

Are China and Russia Partnering to Create an Axis?

By Fu Ying

After experiencing many ups and downs in their relationship, China and Russia have forged a strategic partnership since the advent of the 21st century. While Russia's relations with the United States and the European Union have hit a rough patch, its ties with China are on an upward trend. Meanwhile, the United States and Europe are closely watching the two big neighbors in case of the event of a creation of an anti-Western "axis." Grounded in an analysis of the unique advantages of China-Russia relations, this paper argues that the two countries have established a high level of political trust and will continue to work in concert on all fronts. It also looks back at how China entered into alliances throughout its history and the lessons it has learned from those experiences. It emphasizes that China does not deem the establishment of exclusive alliances or political blocs as a foreign policy option. (This paper is based on a roundtable discussion of Chinese academia in 2015.)

The thriving China-Russia relationship has given rise to questions as to whether they will form an axis.

The year 2015 appears poised to be another year bustling with activity for China and Russia. In July 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping participated in the summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS nations in Ufa. Xi also paid a visit to Russia to attend celebrations marking the 70th anniversary of the victory of Russia's Great Patriotic War in Moscow on May 9. During June last year, Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, headed to Russia for a meeting of the cooperation committee of the two countries' legislative bodies and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Parliamentary Forum. The schedule for the second half of 2015 was busy as well. In September, Russian President Vladimir Putin attended China's own celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. The two countries' heads of government held their regular annual meeting at the end of the year—the 20th of its kind. At a time when Russia's ties with the United States and nations in Western Europe are showing signs of frostbite, its warm relations with China have caught the world's attention. When visiting American think tanks earlier this year, I was asked many questions regarding the direction of China-Russia relations. International scholars and members of the media have begun dusting off anxieties that were once shelved, curious to discern the nature of the partnership between the two countries. The parallels between the global turmoil of today and the

Cold War are closing in—will containment and bloc alliances play a sinister role once more?

There have long been two arguments on how to assess and predict the future development of China-Russia relations. One holds that these relations are vulnerable, complicated and filled with uncertainties. As the gap in power yawns between the two countries so will the amount of suspicion harbored against each other's foreign policy. These, coupled with their reluctance to have their hands tied by the other, have made it impossible for them to become allies in a Cold War context. After the two countries vetoed a UN bill on Syria in May 2012, George D. Schwab, former President of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy characterized the China-Russia relationship as a "marriage of convenience" guided by expediency. On the other hand, some believe that it is inevitable that the two countries, both under heavy U.S. pressure and perceiving the United States as a main threat, will create an anti-Western alliance. Such an alliance, according to those suspicions, would be aimed at dethroning the United States from its leading position in the world and thereafter shaping a new world order. An article published on the U.S.-based *Business Insider* website even proposed nine ways in which China and Russia could undermine the United States. [1]The proposals included massive military as well as nuclear forces buildup, the consolidation of territorial claims, and the support of "rogue regimes" both economically and militarily. In addition, waging cyber warfare worldwide, indirectly facilitating terrorist groups and obstructing the UN's decision-making process were deemed as likely methods for causing havoc.

China gained its understanding of alliance from historical experiences

Throughout history, the formation of alliances was often a way to create a blocs of power, allowing weak states to coalesce and maneuver for survival. From China's point of view, a traditional alliance is likely to be composed of four main features. First, it would grant the members the ability to cope with external threats in special situations. Second, there is often a disparity between the abilities of each member, resulting in the subordination of the weaker component. Third, an alliance is often formed at the sacrifice of the interests of one or more parties involved. Fourth, most alliances are not set in stone, and are therefore unsustainable when the situation changes or the goals of the collaboration are met. From an international perspective, an alliance is often the product of political blocs, which results in an unequal and unfair world order filled with double-standards. This point of view can easily trigger contradictions and conflicts among countries or country groups, and constrain the policy choices of allied nations when facing major international issues. It is safe to say that the currently existing alliances are the dregs of the Cold War and are not consistent with the trends of the 21st century.

Such a conclusion was drawn on the basis of China's historical experience. In the decades between the 19th and 20th centuries, China signed three alliance treaties with the Russian Empire and its successor, the Soviet Union, all of which ended in vain.

The first alliance was inked at the end of 19th century. Following China's crushing defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, leading Chinese officials advocated the thinking of reining in the eastern power of Japan by cementing bonds with those in the West. The Russians, at the time, were considering "leasing" land from China to build a railway from Chita to Vladivostok via northeast China with the dual-purpose of having stronger influence over the region as well as counterbalancing Japan. In 1896, Li Hongzhang signed on behalf of the Qing Dynasty of China with Russia the *Treaty of Mutual Assistance in Defending against the Enemy*, which stipulated mutual assistance in the event of a Japanese invasion. It also allowed Russia to construct a railway through Heilongjiang and Jilin to connect with Vladivostok to facilitate the transportation of Russian troops, munitions and provisions.[2] The treaty had some effect in curbing Japanese aggression. Nonetheless, the treaty failed to live up to its name as it ultimately whetted Russia's appetite for acts of encroachment on China's resources—it forced China to recognize the independence of Outer Mongolia and allowed Russia to station its troops in Lushun, jointly operating the Changchun Railway with China. This culminated in Russia's joining forces in 1900 with Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Japan, Italy and Austria-Hungary in invading Beijing and going on a killing and plundering spree.

China and Russia became allies once again in the 1940s. In the spring of 1945, the United States felt a pressing need to urge the Soviet Union to declare war on Japan. It brought the Soviet Union and Britain to sign the *Far East Agreements* on February 11, 1945, and pressured China's Nationalist government to sign the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance* and its appendices on August 14, 1945. The treaty made headway in the struggle against Japan's imperialistic ambitions, and eventually led to their unconditional surrender. Yet it was in essence an unfair treaty as it forced China to recognize the independence of Outer Mongolia and allowed Russia to station troops in Lushun and jointly operating the Changchun Railway with China.

In the 1950s, China and the Soviet Union allied for the third time, when the latter was locked in the Cold War with the United States and the newly founded People's Republic of China was struggling with reconstruction. The two nations annulled the treaty of 1945 and signed the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance* along with four related agreements in 1950, which stipulated that the two sides established an alliance and would cooperate in all areas. The new Sino-Soviet alliance provided strong support for the rebuilding of the new China. However, due to divergent expectations, unequal status, and the fact that both sides tended to put ideology before national interests, the alliance fell into crisis within its first decade.

What China can glean from these past experiences is that alliances are not always the panaceas that they are purported to be, nor can they guarantee the security of those involved.

China and Russia draw a red line--"no alliance, no conflict and no moves targeting any third country."

China, having learned from past mistakes and therefore keeping a firm grip on reality, decided to adopt a policy of nonalignment. In the 1980s, China and the Soviet Union started negotiations on normalization of diplomatic relations, and former Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, put forward the basic principle for relations between the two countries, namely, "independency, full equality, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs." In May 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, visited China and accepted China's proposition. The two countries then jointly reaffirmed that they would develop bilateral relations based on the principle of "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence." [3] Deng told Gorbachev, "Our meeting is to put an end to the past and open up a future for our two countries." [4]

On December 25, 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated. Russia was tasked with taking up the mantle for normalizing its relationship with China. From the onset, both countries adopted a principle of "no alliance, no conflict and no moves targeting any third country"—for their relations. In addition, both countries agreed that they would not be dependent on each other or regard any other country as a common enemy. Also, all disputes were to be resolved through consultations, from which, the preconditions for developing bilateral relations would be drafted.

Then, what have China and Russia done all these years? What kind of relationship have they established? Why have the two sides chosen to adopt such a policy? What benefits have this arrangement brought to the two countries? What does this mean for the world, and are both countries capable of keeping their commitment to the nonalignment policy? While these are points that the international community may find worth considering, it is ultimately up to the members of the agreement to find the answers to those questions.

Russia began strengthening its cooperation with China as part of its effort to diversify its diplomacy.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newborn Russia was facing new choices in foreign relations. The idea of a return to "Atlanticism" was the predominant view in the beginning, advocating that Russia's adoption of the Western system was in accordance to its national interests. That meant the Russian foreign policy would henceforth look to the West. Its first foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, believed that Russia's key partners should be wealthy developed countries with mature economies and democratic systems, i.e. the United States, West Europe and Japan. [5] To win the trust and help of the West, Russia actively responded to the U.S. and European requests and made concessions on major issues including economic reform, reduction of strategic nuclear weapons, withdrawal of troops from the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and imposing sanctions on Iraq. In 1993, then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin and U.S. President Bill Clinton issued the Vancouver

Declaration, announcing their firm commitment to "a dynamic and effective U.S.-Russian partnership," turning from Cold War opponents to strategic partners. In 1994, the two sides issued the Moscow Declaration, announcing that their relationship "entered a new stage of mature strategic partnership," and they would no longer target their nuclear missiles at each other. According to a survey conducted by Levada-Center, a Russian independent polling and sociological research organization, at that time, the Russian public had good impressions and high expectations of the U.S. The respective proportions of Russians whom liked and disliked the U.S. were 80 percent and 6 percent. [6]

However, from the Russian perspective, their passion for the West turned out to be wishful thinking in that they received no more than lip service while Russia was in extreme economic difficulties. Since 1992, Western countries had promised to assist Russia financially on multiple occasions, totaling \$70 billion, but many of the pledges were not fully fulfilled. For example, according to Russian statistics, in 1992, the United States announced a \$24-billion Russian aid plan, but provided only \$15 billion. In 1993, the G7 countries promised to offer \$43 billion to Russia, but only gave \$5 billion.[7] Moreover, the U.S. had difficulties trusting Russia, and gradually shifted its policies towards the aid of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), who were formerly part of the Soviet Union. That shift away from Russia was designed to create geopolitical diversity, so that the region would avoid become strengthened against Russia's sphere of influence.[8] This was called a "squeeze strategy" by the Russians, who perceived the move as preventing them from rising to power once again.

Therefore, Russia sought to rebalance and diversify its foreign relations as well as resume more active relationships with its neighbors and countries in East Asia. At the end of 1992, Russia put forward the "double-headed eagle" strategy to simultaneously "look to the West and East." China became a top priority in its Asian strategy. In December 1992, Yeltsin visited China and met with Chinese leaders for the first time. During his visit, the two countries announced that they would "regard each other as a friendly country." In 1994, the then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Russia and the two sides declared the establishment of "constructive partnership featuring good neighborliness and mutually beneficial cooperation." Since then, China-Russia relations had been put on the fast track and were upgraded every few years, with their cooperation areas continuing expanding. In 1996, the two countries decided to develop a "partnership of strategic coordination based on equality and mutual benefit which was oriented toward the 21st century." In 2001, the *Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation* was signed, which stated that they would develop the "strategic cooperative partnership of good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation and equality and trust between the two countries from a long-term view and in a comprehensive manner." In 2014, leaders of the two countries jointly issued a declaration, stressing that "China-Russia relations have entered a new stage of comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination." [9] Amid the complicated and fast changing international situation, China-Russia relationship has managed to make

consistent progress, standing out among the 72 partner relationships China had established with countries around the world.

Equality and respect are defining features of Sino-Russia relations

What has sustained Sino-Russia relations? What is it that they set the greatest store by? Mutual respect and equality are the most esteemed values. Both the Chinese and Russians have a strong sense of self-esteem, they want to be respected and treated as equals. In 1992, the two countries issued the first joint political document—the *Joint Statement on the Foundation of Mutual Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation*. They agreed that, the freedom of people to choose their own development paths should be respected, while differences in social systems and ideology should not hamper the normal development of relations.[10] By setting such fundamental and commonly shared principles, China and Russia were able to gradually resolve differences and conflicts. For instance, the two countries completed the 40-year marathon-style border negotiations in 2008, peacefully resolving territorial disputes that have troubled the two neighbors for decades. By demarcating the 4,300-kilometer-plus borderline, the two countries had eliminated the biggest obstacle and hazard for bilateral relations.

Equality and mutual respect bred a high degree of political confidence, and made it possible for the two countries to have unconstrained, direct and candid bilateral dialogues at all levels. Rather than focusing on punitive finger-pointing or other trivial activities, relations between the two countries were constructive—each side offered each other understanding and support. They have also established a full-fledged cooperation mechanism, consisting of regular annual meetings between heads of state, prime ministers, top legislators and foreign ministers. Since 2013, President Xi has paid four visits to Russia. Plus meetings on the sidelines of multilateral occasions, the two heads of state have already met 14 times. In particular, between May and November 2014, Xi and Putin met once every two months on average. Putin has become the foreign head of state that Xi met most frequently since assuming the Chinese presidency. The General Office of the CPC Central Committee and Russian Presidential Executive Office established cooperative relations, which is rare in China's external contacts.

Mutually beneficial cooperation is a key principle for China-Russia relations

When the Chinese and Russian leaders met at various levels, the promotion of functional cooperation was always the central topic on the table. From 1991 to 1995, the bilateral trade volume was less than \$5 billion and primarily in the form of barter trade. In 2014, it came close to \$100 billion, a nearly 20-fold increase in 20 years. China has been Russia's largest trading partner for four consecutive years. In 2014, China's investment in Russia grew by 80 percent, a far higher rate than the average investment growth in other parts of the world. A 2015 statistics from the Russian Public Opinion Research Center showed that, 66 percent of Russians thought that

China would replace Western countries to become Russia's main economic partner. In Russia's Far Eastern region that is adjacent to China, more than 76 percent of people held optimistic views on the prospects of China-Russia economic and trade cooperation.[11]

Particularly in recent years, cooperative projects that are mutually beneficial to the economies and the livelihoods of both countries have been progressing in earnest. In 2014, China and Russia signed a landmark contract on constructing a natural gas pipeline on the eastern route. From 2018, Russia will start to supply natural gas to China for 30 years via the eastern route, which will have a maximum transportation capacity of 38 billion cubic meters per year. The two countries signed a technical agreement on Russia's supply of natural gas to China via the western route. Energy cooperation is flourishing on both fronts. Even so, the two countries will not stop at energy supply deals; rather, they are working toward the integration of upstream and downstream energy production, pipeline construction and trade. Both countries are making great efforts to improve their trade structure, and planning more "big deals" in fields such as finance, nuclear power generation, aerospace manufacture, high-speed rail, and infrastructure development. Moreover, they are cooperating on new multinational financial platforms such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, BRICS Development Bank and BRICS foreign exchange reserve pool, so as to tap their maximum potential for practical cooperation.

In May 2015, China and Russia released a Joint Statement on Connecting the Silk Road Economic Belt and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as well as a Joint Statement on Deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination and Advocating Win-win Cooperation. These agreements have aligned the development strategies of the two countries in an unprecedented way, and given more substance to bilateral cooperation. This marks significant progress in the relations between China and its neighbors.

During the June 2015 visit to Russia by Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China, the two countries agreed that the legislatures of both countries should promote the implementation of all decisions reached by the leaders. They also agreed to provide a sound legal environment for bilateral cooperation in various areas, especially cooperation in practical strategic projects, and jointly facilitate cooperation at the level of local governments.

The development of China-Russia defense and security cooperation is geared towards their respective national security needs and regional and world peace

Defense cooperation is an important part of China-Russia relations. Since the end of the Cold War, China started to import weapons and equipment from Russia. In 1992, Russia exported Su-27 fighters to China for the first time. The two sides then set up the inter-governmental *Joint Committee on Military Technology Cooperation*. China has been the largest importer of Russian arms for many years, purchasing 30-50% of

total Russian arms export. This figure rose to 70% in 1996.[12]Such purchases have effectively sped up China's defense modernization as well as afforded new growth opportunities to Russia's defense contractors. Recent years have seen a decrease in the scale of arms transactions between the two countries. This is partly due to the fact that the two countries are moving away from the initial stages of arms trading to a more advanced collaboration involving joint research and production.[13]

China-Russia defense cooperation is not limited to arms trade; it's all-dimensional and covers defense consultations, joint training and exercises, and personnel training. For example, when China resumed the practice of sending military students to study overseas in 1996, the first cohort of 42 cadets went to study in Russia. Since then, thousands of Chinese servicemen and women have studied in Russia, and Russia in turn also sent big numbers of military personnel to the National Defense University of China for short-term study.[14] Furthermore, since the holding of small-scale joint military exercises in the border areas between the two countries in 2002, the two sides have conducted more than 20 counter-terrorism joint exercises bilaterally and within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. What particularly caught people's attention was the fact that President Xi was shown around the strategic command center at the Ministry of Defense of Russia during his visit in 2013. Moreover, the Guard of Honor of the People's Liberation Army attended the military parade at the Red Square in Moscow on May 9, 2015. Russia also sent troops to join the military parade at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on September 3rd the same year. All these were pioneering exchanges between the two countries in the defense field.

China and Russia manage their cooperative relations from a long-term and strategic perspective

In a speech delivered in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 2013, President Xi said, "China and Russia will forever be good neighbors, good friends and good partners." [15] This is an important conclusion drawn from the two countries' history and realistic needs. Over the years, both countries have taken real actions to make their friendship take root and blossom in the hearts and minds of their people. Their determination "to develop the friendship between the people of the two countries from generation to generation," [16] is borne out by the following examples. On September 1, 2004, following the deadly Beslan hostage crisis, China invited injured Russian children to receive rehabilitation treatment in China. In 2008, after the devastating Wenchuan Earthquake in China, Russia offered emergency assistance promptly, and later, invited children in disaster areas to recuperate in its Far East region. Since 2006, China and Russia have, respectively, held many themed activities such as the Year of China, the Year of Russia, the Year of Chinese Language, the Year of Russian Language, the Year of Russian Tourism, and the Year of China Tourism. In 2014 and 2015, more than 300 activities were held to mark the China-Russia Youth Friendly Exchange Year. In 2016 and 2017, the two countries plan to celebrate the China-Russia Year of Media Exchanges. People-to-people exchanges between the two countries are also robust. In 2014, more than 3 million

people in the two countries visited the other country, and a total of 50,000 Chinese and Russian students were studying in each other's schools. China has leaped to be Russia's largest source of tourists, and Russia has become a particularly popular destination for young Chinese tourists. Some Russian merchants have even admitted that being able to speak a few Chinese words has now become a necessity for business. A recent opinion poll in Russia demonstrated that 77 percent of Russians regarded China as a friendly country, up 30 percent from 2006.[17] During my visit to Russia, I found everybody I met could say "Ni hao" ("Hello" in Chinese).

Differences and conflicts of interest still exist but are well-understood and kept under control

To begin with, historical issues and misgivings still remain a hindrance towards bilateral relations between both countries. For instance, in Russia, the China Threat Theory still has influence. That is to say, some Russians worry that China will sooner or later put forward territorial reclaims and Chinese immigrants might virtually overrun Russia's Far East. In China, some academics still talk about the 1.5 million square kilometers of land annexed by Tsarist Russia in the late 19th Century, which has been recorded in China's history textbooks. A search for this topic on Chinese search engine Baidu produces millions of entries. Second, some Russians are not used to the change in the relative power between China and Russia. Some German media outlet quoted a Russian survey in 2010 which said that two thirds of Russians have doubts concerning the activities of Chinese firms in Russia, while more than 80 percent of Russians believed that it was wrong to "transfer assets to Chinese companies." More than 60 percent of Russians proposed to restrict imports from China.[18] Attacks even occurred by Russian extreme nationalist organization Skinheads on Chinese businessmen and students in Russia, which is of great concern.

In international practices, China and Russia have different styles and focuses. Russia is traditionally oriented toward Europe, which is also its current foreign policy priority, whereas China is more focused on Asia. Russia's foreign policy style that is more on the hawkish side, and leans towards the unexpected. This may lead to confrontations and strains in foreign relations. In comparison, China's diplomatic moves are more conservative. Naturally this has to do with different levels of perceived pressure in each country's respective security arena. Moreover, in recent years, China has continued to deepen cooperation with other members of the CIS, which might have given Russia the impression that it is competing for influence. In 2013, China put forward the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, and for a time, Russia was worried that it might divert attention from the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) that it initiated. Fortunately, the two countries have since agreed to align the two initiatives for the common good of the region.

Despite some differences over certain issues, China and Russia share similar political considerations about the need to firmly develop their bilateral relations. The first consideration is from a national security perspective. China and Russia share a

common border of 4,300 kilometers. The 20 years of tension over the later part of the last century has created a common wish by both nations to turn the border into a source of friendship and stability. Another consideration is about internal security and stability. The two nations established a strategic security consultation mechanism and put jointly preventing "color revolutions" and combating the "three forces" of terrorism, extremism and separatism high on their agenda. Bilateral cooperation in the areas of military technology and energy is of great significance for China's national defense as well as energy security. The second perspective is about development. China's huge market and abundant capital are good complements for Russia's national development, especially so now that the Russian economy is going through difficult times. On the other hand, Russia's advantages in aircraft manufacturing and nuclear power plant construction may help China break its development bottlenecks. What is noteworthy is that Chinese private capital has started to show interest in the Russian market and some enterprises with good reputations and relatively large size are considering about branching out into Russia. Not long ago, Jingdong, China's largest online direct sales company, signed partnership agreements with Russia's two online payment companies, Yandex and QIWI Wallet. Thirdly, China and Russia have wide opportunities for international cooperation. Both nations serve as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and share similar views on multiple issues regarding international peace and development, and therefore enjoy broad room for cooperation in international affairs. Their bilateral relationship is conducive to the balance of the international system, as well as in facilitating the solution of many international problems. Thanks to existing trust, Sino-Russian cooperation moves more smoothly within frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS.

Sino-Russia relations are typical of major country relations in the 21st century. Regardless of agreements or disagreements, a majority of countries lie on a solid base of mutual trust, from which issues can be handled rationally. They do not need to conceal disputes through consensus, and will not allow disagreements to undermine consensus, either. The most important progress in the China-Russia relationship is that they are able to acknowledge and effectively manage friction while continuing to expand consensus. As a result, in recent years, their number of disagreements have reduced considerably. Meanwhile, consensus and trust has grown between the two countries. Currently, both China and Russia regard development as the top priority of national policies. By joining hands, they bolster their capabilities, resulting in a strategy of "one plus one is greater than two."

China and Russia both value national independence and autonomy, so neither would impose its own will upon the other, or hurt the other to benefit itself; rather, they respect each other's choices, and work hard to seek convergence and a balance of interests. As the world is undergoing profound changes, countries are exploring how to establish appropriate and harmonious relations between powerful states, neighboring countries, the East and West, the South and North, and countries with different political systems and cultural traditions. A possible model to follow is to set

up cooperative relations based on equality and mutual respect and a partnership rather than alliance. This is the relationship China and Russia seek to build. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, this is a new approach for conducting external relations.[19]

In contrast to closer China-Russia ties, the relationship between Russia and the United States has been moving in the opposite direction.

The Ukraine crisis that broke out more than a year ago has pushed the Russia-U.S. relationship to its lowest point since the Cold War. In March 2014, Ukraine achieved a regime change through "revolution" and the ousted President Viktor Yanukovich fled to Russia. President Putin then dispatched Russian troops to Crimea, which later declared independence from Ukraine and joined Russia after a referendum on March 17, 2014. Putin called Crimea "historically Russian land and restoration of historical glory." Many Chinese people saw Putin's stoic appearance on TV and heard his famous speech at the signing ceremony of the treaty for Crimea to join Russia on March 18 that same year. Putin said, "Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard." [20] Later, the eastern part of Ukraine was embroiled in political turmoil, where prolonged military conflicts between government forces and pro-Russian militia turned into a de facto proxy war.

I attended the security conference in Munich, Germany, in early February 2014. The situation in Ukraine got almost all the attention from the conference participants, and even the potential candidates for future Ukrainian leadership were discussed. What happened afterward was beyond all the scenarios discussed during the meeting. Russia saw its annexation of Crimea as a forced response to circumstances. But for the Americans and Europeans, Russia's actions were totally unpredicted and unacceptable. In response, the United States and the EU imposed harsh countermeasures. U.S. President Barack Obama chided Russia for violating the international law and the code of conduct in international affairs. The restrictive measures were later tightened, including suspending Russia's G8 membership, issuing visa bans on some high-ranking Russian officials and prohibiting the provision of financing for Russia's financial, energy and defense sectors. Russia responded with retaliatory sanctions toward the U.S. and the EU. The tug of war of sanctions and counter-sanctions has taken its toll on both Russia and the West. In addition to dealing a heavy blow to Russia's financial stability and economic development, it has also presented a dilemma to the EU that relies and focuses heavily on Russian energy supplies.

At a meeting held in Dubrovnik in Croatia in July 2014, I had an opportunity to listen in private to Victoria Nuland, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State and Aleksey Meshkov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, who are both in charge of Ukraine-related affairs. Expressing intense anger toward each other, their viewpoints on the unrest in the region were completely contradictory. The U.S. official insisted

that Russia's intention to annex east Ukraine reflected Moscow's ambition to continue the former Soviet Union's expansionist policy and that its moves threatened the sovereignty of former Soviet and East European nations. The Russian diplomat argued that his country had no intention of doing so and instead hoped the region would exercise a high degree of autonomy. He said that Russia supported efforts to settle the Ukraine crisis through peaceful negotiations and accused the U.S. and the EU of maneuvering to undermine Russia. The famous proverb, "as you sow, so shall you reap," can also be applied to countries around the world as they exert influence over each other through action and reaction. Both the United States and Russia claim that what they did was intended to protect international law and order, and they have tried to seek China's support for their respective stances. Apparently, the distrust between Washington and Moscow runs deep—this can give rise to misunderstanding and even miscalculation.

Actually, over the years, the Russia-U.S. relationship has been relatively fluid. Even after the Ukraine crisis, the two countries maintained frequent communication. By the end of 2015, relations between the two had warmed up in an effort to cope with the ISIS threat. After the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, Russia decided to cooperate with the United States on fighting terrorism. As a result, Moscow acquiesced to U.S. military presence in Central Asia and NATO's further eastward expansion. The two countries also signed the *Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty* and the *Joint Declaration on the New Strategic Relationship* in May 2002. However, Russia felt more and more threatened by what it perceived to be United States-orchestrated and repeated regime changes in former Soviet republics. During the Munich Security Conference in 2007, President Putin openly lashed out at unilateral actions and the unconstrained hyper use of military force by the United States as well as NATO's eastward expansion. The relationship between Russia and the United States further worsened after the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008. The standoff lasted until President Obama extended an olive branch to Moscow in January 2009, which was met with a positive response from then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Two months later, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pressed the "reset" button for bilateral relations in Geneva, Switzerland. But after Putin took office for a third presidential term in 2012, relations between Russia and the United States turned frigid once more.

It should be noted that Russia and the United States interacted frequently despite the onset of the Ukraine crisis. Also, relations between the two warmed up in light of the pressing need to cope with the ISIS threat. Putin and Obama held their first formal meeting in nearly two years after the Ukraine crisis erupted at the UN headquarters in New York City on September 28, 2015. The summit lasted one hour and 40 minutes, doubling the scheduled time. "There were many common points," Putin said after the talks. "There were also disagreements which we agreed to work together." A day later, Russian warplanes raided targets in Syria in the name of anti-terrorism. While accusing Russia of taking this opportunity to deal a blow to Syria's moderate opposition and inflicting civilian casualties, the United States expressed its

willingness to work in concert with Russia to combat terrorism. This was tantamount to a tacit consent to Russia's operations. Nevertheless, the underlying discord between the two countries remained, with neither having an idea of how far they can go along the path of cooperation.

To the United States, the crucial question lies in what kind of role Russia will take on—that of a challenger or component to the "Western world." Though successive U.S. administrations vary in their perception of Russia, they more or less agree that, the pursuit of expansionism and hegemony is a deep-rooted tradition in Russian diplomacy. Therefore, they put the prevention of the revival of Russia as a global empire as the abiding objective of their Russia policy,[21] viewing Russia as a potential threat [22]. U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has openly expressed pessimism about the U.S.-Russia relationship, saying that tensions between the two countries will not ease in the short term and that the United States must bolster the military deterrent in Europe against Russia.[23] In 2014, President Obama even described Russia as one of the three major threats in the world, along with the Ebola epidemic and the so-called "Islamic State" extremist group. A 2015 February 8-11 Gallup poll found that 18 percent of the respondents, up 9 percentage points, saw Russia as their country's greatest enemy as tensions between Russia and Ukraine increased; 49 percent of respondents view Russia's military power as a critical threat to the U.S., 17 percentage points more than that of 2014; 70 percent held unfavorable views of Russia and 72 percent unfavorable view of Putin. [24] To Russians, the crux of the problem lies in what America desires from their relationship with Russia. The proportion of Russians holding negative views of the United States has also been on the rise, reaching 36 percent in 2013.[25]

Some in the United States claim that China adopts a vague attitude toward the state of affairs in Ukraine and the increasing tension between the United States and Russia. Comments that China may handle South China Sea disputes forcibly –"in a Russian way" – are often heard. The fact is, however, that a spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued remarks expounding China's stance of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs and made it clear that Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected immediately after the crisis broke out. Later, China, in a constructive spirit, put forward a three-pronged proposal that calls for expediting the establishment of an international coordination mechanism, refraining from actions that may aggravate the situation and helping Ukraine safeguard economic and financial stability, among others. Indeed, Beijing did not take sides. Impartiality has been a commitment that China has consistently honored when dealing with international affairs. Concerns in the U.S. academic community that China may follow in Russia's footsteps to address other issues are unfounded.

In China, more attention has been devoted to the factors that led up to the Ukraine crisis. These include "color revolutions" repeatedly staged in CIS members and external factors behind them and security pressure on Russia in the wake of NATO's persistent unilateral eastward expansion. In addition, complicated historical, ethnic,

religious and territorial issues between Russia and fellow CIS members are noteworthy. Crimea, for instance, enjoyed and continues to enjoy close ties with Russia. Since these factors are intertwined, the Ukraine crisis is a result of their interaction. When talking on the phone with President Putin on March 4, 2014, President Xi said what has happened in Ukraine was an "inevitable accident." At the press conference of the second session of the 12th National People's Congress held on March 8, 2014, Foreign Minister Wang Yi also noted that the crisis "resulted from certain causes." [26] Dr. Henry Kissinger, for his part, wrote, "If Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side's outpost against the other—it should function as a bridge between them." [27]

From an observer's angle, America's and Russia's perceptions of each other is still heavily influenced by the Cold War. When talking about Russia, U.S. politicians and media tend to describe it as a loser in the Cold War rather than making the distinction that it is a separate entity from the Soviet Union. Criticism of America's hegemonic actions can also be frequently heard in Russia. Some people have suggested that the standoff between Washington and Moscow over Ukraine would lead to a new Cold War. But from a historical perspective, the current confrontation is more like the prolonged ending of the Cold War. The Iron Curtain divided the world into two hostile camps for 40 years. Though it nominally came down more than 20 years ago, Cold War mentality and rhetoric, and sometimes Cold War-style behavior, still haunt international relations in the beginning of the 21st century. It remains unclear if parties to the ongoing confrontation are smart enough to put a final end to the Cold War.

The currently stable China-U.S. relationship is still vulnerable to disruptive factors.

Combined, China and the United States account for one third of global GDP. Their cooperation is of vital importance to today's world. In 2014, trade between the two countries reached \$555 billion and accumulated mutual investment exceeded \$120 billion. Air passengers made 6.13 million flights between China and the United States last year, which averaged a daily volume of 17,000 travels across the Pacific. Those figures are expected to increase by 15 percent year-on-year. As President Xi said, the 35-year history of the diplomatic relationship between the People's Republic of China and the United States has proved that a sound China-U.S. relationship is not only in line with the fundamental interests of the two peoples, but also is conducive to the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large.[28] Encouragingly, the U.S. side also shares this view. Every administration expressed that the U.S. welcomed the peaceful rise of China. In November 2014, when attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Beijing, President Obama spoke to the CEO Summit, and stating "The United States welcomes the rise of a prosperous, peaceful and stable China." [29] In my discussion with Dr. Henry Kissinger, he said that he believed the U.S.-China cooperation is on the right course and called for increasing exchanges and sincere collaboration between the two countries. American business, financial and

hi-tech sectors, in particular, have placed high hopes on cooperation with China with the confidence that a thriving China will create more opportunities for them and bring about mutually beneficial results.

In September 2015, President Xi made his first state visit to the United States after assuming office. Media reports showed that the "two heads of state spent nine hours exchanging views and attending joint activities. "[30] According to the list of achievements released by China, China and the United States achieved 49 major agreements and outcomes in five areas, beyond the expectations of most observers. Those on global governance received extensive attention, including macroeconomic policy coordination, jointly promoting world economic growth and supporting financial stability. In addition, both countries focused on working together to cope with climate changes and enhance global health security as well as meeting challenges in the fields of anti-terrorism and nonproliferation of weapons. Cybersecurity was one of the prominent points of contention before President Xi's visit. Leaders of China and the United States held candid talks on this issue, during which they clarified their intentions and reached consensus on creating a high-level dialogue mechanism to crack down on cybercrime. Both countries agreed to cooperate on a bilateral level and at the same time make joint efforts to push for the establishment of cyberspace codes of conduct in the international community. This shows that China and the United States can engage in wide-ranging cooperation of vital importance on a global scale. Both sides have been increasingly aware that they need and are able to conduct mutually beneficial cooperation and prevent lose-lose scenarios. The outcome list is a testament to the fact that the two major countries are working in the right direction to forge a mature relationship.

Of course, it is impossible to resolve all problems through a single visit. The two countries still confront challenges in many areas such as the South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights, business and trade. These issues may crop up from time to time causing trouble. It is imperative that both countries always keep in mind that when disputes arise they should strengthen communication to manage them in a reasonable way while seeking solutions. Some are worried that the United States may shift its China policy from constructive engagement to intensive containment, but there has not been enough evidence to substantiate their claims. Joint efforts are required to put the agreements reached by the two countries' leaders into practice and ensure long-term stability of bilateral cooperation.

Some in the United States hold the view that China's development constitutes a challenge to U.S. global leadership. During his visit to the United States, President Xi responded by saying, "The path China follows is one of peaceful development, and China does not pose a threat to other countries. China wants to work with the United States for common development and prosperity." [31]

"China's policy toward the United States is consistent and transparent," he said. "People should move ahead with the times, and give up on the old concepts of 'you

lose, I win' or 'zero-sum game,' and establish a new concept of peaceful development and willing cooperation. If China develops well, it will benefit the whole world and benefit the United States. If the United States develops well, it will also benefit the world and China." [32]

Nonetheless, underlying structural problems which remain between the two countries must be addressed as well. China's political and social systems have long been targets of Americans' criticism. Appraising China's development is often a hot topic in the United States. After more than 30 years of growth of 9 percent or more, China has become the world's second largest economy and is expected to top the ranking at around 2020 [33]. To some American realists, who believe that a strong nation is bound to seek hegemony, China's growing economic strength and its correspondingly higher international influence constitutes a potential threat and challenge to their country's global leadership. Not long ago, I had a heated argument with John Mearsheimer, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago. He claimed, as long as China maintains its current development speed, confrontations, or even conflicts, between the United States and China are inevitable. He suggested the United States team up with other countries and act immediately to contain China, instead of standing by and letting China become too big to be contained. In the first half of this year, many think tanks and media outlets in the United States were involved in a discussion on the intentions behind China's construction activities on the Nansha islands and reefs in the South China Sea. They do not seem to care much about the merits of the matter, yet for fears that China is attempting to drive the United States out of Asia; they demanded tough measures on the U.S. side to resist China's "expansion." In their opinion, a more influential China, whatever it does, is cause for concern and suspicion.

But seen from the Chinese perspective, China's rapid economic development after the implementation of the reform and opening-up policies should, to a certain extent, be attributed to its successful integration into the world economy and its effort to keep up with the pace of globalization. China is one of the major participants, supporters and beneficiaries of the current international system with the UN at its core, and a strong advocate of principles such as sovereign equality and non-intervention in internal affairs of states which were written into the UN charter. In April 2015, when attending activities commemorating the 60th anniversary of Bandung Conference in Indonesia, President Xi reiterated that the Chinese nation is peace-loving and cherishes harmony. China will stick to the road of peaceful development and adhere to an independent foreign policy of peace. It remains committed to the policy of mutually beneficial cooperation and true to our right and obligations. China will develop friendly relations with any other nation on earth on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence, and will always be a staunch force for safeguarding world peace and promoting common development.[34] Based on its current national conditions, China should be focused on domestic development for a long time to come. A large number of thorny issues still confront the country, such as environmental pollution, corruption, how to improve people's welfare and maintain

stable economic growth. China needs a stable and peaceful external environment for development. Either from the perspective of its foreign policy or domestic demand, it is not in the interest of China to challenge, and much less, overturn, the fundamental international structure and order, neither does China have the power to do so. At the same time, China is determined to safeguard its own interests, and its ability to do so has also grown. China would respond firmly to any acts of provocation and encroachment on its territorial sovereignty and rights and interests. This should be viewed as an important component of regional peace and stability.

The very essence of the concept of "a new-model of major country relations," as proposed by Chinese President Xi, is to avoid confrontation among world powers such as China and the United States and to blaze a new trail of mutually beneficial cooperation. This can be a new solution for the major countries in working with one another.

The unbalanced development of relations among China, the United States and Russia poses the three countries into a scalene triangle.

The constantly evolving relationship between the three countries undoubtedly causes friction—but how do the sparks they create affect the international players that lie outside of their triangle of influence?

First of all, in this triangle, China-Russia relations are obviously more positive and stable, and on the rise. China and Russia also find some common grounds in dealing with the United States: They both disagree with the U.S. practice of using force and sanctions to threaten other countries and the double standards applied on itself and others, on its allies and non-allies. As a result, China and Russia usually take similar stances in international affairs. In addition, their relations with the United States both are beset with some problems and difficulties, with Russia-U.S. relations in extreme difficulties as the former is heavily sanctioned by the latter both economically and financially. There is no sign of recovery for the time being. Tension between China and the United States sometimes also flares up due to U.S. criticism and accusations against China. As a matter of fact, China-U.S. relations have not stopped fluctuating in the past few decades. Robust economic and financial cooperation marked periods of triumph, coupled with lagging political and security understanding and trust. The latter has become a weak link in China-U.S. relations and has been quite pronounced in recent years.

While China and Russia are closest to each other on the unequally-sided triangle's metaphorical points, the United States would therefore be the most incongruent and furthest from the two.

The U.S. and its allies could easily cite the closer ties between China and Russia as evidence of an alliance which is interpreted as a force to disrupt or challenge the U.S.-led world order.

It must be pointed out that the tripartite relationship is no longer and should no longer be a game where two players ally against the third. The idea of containing China by roping in Russia or the concept of China and the U.S. jointly running the world have both failed to be implemented as they are divorced from the reality of international politics. In the 21st century, cooperation and development should become a universal theme of international relations. China has always adhered to an independent foreign policy of peace. It doesn't like taking sides, nor does it approve of exclusive bloc politics, which is intended to contain certain countries by forming an alliance. The sound development of China-Russia relations is not aimed at the United States, nor will it be affected by the U.S., and vice versa. China's cooperation with the U.S. would not be affected by the Russia factor either, since the issues between China and the U.S. can only be addressed by the two countries themselves. China stands for respecting the political and policy choices of other countries. We should be focused on our own affairs instead of meddling with affairs of other countries. China will neither pursue the foreign policy objective of forming an alliance based on bloc politics nor will it be recruited as an ally by other countries.

The current world order is the cornerstone for maintaining stability around the world. But it is not perfect. Dr. Kissinger said in his latest book, *World Order*, "The order established and proclaimed by the West stands at a turning point." [35] Therefore, reforming and improving the current world order is a trend of the times, which calls for concerted efforts from the international community. In 2005, which marked the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and the founding of the UN, China and Russia issued a *Joint Statement on a New World Order in the 21st Century*, which can be summarized into three major points. First, the current world order should move towards a more just and reasonable direction, but the process will be complicated and prolonged as all sides need to pitch in to find common ground. Second, the 21st century order must be based on commonly acknowledged principles and norms of international law. Countries should cooperate with respect and the spirit of inclusiveness while resolving conflicts through equal consultation and dialogue. Third, the evolution of China-Russia relations can offer experience for the improvement of international order. China and Russia are committed to building and developing a harmonious world together with the rest of the international community. [36] Ten years from now, both China and Russia have held and will hold more activities to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War, the purpose of which is to express their strong opposition to any act of denying, distorting or fabricating the history of World War II. They both urge the international community to remember history and create a better future for the purpose of upholding the WWII victory and international justice while preventing human society from being trapped into the same historical cycle of war and hegemony.

On U.S. alliances in the Asia-Pacific

Concerning U.S. military alliances in the Asia Pacific region, China's stance used to be one of acknowledgment, though not of explicit approval. China publicly stated that

these alliances were the "vestiges of the Cold War" and hoped they could play "a constructive role for regional security." However, as part of the "pivot to Asia", the United States has frequently conducted exclusive military exercises in the Asia Pacific. It readjusted its military deployments and increased its military activities in the region. The most incomprehensible behavior is that the U.S. has increased the proximity reconnaissance on China to over a thousand times per year. Such moves, as well as its deepened security ties with its regional allies like Japan, South Korea and Australia—some of which see China as an adversary—have posed strategic security pressures on China. These factors have made Chinese reevaluate and question the goal of the U.S. military alliances in the Asia Pacific. Some scholars even held that if the United States insists on imposing bloc politics on the world, China and Russia should consider adopting Plan B, meaning that they should face up to the U.S. threat by forming some sort of alliance. But this thinking is not approved by most including decision-makers in China. Some of the U.S.'s Asian allies, to exert their claims to China's sovereign territory and maritime rights, spared no effort to challenge China and kowtow to the United States for the purpose of involving the U.S.-led military alliances into further territorial disputes with China. This is a dangerous path, which also snares the U.S. in a paradox. On the one hand, the United States insists on putting its alliances at the core position in the handling of Asia-Pacific affairs, which means in effect that the US put the security concerns and interests of its allies above those of other countries. But on the other hand, the United States expects countries outside of its alliances, including those that are viewed as rivals by its allies, to respect and accept U.S. leadership and cooperate with the U.S. in many important security affairs. Such a mentality only brings theoretical inconsistency and structural instability for the regional security order, which further demonstrates that the old alliance system and group politics are out of step with the increasingly globalized world.

More than six decades ago, neither leaders of the U.S. nor leaders of Russia wanted a Cold War, but it happened nonetheless. There is a lot of analysis as to why that had happened. The opinion of Melvyn P. Leffler in his book *For the Soul of Mankind* is worth noting. He wrote that the Cold War came because conditions in the international system created risks that the U.S. and Soviet Union could not accept. But the beliefs and experiences of top leaders of the two countries magnified their perception of threat. [37] Apparently, they had different perceptions on the world peace and order, firmly believed the other party was a threat, and had a distorted understanding of facts and principles through the prism of their respective alliances. The Cold War left profound lessons for mankind. The world should be wary against reopening Pandora's box to avoid going back to the politics of fear, containment and conflicts between powers. Empowered by globalization for more than 20 years after the Cold War, a multipolar world and the diffusion of world power have become the new normal, which means that international affairs cannot be monopolized by a single country. What today's generation faces are not just conventional security threats, but ones that have the capability to be globalized, transnational, trans-regional and cross-domain. To combat these new threats, communities around the world need to

coordinate the efforts of the entire global village. Today, in the second decade of the 21st century, this has already become the consensus among most countries in the world.

President Xi wrote in the Russian newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in May 2015 that "Today, mankind is better equipped than ever to stride forward for peace and development and should devote themselves to building new-type country-to-country relations with cooperation and win-win outcome at its core." Indeed, there is no reason for us not to grasp those opportunities. China does not pursue policies of bloc or alliance politics, nor do we have such a political culture in action. China and Russia should stick to the principle of strategic partnership rather than alliance. That is the right path for a harmonious relationship. As for China and the United States, both should follow the direction of building a new model of major-country relations and allow dialogue, cooperation and management of differences and conflicts to prevail. Both should inject more positive energies into bilateral relationship for the sake of peace and prosperity.

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