, Beijing needs Russian weapons, since the major powers banned arms sales to China after the 1989 Tiananmen (天安門) tragedy. Even if the ban were lifted, China could hardly cease its longtime reliance on Soviet and Russian technology. Since China tries to avoid the Soviet mistake of pursuing a military buildup at the expense of the civilian economy, Russian weapons not only satisfy immediate needs, but also facilitate Chinese research and development.

China was the biggest customer of the Russian military industry in the 1990s, and Russia helped China improve its missile technology. China is buying or building advanced Russian surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) such as the long-range SA-10 and the SA-7, the anti-aircraft missile. It has bought S-300 SAMs to protect ballistic missile bases that can target Taiwan, and has developed indigenous SAMs based on Russian designs. Russian assistance in communications technology also boosted China's war-fighting capability. China has bought fourth generation fighters, such as the Su-27. Equipped with advanced radar and missiles, they come close to the American F-14s and F-15s. Furthermore, China acquired a license to produce up to 200 Su-27s by 2012. China has subsequently acquired Su-30 fighter-bombers as well as in-flight refueling capability. Russia has

Russian Military Technical Cooperation," in *Russia and the Arms Trade*, ed. Ian Anthony (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 194-216; Ming-Yen Tsai, *From Adversaries to Partners? Chinese and Russian Military Cooperation after the Cold War* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003); Bin Yu, "Sino-Russian Military Relations: Implications for Asian-Pacific Security," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 3 (March 1993): 302-16.

⁴⁶Take the Su-27 production license, for example. Russia will upgrade Chinese production over fifteen years, and retain the right to assemble the engine and electronic equipment. China will only be able to produce 70 percent of the fighter, and the engines will have to be sent to Russia for repair. See Tsai, *From Adversaries to Partners?* 186.

also helped China convert B-6 bombers into aerial refueling tankers, and sold IL-76 heavy cargo planes capable of transporting troops and materiel outside China's borders. Aspiring to the status of a "green-water navy" and even a "blue-water navy,"⁴⁷ China purchased several new Kilo-class attack submarines, a carrier-busting weapon, and Kamov Ka-28 (Helix), destroyer-based helicopters designed for anti-submarine warfare. Most important, four Sovremenny-class destroyers were purchased after the United States deployed aircraft carriers during the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Armed with SS-N-22 Sunburn anti-ship missiles, they pose a threat to American aircraft carriers.

Beijing and Moscow have established other forms of military cooperation in addition to arms sales. As the tsarist prime minister Sergei Witte remarked, "The world bowed not to our culture, not to our bureaucratized church, not to our wealth and prosperity. It bowed to our might."⁴⁸ Beijing has long been similarly impressed by Russia's military tradition. Russia has helped train military students, scientists, and engineers, and economic hardship at home has motivated some Russian weapons scientists to seek work in China. There have been military exchanges and joint training exercises between the two sides. The Russian and Chinese navies began conducting joint military exercises in 1999. During the "Peace Mission 2005," troops from both sides conducted a week-long joint military exercise on the Shandong Peninsula (山東半島). The mock air and naval blockades, amphibious assaults, and armed occupation did not go unnoticed by the Americans and their East Asian allies. One day before the joint exercise, Taiwan conducted a drill to repel a simulated Chinese invasion. During the "Peace Mission 2007," held in August, the six SCO countries carried out anti-terror drills first in Urumqi (烏魯木齊), the capital of Xinjiang, and

⁴⁷The former would be able to extend eastward in the Pacific Ocean, to the first island chain ranging from the Aleutians, through Japan and Taiwan, to Borneo; the latter would extend out to the second island chain ranging from the Bonin Islands, through the Marianas and Guam, to the Caroline Islands.

⁴⁸Robert Legvold, "War, Weapons, and Soviet Foreign Policy," in *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, ed. Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988), 100.



later in Chelyabinsk in Russia's Ural Mountains.

Russian Options in a Cross-Strait Conflict

It is one thing to demonstrate that Moscow is able to exert great influence on Beijing's Taiwan policy and another to show that Moscow would be willing to help China in a cross-Strait conflict. There is no lack of tentative speculation on what Moscow would do in the event of a cross-Strait conflict. Some in Beijing believe that Russian support for China would make Washington cautious about intervening in a cross-Strait conflict.⁴⁹ Others have noted that Moscow's support is mainly symbolic and rhetorical.⁵⁰ In this section, I examine three options Russia might face in a cross-Strait conflict. They are joining a pro-Taiwan coalition led by the United States against a weaker China; supporting China against a pro-Taiwan coalition; and maintaining benign neutrality. I argue that they are in ascending order of possibility, because Russia's foreign policy is presumably determined by (1) its national interests, which include security, wealth, and power; (2) regional alignment, especially the balance of power among Taiwan, China, Japan, and the United States; and (3) Russia's strategic culture, which is loosely defined as the national style of Russian strategy.⁵¹

⁴⁹Tubilewicz, "The Little Dragon and the Bear," 292.

⁵⁰Mark Burles, *Chinese Policy Toward Russia and the Central Asian Republics* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1999), 48-49; and Richard Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," *Naval War College Review* 56, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 51.

⁵¹I recognize that all three concepts are to some extent ambiguous. Short-term, medium-term, and long-term interests do not necessarily converge; nor do economic, military, and ideological interests always remain compatible. In terms of regional alignment, all countries develop at different speeds, and their relations may undergo great change. Finally, strategic culture is even more elusive and complicated. On national interest, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, brief edition revised by Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993). On global changes, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). On strategic culture, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995): 32-64.

Siding with Pro-Taiwan Forces against China

It is not impossible that Russia would take advantage of China if the latter fought against a powerful pro-Taiwan alliance. As Randall Schweller points out, great powers tend to bandwagon with stronger powers for profit.⁵² The history of Russo-Chinese relations provides ample evidence for this. Scholars have characterized Russo-Chinese relations in many different ways,⁵³ but what defines the bilateral relationship is the lack of mutual trust, which is rooted in Russia's expansion at the expense of China and fear of Chinese irredentism.

No other power benefited more from China's decline than did Imperial Russia.⁵⁴ The two countries signed their first bilateral treaty in Nerchinsk (尼布楚條約) in 1689. Initially, they were roughly equal in terms of power. Petrine Russia was preoccupied with its western front, while Qing (清朝) China was busy dealing with Djungaria. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed Russian encroachment on the Amur (黑龍江) and Ussuri valleys. Whereas the European powers dominated the more populous and prosperous parts of China, Russia often fished in troubled waters by annexing vast but sparsely populated areas of China. Having been defeated by Britain and France in the Crimean War, Russia then benefited from their defeat of China during the Second Opium War. Using incursion, intimidation, and intrigue, Russia had the Qing court cede it 1.5 million square kilometers of Chinese territory.⁵⁵ After the Sino-Japanese War, Russia proposed an alliance with China against Japan in exchange

⁵²Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72-107.

⁵³Voskressenski, for example, identifies four characteristics: the lack of major wars; attempts at alliances; temporary treaties of friendship; and the importance of ideological and personal factors. See Alexei D. Voskressenski, *Russia and China: A Theory of Inter-State Relations* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 208.

⁵⁴For a good overview, see, for example, O. Edmund Clubb, *China and Russia: The "Great Game"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); and G. Patrick March, *Eastern Destiny: Russia in Asia and the North Pacific* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996).

⁵⁵Russia annexed the 600,000 square km Amur region in 1858, seized 400,000 square km east of the Ussuri River in 1860, and captured 440,000 square km of China's northwestern territory in 1864. Between 1864 and 1881, Russia gained more land farther west on the Tianshan (天山) boundary. See Parker, *An Historical Geography of Russia*, 367.

for privileges in Manchuria. As a result, Russia extended the trans-Siberian railway through Manchuria to Vladivostok. Policed by Russians, this railway increased Russian influence in Manchuria. Following in Germany's footsteps at the end of the nineteenth century, Russia exacted the leasing of Port Arthur (旅順港) at the southern tip of Manchuria, and extended the railway to this ice-free outlet to the Pacific. Russian troops invaded Beijing to suppress the Boxer rebellion, but stayed in Manchuria until their defeat by Japan in 1905.

The Soviet Union inherited this mantle of expansionism. Out of internal weakness, initial confusion, and socialist ideals, Soviet leaders initially declared the unequal treaties with China invalid, and even promised to return the annexed land to China. Before long, however, they retracted their words. Communism actually served Russian expansionism, and the two ideologies were mutually reinforcing in China.⁵⁶ Tannu Tuva (唐努烏梁海), for instance, was first declared a people's republic in 1921 and annexed in 1944, and Outer Mongolia became a people's republic in 1924 and remained a longtime Soviet protectorate. In 1935, the Soviet Union sold all its rights in the Chinese Eastern Railway to Japanese-controlled Manchukuo (滿洲國).⁵⁷ Moscow agreed to fight Japan at the end of World War II on condition that the independence of Outer Mongolia would be guaranteed, the Russians would have the right to use the port of Dalian (大連) and the naval base of Port Arthur, and that they would operate the Manchurian railways together with China. After World War II, in exchange for Nationalist China's recognition of Mongolian independence, the Soviet Union promised not to support the Chinese communists. After a short period of friendship with the People's Republic of China from its founda-

⁵⁶Sow-Theng Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1926* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), xix; and Allen S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China 1917-1924* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 249-52.

⁵⁷For Soviet policy in Mongolia and Manchuria, see, for example, Bruce A. Elleman, "Secret Sino-Soviet Negotiations on Outer Mongolia, 1918-1925," *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 4 (Winter 1993-94): 539-63; Bruce A. Elleman, "The Soviet Union's Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924-1925," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (May 1994): 459-86; and Peter S. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911-1931* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1959).

tion in 1949 to 1957, the Sino-Soviet split aggravated mutual distrust.⁵⁸ Aspaturian found evidence of great fear and hatred of China among the Soviet leaders and people, partly because Russian greatness and Chinese humiliation were coetaneous, and China was mistakenly associated with the Mongols' 200-year-long rule in Russia.⁵⁹ Khrushchev even claimed that China wanted to occupy Siberia without a war.⁶⁰

Rozman finds no evidence of writings in the Russian Federation that view a rising China as a long-term benefit for Russia.⁶¹ According to a poll conducted by the Ekho Mosky radio station on September 8, 2005, 74 percent of respondents thought Russia should side with Washington against Beijing, and 26 percent thought Russia should take sides with Beijing against Washington.⁶² Two Russian military analysts have speculated that China might use force against Russia if the latter did not have nuclear capability and sufficient combat capacity east of the Urals.⁶³ Misgivings about China are prevalent in the Russian Far East, where about 30,000 Chinese lived before Stalin expelled all East Asians for fear of Japanese espionage in 1937. Since the demise of the Soviet Union deprived it of financial assistance, this vast and resourceful region has suffered serious economic decline. What reflects and reinforces such difficulties is the demographic decline in the region as a result of high mortality and emigration to European Russia. Only 30 million Russians live to the east of the Ural Mountains, and as few as 8 million of them live between Lake Baikal and the Pacific, while over 200 million Chinese live in Northeast China. Many in the Russian Far East opposed the border settlements with China,

⁵⁸It is worth mentioning that Moscow was generous toward Beijing during this period. Moscow not only provided economic assistance, but also bestowed high status on China in the communist bloc.

⁵⁹Vernon V. Aspaturian, "The Domestic Sources of Soviet Policy toward China," in Stuart and Tow, *China, the Soviet Union, and the West*, 44-45.

⁶⁰Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 250.

⁶¹Gilbert Rozman, "Sino-Russian Relations: Will the Strategic Partnership Endure?" *Demokratizatsiya* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 408.

⁶²BBC monitoring former Soviet Union, 09/09/2005.

⁶³Peggy Falkenheim Meyer, "The Russian Far East's Economic Integration with Northeast Asia: Problems and Prospects," *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 221-22.

and exaggerated and decried the Chinese presence in the region.⁶⁴ The 100-kilometer border zone between China and Russia is demilitarized, with the exception of Khabarovsk and Vladivostok.⁶⁵ In his July 2000 speech at Blagoveshchensk, a border city across the Amur River from China, Putin seemed to echo the words of the Russian prime minister Pyotr Stolypin in 1908, warning: "If you do not take practical steps to advance the Far East soon, after a few decades, the Russian population will be speaking Japanese, Chinese, and Korean."⁶⁶

Other things being equal, Russia's long-term interests are served by Taiwan's separation from China, not its unification with China. In an anarchic world characterized by a security dilemma, neighbors are vigilant of one another, and show great concern over a rising power.⁶⁷ A stronger China is unprecedented in Russo-Chinese relations, and the juxtaposition of Russia's decline and China's rise makes Russians even more reluctant to see the unification of China and Taiwan. Tubilewicz argues that China's unification would increase its economic power, promote closer Sino-American relations, and depreciate Russia's strategic friendship. Others

⁶⁴Mikhail A. Alexseev, "In the Shadow of the 'Asian Balkans': Anti-Chinese Alarmism and Hostility in the Russian Far East," in Mikhail A. Alexseev, *Immigration Phobia and the Security Dilemma: Russia, Europe, and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95-147; Sherman Garnett, "The Russian Far East as a Factor in Russian-Chinese Relations," *SAS Review* 16, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 1996): 1-19; Victor Larin, "Chinese in the Russian Far East: Regional Views," in *Crossing National Borders: Human Migration Issues in Northeast Asia*, ed. Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005), 47-67; Elizabeth Wishnick, "Migration and Economic Security: Chinese Labor Migrants in the Russian Far East," *ibid.*, 68-92; and Alexander Lukin, "The Image of China in Russian Border Regions," *Asian Survey* 38, no. 9 (September 1998): 821-35.

⁶⁵Tsai, *From Adversaries to Partners?* 185.

⁶⁶Putin is quoted by Alexseev, "In the Shadow of the 'Asian Balkans,'" 95. Stolypin remarked, "Nature does not tolerate emptiness.... Our distant and stern border territory is at the same time rich—rich with gold, wood, fur and vast spaces good for agriculture. And under these circumstances, gentlemen, having a densely populated country as our neighbor, this border territory will not stay deserted. The foreigner will penetrate it unless the Russian comes there before him, and this penetration has already begun." Quoted in Alexander Lukin, "Russian Perceptions of the China Threat," in *China Threat: Perceptions, Myths, and Reality*, ed. Herbert S. Yee and Ian Storey (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 89.

⁶⁷For the security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167-74.

even raise the possibility that if the Taiwan issue is resolved, China might focus on redressing territorial disputes in the north.⁶⁸

Siding with China against Pro-Taiwan Forces

Russia may side with China against the pro-Taiwan coalition, since balance of power, a strategy of siding with a weaker power against a stronger one, seems natural and prevalent in the international system.⁶⁹ Right now, Russia derives no satisfaction from American and Japanese dominance in global and regional affairs. During the twentieth century, Russia did not have good relations with either country. All of the three major treaties Russia signed with China, in 1896, 1924, and 1950, were directed at Japan.⁷⁰ Its disputes with Japan over the Kurile Islands may not be resolved for the foreseeable future. Washington leaned toward Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, and joined the Japanese in occupying the Russian Far East in 1918. The rivalry between the two superpowers during the Cold War was legendary. Russia wooed the West in the post-Cold War era, but was snubbed, so a weak and humiliated Russia sought solace in a close relationship with China. The Kosovo crisis prompted Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov to call for a tripartite alliance among Russia, China, and India.⁷¹ Russian resentment at the West, especially the United States, manifested itself in Putin's February 10, 2007, Munich speech. He criticized American unilateralism as harmful to the world; declared the

⁶⁸Tubilewicz, "The Little Dragon and the Bear," 297; and Andrew C. Kuchins, "Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership," in *Russia after the Fall*, ed. Andrew C. Kuchins (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 210; and Dmitriy Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 207.

⁶⁹Waltz offers an excellent analysis of balance of power. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). Stephen Walt argues that states tend to balance not against power but against threat. See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁷⁰Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," 51.

⁷¹For the proposal and its critique, see, for example, Harsh V. Pant, "The Moscow-Beijing-Delhi 'Strategic Triangle': An Idea Whose Time May Never Come," *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (September 2004): 311-28; and Kuchins, "Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership," 204-19.



end of the unipolar world; railed against NATO's expansion eastward into countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union; denounced American missile defense plans in Central Europe; and accused the West of economic discrimination.⁷² A good relationship with China would be to Russia's benefit.⁷³ At least two factors might motivate Russia to side with China in a cross-Strait conflict. First, China is more important than Taiwan, and therefore it would be natural for Russia to put China before Taiwan. Taiwan is much smaller and farther away from Russia, and geography determines that it would be easier for Washington to abandon Taiwan than for Moscow to neglect China. A stronger China may concern Russia, but Russia would not necessarily benefit from a Chinese defeat. A feeble and chaotic China would not only do more harm than good to the Russian economy, but may even create a flow of refugees into Russian territories.

Moreover, helping China in a cross-Strait conflict might benefit Russian territorial integrity. Even since the collapse of the Soviet empire, Russia has had its share of territorial disputes both at home and abroad. In this regard, Beijing's sympathy with Russian positions means a great deal, as testified by Beijing's support for Moscow in the two Chechen wars.⁷⁴ More important, a pro-China position in a cross-Strait conflict would probably facilitate a permanent solution of their border issues. Both Moscow and Beijing have declared that they no longer have any border issues after numerous rounds of negotiations.⁷⁵ Gorbachev's 1989 acceptance of the

⁷²Thom Shanker and Mark Landler, "Putin Says U.S. Is Undermining Global Stability," *New York Times*, February 11, 2007.

⁷³Yeltsin mused in July 1995: "China is the most important state for us. It is a neighbor, with which we share a long border and with which are destined to live and work side by side forever. Russia's future depends on our cooperation with China. Relations with China are extremely important to us in global politics as well. If we can rely on the Chinese shoulder with our relations with the West, the West will be more considerate to Russia." Quoted in Lukin, "Russian Perceptions of the China Threat," 104.

⁷⁴For Chechnya, see Anatol Lieven, "What is the Future of Chechnya?" in Kuchins, *Russia after the Fall*, 242-59.

⁷⁵A good overview of border negotiations may be found in Akihiro Iwashita, "An Inquiry for New Thinking on the Border Dispute: Backgrounds of 'Historic Success' for the Sino-Russian Negotiations," in *Siberia and the Russian Far East in the 21st Century: Partners*

thalweg doctrine with regard to river borders, rather than taking the Chinese bank as the boundary, paved the way for fruitful border negotiations. The year 1994 saw the signing of an agreement on the western section of the border and a mutual agreement to demilitarize the borders. Both countries declared the resolution of all border issues in the eastern section in late 1997, and determined the ownership of the islands in the Amur, Ussuri, and Argun (琿琿河) rivers in 2005. Nevertheless, it would be naive to assume that current borders will become permanent. The Treaty of Nerchinsk was the first but not the last accord to delimit the Russo-Chinese border. Despite some concessions made by Russia in the border negotiations, many Chinese nationalists do not like the existing borders.⁷⁶ Moscow basically followed the international convention on border rivers, kept almost all territories wrested from China, and denied Chinese access to the Sea of Japan, only 15 km from Jilin Province (吉林省). Russian assistance to China in achieving national unification, however, would make it easier for Chinese nationalists to forget the territories lost to Russia. After all, Chinese control of those areas was tenuous, intermittent, and nominal in the first place.

Benign Neutrality

The two previous options have their own justifications, but suffer their respective disadvantages. If Moscow were to take advantage of a weaker and weakened China, such backstabbing would reopen old wounds inflicted by Russian imperialism, and turn China into Russia's longtime archenemy. By virtue of its sheer size, even a weak China poses a great challenge to Russia. Nancy Tucker argues that the Chinese challenge ac-

in the *"Community of Asia"*, vol. 1: *Crossroads in Northeast Asia* (Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2005), 95-114.

⁷⁶A good example is Yan Jiaqi (嚴家祺), who is former director of the Institute of Political Science at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and a leading dissident liberal who went into exile in the United States in 1989. He accused the Chinese leaders of waiving China's right to recover lands occupied by Imperial Russia, and called for the revision of the border treaties on the basis of the UN Charter and international laws. See Yan Jiaqi, "Zhong-E bianjie wenti bixu zaiyi" (The issue of the Sino-Russian border must be discussed again), *Dongxiang* (Trends), November 2002.



tually contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ Moreover, Moscow does not want to see a pro-Taiwan alliance become even more powerful. Thus it would not pay to adopt a policy of bandwagoning. On the other hand, if Russia sides with China against the pro-Taiwan coalition, Russia will suffer from a confrontation with the world's most powerful countries. Even if the Russo-Chinese alliance prevailed, a triumphant China would do Russia no good. The second option seems to be the lesser evil. Offending China, Russia's largest neighbor, does not serve long-term Russian interests, and the policy of balancing makes sense in international politics.

Between a rock and a hard place, Moscow would probably maintain benign neutrality. Lukin points out that a cross-Strait conflict would put Russia in a difficult situation. If Beijing attacked Taiwan, and Washington supported Taipei, Moscow would be unlikely to interfere, since any interference would displease either Beijing or Washington. Voskressenski identifies three positions among the Russian elite: adherence to the "one China" policy; a toleration of unification by force (adopted by a small number); or a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue (a view held by the vast majority).⁷⁸ Maintaining neutrality is not the best option, but the least bad one,⁷⁹ and there are several justifications for this option.

First, common sense and existing theories on third-party participation in wars both point to the probability of Russian neutrality. Usually it is allies, rather than non-allies, who join a war. Furthermore, allies remain neutral rather than join wars most of the time.⁸⁰ Moscow and Beijing often emphasize that their 2001 treaty does not make them allies. Historically, Russia has often found neutrality attractive. In addition to the infamous

⁷⁷The three contributing factors were China's security threat, economic challenges, and political repression. See Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "China as a Factor in the Collapse of the Soviet Empire," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (Winter 1995-96): 501-18.

⁷⁸Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon*, 298; and Voskressenski, "The Perceptions of China by Russia's Foreign Policy Elite," 17.

⁷⁹One of the most powerful arguments against neutrality is made by Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74-76.

⁸⁰J. David Singer and Melvin Small, "Formal Alliances, 1815-1939: A Quantitative Description," *Journal of Peace Research* 3, no. 1: (1966): 1-31.

German-Soviet nonaggression pact of August 1939, the Soviet Union signed similar agreements with both China and Japan. After Japan invaded China in 1937, Moscow, which had provided military and economic assistance to China, opted for a Treaty of Nonaggression with China. Despite its two border skirmishes with Japan, Moscow signed a neutrality pact with Japan in April 1941.⁸¹ Stalin approved of the North Korean invasion of South Korea, but after the tide turned, Russia stayed out of the fray and urged China to get involved. Chinese participation not only scuttled the Chinese plan to take Taiwan, but boosted Russian arms sales to China.⁸² In the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict, Russia maintained its neutrality. When China invaded Vietnam in 1979, Moscow did not provide enough assistance to its Vietnamese ally either.

Second, a rational analysis of a cross-Strait conflict may discourage Moscow from joining the war. Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita posit that third-party participation in a war depends on the possible outcomes of the conflict and on the party's ability to influence the outcome.⁸³ Neither an independent Taiwan nor a unified China would matter that much to Russia's vital national interests. No matter whether China or the pro-Taiwan coalition won the war, the cost of Russian participation would outweigh its benefits. No less important is the fact that Russia's impact on the outcome of the conflict would be limited. An anti-Chinese Russia would make it easier to defeat China, since the odds are against China in the first place. A pro-Chinese Russia might prevent China from being defeated but could hardly help China win a war.

Finally, Moscow would benefit from staying neutral. It would benefit from trade with China, which would probably be subject to economic sanc-

⁸¹John W. Garver, "Chiang Kai-shek's Quest for Soviet Entry into the Sino-Japanese War," *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 295-316; and Brian Bridges, "Yoshizawa Kenkichi and the Soviet-Japanese Non-Aggression Pact Proposal," *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1980): 111-27.

⁸²Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁸³Michael F. Altfeld and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "Choosing Sides in Wars," *International Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (March 1979): 90.



tions. Its rhetorical and moral support for Beijing would earn gratitude, since the pro-Taiwanese alliance would portray the cross-Strait conflict as a communist attack on a democracy or an act of aggression by a continental power against an island nation. This option would appeal to those Russians who admire Taiwan's economic development and political democratization, and appreciate Russia's trade surplus with Taiwan. It would also enhance Russia's international power in that even if the war did not end in stalemate, the major belligerents could at most expect a Pyrrhic victory. By maintaining neutrality, Moscow could claim the moral high ground and broker a peace. Since most of the other major powers would be sucked into the maelstrom of a cross-Strait conflict, only Russia would be left to play peacemaker. Deterring or stopping a conflict among nuclear powers would serve the interests of all the belligerents and contribute to world peace.

Conclusion

In this article I have put forward three arguments concerning the role of Russia in cross-Strait relations. First of all, Taiwan has never figured prominently in Russian foreign policy. This applies to Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. Russia's policy toward Taiwan is part of its policy toward China, which in turn is a function of Russia's overall foreign policy. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union mainly ignored Taiwan. Since then, Moscow has basically adhered to the "one China" policy. Even when its relations with China reached a nadir, Moscow supported Beijing in its effort to replace Taipei in the United Nations in 1971. After Gorbachev normalized relations with China, the Soviet Union subscribed to the "one China" principle while keeping up unofficial relations with Taiwan. In the Russian Federation, both Yeltsin and Putin have cultivated friendly relations with Beijing, and endorsed Beijing's position on Taiwan. The relative insignificance of Taiwan in Russian foreign policy is far from accidental. It reflects the geopolitical reality that Taiwan, a relatively small and distant island, is far less important for Moscow than China, Russia's large and close neighbor.

Moreover, neither Taiwan independence nor the unification of Taiwan and China would have a great impact on Russia's vital national interests.

Second, despite its loss of superpower status, Russia has a very important role in Beijing's Taiwan policy for international, geopolitical, economic, and military reasons. What distinguishes Russia from all the other major powers is its endorsement of Beijing's policy on Taiwan. Since Russia and China share a long border, a hostile Russia would make Chinese unification almost impossible. At present, Russian economic ties with China are far from impressive, but it is a mistake to underestimate the importance of Russia to China. Russia has supplied China with much-needed raw materials, including oil. That a cross-Strait conflict would probably cause China's major trading partners like the United States, Japan, and the European Union to impose economic sanctions on China makes Russia indispensable to China's military operations, if not its economic survival. The military importance of Russia to Beijing's Taiwan policy does not go unnoticed, and Russian military cooperation with China, especially its arms sales, enhances Chinese military power vis-à-vis Taiwan and its potential allies. Given the existing international balance of power, a friendly Russia might not be able to help China achieve unification, but it is safe to say that a hostile Russia would rule it out completely.

Finally, although Russia can greatly influence cross-Strait relations, it would be premature to treat Russia as Beijing's willing ally in war. The asymmetric relationship between Moscow and Beijing over the Taiwan issue offers Russia a wide range of wartime options. Russia could side with the pro-Taiwan alliance against China, or side with China against the pro-Taiwan alliance, but both options have their drawbacks. The first option would ruin Russia's relations with its largest neighbor, hence hurting Russia's long-term interests, whereas the second option would antagonize the world's dominant powers, especially the United States, thereby undermining Russia's short- and medium-term interests. This would leave Russia with a more realistic option of maintaining benign neutrality. This way, Russia could trade with the warring parties, play peacemaker, and increase its relative power in the world. This does not imply that the last option would be automatically adopted, because each option has its own advan-



tages and disadvantages, and because a final decision depends on certain specific factors, such as the nature of a cross-Strait conflict, the balance of power among the warring parties, and Russia's economic, military, and political conditions. Be that as it may, being neutral does look like the best option for Russia.

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