

Vladimir Putin's Deepening Rapprochement with China in the Tangled Russia-China-US Triangle

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Abstract

Russia's foreign policy has been Western-oriented due to historical and cultural reasons. This paper argues that the US's attitude towards Russia and the increasing expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe leads Russians to feel insecure. Consequently, East Asia has become significant to Russia in coping with the West. Above all, China's rise is predominant in Russia's policy options. Nevertheless, Russia will finally encounter a dilemma that rapprochement with China may help improve China's relative position in world politics. In essence, Russia's anxieties toward China's rapid rise make Russia's rapprochement toward China skeptical and reserved. The new approach, taken by President Obama, shifting from unipolar into multipolar global politics, offers Putin a new arena to re-identify Russia itself in the Russia-China-US triangle. The US government's fierce criticism of the Russian government being undemocratic during the elections process, along with the Chinese government's full support of Putin will make the Russia-China-US triangle naturally tilted toward Russo-Chinese side during Putin's office of premiership or for a certain time if he is elected in the presidential election 2012.

Key Words: Vladimir Putin, Strategic Options, Russia-China-US Triangle, China Rising, Russia's Presidential Election 2012

I. A General Policy Idea of Vladimir Putin's Foreign Affairs

There has long existed a strong sense of insecurity in the mind of Russian foreign policy makers thanks to Russians' changing borders, eroding national identity, and alienating feelings toward Westerners and Asians.¹ After the end of the Cold War, the world order changed from a unipolar system into a multipolar one; the global Cold War confrontation between the two camps has been intentionally avoided and replaced by more complicated and pluralistic diplomatic relations.² The challenges of Russia's security are mainly from three sides: the West, the Muslim world, and China. Amid the external challenges, the West, especially the US, is the main source of threats for Russia. Certainly, in contrast to the era of the Soviet Union, nowadays Russian people are not so hostile toward Americans or Europeans like in the past, but anti-Western sentiments remain deep-seated in the Russian mind. In face of the West, Russian leaders have been very sensitive toward the spread of western democracy, which may be used to weaken or even undermine Russian leadership. Russian leaders have also been nervous about the increasing expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe.

Under the contexts of the current Russian foreign policy, Putin's personal preferences are saliently shown; because Putin regards himself as an expert in foreign affairs.³ Ever since Putin came to power in 2000, he has shown a strong ambition to regain Russia's past glory. Different from Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika of strong leadership and ambitious strategic views, Putin shows a hard-liner's approach toward the West. Russia's great demand in the development of the Far East also makes its east-bound policy urgent. The rise of China also catches Russian leaders' attention to the East.⁴ It marks a crucial factor for the direction of Putin's policy shift toward East Asia. For him, the presence of East Asia has become greatly significant to Russia in coping with the West.⁵ During his office, obviously, Putin has been active in joining the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum, which presents a chance for Russia to invite more Asia's resources into Siberia and the Russian Far East and to foster the support to enter the World Trade Organization from Asian partners.

For Putin, neglected by the West, Russia is pushed to find a partnership with China.

¹ Legvold, Robert. 2009. "The Russia File: How to Move Toward a Strategic Partnership," *Foreign Affairs*, pp.78-93.

<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2007/Norling_China_and_Russia.pdf> (July/August).

² Sakwa, Richard. 2008. "New Cold War' or Twenty Years' Crisis? Russia and International Politics," *International Affairs*, Vol.84, No.2, March, p.266. & Simes, Dimitri K. 2007. "Losing Russia: The Costs of Renewed Confrontation," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, pp.51-52.

³ Tsytkin, Mikhail, "Russian Politics, Policy-making and American Missiles Defense," *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4, July, 2009, p.789.

⁴ Tymoshenko, Yuliya. 2007. "Containing Russia," *Foreign Affairs*, May/ June, p. 71&74-75

⁵ Legvold, Robert. 2009. "The Russia File: How to Move Toward a Strategic Partnership," *Foreign Affairs*, July/ August, p.82.

In contrast to the past decades, the relations between Russia and China come closer. Over the past few years, high-level political visits between China and Russia have reached a historic high. They mark advanced consolidation of Russia-China relations in substantial fields. For both Russia and China, domestic issues are always policy priorities. In order to devote themselves to domestic issues, the improvement of mutual relations is very crucial for both sides. Both Chinese and Russian leaders maintain that current Russo-Sino relations are the best in history. The rise of China is the key to Russia's interests in a reinvigorated presence in Asia. For Putin, in a sense, China is a useful counterweight to the US.

To depict the process of Putin's deepening rapprochement with China, this paper attempts to adopt Anthony Giddens' concept- "The structure vs. action"-in observing agents' action in the contexts of the historical process. For Giddens, structures have binding effects on agents while they also offer dynamism for the agents to act.⁶ To explicate the operation of the structural forces in the historical process, the author tries to imitate a "push-pull" framework⁷ to inquire the structural and developmental causes of Russia-China relations at large, with the intervening of the US presence. In the course of history, the US presents a structural force to push Russia away, and China another structural force to pull Russia together; and Vladimir Putin plays as a significant agent to determine Russia's diplomatic option in the tangled Russia-China-US triangle.

II. The US as A Push-Out Force for Russo-US Relations

It is no doubt that the US has been the number one imaginary enemy for Russia. Russia had been experiencing a decade-long chaotic situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, since the turn of 21st century, Russia has gradually recovered from a chronic economic downturn. With it, President Vladimir Putin pledged to turn Russia back to its glorious past. In the midst of restoring Russia's strength, Putin has to whole-heartedly cope with American domination of the world. The US, then unequivocally, becomes the main target that Russia is striving to transcend. From a strategic point of view, China has become a card for Russia to play against the US. With historical pride, and being with abundant natural resources, especially energy, and advanced technology, Russia is apt to make good use of its

⁶ Giddens, Anthony (1993), *New Rules of Sociological Method*, Cambridge: Policy Press, p.5.

⁷ Hein de Haas, Migration and development: A theoretical perspective. *Paper 9*, Working papers Year International Migration Institute, p.44.
<<http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/pdfs/imi-working-papers/WP9%20Migration%20and%20development%20theory%20HdH.pdf>> (2008).

strategic resources at hand to run neck and neck with the US. In this regard, being a neighbor, China's rapidly improving economy and defense capabilities have offered Russia a readily available source to contend against the US.

Ironically, both Russia and China, similarly viewed as market economies and authoritarian regimes, do not share same treatment from the US. The U.S. takes a more businesslike, restrained and positive approach toward China, while Russia's domestic political reality and international activity are often vilified by the US. By the end of American President George W. Bush's second term, America's relations with China were unexpectedly smooth, while tensions with Russia were equally unexpected. In other words, Russia plays as a failed partner, while China is viewed as a rapidly growing power which is highly expected to be integrated in the global order defined by the US. Apparently, the approach toward Russia taken by the US is negative, but that toward China is positive. This sort of imbalance interests both Igor Zevelev and Mikhail Troitsky. In their research, they found that China has a far less pluralistic and open political system than Russia; China's bureaucratic culture is less closer to the US than Russia's; Russia has a much closer historical, cultural and institutional relationship with the West; besides, Russia has a pro-American political opposition and Russia's authorities are much more tolerant of it than the Chinese.⁸ The main arguments in their interpretations are: Russia is perceived as European derived, which deserved much more criticism for the wider gap between expectations and reality. China has better chances of becoming America's main global contender in the 21st century, and China has much better gross parameters of the economic performance.⁹ It seems that the latter two arguments sound more convincing and closer US-Sino economic relations quite speak louder. Thus, America's eccentric policies toward Russo-Sino relations then offer a force for a closer political linkage between Russia and China.

In fact, Russia once tried to remedy its relationship with the US, and President Bill Clinton maintained a policy of engagement toward Russia, but Russia's strong nuclear weapons program seriously upset Clinton. Under the Clinton administration, the US government sought a defensive shield for the continental United States – the National Missile Defense (NMD), but after President George W. Bush's inauguration, he dropped the "national" and spoke of a shield that would protect key US allies in an attempt to secure the support of other members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The missile defense shield proposals are in clear violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which forbids the US and Russia from developing a continental missile shield. On July 16, 2001, Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin signed the "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's

⁸ Igor Zevelev, Mikhail Troitsky, "Russia and China in the Mirror of U.S. Policies," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No.4, <<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/64>. (October/December,2007).

⁹ Ibid.

Republic of China and the Russian Federation” in Moscow. But Putin claimed that was not a move to show Russia’s discontent with Bush’s withdraw from the AMB Treaty.

After the 911 terrorist attacks, Russia took a clear side with the US. Russia-US relations were temporarily sweet. On December 13th, 2001, President Bush formally announced that the United States intended to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. It was opposed by Russia, China and most U.S. allies. While the U.S. had suggested the possibility of modifying the Treaty in discussions with Russia, in fact the President was determined to go-it-alone in opting out of a treaty. Putin was critical of Bush’s decision as a mistake.¹⁰ Moscow doubted the sincerity of US pledges to be cooperative with Russia. Russia’s Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov said, "I see no reasons for that," referring to the logic of Russian-US cooperation in missile defense.¹¹ On June 13, 2002, the U.S. withdrew from the ABM Treaty. Interestingly, in a different tone, Putin stressed that Bush’s decision would not threaten Russia’s security and Russia would continue to reduce the number of nuclear warheads. Putin compromised. Putin’s accommodating attitude shows that the Russia’s awkward economic situation makes Russia lean toward taking a pro-US policy option. Meanwhile, a pro-China policy had been kept in Putin’s mind. After Putin took power, externally, he tried hard seeking to restore Russia's great power status and safeguard Russia's national security interests; internally, he devoted himself in revitalizing the domestic economy, solving the thorny issue of Chechnya. Putin was very clear that in order to achieve policy objectives stated above, he had to work well with the West, particularly the US. Making good use of supporting the US in the international fight against terrorism after 911, Putin sought solutions for safeguarding Russia’s security interests on the issues of the anti-missile defense system and NATO's eastward expansion. In stressing the common interests in Russian-US cooperation, he maintained Russia’s big role on the international stage.

But shortly thereafter Russo-US relations turned worse again. US military action in Iraq in March 2003 was strongly opposed by Russia. Russia-US relations turned sour. Nevertheless, a coalition of Russia-Germany-France finally could not prevent the US from triggering a war with Iraq. Even worse, Russia’s attempts did not successfully split the relationship between the US and the “Old Europe,” it just sabotaged its political relationship with the US. Eventually, a solid base of traditional relations between Europe and the US in every aspect could hardly be shaken by Russia, not to mention that Europe had long regarded Russia as a problem or a threat. Hence, the feeling of being alienated by the West, certainly helped push Russia to move further

¹⁰ <http://5ko.free.fr/en/usa.html>

¹¹ M K Bhadrakumar, “In the trenches of the new cold war,”
<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/ID28Ag04.html> (April 28,2007).

toward China. Certainly, the alienating relationship between Russia and the US did not last long, either. At the late stage of the Iraqi war, Russia-US relationship was gradually improved. In June 2003, Putin and Bush signed a treaty to mutually restrict strategic nuclear arsenals. Similarly, the honey relationship could not get rid of contradictions innate in Russia-US relations. Putin called for the United Nations to restrain the US from military expansion.

The fact is that the US has been aggressive and domineering toward Russia. The US has also squeezed Russia's strategic space by the increasing expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe. It also tried to isolate Russia by its Central Asian policies, winning over the Republic of Georgia and Central Asia. Furthermore, the US also planned to deploy anti-ballistic missile system in Central Europe, as is seen as a threat to Russia's national security. Even though the leaders of both sides tried to repair their relations by the meetings at the summits, some basic contradictions in national interests are not able to resolve. Russia-US relations had inevitably undergone various fluctuations.

The strategic collaboration between Russia and China does not necessarily come out of their own subjective willingness. Instead, it is mostly forced out by American unilateralism over many international issues, such as policies regarding Iran, Iraq, missile defenses, Central Asia, and democracy promotion. It is America that pushes Russia to tilt toward China.¹² However, no matter what reasons Russia and China are allied, in a certain sense, a Russo-Chinese alliance has come to be a substantial reality, as will pose a potential threat to the United States. A clear example is shown in the case of the regional politics in Central Asia that the improving bilateral relations between Central Asian countries and Russia as well as China, and the enhanced operation of SCO has diluted the predominant influence of the US in Central Asia.¹³

Although the Russian president is the central factor in determining Russia's foreign policy course, as Prime Minister, Putin's impact on this sphere is far from negligible. Putin has had substantial influence on Russia's foreign policy, especially on Russian relations with the US. Over the past few years, apparently, Putin has taken a pro-China and anti-US position in foreign affairs. Putin criticized the US as a parasite on the global economy by taking advantage of the dollar's role in international trades by printing its way out of economic crises with seemingly unlimited borrowings that will never be paid back. This was also echoed by China.¹⁴

Basically, Putin is not an ideological strategist. He is very much realistic and

¹² Stephen Blank, "Partnership of Convenience: Understanding Russo-Chinese Relations," <<http://www.criticalthreats.org/russia/partnership-convenience-understanding-russo-chinese-relations>> (June 30, 2009).

¹³ Sylvia Villalobos, "US Declining Influence in Central Asia," *Opinion Maker*, <<http://www.opinion-maker.org/2010/04/us-declining-influence-in-central-asia>> (13. Apr, 2010)

¹⁴ Hamsayeh.Net, "Putin Labels US A Parasite On Global Economy," 4 November 2011 <http://hamsayeh.net/archive/1009-putin-labels-us-a-parasite-on-global-economy.html>

pragmatic when he takes Russia's interests into consideration. As stated above that on the ABM issue of 2002, Putin took an accommodating attitude toward a pro-US policy. A new deal for extracting billions of barrels of oil and hydrocarbons from under Russia's Arctic waters between Rosneft, the Russian state oil company, and ExxonMobil Corp, announced by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was seen as evidence of better US-Russia relations.¹⁵

Even after Putin steps down in the future, Medvedev, as his hand-picked heir, will naturally keep a fair degree of continuity in the policy, especially on the relations with the US.¹⁶ Of course, so far it is over-exaggerated to see a Russo-Sino alliance in challenging US hegemony. On the surface, sometimes, Russia and China stand together in countering US policies, but in reality, all are situated in a non-zero sum game.¹⁷

III. China as A Pull-In Force for Russo-Chinese Relations

High-ranking political contacts between Russia and China greatly enhanced their mutual relationship. On July 17-18, 2000, Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin signed nine documents including the Beijing Declaration and Joint Statement on Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The documents signed to solidify the strategic partnership between China and Russia are to help strengthen the friendship between the Chinese and Russian people, the state-to-state cooperation, the promotion of a multi-polarized world, and the building of a just and fair new international order. On July 19-21, 2000, leaders of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia met in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. An Altay Regional Cooperation Agreement was signed to promote multilateral cooperation in animal husbandry, cultivation, mining, and tourism. On June 14-15, 2001, the birth of the Shanghai Cooperation (SCO) in Shanghai marked an important milestone for Russo-Sino relations in coping with US hegemonic presence in Asia. Except for Russia and China, participants included Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The discussions focused on security and territorial integrity, and economic cooperation. On July 15-16, 2001, Putin signed with Jiang in Moscow a 20-year "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation."

Although Russo-Chinese partnership was solid, they were helpless in impeding the unilateral decision made by the US. But, obviously, Moscow and Beijing had

¹⁵ NewsBeast, "Exxon's Big Russia Deal," Newsweek, September 12, 2011. P.8

¹⁶ Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russian Foreign Policy and the United States after Putin," *Council on Foreign Relations*, <<http://www.cfr.org/us-strategy-and-politics/russian-foreign-policy-united-states-after-putin/p16910>>(July/August 2008).

¹⁷ James C. Hsiung, "U.S.-RUSSIA-CHINA: AN UPDATE ON THE STRATEGIC TRIANGLE," <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/hsiung/strat_tri.pdf>

become closer in many respects. Above all, the complete resolution of Russo-Chinese borders in 2004, having troubled both countries for over one hundred years, was crucial to boosting bilateral relations in many areas. Upon the reduction of political hostilities, substantial relations between the two countries greatly improved, and paved a sound base for the upcoming exchanges between Russia and China. They also become the firm foundation for the making of Russia's China policy.¹⁸

In the Russo-Chinese interactive process, Chinese leaders' "low profile, no confrontation" strategy inherited from Deng Xiaoping plays as a central idea for the making of its foreign policy. Following that doctrine, China tried to prevent the Shanghai Cooperation Organization from becoming a military bloc. President Hu Jintao, at the SCO summits in 2006-2007, declared that the SCO should stress regional economic cooperation in trade and development as its main priorities. China understands that the emergence of a military bloc will stimulate the US to strengthen its military containment toward China in East Asia; it will only function as a card to be played against the US by Russia and also hurt its own substantial interests with the US. For China, the current primacy of its national development is on economic development; unnecessary military confrontation is not in its interests. Besides, military deployment consumes money, while economic development accumulates strengths. Beijing has activated economic and practical ties with all Central Asian countries and strives to comprehensively strengthen economic relations and the dependency of them on China's market. A substantial buildup is much smarter than a mere military buildup during times of peace. In fact, in such a historically, culturally and politically complicated region, substantial exchanges may offer a better buffer zone to secure order for both Russia and China. Above all, the regional economic development is of China-centric interests.

In Russo-Chinese economic exchanges, both countries see a huge development. The Russo-Chinese bilateral trade reached US\$ 56 billion in 2008 from US\$ 9.3 billion of 2002, a 5-fold increase. Currently, China is the No.3 trading partner for Russia; Russia is the No.11 for China. This means that, in the economy, Russia depends more on China than China depends on Russia.¹⁹ Strikingly, in face of the global financial meltdown, China reached an 8.8% increase of GDP, while Russia saw a -7.9% decrease in 2009.²⁰ The growth of industrial cooperation between Russia and China has huge

¹⁸ Yu Bin, "China-Russian Relations: New Century, New Face, and China's 'Putin Puzzle.'" March 8, 2011, *e book browse*,

<http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/0001qchina_russia.pdf>(March 8, 2011).

¹⁹ Lucian Kim, "Putin's China Visit Helps Russia Become Global Energy Supplier," *Bloomberg*, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aNSkMKt_Syic> (October 13, 2009).

²⁰ Kay Mitchell, "Russia's economy contracts 7.9% in 2009," *Finance Markets*, <<http://www.financemarkets.co.uk/2010/02/01/russias-economy-contracts-79-in-2009>> (February 1, 2010).

progress, such as in the helicopter industry, mechanical engineering, energy sector, timber manufacturing, and the realm of innovation. Besides, Russia also shows strong interests in inviting Chinese investments in the energy-related and mineral-related industries in Russia.²¹ In February of 2009, Russia promised to supply oil to China for 20 years, so as to gain US\$ 25 billion. In mid-October of 2009, Putin signed agreements with China on the projects of oil, natural gas, and nuclear. It made Russia a global energy supplier as the pipelines of oil were extended from Berlin to Beijing. Russia also started to sell electricity to China from the Far East. The deals in coal reached US\$ 1 billion in the end of 2009.²² The increase of energy exports toward China will also help Russia reduce the risks of its export dependence on Europe.²³ Furthermore, economic benefits also boost cooperation in international politics, which showed in two respects: (1) Russia sought diplomatic support from China on the Chechen issue; (2) In coping with US unilateralism, both Russia and China need to reinforce the concept of multi-polarity.²⁴ As the No.1 and No.3 holders of foreign reserves in the world, China and Russia had shown their muscles to speak loudly on the international stage.

In contrast, 2009 and 2010 were the busiest two years for the comprehensive exchanges between Russia and China. Cultural ties between two countries have become much stronger thanks to the programs of “Russia Year in China, 2009” and “China Year in Russia, 2010.” Frequent high-level visits have become a salient feature of the diplomatic relations between Russia and China in the two years. Chinese President Hu Jin-tao, on May 9th, 2010, attended the 65th anniversary of the Victory Day in Russia commemorating the defeat of Nazi Germany. Besides, other Chinese leaders such as Vice Chair of Chinese Communist party Xi Jin-ping and Premier Wen Jia-bao also paid visits to Moscow intensively. Likewise, Putin visited Beijing and signed the joint communique of the 14th regular prime ministers’ talks between China and Russia on Oct. 13th, 2009.²⁵ Medvedev arrived in Beijing on Sept.26th, 2010 for his three-day China visit.²⁶ The intensive high-level official visits favored improving the substantial exchanges between two countries.

On June 16th, 2011, both Russia and China failed to agree on a 30-year gas deal, worth up to US \$ 1 trillion. But, later on October 12th, 2011, it was reported that both

²¹ IA Novosti, PM Putin suggests Russia, China ditch dollar in trade deals, *RIANOVOSTI*, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20081028/117991229.html> (2009/10/28)

²² Lucian Kim, “Putin’s China Visit Helps Russia Become Global Energy Supplier,” *Bloomberg*, <http://www.oilandgaseurasia.com/news/p/0/news/5871> (October 13, 2009)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ James C. Hsiung, “U.S.-RUSSIA-CHINA: AN UPDATE ON THE STRATEGIC TRIANGLE,” http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/hsiung/strat_tri.pdf.

²⁵ Xinhua, “China, Russia sign 12 agreements during Putin's visit,” *global times*, <http://china.globaltimes.cn/diplomacy/2009-10/476718.html> (October 13 2009).

²⁶ Xinhua, “Russian President arrives in Beijing,” http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/photo/2010-09/26/c_13530789.htm (September 26, 2010).

sides reached a comprehensive consensus when Putin visited Hu in Beijing although there were no details about gas deal. In a joint interview by the Xinhua News Agency, and China Central Television, October 13th, Putin confirmed that Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin said in May that Russia and China are expected to agree on a gas price by September, and Gazprom will likely supply gas to China in 2015.²⁷ Besides, Putin also revealed that Russia began to supply oil to China through the Skovorodino-Daqing oil pipeline on Jan. 1, 2011. This pipeline is designed with an annual throughput of 15 million metric tons of oil. The Russian gas company Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation reached an agreement 2010; China is allowed to receive up to 70 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Russia each year.²⁸ Reinforced by the high-level visits, the economic and industrial cooperation between Russia and China have been improved and enhanced up to a higher level. During his two-day visit, Putin even forged a high technology and economic modernization alliance with Beijing by signing numerous economic agreements and the Memorandum on Cooperation in Modernization. In an amount of \$70 billion of bilateral trade with China, Putin maintains that Russia needs to modernize its own economy with China's help.²⁹

Besides, security is also a key issue between Russia and China. The mutual security dialogue between two countries has gradually become much more active than before over the past few years. Back in July 21st, 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that strengthening ties with China ranked at the top of Russia's policy agenda. He maintained that Russia hoped to promote security consultation and energy resource negotiation mechanisms with China, and to realize the "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation." In the meeting, Hu also pledged that the relationship with Russia would be China's diplomatic priority.³⁰ Apparently, high-level leaders' visits have re-enforced increasing substantial exchanges between Russia and China. Above all, the regular meetings between Chinese and Russian prime ministers, first established in 1996, have become an important platform for guiding and coordinating bilateral cooperation.³¹ On October 12th, 2011, Putin visited Beijing and signed a joint communiqué to help optimize trade structure, increase the proportion of electromechanical and high-tech products in bilateral trade volume and realize the goal

²⁷ CNTV, "Putin expresses optimism in future Sino-Russian energy cooperation," *China.org.cn.*, <http://www.china.org.cn/video/2011-10/13/content_23613166.htm> (October 13, 2011).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Dmitry Kosyrev, "Russia and China: bilateral relations," *Brookings*, <http://www.silobreaker.com/russia-offers-china-gas-in-exchange-for-modernization-5_226491760695364827>(April 30, 2008).

³⁰ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-07/21/content_8741208.htm

³¹ CNTV, "Putin expresses optimism in future Sino-Russian energy cooperation," *China.org.cn.*, <http://www.china.org.cn/video/2011-10/13/content_23613166.htm> (October 13, 2011).

of lifting bilateral trade to US\$ 100 billion by 2015 and US\$ 200 billion by 2020.³² Besides, the communique revealed that the two countries would deepen cooperation on the joint construction and operation of special economic zone in Russia.

IV. Russia's Strategic Concerns and Policy Options

As the tacticians say, "Unite with a secondary enemy to fight the primary enemy"; although Russia fears China's demographic expansion to Siberia and the Russian Far East, in contrast to American hegemony, Russia has long strategically tried to treat China as a good neighbor. Over the past two decades, Russo-Chinese interactions have been more substantial than formal. China has become an energy-hungry country, whereas Russia a major energy supplier, especially natural gas. The unrest and turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East, along with the nuclear disasters in Japan, increased Russia's bargaining power in negotiating the prices of natural gas with China. But some factors reduced Russia's bargaining power in the deals with China.³³ The main sources of energy for China continue to be coal and petroleum; gas accounts only for 7-8% of its total energy consumption. China has begun purchasing gas from Kazakhstan; China's diversified options make Russia frustrated in the high-profile approach toward China. In Russia's exports, the Chinese market has become much more important and significant for Russia, since the US and the European Union want to limit Russia's role in energy supplies to Europe. Over the past decade, the developments of mutual exchanges between Russia and China have had a remarkable progress. Both sides are increasingly interdependent on each other.

An evaluation that the Russo-Chinese partnership shows is an axis of convenience rather than an alliance of conviction, and is based only on interests instead of affection may be right but less informative because interests instead of affection have been the basic principle for the exercise of international politics. It reminds observers of cautiously gauging their intimate beliefs on some issues like Central Asia, arms trade, energy, ties with Japan, and the future outlines of the Korean peninsula, and objections to US missile defenses.³⁴ Russia has also helped build a strategic partnership among Russia, China and India so that the danger from a Sino-Indian rivalry and the difficulty

³² Xinhua, "China, Russia committed to deepen strategic partnership," *CNTV*, 10-13-2011 10:20 *BJT* Special Report: Russian PM Putin Visits China, <http://www.silobreaker.com/china-russia-committed-to-deepen-strategic-partnership-5_2264917344960643190> (October 13, 2011).

³³ Vladimir Skosyrev, "Putin falls into the embrace of a friendly dragon," *RT*, <<http://rt.com/politics/press/nezavisimaya/russia-china-relations-economy/en/>> (11 October, 2011).

³⁴ Stephen Blank, "Partnership of Convenience: Understanding Russo-Chinese Relations," June 30, 2009, *AEI Critical Threats Project*, <<http://www.criticalthreats.org/russia/partnership-convenience-understanding-russo-chinese-relations>> (June 30, 2009).

of taking sides between China and India could be moderated or eliminated. Besides, Russia's strategic partnership with China raises its influence in Central and East Asia. As far as this is concerned, Russia needs Chinese support more than China needs Russia's.

At any rate, Russia will finally encounter a dilemma that her rapprochement with China may help improve China's relative position in world politics.³⁵ In Russia's views, the US is the first imaginary rivalry; anything that helps challenge or undermine America's power projection will favor Russia. This may account for the reason why it actively supports China's military development, even though it acknowledges that this power represents a threat to its own interests, including the failure to resolve fully the intellectual property issue of Chinese copying Russian systems. Russia cannot help but live with this ambivalence though some scholars have charged that the rise in China's capabilities could go beyond a conventional threat to Russian assets in Siberia and Russian Asia; the development of China's nuclear and missile defense forces could easily threaten Russia's Asian position.

With China rising, Russia's dream of regaining the past glory would be unlikely accomplished. The swinging of partnership between Russia and China may mainly come out of Russia's anxieties toward China's rapid rise. As a matter of fact, on the way to resuming its previous seat in world politics, Russia has never ceased to preclude China from dominating Central Asia. In Central Asia, historically, Russia has dominated it as the former Soviet Union had. Nevertheless, China's skillful offer of credit policies to Central Asia in the wake of the global financial crisis that erupted in the end of 2008 upholds China's prestige in Central Asia. Besides, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization also assumes a very effective institutional setting for China to maneuver.³⁶ In 2010, China granted \$10 billion in loans to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization nations to shore up struggling Central Asian economies. China, through the SCO, has shown its strong vigor and long-term ambition. China's influences in economic, social, and cultural spheres are rising and its influences likely match Russia's. With it, geo-strategically enmeshed with Central Asia, China's role as an integral and influential player in the region is also re-enforced.³⁷

From this angle, no wonder that Russia's strategic relationship with India in Central Asia is about to ensure a balance against China's overwhelming domination in the areas of military, security, business, and so on and so forth. Although Russia sells China \$2 billion worth of weapons annually, it has refrained from selling Beijing its

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Charles Freeman, "China's Emergence in Central," Asia, *CSIS*, <<http://csis.org/programs/freeman-chair-china-studies/past-freeman-chair-projects/chinas-emergence-central-asia>> (February 5, 2012).

³⁷ Ibid.

most sophisticated and latest technology, which it already sold to India. Impressively, Putin warned that Russia might end up speaking Korean, Japanese, or Chinese if Russia fails in developing the Far East. But, Russia cannot help but continue to move towards Beijing substantially. China has become a very active partner in offering capital investments in the infrastructure. Russia cannot supplant China.³⁸ China's presence with strong economic power will be decisive and ultimately further marginalize Russia as a serious Asian player. To balance it, Russia also tends to use Japan and South Korea in the Far East to balance China. By this token, skepticism about China's ambition has also become Russia's grounds to help gauge its strategic cooperation with China in Central Asia.

Without a doubt, China is a potential imaginary rivalry for Russia's concerns in the near future. To take the lesson from China's "low profile, no confrontation," Russia may foster its energy and strength from engaging the US. However, the main psychological complex in Russian leaders' mind is that Russia cannot openly admit its converging interests with the United States in terms of Asian's balance of power. Even worse, Russia tends to take an anti-American approach which may make its strategies in Asia inflexible.³⁹

Given the socio-economic fragility of the Far East and its nuclear naval deficiencies, it is true that the pressures of North Korean proliferation and China's rise have changed the nuclear landscape in Northeast Asia and, consequently, will affect Russia's psychology in setting its strategies against external threats. Russia's increased defense spending has led to an increased tempo and more exercises in Siberia and the Far East to redress Russia's conventional inferiority vis-à-vis the US and Chinese threats. On January 20, 2008, Russian chief of staff General Yuri N. Baluyevsky stated that Russia does not intend to attack anyone, but to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia by all means, including the use of nuclear weapons.⁴⁰ Russia's nuclear option may evoke its neighbors' humiliated memories embedded in the history. Confrontations and wars will undermine Asian economic miracles and put this region back into the dead end of past history.

In the wake of China rising, it was believed that after the mid-2010s US influence in Central Asia has significantly waned and to a certain extent displaced by both Russia and China. The waning of the US, if it really happens in the future, will also bring about the weakening of Russia's role in its conventional sphere of influences. Russian authorities understand that they have at least ten years before China can threaten

³⁸ Stephen Blank, "Partnership of Convenience: Understanding Russo-Chinese Relations," June 30, 2009, *AEI Critical Threats Project*, <<http://www.criticalthreats.org/russia/partnership-convenience-understanding-russo-chinese-relations>> (June 30, 2009).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Russia.⁴¹ In a sense, China is the source of the pressure for tomorrow. At any rate, the US remains an immediate source of the pressure. Situated in the pyramid of the distribution of global power, the US remains at the center of the global politics. In positioning its own locus in the global political system, at any rate, Russia cannot get rid of a Western-oriented orbit. Its relationship with the US, instead of China, is still the main concern for Russia's policy making. In case the US would stretch out its olive branch to Russia, would Russia change its policy at the expense of China's interests? For instance, if both sides' interests in deterring or defeating attacks from nuclear hostiles such as Iran and North Korea come closer; or, consequently, there emerges a "security⁴² community" across the breadth of Europe including NATO and Russia, political relations between the US and Russia will improve.⁴³

But the above scenario tends to be a rosy wish in the foreseeable future. It is a fact that United States-led western countries have not really accepted Russia as a partner. The US does not take into account Russia's feelings toward its build-up of anti-missile systems in Europe. Russia and the US are doomed to be more hostile than cooperative, as described below. (A) In Central Asia: In the wake of 911, the United States took the Afghanistan War as a strategic point to achieve its aims of global strategy in Central Asia and accomplished its political, military and economic deployment. (B) In Eastern Europe: Through NATO's eastward expansion, the US tried to put Eastern European countries into its geopolitical map. (C) In the Middle East: United States took the opportunity of Russia's decline after the end of the Cold War to expand its influences in the Middle East. The US made good use of the Gulf War and the Iraq War to dominate the Middle East. Syria and Iran are the two remaining allies of Russia. Syria has the only overseas military base of Russia as well as its only foothold in the Mediterranean. Syria and Iran are Russia's gates to the South. Hence, if Russia lost Syria and Iran, Russia is likely to be completely pushed out of the Middle East. The above scenarios show that Russia's strategic space has been sternly squeezed by the US. From this point of view, if Putin is elected to be the president, he is likely to strive for regaining Russia's past glory by expanding Russia's military strength, resuming the Russia's great power status, and seeking to change the pattern of the world today. American efforts in setting up anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe have shown a "pre-emptive strike" view against Russia.

Under the contexts of decades-long mistrust between Russia and the US, clearly, a balanced, flexible, and aggressive approach has been shown in Putin's diplomatic wisdom by avoiding serious conflicts with the US but engaging China. After "The

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sir Tony Brenton, "Russia and Asia," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. XLII, No. I, p. 27.

⁴³ Stephen J. Cimbala, "Minimum Deterrence and Missile Defenses," *Comparative Strategy, An International Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 4, September- October, 2011, p. 358.

Shanghai Five” was set up in July 2001, Russia and China signed the "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation" in July 2001. Both tended to work together to build a multipolar world against US unilateralism and to prevent the US from deploying a global missile defense system. Nevertheless, after 911 Putin actively strengthened Russia's cooperation with the US and turned to cater for US strategic choices. US-Russian relations leaped to another horizon. In contrast, Beijing asserted that its support for the US was conditional. There appeared strategic leverage between Russia and China in their US policies. However, in 2004, Russian-Chinese border agreement was signed, thus solving several decades of mistrust and suspicion between Russia and China. Russo-Chinese trade is improving: in 2005, bilateral trade reached \$ 30 billion with an increase of 37% compared to 2004. In 2005, both sides held a large-scale joint military exercise known as "2005 peace missions."⁴⁴ There was no concrete evidence to show that Putin successfully played the “Washington Card” to force Beijing to make more concession at the Moscow-Beijing negotiating table. Nevertheless, it was true that the contents of the negotiations on the Chinese public had been kept strictly confidential. It also aroused a lot of criticism by the Chinese.⁴⁵ One Japanese scholar concluded that “ As far as an objective examination of the Sino-Russian border negotiations is concerned, the reason territorial issues could be peacefully resolved is because the two sides compromised and made concessions with one another, but, above all, it is because Russian diplomacy sincerely wanted it and made it happen. The Chinese took these hopes seriously and responded in turn.”⁴⁶ A Russia's media commented that “Russia and China have drawn closer together, motivated by factors including a joint desire to promote economic growth and form a regional counterweight to the power of the United States.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, haunted by Russians' belonging and identity as part of Eurasia, Russians do not see themselves as part of Asia. Historically and culturally, elite Russians think of themselves as Europeans. Out of the domain of the Europe, at most, Russians' perception of the East has been confined to Central Asia and Northeast Asia. The Asia-Pacific region almost disappears in the map of Russian strategic thinking.

⁴⁴ <http://renminbao.com/rmb/articles/2004/10/15/32858b.html>

&<http://renminbao.com/rmb/articles/2004/9/30/32701b.html>

⁴⁵ <<http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/12/4/n737428.htm>> &
<http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2005-10/19/content_3644628.htm> &
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oS_uLBr4_T8>

⁴⁶ Iwashita Akihiro, “Chapter 6: An Inquiry for New Thinking on the Border Dispute: Backgrounds of “Historic Success for the Sino-Russian Negotiations,”<
http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no6_1_ses/chapter6_iwashita.pdf>

⁴⁷ Staff Writers, “Russia gives territory to China, ending border dispute,” *Moscow (AFP)*
<http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Russia_gives_territory_to_China_ending_border_dispute_999.html
>(Oct 14, 2008.).

Conventionally, Russia's strategic concern had been very much Western-oriented. Either strategically or psychologically, the West still lies at the core of Russian foreign policy. In a remark by Yuri Tsyganov, he concludes that prior to Putin's strategic differentiation of foreign policy directions, Russia's leadership often attended the international affairs for the sake of participation without considering the consequences.⁴⁸ In a word, bound by historical and cultural ties, Russia's Asian policies are still viewed as a function of its Western line. It is hardly believed that Putin will violate such a historical rule.

For Russian leaders, engagement in Asia brings real opportunities, but also very real risks. It is argued that Russia will sooner or later be looking for a rapprochement with its European heritage and values. It will leave space for the imagination that, according to its diplomatic tradition, Russia has been reluctant to pay owing to sticking to loyalty for its old partnership. Above all, the emerging confrontations between US and China permeating into many fields have interested many strategists in speculating the role of Russia in the complicated international relations. One question arises: How long will Putin, as well as his heir, adhere to a firm Russia-China partnership?

V. Concluding Remarks

Underpinning Russia's policy we see Russia's policy priorities. First, seek good ties with the West. Second, play geopolitical games aimed at refraining itself from American domination. Third, consolidate Russian influence in the former Soviet Union. The rise of China will gradually become a much more significant, important, and worrisome issue in Russia's foreign policy, but too much stress on antagonism and conflicts between Russia and China in the process of history would be over-exaggerated. Similarly, an expectation for an everlasting honeymoon for Russo-Sino relations is also too unrealistic. In a sense, Russo-Sino relations may be defined as a complex balance of competition and cooperation.⁴⁹ In face of China rising, what Russia has to urgently conduct is a political strategy to defuse potential security challenges around Siberia and the Far East. In this regard, Russo-US relations are not exceptional. As both competition and cooperation can be balanced, serious conflicts can likely be avoided. As Stephen Blank stressed that a smarter strategy for Russia is political instead of military one. A purely military nuclear strategy toward the US may lead Russia into a strategic dead-end. Russia's stress on nuclear weapons may arouse

⁴⁸ Yuri Tsyganov, "Russian Policy toward Northeast Asia. In Search of a New Approach," CERC Working Papers Series No.2, <<http://www.cerc.unimelb.edu.au/publications/CERCWP022003.pdf>> (2003).

⁴⁹ Ashley J. Tellis, "India and China's Rise – Competition and Cooperation?," *Carnegie Europe*, <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=1172>> (JANUARY 16, 2008).

nuclear competition among regional powers. Japan and South Korea could be tempted to develop their own nuclear programs, which would then encourage an increasing presence of the US in this region.

Russia not only has to search for partnership with China, but also a regional balance made by the US and the nullification of the re-nationalization of Japanese defense policy. To safeguard its national interests in a balanced view, Russia needs to play divide-and-rule tactics in coping with neighboring countries.⁵⁰ As the Obama administration tends to turn the theoretical base of its foreign policy from unipolar into multipolar, there will emerge more strategic space for participants to maneuver. Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary for Bureau of European and Eurasian, maintained that the US would consider inviting Russia into the NATO as a member.⁵¹ In response to it, there comes out an emerging consensus in western circles of policy makers that NATO, as an alliance, should see itself as a strategic framework for the three centers of power: North America, Europe and Russia and the door to NATO membership should be opened for Russia.

Likewise, it seems to be the time for Russia to think of opening up its arms to embrace the West. Strategically, as security threats from the West diminish due to Russia's joining NATO, Russia will have more energy and confidence to develop its Far East. However, some predicaments are within. In coping with the West, given the Kremlin indoctrinated with the greatness of Russia, a generation of cadres was trained to rouse masses of young people and organize demonstrations, and manipulate the press. Even the growth of violent racism in Russia has been encouraged by the Kremlin's dabbling with nationalist ideology and politicized youth groups. Russian government is not trying to eliminate the wave of ultra-nationalism, but is doing its best to co-opt the movement.⁵² Russia's ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin predicts that the idea of fighting for ethnic Russians' rights will grow. It was argued that it is too late even though Kremlin's leaders are determined to stop the ultra-nationalists.⁵³ The way to approach the West will not be that smooth.

In a remark by Yuri Tsyganov, Putin regards himself as an expert in foreign affairs.⁵⁴ This implies that Putin's personal preferences will matter in Russian foreign policy. In a balanced approach, Putin's leadership has managed to avoid any serious

⁵⁰ Stephen Blank, "Partnership of Convenience: Understanding Russo-Chinese Relations," *AEI Critical Threats Project*
<<http://www.criticalthreats.org/russia/partnership-convenience-understanding-russo-chinese-relations>>
(June 30, 2009).

⁵¹ Philip H. Gordon, "2010 Transatlantic Trends Report," *US Department of State*,
<<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2010/147285.htm>> (September 15, 2010).

⁵² Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova "Fascist Russia?" *Newsweek*, August 15, 2011, pp.20-23

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁵⁴ Tsygkin, Mikhail. "Russian Politics," Policy-making and American Missiles Defense, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4, July., 2009, pp.782-799.

conflicts with the West, while engaging other strong international players.⁵⁵ Although historically and culturally Russia has been West-oriented and Putin's attitude toward the US is not ideologically rigid. However, in Putin's views, the US government has been greatly suspected for its intervening Russia's elections by criticizing Russian government's being undemocratic. On the contrary, the Chinese government has shown full support of him. For Putin, the alleged democratic reform is detrimental to him because he and his circle have tasted so much power and money.⁵⁶ Hence, there is no wonder that the Russia-China-US triangle will be naturally tilted toward Russo-Chinese side during Putin's office or after he is elected in the presidential election. It is predictable that Putin will not change its hard approach toward the US immediately after Russia's presidential election. Simultaneously, current good Russo-Sino relations will be maintained for a certain period of time. Nevertheless, tactics, short-term strategies, or diplomatic languages cannot be confounded with long-term national strategies. Different analytical levels of the same political reality should be clearly discerned. In a word, Putin's strategic options in the Russia-China-US triangle cannot be shown in a generalized manner. A close and dedicated ongoing watch on Putin's patterns of behavior in Russia's foreign policy is greatly needed.

⁵⁵ Kolotov, Vladimir N. "Main Trends of Russia's Foreign Policy in Transforming East and Southeast Asia," *Brookings Northeast Asia Commentary*, April 30, 2008..
[http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/04_asia_kolotov.aspx]

⁵⁶ Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova, "Back to the USSR," *Newsweek*, October 17, 2011, p.48. (pp.46-51)

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普欽在俄中美三角關係中的戰略選擇

Vladimir Putin's Deepening Rapprochement with China in the Tangled Russia-China-US Triangle

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摘要

基於文化與歷史因素，俄羅斯的國家發展一直都是傾向西方。本文中論道，美國對俄羅斯的刻板態度與北約東擴都令俄羅斯深感不安。因此，東亞對俄羅斯抗衡西方深具意義。尤其是中國的崛起已成為俄羅斯對外戰略選擇的重要參考。然而俄羅斯終究遇到兩難--與中國親善交好，將會幫助中國相對提升其國際地位；卻有傷自身的國家利益。本質上，俄羅斯對中國的崛起也甚感不安，這使得其對中的親善政策持有疑慮與保留。歐巴馬總統由單極轉向多極的國際政治觀，提供普欽一個在俄中美三角關係重新定位的空間，然而相對於美國政府嚴厲批評普欽選舉的不民主；中國政府卻是全力支持普欽。對比之下，在普欽總理任內或 2012 一旦選上總統後，俄中美三角關係無疑應會向俄中傾斜。

關鍵詞：普欽、戰略選擇、俄中美三角、中國崛起、2012 年俄羅斯總統選舉