

Far Eastern Affairs

© East View Press

<http://www.eastviewpress.com/Journals/FarEasternAffairs.aspx>



USA-PRC-Russia: The “Triangle” 35 Years on

Andrei DAVYDOV

One of the most important foreign policy events of the year 2007 was RF President Vladimir Putin’s February speech at the Munich Conference, signifying a unique turning point in Russia’s relations with the West.

The Russian leader’s sharp criticism of the United States for its uncontrolled use of force in international affairs, and for its “unilateral, illegal actions” leading to the outbreak of wars and minor conflicts, had such a powerful and wide international response that all other events, dates, and facts that, under different circumstances would really deserve being recalled, were pushed into the background. Such a memorable event as the 35th anniversary of US President Richard Nixon’s visit to the PRC at the end of February 1972 was therefore consigned to the shadows of oblivion.

It was worth remembering in any case, since this visit was, in its own time, of such a bold and far-reaching nature that, after the signing of the famous “Shanghai Communiqué” during the trip, the world sensed it was now operating under the conditions of a fundamentally new geopolitical reality. This feeling was reinforced by the American president’s subsequent visit to Moscow in May of that year, which informally confirmed the birth of a new geopolitical structure within the confines of the then-bipolar system of international relations: the “USA-PRC-USSR Triangle,” which immediately became one of the most vital factors in regulating the world’s balance of power.

Strictly speaking, the first sketches of such a triangle were drawn as early as the second half of the 1940s, when the United States was seeking leverage for itself in China by attempting to establish closer contacts with the Chinese Communist Party, while the Soviet leadership, as they were encouraging Mao Zedong’s policy of seizing political power inside the country, simultaneously maintained their official ties to the government of Chiang Kai-shek to the last. While ideological considerations at first outweighed geopolitical ones, the struggle that unfolded between the USSR and PRC in the early 1960s for leadership in the international Communist Movement, and which led finally to a rift in the

Andrei Davydov, Ph.D. (Hist.), Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Far Eastern Affairs*.

socialist bloc, served as the real impulse for the USA to renew its search for geopolitical alliances favorable to it, in order to achieve its own strategic aims.

The Triangle, transformed into a “USA-PRC-Russia” figure following the collapse of the USSR, lost part of its previous character while simultaneously acquiring a certain new quality. It has, however, maintained its main characteristic – being able to radically influence the global situation – down to the present day. In other words, peace and stability on our planet continue to depend largely on the state of relations between America, now reveling in its superpower status; China, now confidently gaining strength and firmly established as one of the world’s leading countries; and Russia, which lost part of its overall national might following the collapse of the Soviet Union but is once again flexing its muscles.

At the same time, it is obvious that the collapse of the USSR, which led to the demise of the bipolar system, did not in fact offer any alternative model of a world system. If, by definition, a “pole” in the world’s geopolitical system is a nation possessing such abundance of political, economic, ideological, military and other resources that not only ensure the capability of conducting a policy favorable to itself in international affairs, forcing rival entities under international law to come to terms with it, but also allow it to shape key elements of world development, then obviously those analysts are correct who maintain that only two completely different, “contradictory trends of development – multipolarity and monopolarity”¹ – have survived to the present day, and are capable of coexisting for a certain period of time.

If so, then neither one model nor the other is ideal. For many countries, the expressed desire for multipolarity remains largely talk, though the first steps in this direction have already been taken. Monopolarity, as seen in the United States’ use of open force to bind the rest of the world to its sometimes rather doubtful diagnoses and prescriptions, leads to periodically intensifying bouts of global allergy. What will be the final cost, for example, of the policy for the forced democratization of other countries, which has already proven to be simply counterproductive? Today, according to data from some surveys, 52% of the PRC’s citizens and 60% of all Russians believe “the United States’ influence on the world is negative.”²

Under current conditions, as Academician Yevgeny Primakov has noted, “the unlikely possibility of future world wars is not the same as the advancement of world security. Only the nature and scale of the threat have changed.”³ In fact, conflicts continue to rage around the world; nowhere have they disappeared. They have simply been transformed from political and ideological struggles into religious and ethnic ones. In this fertile soil, there has been a tremendous increase in danger from international terrorism, and separatism has gained in strength. The worldwide proliferation of weapons of mass destruction poses an extraordinary threat.

Paradoxically but true, according to the results of a Harris Interactive poll, it is the United States, which promotes itself as the world’s main fighter for peace, that presents the greatest threat to peace. At least, this is the belief of 46% of all

Spaniards, 32% of all Germans, 31% of all Frenchmen, 30% of all Britons, and significant numbers of people in other European countries. China and Iran were in second and third place, respectively, while Russia held only sixth.⁴

In addition, it is well known that the United States leads the world in its volume of military spending, which totaled \$528.7 billion in 2006. In this regard, the PRC is in fourth place with \$49.5 billion, while Russia is in seventh with \$34.7 billion.⁵

In speaking of the chances America has truly lost, we should especially emphasize the one to create the foundation for a new, non-confrontational world order, based on equality and trust, following the collapse of the USSR. If the world community's leading countries fail in the near future to progress beyond their own ambitions and combine efforts to coordinate their actions in guaranteeing true global stability, the most pessimistic forecasts made by a number of experts at the end of the 20th century, when there was talk of a possible "clash of civilizations," could once again become reality.

In connection with this, it is worth remembering that each member of the abovementioned "triangle" does indeed stem from different civilizations. The entire history of their relations, bilateral and trilateral, provides no grounds for unrestrained optimism.

As is well known, relations between the United States and PRC were distinguished by sharp zig-zag turns throughout the second half of the 20th century: from open hostility in the 1950s and careful sounding out of one another in the late '60s, through Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai's "ping-pong diplomacy" of the early '70s, to diplomatic recognition and the establishment of strategic ties at the end of that decade; from American maneuvering between the PRC and Taiwan under President Reagan, to the almost complete freeze in bilateral contacts following the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

In exactly the same way, the 1950s' euphoria of "great friendship" in relations between China and the USSR was replaced by open and sharp polemics from the Party and government leaders of both countries, and was later transformed into genuine hostility that culminated in the direct armed border clashes of 1969. The reconciliation of the late 1980s was neither easy nor painless.

For 40 years after the end of World War II, in which the Soviet Union and United States were allies, relations between the two countries remained in a state of "Cold War," only to be heated up periodically by one major military or political crisis or another, the most dangerous of which was the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The United States and Russia: From a "Cold War" to a "Cold Peace"

As early as 1793, Thomas Jefferson, one of the United States' Founding Fathers, expressed the following wise sentiment: "We cannot, of course, deny any

people the law on which our own form of government is based, in the certainty that each nation can choose for itself that form of government which it happens to like, and alter it in accordance with its own will; and also deal with other nations through whatever agency they consider appropriate for themselves – be it a king, congress, assembly, committee, president, or anything else. The Will of the People is the only important thing worth worrying about.”⁶ It is regrettable that these words were apparently doomed long ago to oblivion in their native land.

In the contemporary United States, they also clearly prefer not to heed the call of George Washington to be “the City on the Hill,” on which the eyes of all who wish to follow the American example are fixed; but this is not all. Neither have John Quincy Adams’s hopes that “America will not cross the ocean to hunt and slay monsters” come true. In plain mockery of their distinguished predecessors, her current leadership is doing just that.

In reproaching the United States for its egocentrism, even Western international experts note that “American policy is excessively harsh, self-centered, and indifferent to the interests of others.”⁷ In the final analysis, this was yet another reason for the rough tone of Putin’s Munich statement, which made it perfectly clear that Russia was and remains a great power with its own national interests and does not need anyone’s instructions or pointers. The American leadership’s inability or lack of desire to realize this in time could bring with it a further escalation of tension in US relations with Russia and, as a consequence, the rematerialization of the “cold” phantom of the unforgotten and not-so-long-ago past. As our accumulated experience shows, it is easy for us to curse one another, but much harder to mend the relations.

Incidentally, even if the United States’ current tightening of its policy toward Russia has no rational justification, it can nevertheless be explained in full. America is, above all, still under the influence of the “Victor’s Syndrome.” Washington believes that winning the Cold War over the USSR gave the United States a decades-long mandate for the worldwide exercising of unilateral power.

It is entirely understandable that, having quickly gotten used first to the openness of the Soviet leadership in the persons of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, and then to Russian leaders, as personified by the duo of Yeltsin and Kozyrev, becoming reconciled to the role of “junior partner,” the United States came to regard Russia’s independent behavior in the international arena, as manifested in Putin and Lavrov’s policies of “multiple vectors and the firm but non-confrontational upholding of national interests in foreign affairs,”⁸ first with a lack of understanding and then with ever growing displeasure. This displeasure was magnified by America not only forgetting the need to seek compromises, a fact of life during the period of bipolar confrontation, but also adopting the rule of ignoring its own promises, regardless of when they were made. This tactic has been seen repeatedly over the past 15-plus years, beginning with the United States’ violation, at the end of the Cold War, of the agreement not to expand NATO’s sphere of influence, and ending with the US depart-

ture from the strategic policy embodied in its own time in the START-1 and START-2 treaties.

On the other hand, we must not forget that the 21st century began catastrophically for America: September 11, 2001, has already become the nation's "second Pearl Harbor." The unexpected discovery of just how defenseless the heart of the country was from surprise attacks by terrorists sowed panic among its leaders and led not only to a keen and perfectly legal desire for revenge but to an onslaught of aggressive fury, the main targets of which were the so-called "rogue states" – *i.e.*, those that Washington counted among its "main enemies" (Iraq, Iran, North Korea, *etc.*). Iraq was, without the sanctioning of the United Nations Security Council, soon bombed into rubble and occupied. Iran and North Korea are continually being subjected to harsh political and military pressure.

Along with the "rogues," a number of other states were identified as a "second circle" of countries that could theoretically pose a danger to the United States. Despite post-9/11 assertions of solidarity with the United States in the fight against terrorism, Russia and China, which Washington views as its main global rivals, were included among them.

The main conceptual difference between them lies in their views on the future shape of the world order. The United States, based on the universality of its principles and interests, is aiming at a unipolar world under its own leadership; at the same time, Russia and China have expressed their desire to achieve multipolarity. For unipolarity to take firm root, and to assure its leadership under such a system, the United States must attain a decisive advantage in its rivalry with them. However, in the event of an unbridled and uncompromising rush by both sides to carry out their expressed tasks, the potential antagonism inherent in the widely different nature of their goals could easily be transformed into reality. In turn, this would lead inevitably to a change in the balance of power, both within the triangle and on the global level.

It is noteworthy that certain signs of such a change can be seen even now. First of all, the impossibility of America exerting a decisive influence on the course of world development is becoming increasingly obvious. Second, as a result of the failure of the military campaign in Iraq, the Pentagon's ability to conduct large-scale warfare over the next decade has been considerably reduced. Third, US leadership in the world economy is weakening, and it is clear that the Americans fear they simply lack the strength to perform the functions of the world's only superpower, even with all their economic, financial, technological, and military might.

Such prospects are undoubtedly not to the Americans' taste, although a retrospective analysis provides grounds for suggesting that everything now happening is objectively inevitable. Every nation that has assumed the role of world leader has invariably gone through a stage of ascent, flourishing, and decline. Today, we see the characteristic signs that a natural end may be coming to the "American Century."

It is understandable that the Americans are desperately resisting this. Prolonging the United States' "Golden Age" is the current administration's main concern. The same theme, albeit indirectly rather than directly, has also become the main topic in the country's now unfolding presidential primary race. Along with establishing purely domestic reasons for the approaching crisis, American politicians and political analysts are following tradition by seeking to identify troublemakers on the "outside," beyond the borders of the United States, while suggesting courses of action against those potentially responsible for the "storm clouds gathering over America" – China and Russia.

Former US senator Fred Thompson painted an alarming picture during the recent Republican presidential debates: "We see how China and Russia are going to cultivate their military might. We already see how both countries are conducting a dangerous and aggressive international energy policy. At the same time, our allies and NATO are letting themselves cut defense spending that they cannot afford even for their own defense."⁹ Republican Senator John McCain, another contender for the presidential post, was the first to officially admit that the anti-ballistic missile system the Americans are now setting up is at least partially directed against Russia: "An effective ABM system is of decisive importance in defending America against rogue states such as North Korea, criminal states such as Iran, and in ensuring safety against potential threats from possible strategic rivals Russia and China."¹⁰ Among the Democrats, John Edwards, the former senator from North Carolina is the most critical of Russia. He has repeatedly stressed that "the path she is following, though it is also of the greatest importance for America's national security, is, unfortunately, from the US point of view, the wrong one."¹¹

The deterioration of relations between the United States and Russia, which has become especially noticeable over the last three years, also has deeply bilateral reasons. In particular, the "strategic partnership" proclaimed after 9/11 has practically not been implemented at all, since no appropriate mechanism for cooperation between the two sides was worked out, and it was given no legal or institutional form. No permanent structure was consequently built for discussing and monitoring a whole range of key problems on which Moscow and Washington have serious differences. These include Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Kosovo, NATO expansion, the deployment of anti-missile systems, and so on.

Additionally, in contrast to US-PRC relations, there is virtually no economic base in Russian-American relations that could play the stabilizing role, should there be an exacerbation of political differences. On the contrary, the psychology of mutual nuclear destruction, which continues to exist in the mindsets of certain politicians and political scientists on both sides, remains *de facto* a destabilizing influence in relations. This in turn leads to the continuation of Russian-American strategic military rivalry. The United States' decision to build anti-missile installations in Poland and the Czech Republic has given new impetus to this. As Sergei Rogov, Director of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for the

USA and Canada, has emphasized, “even during the Cold War, both sides held negotiations on limiting the arms race. Today, arms control negotiations have come to a halt. Meanwhile, an ‘arms race with no rules’ has begun, and has acquired a multilateral character.”¹²

Finally, the situation is complicated by the formation of a unique alliance, within the United States itself, of prominent members of both main parties, one that is based on criticizing Russia’s domestic and foreign policy. This could, in the long term and under certain circumstances, lead to the United States adopting a policy of trying to restrain Russia.

The above leads one to believe that, if a new Cold War between the United States and Russia has not yet begun, the previous thaw in their relations has already been forgotten. It was cooled by the emergence of a “Cold Peace” between them.

PRC-USA: The Race for Leadership

The seven years that have passed since the start of the 21st century can be characterized with regard to China as the period in which it actively integrated itself into the world economic system, with the rights not of a Third World nation but those of one of the world’s leading economic powers. It was also the period in which China took its first steps on the road of advancing from the status of a great regional power to that of a full-fledged global superpower. It is obvious that, in the process of China’s transformation into a world superpower, its relations with the only other remaining superpower – the United States – would continue to be of primary importance to China’s foreign policy.

China has officially recognized that its relations with the United States are “the most important bilateral relations in the world,” affecting not only the interests of both countries but peace and stability in Asia, and on the global level. The American leadership’s overall assessment of relations with China was expressed in its certification of their “continuous and gradual development.”

In fact, such assessments do not reflect either the many nuances in the two countries’ relations or the global trends affecting their state. In the graphic terms of *The New York Times*, China is comparable to “a simmering kettle, on the surface of which everything seems to be still, but in whose depths the heat continues to build.”¹³ Such a comparison is fully applicable to the current state of US-PRC relations as well. For this reason, it would obviously be more natural to put rivalry in first place when describing “relations of cooperation and rivalry.”

In the relations between the two countries, the disparity between the successful development of trade and economic ties and the rise in mutual suspicion in the political and strategic military spheres is most clearly apparent. The publication, in the early months of 2006, of a number of Washington’s foreign poli-

cy documents and initiatives demonstrated that the United States intended to more effectively counterbalance the growth of China's influence, especially in those areas where its actions, in the opinion of the Americans, endanger their national and global interests.

Thus, in the *Strategy for National Security* popularized by the White House, we read "the United States supports China on its road to reform and openness"; however, a number of PRC policies are "cause for concern," including "the ongoing camouflaged growth of the Chinese armed forces; support for nations rich in natural resources, regardless of the situation within these countries and their improper behavior in the international arena; and so on."¹⁴

One fundamental component of the Americans' global strategy is their drive to prevent a new superpower from appearing in the world arena. Therefore, in the United States a threat to its own well-being is perceived in the models of China's development and in its concepts for restructuring the world. The Chinese model, unlike that of the Americans, does not presume an inapplicable and, more important, immediate "hybrid" of a market economy and Western-style democratic system. Moreover, the Chinese can see for themselves the fresh example of Russia, whose ill-considered forced transition from totalitarianism to a democratic model resulted in legal chaos, leading to the weakening and criminalization of the government. China, while not denying in principle the benefits of a democratic society, is moving in this direction gradually and thoughtfully, via its own path, as it "feels for the rocks while fording the river." The United States therefore fears that implementation of the Chinese model will in practice facilitate the creation of a new structure in the world order, and could thus call its global leadership into question.

China, in turn, has expressed its desire to achieve superpower status not through antagonistic confrontation, but through trade and working together with other countries. In 2003, it began building a foreign policy that suited the concept of "peaceful ascent," which, in the minds of Chinese theoreticians, was destined to guarantee the free and independent development of the country, and help to preserve international peace.

The concept of China's "peaceful ascent" resulted from the interaction of the many factors and circumstances of China's development over the previous few decades. It was based on the peculiarities of the Chinese national mentality, according to which the country, while reconciling itself for one reason or another to certain periods in its history and temporarily abstaining from decisive participation in regional and global affairs, should not "vegetate in secondary roles" forever.

The Chinese also place the sense of the "peaceful ascent" concept in the context of the history of the rise and fall of great powers, which are as a rule accompanied by a breakdown in the balance of power that exists at that particular moment. In moving to implement this concept, however, China did its best to convince the surrounding world that the new conditions of its economic ascent

and the growth of its military potential would present no threat to peace and stability, since other countries would be able to gain from the process: the new, stronger China would guarantee additional opportunities for their economic development through the size of its own domestic market.

Nevertheless, in the final analysis, the implementation of the “peaceful ascent” concept assumed that China would become the main power in East Asia, and that it would gradually achieve parity with the United States in all basic parameters of global policy.

While preserving this as their strategic goal, however, the Chinese leadership in 2005 made certain adjustments to the tactics of achieving it. The slogan “Peace and Development,” seen in the context of the foreign policy concept of “harmonizing international relations,” was borrowed from the past and became the policy’s new centerpiece. The *de facto* new subject was the practical steps needed to create a multipolar world system with several powerful centers, one of which – so the thinking went – must be China.

Beijing thus demonstrated its readiness for more flexible maneuvering, along with a willingness to ease up somewhat on its efforts to attain the objective mentioned above. It continues to adhere to a strict line separating the issues important to it from the ones that are possibly of more importance internationally, but are not currently among its priority interests, even if involvement in their resolution would create difficulties for the United States as a potential rival. The Chinese are most likely operating on the assumption that the fight against hegemonistic trends in American policy is not a priority issue so long as they do not directly threaten PRC interests, since it could lead to the premature exhaustion of strength.

In this situation, a desire to avoid (for the time being) the status of a participant in a multilateral, global confrontation, and to keep open the role of a “third party” with a potentially much wider range of opportunities, is taking root.

Unlike the former Soviet Union, China is not attempting to spread Communist ideology around the world, and avoids involvement in the struggle with democracy and capitalism. In addition, Chinese leaders believe their success will hinge on how well they integrate the country into the current international system.

On the whole, American analysts believe that China’s ideological behavior is determined not so much by the postulates of Marxism-Leninism as by the ideals of Chinese nationalism. Therefore, the ideological struggle that was one of the key factors of US-USSR rivalry in the world arena is giving way to “measures for pacifying” such nationalism,¹⁵ and the United States plans to use these whenever they are needed.

The problem lies in China not succumbing to American threats, as other countries do; this is the main reason for the American political strategists’ fear of Beijing. This presents them with a dilemma, since any step toward confrontation is checked and restrained by American companies’ dependence on China, which is for them an important partner with a constantly growing market.

At the same time, China's rapid economic growth, its huge population, its need for resources, and its active and energetic foreign policy are today a growing worry to the United States and its allies. They certainly are not ecstatic about the possibility of a "new bipolarity," *i.e.*, China achieving the status of a global superpower and being transformed into a center of power analogous to the former Soviet Union, with an antagonistic attitude toward the Western world.

In its 2005 report, the bipartisan US Congressional Commission for the Study of Economic Issues and Security Problems in US-PRC Relations stated bluntly that "the trends in American-Chinese relations are having an overall negative effect on long-term US interests in the areas of economics and security, as China's interests, aims, and values do not coincide with those of the United States in many instances. The United States must therefore respond with the help of various means and approaches wherever China challenges American interests, and with whatever level of aggressiveness is needed to defend them."¹⁶

In practice, the selection of means and approaches in the US arsenal is traditional to the point of banality. They include broad propaganda campaigns to spread the slogan of a "Chinese threat" and accusing China of violating any number of rights (human, intellectual property, *etc.*), of expanding the production of cheap goods, of dealing in arms, and so on.

One of the Americans' favorite "means of response" is the boycott, which they practice in cases where they consider it necessary to demonstrate peacefully their displeasure with one situation or another, or with actions directed against them. Under certain circumstances, however, their abuse of this can make it look like a complete farce. Precisely such will look, should it be implemented, the August 2007 proposal by US Congressional Representatives Dana Rohrabacher (Republican) and Maxine Waters (Democrat), to organize the next Olympic Games (to be held in Beijing in 2008) only after considering the human rights situation in China and Beijing's support for the regimes in Sudan, Burma, and North Korea. It is fair to admit that the blow to China's national prestige resulting from such a measure would be quite painful. One has only to recall the 1980 Olympics in Moscow as an example.

Along with boycotts, the United States uses other approaches as well. These might include attempts to increase American pressure along China's borders and the perimeter of the areas it controls; the exploitation of national, ethnic, and religious elements, wherever it is possible and expedient to do so; and to employ the levers of economic, trade, legal, and other such actions.

As was mentioned above, all of these actions, including boycotts, are peaceful in nature. It is likely that conflict would be transferred to the military plane only if major complications associated with the Taiwan issue, which continues to remain the number one reason for Chinese-American confrontation, should happen to arise. In particular, the United States believes that Beijing's *Law on Preventing the Breakup of the Country*, which does not exclude the possibility of using force to reunite the island with the mainland, complicates dialogue

between Beijing and Taipei and does not help to maintain peace and stability in the region. Beijing, to the contrary, states it is directed against separatist activity in Taiwan and helps in the ongoing, gradual development of relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

The policy of George W. Bush's first administration naturally evoked Beijing's displeasure by encouraging military cooperation with Taiwan. In particular, China regarded Washington's decision to create a national anti-ballistic missile system, along with its plans to deploy theatre ABM systems, as a direct threat to its own national security, as such systems would render Taiwan invulnerable to Chinese missiles.¹⁷

Since 2003, however, Beijing and Washington have been working hard to coordinate their positions on the government of Chen Shuibyan, in an attempt to stabilize the situation on the Taiwan Strait by preventing a declaration of independence from Taipei. It is difficult to predict just how long such coordination will last, since one must consider the approaching changes likely in the American and Taiwanese leaderships on the one hand, and Beijing's continuing determination "to bring about peaceful reunification with the island, without delay" on the other. Attempts to step up its efforts along these lines are possible soon after the 2008 Olympic Games are over. The possibility that the process might be accelerated by a powerful rise in patriotic feeling within China as a result of triumphs by the PRC Olympic Team cannot be excluded.

Despite China's increasing activity in Asia, it still presents no direct military threat to the United States there. Although current trends associated with the modernization of China's military allow it to extend the zones of its potential military operations beyond Taiwan as well, its capability to sustain long-term campaigns outside its own borders is limited. Because of this, the Americans believe that China is not interested in a military solution to the Taiwan issue, given the broad economic ties between the island and the mainland.

According to some estimates, the GDPs of the United States and China stood at a ratio of approximately 1.3:1 (\$12.98 trillion in the former vs. \$10 trillion in the latter) in 2006.¹⁸ In terms of *per capita* GDP, however, China remains in the middle of the second hundred of the world's countries, considerably behind the United States. Therefore, according to the most realistic forecasts, there will be no global confrontation between the United States and China until at least the year 2030. First, however, China will have to resolve the Taiwan issue.

In assessing China's place and role in the modern world, most analysts agree that the time has not yet come for the PRC to position itself as a claimant to world leadership. Its dependence on imported raw materials and finished goods, its inability to project military might beyond the confines of the Asia region, the affect the uneven development of its different regions has on the country's political stability, and the real poverty of a large part of the Chinese population could all interfere with China's achieving the status of a world superpower over the next 10-15 years. At the same time, we must recognize that China has the right

to claim the role of East Asia’s dominant power and the geopolitically most important nation on the Asian continent.

The American establishment has formulated two positions on the matter of future relations with China. According to the first of these, in a world where democratic values prevail, there can be no enemies (*i.e.*, states) that strive to uphold their views by force. Therefore, involving China in different types of broad international collaboration would serve to strengthen the forces within the country that favor pluralism in Chinese society, the development of democracy inside the nation, and, in the long run, could lead to the dismantling of the PRC’s totalitarian system.

Adherents to the opposite point of view propose viewing China as an inevitable rival, in relations with which the United States should act as it did during the period of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. As a result, the desire of the American ruling circles to hinder major changes in Asian regional structures and strengthen the system of American alliances in the APR, in order to constrain China in the region, is growing. It was for this reason that, in 2006, the United States gave its Asia-Pacific partners – Japan and Australia – the task of “jointly restraining the PRC,” reducing the role of China’s nuclear potential, and preventing the expansion of cooperation between China and Russia, especially in the military-technical and military-political spheres.

On the other hand, the theoretical foundations of China’s policy toward America also contain two different approaches, one of which is currently dominant. It is based on the Americans’ attention being focused at present mainly on the fight against international terrorism and against the regimes it dislikes. In view of that, Beijing should not assume the task of overturning the existing international order, no matter how unjust it might be; rather, using the system’s positive factors, Beijing ought to try ensuring its gradual evolution into a form that suits China’s needs. At the same time, while avoiding excessive responsibility for matters that have no direct bearing on its own interests, China should “concentrate all its efforts on real problems of great importance, such as the Taiwan and Korean issues.”¹⁹

The alternative approach can be summed up as “times will never be better for the PRC.” Since the United States has, through its antiterrorism operations, already asserted itself in areas of the Middle East, the main supplier of China’s imported oil, and continues to entrench itself in the country’s “strategic rear” – the nations of Central Asia, the interests of China’s national security ought to take priority over those of development.²⁰ Should this point of view take root, it could lead to a strengthening of the harsher trends in the PRC’s American policy.

In the opinion of independent experts (including a number of Russian analysts), Chinese strategy in the future might incorporate the following lines and methods:

- (1) Creating zones in East Asia with predominant Chinese influence and exclusion of possible rivals (especially the United States). These could

be transformed into staging areas for extending Chinese influence into other regions as well.

- (2) Maintaining, as much as is possible, normal relations with the United States by making concessions on less important issues, as opposed to those of greater priority to China.
- (3) Following differentiated policies toward the main political forces on Taiwan, and isolating negative (from Beijing's point of view) outside interference in processes associated with reunification.
- (4) Diversification of policy on raw materials, especially concerning the energy sphere.
- (5) Seeking points of strategic contacts, and forms and methods of cooperation with developed and developing countries, in addition to the United States.

One would like to hope that the opportunities that appeared at the beginning of the century for improving relations and widening cooperation between the United States and China are in no way exhausted. The need for it is based on the two parties' mutual interests, especially in the realm of economic relations. For China, the United States is one guarantee of a stable investment climate and flow of state-of-the-art technology in the modernization process, and an important market for selling a wide range of goods. For the United States, on the other hand, a stable and predictable China is greatly preferable to a country mired in economic crisis and torn by social conflicts. The problems arising between them, however, require constant moderating based on mutual compromises.

Attempts by the United States to influence the domestic situation inside China could have an effect contrary to the one intended. For example, should it assist in efforts for political liberalization on the mainland, the Taiwan issue would most likely be settled painlessly. As a result of the economic consolidation of both sides of the Strait, however, the United States could end up facing a much more powerful economic rival that would encroach on its position in world markets. On the other hand, the complete liberalization of the PRC economy will further strengthen class divisions and result in hypertrophied inequality among the population, bringing with it the danger of a mighty social explosion.

The possibility of a deterioration in relations between China and the United States, based on China's self-identification as one of the world's most ancient civilizations – one that finds unacceptable the global dictates of a nation whose history begins only some 300 years ago – cannot be excluded. Indeed, China's 5,000-year-old past, and Russia's 1,000-year-old history, give them the right to have their own opinion, quite distinct from that of the "young" United States, as to how and upon what principles the domestic life of their societies ought to be organized. Their resulting morals and values are an intimate part of their journeys

through history. The United States should remember and consider this in its geostrategic reckoning.

**China and Russia:
The "American Factor" and the Problem of Energy Resources**

Compared to American-Russian and American-Chinese relations, those between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China are developing in an extraordinarily favorable atmosphere, without any noteworthy complications or apparent points of conflict. In 2006, China and Russia marked the tenth anniversary of relations of partnership and strategic collaboration being established between them, along with the fifth anniversary of the signing of the bilateral treaty on neighborly relations, friendship, and cooperation. Over the last few years, the two parties have settled their border disputes once and for all and expressed their mutual desire to "always remain good neighbors, partners, and close friends."

Political contacts cementing the two nations are also increasing steadily. In recent years, meetings between the two countries' top leaders, heads of state, and members of parliament have become regular occurrences. Russia and China work closely together in international affairs, as confirmed by their active collaboration in seeking solutions to such major problems as Korea and Iraq, combating terrorism, reforming the United Nations, and so on.

Russian-Chinese trade and economic cooperation is growing and acquiring an increasingly practical orientation. According to figures from 2006, Russia is now China's ninth largest trading partner, and there are 657 projects involving Chinese investment now under way in Russia.²¹ The volume of bilateral trade in 2006 was estimated at US\$34 billion.

"National Year" events – the Year of Russia in China (2006) and the Year of China in Russia (2007) – have become important happenings in the lives of both countries and peoples. While tacitly recognizing their usefulness and giving them the highest possible ratings, we should nevertheless remember the political subtext of such events. Socially and psychologically, in both China and Russia, signs of mistrust and caution continue to surface in our attitudes toward one another. At the heart of these attitudes, on the one hand, is the insufficient information about one another. It was to fill this gap (the decision to hold bilateral celebrations was taken at the highest level) that such events as the above were needed.

On the other hand, however, some political initiatives from above, no matter what form they may take – business, cultural, sporting, youth, women's, or other forums – cannot correct immediately the remaining imbalance between the economic and political components of Russian-Chinese relations, which is seriously hindering their development.

In economics, despite the rapid growth of mutual trade (on average, around \$5 billion annually over the last five years), the two parties have yet to stabilize at the level of strategically important partners. Russia accounts for no more than 2% of China's foreign trade turnover. According to data from the RF Federal Customs Service, China accounted for only 5.2% of Russia's foreign trade turnover in the January-April 2005 period, for example, and for less than 10% over the entire year.²² Raw materials continue to dominate in Russia's exports to China, while imports are primarily finished goods. Even Russia's traditional raw material exports – oil and gas – are being shipped to China in limited amounts. There are no pipelines between the two countries, and oil is therefore shipped via the railroads. Clearly, such a trade structure does not correspond at all to Russia's strategic interests; not even the existence of a common border helps. In terms of foreign trade, China not only ranks below the European Union as a whole, but below some of its individual members. The situation with investments is approximately the same.

Beijing's current geopolitical interests, which extend far beyond Chinese-Russian relations, limit somewhat the field of searches for new potential spheres of economic collaboration between the two countries. Military-technical cooperation with Russia remains, along with the oil and gas sector, the most attractive for China.

At the same time, Russia, which badly needs to find, for example, labor resources to develop the enormous territories of Siberia and the Far East, is avoiding widespread use of Chinese workers to achieve these ends. Migrants from China are crossing into the border regions of Siberia and the Russian Far East without any control from Moscow, which still does not have either a coherent strategy for these regions or clear regulations for Chinese business; neither is it coping with the many-fold increase in the flow of Chinese trade goods and business structures into the area.

Thus, against the backdrop of jointly declared partnership and neighborliness, and the search for areas in which China and Russia complement each other economically, a situation is becoming increasingly evident wherein the political ties, insufficiently motivated by economic interests, are characterized by an element of dependence on the unstable and occasionally unpredictable fluctuations in the international scene. This does not help in the sphere of strengthening mutual trust among the elites or the broad masses of people of the two countries. Meanwhile, the fears one side has regarding the intentions of the other only intensify mistrust, further cooling the already modest economic interests.

As a result, a vicious circle is emerging: due to the narrow economic base, full advantage cannot be taken of the political opportunities inherent in Russian-Chinese relations; these must then be stimulated artificially. This in turn evokes a definite caution in a third party – the United States, which suspects Russia and China of putting together a new anti-American alliance.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a point of view was prevalent among Chinese political analysts that, under the new world conditions, the American Factor in Russian-Chinese relations was no longer of any relevance and, thanks to the geopolitical concerns that had long been part of the rivalry within the USSR-PRC-USA triangle, it had been transformed into an element of cooperation. At that time, and after the events of 11 September 2001, such an assessment of the situation appeared rational since they were speaking of collaboration in the fight against a common enemy: international terrorism. However, the United States' use of these events to bind the international community firmly to itself as the sole and undisputed global leader deprived the world of the possibility to create a new model for international cooperation between the great powers, was unequivocally considered as an attempt to establish unipolarity, and once again put the three nations in different camps. Under these conditions, the American Factor in Russian and Chinese relations might continue to perform the function of a unique lever used for achieving particular political goals.

A cardinal difference between the current situation in the triangle and the period of the 1970s and '80s is that its weakened party is Russia, while China and the United States, unlike the Soviet Union and China (the antagonists in those days), are simultaneously performing dual roles of rival and partner. Under certain circumstances, this could widen Russia's freedom of geopolitical maneuver, since the disagreements between the stronger sides of the triangle – the United States and China, which are also leaders in the world economy – could be manifested on a broader and deeper scale than those that either side has with Russia. At the same time, however, the possibility cannot be excluded that situations may emerge in which Washington and Beijing might follow Russia's lead in seeking solutions to problems that affect them both.

Quite recently, the United States launched yet another, major initiative in its relations with both Russia and China – and, consequently, acquired greater opportunities for political influence within the confines of the triangle. Even under the conditions of relative stability in the global situation, however, changes in the world are happening quite fast. China's consolidation of its position *vis-à-vis* the United States by establishing a special relationship with Russia in the military-technical sphere was an obvious foreign policy maneuver. At present, the international situation has created a geopolitical reality in which the strength of attraction between Russia and China exceeds that of repulsion. At the same time, though, some analysts persist in the opinion that the bilateral relations between the two countries have already peaked and are now in an era of stagnation and subsequent decline.²³

Nevertheless, Russia and China have taken advantage of a favorable opportunity to strengthen their positions in Central Asia, where America's presence (as has long been evident to all) was from the start aimed against Moscow and Beijing, and not the Taliban or Osama bin Laden. The instrument by which this

strengthening was accomplished was a sharp increase in the activity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

A number of Russian military experts assert that the SCO summit in Bishkek, held in August 2007, gave every reason for believing that the organization "is quietly becoming a very important center of power that clearly runs counter to the geopolitical interests of the United States and its allies in the East. The combination of the economic and military potential of only the organization's two leaders – Russia and China – renders NATO's superiority much less obvious. Moreover, both Russia and China are nuclear powers.... The SCO is on the way to becoming the 'guilty party' in a new, unpredictable episode of world history. One thing is absolutely clear, however: if there is economic integration, there will be military integration as well."²⁴

Such optimistic prognoses by Russian military experts regarding the prospects for the SCO ought not to distract us from reality, however. The reality is, we must continually remember that neither Russia nor China intend to transform the relations between them into an alliance, and especially a military one. This provision has been stipulated many times in bilateral Russian-Chinese documents. It therefore makes no sense to drone on and on about the possibility of turning the SCO into an alliance equivalent to or as strong as NATO.

In addition, the Bishkek summit showed that the two parties view the organization's main tasks differently. In his speech, for example, China's leader stressed economic cooperation within the SCO, while the Russian president named strengthening security as the key task.²⁵ SCO leaders have never officially declared themselves to be an "Asian counterweight to NATO," though Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov did tell representatives of the mass media that Moscow and Beijing are united, for example, in their opposition to the expansion of the American anti-ballistic missile system.²⁶

It is another matter entirely that, as a result of a certain weakening of American influence in Central Asia, where it had been growing geopolitically over the last two decades, Russia and China are doing their best to respond to the challenge of hegemony in their own ways. They are, however, doing this quite quietly, avoiding direct confrontation that could affect those economic and technological dividends which the two parties are getting from the West and using to deal with their own developmental needs.

At the end of the 1990s, Russia and China's strategic partnership was formed basically as a challenge to American global hegemony. It was a partially forced association of two weaker nations to oppose a much stronger one. It could, however, fully become one of competition and even rivalry as the joint might of Russia and China grows, and the two countries' roles in their self-declared multipolarity are achieved. This will depend largely on the vectors of their main political and economic interests.

In the foreseeable future, improving the domestic and foreign conditions for maintaining the country's investment climate and making it better will likely

remain one of Russia's main vectors. In China, as in the United States, it is already oriented toward acquiring access to world resources.

It has been shown that the extravagant model on which China's modernization is based could not only bring down the country's economy, it could also lead to the exhaustion of the world's resources. What was needed not so long ago to satisfy the needs of the "golden billion" would be absolutely insufficient if China, with its current population of 1.3 billion, were to become a full-fledged member of the international consumers' club. Though China is in first place where world reserves of coal are concerned, it became a net importer of coal in 2007. By 2010, China's dependency on the foreign market could be as great as 58% for crude oil, 52% for pig iron, 38% for manganese, 82% for copper, 52% for lead, and 69% for zinc – not to mention either timber or natural gas. Along with this, climate change in the next 40 years will, in the opinion of many ecologists, lead to the drying up of the Yangtze – the giver of life for 500 million Chinese.

It is no accident that Henry Kissinger has specially stressed the exceptional seriousness of energy and ecological problems for China itself, and for its relations with the United States. He suggests that ignoring them could lead to "the outbreak of a war analogous to the one at the beginning of the 20th century."²⁷

The United States and China understand their energy interests differently. China views long-term agreements on deliveries of energy resources as one means of ensuring economic development and financial security. At average annual rates, China's demand for oil has grown by 47% since 1990. If this continues in the future, China will need 21 million barrels of oil annually by 2022 – the same amount the United States requires today.²⁸

It is for this reason that concluding agreements on purchases of energy resources from new suppliers, and at prices that are often higher than market prices, is now China's main priority. In addition, China is aiming at markets where competition is less intense. This forces it to conclude deals with those countries whose regimes are on the United States' "rogue" list. The real reasons for conflict are therefore rooted here, as the United States is doing its best to isolate such nations while China *de facto* gives them financial and economic support.

Trying to make the world safe from Saddam Hussein's nuclear ambitions was obviously not the main reason for US intervention in Iraq. Rather, it was that of ensuring American oil monopolies' broad access to the country's huge petroleum reserves, from which they were virtually excluded after the former Iraqi dictator's rise to power. Having accomplished the redistribution of petroleum resources, the United States strengthened its levers of control over the Middle East. China, a major importer of Middle East oil, unwillingly found itself dependent on the resulting situation, and was at first compelled to observe the American rules of the game.

With regard to the Iraq issue, China reverted to a long-standing traditional policy principle: "remain in the shadows and do nothing to call attention to ourselves." It rationalized its passivity by believing that the main threat to peace came

at that moment from the forces of international terrorism, which also justified the Americans' violation of Iraqi sovereignty. Moscow then took a somewhat firmer position, having already condemned the war against Iraq. The only thing uniting the two countries was a desire to shift the resolving of the Iraq issue onto the path of a political settlement within the framework of the United Nations.

However, the role and influence of Iran, now transformed into a regional superpower, rose sharply in proportion to the worsening of the internal political situation in Iraq and the rise of anti-American sentiment throughout the region. Teheran *de facto* demonstrated that a political settlement in Iraq was impossible without Iran's direct participation. It was under these conditions that Beijing became the main importer of Iranian oil in late 2004. In addition, Chinese oil companies invested considerably in Iran's energy sector, in violation of the US regime of sanctions against Iran and Libya. In temporal terms, this surprisingly coincided with the announcement of the results of the US presidential election, in which the defeat of Democrat John Kerry delayed by another four years the return, for which China had hoped, to the "golden era" in relations between the two countries during the last Democratic administration.

Finally, during a joint meeting in New York on 20 September 2005, the foreign ministers of Russia, China, and India expressed their disapproval of the United States' intentions to submit its Iranian nuclear report to the UN Security Council.

China's maneuvering over the last few years clearly testifies to Beijing's pragmatism and prudence, along with its economic and political depth in regard to ensuring access to world resources. Since Qatar and Iran, alongside Russia, have the world's largest natural gas potential, it is not difficult to predict that China's long-term interest in the Middle East will continue. China will, however, have to continually take the American Factor into account.

The need for new energy sources is also forcing China to assume leading positions in exploiting the oil and gas ranges of the South China Sea's continental shelf and ensuring access to the resources of the Central Asian countries and Russia's Far East. Rivalry with the United States in this sphere is one part of the broader economic and political conflict between the two countries.

Russia's natural resources have long attracted the attention of the one and the other. The competition between America and China for them could therefore be intensified in the future. If the gathering might of China and the aggravation of contradictions in its relations with America push both to the brink of war, The United States' supreme task will be to prevent China from increasing its strength through the resources of Siberia and the Russian Far East. The primary task for China will be to gain access to these resources by any means possible, in order to leap ahead in its economic rivalry with the United States.

At the same time, the interests of the United States and China should harmonize perfectly from an economic point of view. Together, they require a huge and constantly growing share of the world's oil, and are interested in driving

down process for it. The meshing and synchronization of American and Chinese interests will allow the two countries to coordinate their battle against speculation on world energy markets and eliminate today's imbalance in oil prices. Such an energy compact could, however, have a negative impact on Russia's interests, if the drop in prices is considerable.

Among the multitude of forecasts and scenarios for the development of the world's geopolitical situation in coming decades, there are some that do not exclude the possibility of the United States and China concluding an alliance behind Russia's back, to make it easier to gain access to her resources. There are also more optimistic scenarios for Russia, in which it assumes the role of a uniting force in the event of, for example, a confrontation arising on racial or other grounds. Remembering how unfavorable prognoses can be, however, one must recall yet again the words of Henry Kissinger, who rightly noted: "Those who study history understand there is no method for predicting what will happen in another 20 years.... No American knows this, and neither does any Chinese. We should not, however, view another country as our enemy ... we must understand that our future depends on our cooperation. Our future depends on whether we can create such an international system as has never been seen before."²⁹

It is true that, after three and a half decades of existence, the triangle, while it has ceased to be a vehicle for confrontation, has yet to become a full-fledged structure for interaction and collaboration. However, one would hope that, despite all the disagreements among the nations that comprise it, they will continue jointly to find peaceful responses to all challenges and threats by adopting the reciprocal consideration of each party's occasionally conflicting and mutually exclusive interests as the primary objective.

NOTES:

1. Bazhanov, Ye.P. *China: From the Middle Kingdom to a 21st Century Superpower*. Moscow. 2007, p. 341.
2. From the television program "Postscriptum." June 2, 2007.
3. Primakov, Ye.M. *Eight Months Plus....* Moscow. 2002, p. 234.
4. From the Russian newspaper *Nedelya*. June 22, 2007.
5. *Ibid.*
6. The quote is from A. Fomenko's "The American Defense." *Moskovskiye novosti*. 2007. No. 15.
7. Gaddis, J.L. *And Now This: Lessons from the Old Era for the New One*. Oxford. Perseus Press. 2001, p. 13.
8. From Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's speech at the XV Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, March 17, 2007.
9. <http://www.ng.ru/world/2007-08-08/7russia.html>.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Rogov, S.M. "After the War in Iraq: The Collapse of the Unipolar World." *Nezavisimoye voennoye obozreniye*. P. 14. (<http://www.nvo.ng.ru/printed/7005>).

13. *The New York Times*. November 21, 2005.
 14. *Kompas*. ITAR-TASS. 2006. No. 12, p. 17.
 15. See: Brzezinski, Z. *The Great Chessboard*. Moscow. 2002, pp. 192-193.; "Living with China." *The National Interest*. Spring 2000. Issue 59, pp. 5-21.
 16. *2005 Report to Congress of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission* (<http://www.uscc.gov>.)
 17. "Strategic and Security Review." *Shishi Chubanshe*. 2002/2003, p. 23.
 18. From the Russian newspaper *Nedelya*. September 21, 2007.
 19. Kuzyk, B.N., Titarenko, M.L. *China and Russia in 2050: The Strategy of Codevelopment*. Moscow. 2006, pp. 542-544.
 20. *Ibid*.
 21. From a report by the *Xinhua* Press Agency. December 26, 2006.
 22. <http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2005-06-28/11kitai.html>.
 23. This assertion was contained in the report of one Japanese political scientist to the V Annual Russian-Japanese Conference "Development and Stability in Northeastern Asia," held at the RF Foreign Ministry's Moscow State Institute (University) of International Relations, September 20, 2007.
 24. <http://www.kr.ru/daily/23951/71653/print/>.
 25. <http://www.ng.ru./printed/81288>.
 26. <http://gzt.ru/print/.php?p=politics/2007/08/16/220020.html>.
 27. *Renmin ribao – On Line*, April 4, 2007.
 28. <http://www.mezhdunarodnik.ru/digest/569.html>.
 29. *Renmin ribao – On Line*, April 4, 2007.
-