

## REGIONAL POLITICS

**CONVERGENCE AND CONFLICT:  
THE “STRUCTURE” AND  
POLICIES AFFECTING RELATIONS  
BETWEEN RUSSIA, CHINA,  
AND THE UNITED STATES**

Leon ROZMARIN

*Ph.D., Lecturer in the Global Studies Program  
at the Northeastern University School of Professional Studies  
(Boston, MA, U.S.)*

*Introduction*

Central Asia, much like other regions of Eurasia, has witnessed tensions and cooperation between the United States, Russia, and China. It is also recognized that Central Asia has its own regional dynamics that intertwine with the global inter-state relations, giving strong international tinge to local events and drawing-in extra-regional competition and tensions. Within the above theme is another—the hegemonic rise of China and the expected, or even existent, balancing response by Russia.<sup>1</sup> However, Central Asia

has so far witnessed more Russo-Chinese cooperation than competition while experiencing more Russo-American competition than cooperation, a trend likely to continue in the medium term. Suspicions and tensions in Russo-American relations

<sup>1</sup> J. Mearsheimer, “A Realist View of China,” *Conversations with History*, Institute of International Studies, UC Berkley, 8 April, 2002; “The Rise of China Will Not Be

Peaceful at All,” *The Australian*, 18 November, 2005; *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 2003; St. Blank, “China, Kazakh Energy, and Russia: An Unlikely Ménage à Trois,” *The China-Eurasia Forum*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2005; “Russia, China, and Central Asia: The Strange Alliance,” *The China-Eurasia Forum*, Fall 2004; A. Cohen, “How the Obama Administration Should Engage Russia,” *Prospects for Engagement with Russia*, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings, 19 March, 2009.

are matched by similar trends in Sino-American strategic interaction.

Russian national doctrines, and its policy-makers, have repeatedly emphasized the extremist-terrorist threats and the U.S.-NATO preponderance and policies, including the ABM initiative and militarization of space, as the main non-state threats and state-based challenges, respectively. In this environment, China is an important regional and strategic partner, part of the response to challenges.

Over the past twenty years and for the medium term, the major structural factors in relations between the three powers are the diverging priority vectors of Russian and Chinese foreign and security policies—toward the west and east, respectively—combined with the global power of the United States which confronts these states in Europe-CIS and East Asia, providing a measure of common interests to Russo-Chinese relations. On a number of important strategic issues, these interests converge on the U.S. problem—joint opposition to American global ABM initiatives, regime change and democratization policies, NATO expansion, competition over Ukraine, the balance of power in Europe and in East Asia. Meanwhile, Central Asia has had to experience elements of this broader competition, but at the same time has provided, and will continue to provide, its own contribution as a force for cooperation and competition, not only as a symptom but as a cause in its own right.

Central Asia is where one can expect a more immediate and pronounced Sino-Russian clash of interests as it abuts both states, has countries susceptible to external influence and domestic subversion, is endowed with energy resources and strategic location, and is porous to non-state

threats. Therefore, strictly from the realist geopolitical standpoint, Central Asia has been primed for Russo-Chinese power and security competition for well over a decade, as has been Mongolia, for example, geopolitically one of the more quiescent and inactive areas.

However, unlike Eastern Europe and the CIS, which experience continuous Russo-American tensions, Central Asia has not witnessed pronounced Sino-Russian security and power competition. This is partially due to its secondary or tertiary priority in foreign and security policies of Russia and China. Yet this more passive explanation does not account for the cooperative, active elements in Russo-Chinese relations, as demonstrated by the establishment and development of the SCO along with the Russia's CSTO<sup>2</sup> and Customs Union projects. Therefore, rather than undertake a security and power competition, Russia and China have instead institutionalized cooperation, as local non-state threats and the somewhat rapid arrival of the United States have helped catalyze the partnership between these Eurasian powers. Hence, both the local and the external trends have buttressed Russo-Chinese relations in the region, leading one analyst to conclude that "the newly independent states have not become objects of rivalry between Moscow and Beijing, but rather a major unifying element."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) includes China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as full members. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>3</sup> R. Weitz, "Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Summer 2006.

## The United States or China?

While Russia is sensitive to instability in and large foreign encroachments into the CIS, its leaders disclose a measure of insecurity over the power and policies of the United States and suspect American deployments and policies in Eurasia, including involvement in the domestic affairs of some

CIS countries.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, they have generally passed over negative or alarmist statements about China, which they depict as a long-term partner, one which is neither as active nor revisionist in the CIS. Compared to the gradual and relatively non-provocative emergence of China in Central Asia, partly due to the prudent policies and reassurance measures its leadership has adopted, American arrival in the CIS and Central Asia was more prompt and has evoked Russian and Chinese concerns and opposition.

Generally, Russia and China have also stressed the need for cooperation in order to offset American preponderance in power, which often leads to sub-optimal outcomes for their own policies. While on panoply of issues Russia and the United States find themselves in opposition, often in direct opposition, to each other,<sup>5</sup> one is hard pressed to find similar instances in Sino-Russian relations. Instead, a convergence on key global and regional issues is noticeable, including joint opposition to some U.S. policies. For example, diverse items like the ABM system and non-interference in domestic affairs were officially proclaimed in the July 2000 “Dushanbe Declaration” during the SCO summit in Tajikistan.<sup>6</sup> In turn, Russia’s *Foreign Policy Concept 2000* stressed “the concurrence of the fundamental approaches of Russia and the PRC to the key issues of world politics as one of the basic mainstays of regional and global stability,”<sup>7</sup> while a year later President Putin commented that with China “we practically have no problems that irritate our relations”<sup>8</sup> and was echoed by President Medvedev during his own visit to China.<sup>9</sup> In his turn, Chinese PM Wen Zhibao underlined recently that “cooperation between RF and PRC preserves the global strategic balance,”<sup>10</sup> a view also expressed by Prikhod’ko, who underscored that joint efforts “strengthen the two states international position” since supporting a strong and stable China is an important means to “guarantee Russia’s strategic interests.”<sup>11</sup>

Expectedly, Russian officials have also expressed similar strategic views in Central Asia. The CSTO secretary Boryduzha opined that China “does not present a threat to Russia ... [we] have a high degree of overlapping interests” and while “economic interests do not always converge, in the security sphere they converge one hundred percent.”<sup>12</sup> Bazhanov contrasted Washington with Beijing, claiming that while the former is “motivated by superpower ambitions” and “continues to embrace and support anti-Russian leaders” in the CIS,<sup>13</sup> the latter are keen to maintain stable and peaceful relations with Russia on China’s northern and western approaches, given the tensions in East and

<sup>4</sup> Russian pronouncements on disagreements and concerns with U.S. policies abound across official doctrines, interviews, and policy papers and do not need to be quoted here; a cursory review of interviews with President Medvedev, PM Putin, FM Lavrov, Duma deputy Kosachev, and military officials quickly builds a general impression.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the aforementioned issues, these include the bombing of Serbia and the recognition of Kosovo, the war in Georgia, Abkhazian and S. Ossetian independence, U.S. bases in Eastern Europe, Russian weapon sales to Iran and Venezuela, the struggle over pipeline routes, Russia’s use of its energy in CIS politics, Russia’s resumption of strategic air patrols close to NATO borders, NATO air-defense exercises in Estonia and Latvia.

<sup>6</sup> S. Morozov, *Diplomatia V.V. Putina*, St. Petersburg, 2004, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2000*, available at [<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>].

<sup>8</sup> I. Ivanov, “Nashi vzaimootnosheniia svobodny ot emotsii,” *Rossiyskaya Federatsiya*, No. 10 (155), July 2000.

<sup>9</sup> “Otnosheniia RF i KNR—kluichevoi faktor mirovoi bezopasnosti,” *RIA Novosti*, 24 May, 2008, available at [[http://www.rian.ru/defense\\_safety/20080524/108253521.html](http://www.rian.ru/defense_safety/20080524/108253521.html)].

<sup>10</sup> “Sotrudnichestvo RF i KNR pozvoliaet sokhroniat’ balans sil v mire,” *RIA Novosti*, 23 November, 2010, available at [<http://rian.ru/politics/20101123/299979326.html>].

<sup>11</sup> S. Prikhodko, “An Invaluable Relationship,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2, 2004. Sergei Prikhodko has been Russia’s Presidential aide and foreign policy adviser over the past decades.

<sup>12</sup> “Kitai ne predstavliaet ugrozu dlia Rossii, uveren gensek ODKB,” *RIA Novosti*, 27 September, 2006, available at [<http://rian.ru/society/20060927/54306767.html>].

<sup>13</sup> Ye. Bazhanov, “Russia Is Much Smarter This Time,” *The Moscow Times*, 20 February, 2009, available at [<http://www.moscowtimes.ru/article/1016/42/374713.htm>]. Yevgeni Bazhanov is Deputy Head of the Russian Diplomatic Academy.

Southeast Asia, where “the sharpest rivalry between Washington and Beijing is playing out.”<sup>14</sup> All in all, Chinese leaders emphasize that they “have no intention of practicing hegemony or expansionism... China does not build up its military presence near Russia’s borders, does not join any anti-Russian coalitions..., [has] founded the SCO [with Russia].”<sup>15</sup>

## U.S. Arrival

Central Asia, too, has become an element on Russo-American and Sino-American dealings, is now experiencing their dynamics, and some states hope to benefit from this competition.

U.S. penetration of Central Asia began before its more rapid 2002 military and political deployments and proceeded through various channels like NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline projects intended as a non-Russian window for regional energy, and the U.S. *Centrasbat* joint military training and airlifts. President Yeltsin was to complain that the “Americans are beginning to penetrate this zone, declaring it their zone of interests. Our interest is weakening.”<sup>16</sup> When in early 2002 the U.S. deployed over two thousand troops supported by several dozen advanced fighter jets, the event at once seemed a culmination of the earlier stage and a beginning of the next.<sup>17</sup> The following years Russo-American relations witnessed revisions to the *status quo*: the abandonment of the 1972 ABM Treaty, invasion of Iraq, Color Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, and NATO expansion. The above helped sour Russo-American relations but did not have a negative impact on Russo-Chinese relations, quite the opposite.

If Russia’s outlook and policy toward the region is one of relative *status quo*, it also claims for itself a privileged, one might say neo-imperial, role. For example, one official emphasized the need to utilize the region to solve “issues concerning Russia’s status as an international and regional power” and the need for the regional states to recognize “Russia’s right to play [such] role.”<sup>18</sup> Another envisioned that in Central Asia “smaller neighbors will receive security guarantees in exchange for the recognition of the special interests and influence of the ‘big neighbor’ [Russia].”<sup>19</sup>

Subsequently, the U.S. began plans to integrate Central Asia south, away from Russia, leading the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to warn that the U.S. “is promoting their plans for forming new structure to unite Central Asia with Afghanistan and Pakistan... Many in Central Asian political circles

---

<sup>14</sup> Ye. Bazhanov, “The Illusory U.S.-Chinese Axis,” *The Moscow Times*, 13 September, 2009. His views are in many ways similar to the General Secretary Hu Jintao speech at the 17th Congress of the CCP (see: “Kitai natselen na ‘druzheskie i partnerskie otnoshenia’ s sosediami,” *RIA Novosti*, 15 October, 2007, available at [<http://rian.ru/politics/foreign/20071015/83877720.html>]).

<sup>15</sup> Ye. Bazhanov, “China as a Partner, Not as a Threat,” *The Moscow Times*, 25 March, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> “Yeltsin Voices Concern at ‘Growing U.S. Interest’ in North Caucasus,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 20 August, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> V. Loeb, “Footprints in the Steppes of Central Asia: New Bases Indicate U.S. Presence will be Felt after Afghan War,” *The Washington Post*, 9 February, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> D. Trofimov, “Russian Foreign Policy Objectives in Central Asia,” *Russian Regional Perspectives Journal*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, available at [<http://www.iiss.org/programmes/russia-and-eurasia/russian-regional-perspectives-journal/rrp-volume-1-issue-2/russian-foreign-policy-objectives-in-central-asia/>]. Dmitry Trofimov is an official at the Foreign Ministry.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from: I. Zviagelskaya, “The Russian Policy Debate on Central Asia,” *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 1995, available at [[http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/st\\_08\\_zvjag.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/st_08_zvjag.shtml)]. Vladimir Lukin served as ambassador to the U.S. and chairman of the Duma Foreign Relations Committee.

view the Western penetration as a source of modernization, financial aid, and inflow of leading technologies...<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, though China's economic emergence, especially energy contracts, were proceeding at a steady pace from the 1990s, its political and security presence moved at a glacial pace compared to the U.S., whose presence and influence expanded much more rapidly. As Weitz opined, "China does not want to jeopardize security ties by challenging Russian policies in a region of limited importance for Beijing"; instead, both states "prefer to redirect resources to other priorities."<sup>21</sup> Though the U.S. arrival was faster and more pronounced, it was not accompanied by the same amount of multilateral and consultative efforts with Russia or China, in contrast to Russo-Chinese regional organizations and summits.

## U.S. Aims

In 1998 Stephen Sestanovich described American interests in the CIS as "important ... vital ... of strategic importance ... very important," explaining the existence of many definitions because "what we are trying to do is to describe a very large stake and a concern."<sup>22</sup> He further expressed U.S. opposition to Russian preponderance in the CIS and underlined that "we object that there are Russian troops in [Georgia and Moldova]" and added that "we made it clear to Russian officials that [CIS] countries are not to be considered a Russian sphere ... our policy toward this region is that it not be part of anybody's sphere of influence."

He was echoed by Secretary Clinton who claimed that "we do not recognize any sphere of influence on the part of Russia, or their having some kind of veto power [in the CIS]."<sup>23</sup> An American analyst summed-up U.S. goals in the region as "totality of regional engagement intended to [break] Russia's monopoly, demonstrate the U.S. power projection, help tie the region to the West, prevent military reliance on Moscow, exclude Russia from conflict resolution, and cement a local presence to defend our energy interests."<sup>24</sup>

And it appears that the U.S. is not intent on adopting a *laissez-faire* approach and letting the expected Russo-Chinese competition to weaken Russia's role since this "backyard of Eurasia, squeezed between Russia and China"<sup>25</sup> is "too important [for the United States] to be left to its own devices or to Russian-Chinese oversight," even if it adds to Russian "suspicions of U.S. intentions, ranging from destabilization through democracy promotion to missile defense schemes."<sup>26</sup>

While the U.S. has subsumed its presence in Central Asia under the anti-terrorist rubric, it works to provide alternatives to the restricting influence of a "Sino-Russian combine." Speaking in Bishkek, for example, Assistant Secretary of State Boucher assured that "we are not here to play games or contend for influence with different countries ... [but] to provide additional options"<sup>27</sup> and "keep [the

<sup>20</sup> *Foreign Policy Overview of the Russian Federation 2007*; section on the CIS, available at [[http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/3647DA97748A106BC32572AB002AC4DD](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/3647DA97748A106BC32572AB002AC4DD)].

<sup>21</sup> Quoted from: V. Loeb, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> *The U.S. Role in Caucasus and Central Asia*, Statement of Steve Sestanovich, Ambassador at Large for the New Independent States, U.S. Department of State, Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, 30 April, 1998, available at [[http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa50308.000/hfa50308\\_of.htm](http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa50308.000/hfa50308_of.htm)].

<sup>23</sup> "Clinton Sees Areas of Disagreement with Russia," *RFE/RL*, 6 March, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> St. Blank, "American Grand Strategy and the Transcaspian Region," *World Affairs*, No. 163, Fall 2000, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> E. Rumer, "The U.S. Interests and Role in Central Asia after K2," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Summer 2006. Eugene Rumer is a researcher at the National Defense University.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> "US-Kyrgyz Relations Back on Solid Ground—but for How Long?" *Eurasia Insight*, 23 August, 2006, available at [<http://eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav082306aa.shtml>].

region] from being bottled up between Russia and China.”<sup>28</sup> He depicted Afghanistan as “a bridge connecting” Central and South Asia, with “New Delhi fed by oil and gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.” Former Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Imanaliev instead warned that the U.S. “wants to establish control over the belt of Islamic countries from the Maghreb to China” and is using the ‘Greater Central Asia’ program to “remove the barrier” between the latter and “their southern neighbors,” which will raise “concerns in Moscow and Beijing.”<sup>29</sup>

## The Issue of U.S. Military Presence

A trust deficit over long-term intentions has also characterized the issue of American military presence in the region, which is not restricted to post-Soviet Central Asia, but also includes a large contingent in Afghanistan. In sharp contrast to Russian and Chinese misgivings over U.S. intentions, one has yet to detect open Russo-Chinese disagreements over Russian deployments in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan or over non-existent Chinese bases in the area; Mongolia, a country truly “bottled-up” between Russia and China, is geopolitically quiescent.

During the 9/11 rapprochement between Bush and Putin, Yakovenko, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman commented on the U.S. deployment and claimed that Russia has “no reasons to doubt repeated statements by American representatives that presence of U.S. units in Central Asia will be temporary and transparent” because now relations “follow the spirit of understanding between [their] leaderships ... we are now jointly deciding a common problem—how to put an end to the threat of terrorism and extremism, stemming from Afghanistan.”<sup>30</sup> Soon after, Defense Minister Ivanov underlined that the U.S. “bases are there on a temporary basis, only until the end of the antiterrorist operation.”<sup>31</sup> However, a few months prior, Secretary of State Powell disclosed that the U.S. is interested in a “deepening and widening” relationship with Uzbekistan “that will endure long after the crisis is over”<sup>32</sup> and estimated that “America will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia, of a kind that we could not have dreamed of before.”<sup>33</sup> Likewise, during this time a U.S. Senator visited Central Asia and averred that the current deployments are “not simply in the immediate term”<sup>34</sup> and State Department official stated in Congress that “when the Afghan conflict is over we will not leave Central Asia. We have long-term plans and interests in this region”<sup>35</sup> while defense official commented that the base openings and joint exercises are intended to “send a message to everybody ... that we have a capacity to come back in and will come back in. We’re not just going to forget about them.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>28</sup> “Washington Seeks to Steer Central Asian States towards South Asian Allies,” *Eurasia Insight*, 28 April, 2006, available at [<http://eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav042806.shtml>].

<sup>29</sup> “Adres tevogji: Tsentral’na’ia Azia,” *RIA Novosti*, 29 August, 2006, available at [<http://rian.ru/analytics/20060829/53264829.html>].

<sup>30</sup> “Moscow on Washington’s Statements about Temporary Presence of U.S. Military Units in Central Asia,” *CDI Russia Weekly*, No. 190, 25 January, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> “United States Expanded Influence Likely to Remain in Central Asia,” *The Associated Press*, 12 March, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> R. Wright, “Powell Seeks Deeper U.S. Ties with Central Asian Nations,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 December, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> “Secretary of State Colin Powell Testifying before the House International Relations Committee,” 6 February, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> “Anger Grows as U.S. Bases Spread,” *The Observer*, 20 January, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from: M. Auerback, “Putin and the Geopolitics of Oil,” *Prudent Bear*, 30 August, 2004, available at [<http://www.energybulletin.net/newswire.php?id=1858>]. Elizabeth Jones was the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.

<sup>36</sup> “Russia Wary of America’s Stance on Military Bases,” *Telegraph*, 10 January, 2002; “Q&A: U.S. Military Bases in Central Asia,” *The New York Times*, 26 July, 2005.



Shortly afterwards, visiting Kazakhstan, the then Duma speaker Seleznyov stressed that “it is not desirable that permanent U.S. bases be established in Central Asia.”<sup>37</sup>

Subsequently, as Color Revolutions took place in some CIS states, including destruction and violence in Kyrgyzstan during spring 2005, the SCO pressed for a timetable for American military withdrawal and later supported Uzbekistan against the West during the Andijon crisis in 2006. Soon after, U.S. officials became more explicit in their displeasure with Russo-Chinese calls for the U.S. to withdraw from Central Asia. In the summer of 2006 U.S. General Myers claimed that it “looks like two very large countries are trying to bully some smaller countries. That’s how I view it.”<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, during the 2007 SCO summit in Bishkek, member states proclaimed that “stability and security in Central Asia can be provided first and foremost by the forces of the region’s states, on the basis of international organizations already established in the region.”<sup>39</sup> As Russo-American tensions grew over other issues, when the U.S. expanded their presence in Afghanistan, Russian Ambassador there expressed suspicions:

“Is it all to fight the Taliban? Maybe this military infrastructure [is] for regional purposes also ... its strategic location is very close to three main world basins of hydrocarbons...”<sup>40</sup>

A month later, soon after the 2008 war in Georgia, he warned that “nobody should expect that he will cooperate with Russia in one part of the world and act against her in another,”<sup>41</sup> confirming, as it were, the reverberations of Russo-American conflicts into Central Asia. Bordyuzha, however, claimed that in Central Asia Russia “views NATO as an international security organization, not as an enemy or competitor”<sup>42</sup> and the American base in Kyrgyzstan “does not contradict the interests of CSTO, if [the base] is temporary.”<sup>43</sup> Yet, two years later, as Kyrgyzstan received financial aid from Russia and began to press the U.S. on the base issue, U.S. Defense Secretary Gates blamed Moscow over Kyrgyz actions: “The Russians are trying to have it both ways with respect to Afghanistan in terms of Manas [base]. On one hand you’re making positive noises about working with us in Afghanistan, and on the other hand you’re working against us in terms of that airfield which is clearly important to us.”<sup>44</sup>

More recently, in February 2011, following U.S.-Afghan discussions over long-term U.S. military presence in the country, Russian Foreign Ministry wondered, “Why will U.S. military bases be needed if the terrorist threat in Afghanistan is [eventually] ended?”<sup>45</sup>

## Russia or the United States?

At the same time as Russian politicians have expressed their preference, even if by default, for a relatively non-threatening Chinese role over the more dynamic U.S. policies, Chinese analysts were

---

<sup>37</sup> “Russia Wary of America’s Stance on Military Bases,” *Telegraph*, 10 January, 2002; “Q&A: U.S. Military Bases in Central Asia,” *The New York Times*, 26 July, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> “U.S. General Charges Russia, China ‘Bullying’ Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan on Bases,” *Registan.net*, 15 July, 2005, available at [<http://www.registan.net/index.php/2005/07/15/us-general-charges-russia-china-bullying-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-on-bases/>].

<sup>39</sup> Pan Guang, “Bishkek: SCO’s Success in the Hinterland of Eurasia,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> “NATO Base in Afghanistan Gets Major Expansion,” *NPR*, 11 July, 2008, available at [<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92427328>].

<sup>41</sup> “Rossiia namerena zapretit’ NATO transit gruzov v Afganistan,” *RIA Novosti*, 26 August, 2008, available at [<http://www.rian.ru/politics/20080826/150675270.html>].

<sup>42</sup> “ShOS i ODKB podpisali memorandum o sotrudnichestve,” *RIA Novosti*, 5 October, 2007, available at [<http://rian.ru/society/20071005/82583255.html>].

<sup>43</sup> “Presence of U.S. Air Base in Kyrgyzstan is Fine if Temporary—CSTO Chief,” *Eurasianet.org*, 21 September, 2007, available at [<http://eurasianet.org/posts/092107kg.shtml>].

<sup>44</sup> “Obama Loses a Key Base for Afghanistan,” *Time*, 19 February, 2009, available at [<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1880686,00.html>].

<sup>45</sup> St. Gutterman, “Russia Opposes Long-term U.S. Bases in Afghanistan,” *Reuters*, 18 February, 2011.

also expressing substantially more alarm over American arrival than over Russian presence—the devil they know. What's more, the misgivings over this new American presence were in addition to those on China's eastern approaches in East Asia, over the strategic resource area of the Middle East, and the "choke points" and vulnerable sea lanes.

Xing Guangcheng stated that China "does not want to see American military presence maintained over time" in Central Asia, but at the same time underlined that his country "does not approve of Russia seeing Central Asia as its 'backyard'" since the region "serves, like Mongolia, as a buffer" for China.<sup>46</sup> Zhao Huasheng envisioned Central Asia as a China's "stable strategic rear" and a means to diversify energy imports through overland pipelines, away from "risky passages and straits under the power of other states." The priority vector is East Asia, however, where the biggest "strategic pressure on China" emanates from the U.S. through the Taiwan issue and through the U.S.-directed "containment of China's rise." Therefore, China should prioritize and "concentrate its resources on the main front and keep others stable and tranquil,"<sup>47</sup> while "Central Asian states depend greatly on Russia for their security and defense" and it is the "most deeply rooted power" in the region.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, he also pointed to the broader Eurasian dynamics, specifically that the U.S. is "enter[ring] Russia's 'near abroad' from Ukraine and the Caucasus," though long-term American military presence in the region is "not acceptable to China either." In the end, relations between the major powers in Central Asia "depend on their overall relations" in the world. In this connection, he suspected the U.S. of attempts to "control the world through energy resources," to contain Russia and China and destabilize the latter's western regions. In this scenario, the SCO is an "important advance for Chinese diplomacy" which "indicates that Russia and China have reached a strategic compromise and a strategic balance." Meanwhile, the U.S. shows that it is "certainly not willing to give up its military bases in Central Asia anytime soon, even if Afghanistan is stabilized."

Hu Jian opined that while America has "torn open a crack in the garden of Russia," NATO's "outer edge is now on China's western border," while NATO's Partnership for Peace program is a "tool to spread into Central Asia."<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the U.S. is also "perpetually afraid that China will become the dominant power ... a barrier for the U.S. to implement its global strategy." The two are "energy deficient countries" which makes it "unavoidable that [they] will compete with each other" for resources in the region. He concludes that China must devote more "attention to the security of its western border as long as the U.S. military stays in Central Asia." In this connection, the brief rumors of the possibility of U.S. AWACS in Kyrgyzstan<sup>50</sup> seemed to confirm Chinese suspicions, paralleling similar Russian worries over U.S. AWACS flights in Georgia in 2003 which "affect Russia's national security interests [as] the radar surveys significant part of Russian territory," according to the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Xing Guangcheng, "China's Foreign Policy toward Kazakhstan," in: *Thinking Strategically*, ed. by R. Levgold, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2003, pp. 109, 112. Xing Guangcheng is Deputy Director of the Institute of East European, Russian, and Central Asia Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Science.

<sup>47</sup> Zhao Huasheng, "China, Russia, and the U.S.: Their Interests, Postures, and Interrelations in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (29), 2004, pp. 116-25. Zhao Huasheng is Director of Russian and Central Asian Studies at SIIIS, Shanghai, PRC.

<sup>48</sup> Zhao Huasheng, "China, Russia, and the U.S.: Their Interests, Postures, and Interrelations in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (30), 2004, pp. 86-94.

<sup>49</sup> Hu Jian, "Cooperation, Competition, Conflict: China and the U.S. in Central Asia," *China-Eurasia Forum*, April-May 2004, available at [[http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/CEF\\_April\\_May.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/CEF_April_May.pdf)]. Hu Jian is the Deputy Director of the SCO Research Center at Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

<sup>50</sup> J. Daly, "Sino-Kyrgyz Relations after the Tulip Revolution," and "Kyrgyzstan: U.S. Ambassador Denounces Reports on AWACS Deployment," *Ferghana.ru*, 18 February, 2005, available at [<http://enews.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=821>].

<sup>51</sup> "Russia Concerned about NATO AWACS Radar Planes Used in Georgia," *The Russia Journal*, 11 July, 2003, available at [<http://www2.russiajournal.com/node/15736>].



## Terrorism and Separatism

What helps maintain Sino-Russian cooperation in Central Asia, besides their diverging vectors and their mutual concern with the U.S., is the worry about terrorism, extremism, and separatism which threaten China's Xinjiang, Russia's North Caucasus and possibly even the middle Volga regions, and the security of Kazakhstan with which Russia keeps a 4,000-km open border. It is an implicit confirmation of continued mistrust that the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, while receiving Russian and Chinese logistical and diplomatic support, has not been able to overcome mutual suspicions and politicking in the region.

Unlike the U.S., which faces the threat of terrorism "only," China and Russia also face separatism and domestic instability from events and developments near their borders. Therefore, Russia "does not want to try any risky experiments ... [wants to avoid] any attempts to accelerate the development of democracy there [in Central Asia] [which might] bring to power fundamentalist forces"<sup>52</sup> and "lead to destabilization of the region ... under the slogan of democracy regardless of historic and cultural traditions and political realities."<sup>53</sup>

While the struggle against terrorist and separatist groups has helped relations between the three powers, in many ways it continues to be conducted separately, unilaterally, and against each state's "own" terrorists, though international connections between such groups are generally recognized. What's more, the anti-terrorist struggle is sometimes tainted by geopolitical competition and in such instances has added to mutual suspicions between the U.S., on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other, but has affected Russo-Chinese relations in a positive way, helping reinforce the SCO. As Huasheng concluded, cooperation between the three states in the region is "about cooperation between China and Russia, on the one hand, and with the U.S., on the other" as "in the foreseeable future China and Russia have no intentions of threatening each other strategically."<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, some Chinese analysts accuse the U.S. of "ulterior motives in Central Asia" and its "selfish geopolitical interests towards the region"<sup>55</sup> as seen in the allotment of "\$1.9 billion" over the years for democracy and reform, for integration projects without Russia, and the construction of the BTC pipeline. Another Chinese analyst claimed that "under the flag of fighting terrorism [the U.S.] started to forge closer security ties with some SCO members, stationed troops ... potentially undermining the organization's cohesion and function."<sup>56</sup>

What's more, decisions by some U.S. circles have raised concerns in Beijing and Moscow. The U.S. National Endowment for Democracy has given grants to the Uyghur American Association while NATO member Germany hosted the World Uyghur Congress.<sup>57</sup> Such policies, if not devious Western sponsorships of China's separatist groups, nevertheless help feed suspicions over a sensitive problem and add to topics of contention the same way that states favoring various forms of Islamic revivalism

---

<sup>52</sup> "Russia's Policy in Central Asia," *RIA Novosti*, 24 November, 2004, available at [[http://en.rian.ru/rian/index.cfm?msg\\_id=5126090](http://en.rian.ru/rian/index.cfm?msg_id=5126090)].

<sup>53</sup> "Address by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation H.E. Mr. Vyacheslav Trubnikov at the National Defense College," 17 April, 2007, available at [[http://rusembassy.in/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=90&Itemid=102&lang=en](http://rusembassy.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90&Itemid=102&lang=en)].

<sup>54</sup> Zhao Huasheng, "China, Russia, and the U.S.: Their Interests, Postures, and Interrelations in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (30), 2004, p. 91.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>56</sup> Wu Xinbo, "The Promise and Limitations of a Sino-U.S. Partnership," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2004, pp. 115-126. Wu Xinbo is a professor for Strategic and International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

<sup>57</sup> C. Mackerras, "'Pivot of Asia' Sees China-Pakistan Maneuvers," *Asia Times Online*, August 2004.

and “fundamentalism” attract U.S. accusations. China has warned that “tolerance of East Turkestan terrorism harms the international struggle against terrorism.”<sup>58</sup>

Likewise, issues of terrorism and separatism are part of Russo-American tensions. Russian Foreign Ministry criticized the U.S. State Department for meeting with a key Chechen separatist in 2002 and over his speech at John Hopkins University in 2011.<sup>59</sup> Eventually, as Washington and London granted asylum to several Chechens wanted for terrorism in Russia, the latter complained that the “positive tone of anti-terrorist dialogue contrast[s] with the presence and anti-Russian actions of Chechen ‘emissaries’ [in the West] who collect funds for terrorist activity against Russia”<sup>60</sup> and suspected the U.S. of “us[ing] the war on terrorism for geopolitical games”<sup>61</sup> and while the presidential envoy to the North Caucasus claimed that “as the 2014 Olympics [in Russia’s Sochi] approach, stoking the flames of ethnic tensions and conflict is a very serious task which occupies Western special services.”<sup>62</sup>

Concurrently, paralleling SCO preference for regional solutions excluding the U.S., in 2002 State Department spokesman stated that the terrorism problem in Georgia “is best dealt with through cooperation [between] the United States and Georgia”; shortly after Russian officials claimed that “the need for participation of a third state” in Russo-Georgian relations was “far from clear.”<sup>63</sup> And mirroring the West’s apportionment of guilt between the Russian government and Chechen terrorists, Foreign Ministry claimed that “in its essence, modern Islamic extremism is a deformed and dangerous but predictable reaction to U.S. unilateralism which is meeting almost no opposition under the unbalanced post-Cold War international system,”<sup>64</sup> laying part of the blame on the U.S. From the U.S. perspective, this has also occasionally been true of Russia and China, as they have aided the military of Iran, a country the U.S. has consistently linked to terrorist groups, and as Russia has welcomed Hamas representatives in Moscow after their electoral victory in 2005.

Therefore, while theoretically the interests of all three powers coincide in the struggle against terrorism, specifically they have often diverged and clashed. Though anti-terrorist struggle has helped improve and solidify Russo-Chinese cooperation, including the SCO, it has positively affected Russo-American relations in inconsistent spurts, often exhibiting contradictions, tensions, and criticism. Nevertheless, positive developments have emerged as Russia and NATO agreed on increased transit to Afghanistan and discussed a purchase of Russian helicopters for Afghanistan. Furthermore, in May 2011 the U.S. classified a Chechen leader as a terrorist and offered \$5 million for information leading to his arrest, a move greeted by Russia.<sup>65</sup>

## *Conclusion*

At present, the aforementioned structures and trends show continued resilience and salience. At least for the medium term, one should not expect an emergence of Russo-Chinese power and security

<sup>58</sup> Xing Guangcheng, *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> “On the Meeting of a U.S. State Department Official with Ilyas Akhmadov,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 25 January, 2002, available at [<http://www.mid.ru/bl.nsf/900b2c3ac91734634325698f002d9dcf/52ba0078bbd9942a43256b4c004efaa1?OpenDocument>]; “MID RF vozmuschen predstavleniem v universitete SShA tribuny boeviku,” *RIA Novosti*, 17 February, 2011, available at [<http://rian.ru/politics/20110217/335249020.html>].

<sup>60</sup> *Foreign Policy Overview...*

<sup>61</sup> S. Lavrov, “Democracy, International Governance, and the Future of World Order,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> “Situatsiu na Kavkaze rasshatyvaiut zapadnye spetssluzhby, schitaet Khloponin,” *RIA Novosti*, 26 October, 2010, available at [[http://rian.ru/defense\\_safety/20101026/289597331.html](http://rian.ru/defense_safety/20101026/289597331.html)].

<sup>63</sup> G.M. Hahn, “The U.S., Russia and Untying the Gordian knot in Pankisi,” *The Russia Journal*, 7 March, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> *Foreign Policy Overview...*

<sup>65</sup> “SSha ob’iavili o voznagrazhdenii v 5 mln dollarov za informatsiiu o Doke Umarove,” *ITAR-TASS*, 26 May, 2011, available at [<http://www.itar-tass.com/c96/151147.html>].

competition in Central Asia but, instead, a prioritization by each power of their diverging vectors and of their strategic competition with the U.S. Within this environment, the persistent Russo-American tensions are not likely to be overcome by the anti-terrorist struggle. Instead, the former has occasionally affected the latter.

---