

# How the United States Can Exploit the Sino-Russian Relationship to Gain a Strategic Advantage In the Mid-Twentieth-First Century

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

How the United States Can Exploit the Sino-Russian Relationship to Gain a Strategic Advantage in the Mid-Twentieth-First Century, by LtCol Wade C. Reaves, 47 pages.

Many in academia and the military view the existing Sino-Russian partnership as a threat to the United States' global hegemony but provide few courses of actions that the United States can take to weaken the Sino-Russian bond. With an appreciation of the political and military events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the United States can exploit policy differences between China and Russia which may allow the United States to gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century. Encouraging cooperation between India and Russia, in addition to highlighting long-term border disputes between China and Russia, combined with favorable policies toward China by the United States in the Arctic can further divide the Sino-Russian dentate. Using international organizations, allies in Asia, and information operations, the United States can create distance between China and Russia while providing an opportunity for the United States to compete with China and Russia independently vice as co-belligerents.

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## Abbreviations

AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
ADMM	ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## Introduction

The rise of China as a new power is another great challenge for the US. Our failure to properly handle Germany and Japan earlier in the 20th century cost us and the world dearly. We must not make this same mistake with China.

—Steve Forbes

The Russians are turning east to the Chinese - to the Europeans' surprise. It always seemed to me that the relationship between Russia and China would shift from being based in Marx and Lenin to being based in oil and gas.

—Daniel Yergin

In 1949, Mao Zedong publicly proclaimed that the Communist Chinese would “henceforth lean to one side..... the Soviet side.” Mao’s statement was understandable during the nascent stages of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) control of China due to China’s desire to benefit from Soviet protection and a shared Marxist foundation in government. Time has since tested the Chinese and Russian relationship through the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s, the United States increasing diplomacy and economic ties with China through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and the crumbling of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the early stages of the twenty-first century, a renewed Sino-Russian relationship has emerged potentially stronger than previous kinships. Fortunately for the United States, the modern Sino-Russian bond has possible fracture points regarding the Sino-Russian border, China and Russia’s relationship with India, and China’s proclaimed right as a major actor and influencer in Arctic affairs. With an understanding of the weaknesses within the Sino-Russian relationship, the United States can exploit these areas of contention over the next decade to gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century.

This monograph will initially provide the reader with a literature review that considers significant writings on the Sino-Russian-United States relationship in the twentieth and twenty-first century with an emphasis on military and economic matters that link the three countries. Next, a historical review will clarify how the relationship between the three major powers has

evolved and explains the events leading to the current Sino-Russian alliance. Finally, the monograph offers three recommendations regarding possible actions the United States can enact over the next decade to gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century.

## Methodology

Research on the Sino-Russian-United States relationship is aided by many works due to the significance of the topic in global affairs. Initial inquiry focused on factors that created the current Chinese and Russian relationship, followed by an investigation of historical events to determine how China and Russia view themselves in relation to each other, and the United States. Emphasis on potential pitfalls in the current Sino-Russian strategic partnership regarding energy, trade, lingering territorial disputes, and Russia's resolve to regain a position of power on the global stage directed follow on research. After an examination of these differences, three areas of strategic importance that the United States, China, and Russia share, and manipulatable, were identified. First, the Sino-Indian relationship is fragile with Russia playing a substantial role in future actions regarding how the two countries with the largest populations interact.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the Sino-Russian border, although currently not militarized, is ripe with historical tensions and potentially susceptible to an information campaign by the United States aimed at increasing rhetoric in China regarding ancient border claims.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the Arctic presents a unique opportunity for the United States to back limited Chinese claims in the region to block Russian dominance above the Arctic Circle.

## Variables

Topics chosen for policy recommendations were based on the potential to have a lasting impact on the Sino-Russian-United States relationship. The focus of this monograph is how the

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<sup>1</sup> David Shambough, *China and the World* (Oxford, England: Oxford Press, 2020), 283-285.

<sup>2</sup> John Herbst, "The Coming Russian-Chinese Clash," *The National Interest*, August 21, 2020, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/coming-russian-chinese-clash-167394>.

United States can gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century. The timeframe with which the monograph attempts to influence, between the years 2040 and 2060, transcends current leaders in the United States, China, and Russia. The variables chosen (Sino-Indian relations, the Sino-Russian border, and the Arctic) have a historical foundation, but more importantly, will persist through the twenty-first century.

## Definitions

The definition for *strategic* throughout derives from the Department of Defense's Joint Publication 3-0. Defined in the publication and this monograph as:

The level of war at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational (alliance or coalition) strategic security objectives and guidance, and develops and uses national resources to achieve these objectives. Activities at this level establish national and multinational military objectives; sequence initiatives; define limits and assess risks for the use of military and other instruments of national power; develop global plans or theater war plans to achieve those objectives; and provide military forces and other capabilities in accordance with strategic plans. See also operational level of war; tactical level of war.<sup>3</sup>

The Department of Defense's definition is critical as it encompasses both the whole-of-government approach of the United States and its actions within international organizations. Additionally, the terms "Sino-Soviet" and "Sino-Russian" occur throughout the monograph and each refer to a specific period of time. The period between the Russian Revolution of 1917 through the downfall of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991 is referenced as "Sino-Soviet." Subsequently, "Sino-Russian" denotes the relationship between the two countries prior to 1917 and the assumption of communist control in Russia, and also the relationship between the two after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Finally, the Hanyu Pinyin system for spelling Chinese words in the Latin Alphabet is used throughout this monograph.

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), GL-15.

## Literature Review

The following literature review presents works regarding Sino-Russian-United States relations to understand major schools of thought and the impact to each country's relationship during significant historical moments in the twentieth and twentieth-first century. Once the Chinese, Russian, and the United States' national interests over time are explored, an explanation is provided to justify this study and the potential actions the United States can take to gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century.

Following World War I, and during World War II, the connection between the three nations is defined by the United States' emerging role in international relations. The United States viewed the Soviet Union as an essential ally against Nazi Germany. China, already at war with Japan and suffering from internal conflict, was used by the United States as a counter to expanding Japanese interest. The United States' pragmatic view of both countries is captured in Christopher D. O'Sullivan's biography of Harry Hopkins titled *Harry Hopkins: FDR's Envoy to Churchill and Stalin*. O'Sullivan explained how the Roosevelt Administration accurately forecasted an eventual conflict with Germany and Japan and implemented a deliberate strategy to exploit both Russia and China to gain a strategic advantage during World War II.

Writings and opinions during the 1930s and 1940s also portrayed a view of China as a backward nation torn apart by the struggle between the Guomin Dang, led by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai Shek), and an emerging Communist party, led by Mao Zedong. Despite China's previous regional dominance in past centuries, ethnic stereotypes and a pessimistic opinion of China's future overshadowed writings regarding China's potential as a great power in the decades to come. John B. Powell's 1945 retelling of his experience in China entitled *My Twenty-Five Years in China*, captured the prejudice of the time as he provided a picture of a nation mired in

conflicting political thought and dated social systems with limited value except as a tool against future adversaries and a market to sell western exports.<sup>4</sup>

After the conclusion of World War II, the threat of the Soviet Union and stopping the spread of communism dominated the United States' view of international relations. Tensions in Europe and the dawn of the nuclear age led to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>5</sup> NATO was an attempt to counter an ambitious Soviet Union while rebuilding Western Europe after the second great war on that continent in thirty years. In 1949, Mao as the leader of the CCP, solidified control over China.<sup>6</sup> Despite the primary focus of the United States on Europe, rising concerns began to surface regarding a strengthened Sino-Soviet relationship that could hinder foreign policy objectives of the United States.

Despite China and the Soviet Union initially holding similar political beliefs, significant political tensions began to strain the Sino-Soviet relationship. O. Edmond Clubb chronicled the Sino-Russian relationship in his book entitled, *China and Russia; The Great Game*, published in 1971.<sup>7</sup> Inspired by President Richard M. Nixon's attempt to engage China, Clubb details the history of both China and Russia with specific interest placed on why the Sino-Soviet relationship initially flourished but eventually led to a "Sino-Soviet Cold-War" by 1965. Followed in 1978, *The Duel of the Giants*, by Drew Middleton expands on Clubb's analysis with an exploration of how the Administration of President Richard M. Nixon attempted a detente with both China and the Soviet Union and the hurdles associated with each endeavor.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John B. Powell, *My Twenty-Five Years in China* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945).

<sup>5</sup> "What Is NATO," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.nato.int/>.

<sup>6</sup> Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> O. Edmund Clubb, *China & Russia, the Great Game* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> Drew Middleton, *The Duel of the Giants: China And Russia In Asia* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978).

The 1980s brought about significant changes in the Sino-Russian-United States relationship starting with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In China, Chairman of the Central Advisory Commission, Deng Xiaoping, began to introduce wide spread modernization projects. As the People's Republic of China changed mistaken policies enacted by Mao Zedong, China began to enjoy improved economic and political position on the world stage. As Russia searched to regain global influence, it began to compete with China for capital and diplomatic attention from the United States and Europe. Jennifer Anderson, a long-time member of the British Diplomatic Service and Commonwealth Office in London, captured the nuances of the evolving Sino-Russian-United States relationship in her work, *The Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership*, published in 1998. Anderson accurately forecasted the new Sino-Russian relationship would be one of convenience and China would keep the former communist ally at arm's length.<sup>9</sup>

A view shared by many providing commentary during the 1990s, including Anderson, still placed China as the junior partner in the Sino-Russian relationship. Except for Russian weapon sales to China, the new Sino-Russian affiliation was not seen as a threat to the West and one the Russians would exploit. *The Bear Watches the Dragon*, by Alexander Lukin, summarized the obvious Russia-centric mindset held by Russia and the United States' view that Russia was the dominate member of the Sino-Russian relationship as both sought to exploit China to gain an advantage on the other.<sup>10</sup>

A reckoning occurred in the 2000s, highlighted by China's mitigation of the 2008 financial crisis, as the United States, and others in the West, began to see China as a rising peer. *In The Party; The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, Richard McGregor highlighted the

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<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Anderson, *The Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the Eighteenth Century* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

shift in the Sino-Russian-United States relationship in his account of the CCP through 2010.

Detailing the CCP well beyond his predecessors in depth and nuance, McGregor provided a look into how China transformed in the twentieth century and echoed his contemporaries in a call to respect China's position in global affairs in the twenty-first century.<sup>11</sup>

In response to a faltering Russia, China's continued economic success, and the United States' desire to shift from the Global War on Terrorism, the Administration of President Barack H. Obama announced the United States would militarily pivot to the Pacific in 2011.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, recent leadership changes in China, Russia, and the United States have intensified this new era of competition among the three nations resulting in an uncharted multi-polar world. Understandably, there are numerous articles and books on the emerging Sino-Russian-United States relationship of the early and mid-twenty-first century. Jacob Stokes and Julianne Smith's article in *The Washington Quarterly*, published in 2020, *Facing Down the Sino-Russian Entente* provides an accurate treatment on recent events between the three nations. Stokes and Smith propose the United States more effectively navigate international organizations and entice other Asian nations on specific issues rather than ideology in an attempt to stabilize the trilateral relationship.<sup>13</sup>

The literature presents a Sino-Russian-United States connection that is anchored in history but recently shaped by shifting power dynamics. Trade agreements, military strength, border disputes, and changes in demographics will continue to alter this complex and interwoven relationship. This monograph will contribute to the existing body of work by examining the

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<sup>11</sup> Richard McGregor, *The Party: the Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's Rebalancing Toward Asia*, Mark E. Manyin, Stephen Daggett, Ben Dolven, Susan V. Lawrence, Michael F. Martin, Ronal O'Rourke, and Bruce Vaughn, March 28, 2012, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Stokes, and Julianne Smith, "Facing Down the Sino-Russian Entente." *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 137-156, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1771048>.

current differences in Chinese and Russian national interest and how those divergences can be exploited by the United States to gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century.

## Historical Review

In keeping with his world view of power dynamics throughout history, former United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, described the relationship between the United States, China, and Russia as a constantly shifting triangle. The values of each side of the triangle, representing the relationships between the countries, are based on temporal domestic and international politics rather than decades-long grievances and alliances between the three nations.<sup>14</sup> This historical review will begin in the early 1900s, move through World War I with the introduction of communism in Russia, followed by World War II and the CCP's control of China after a protracted and segmented civil war. The Cold War period will be explored through the lens of the Sino-Russian-United States triangular relationship with mention of internal struggles within China and Russia. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union opened a new era in relations between the three nations and the rise of China on the international stage. The exploration of Sino-Russian-United States relations between 1900 and 2020 grounds further debate on the future of the triangular relationship on a historical footing and sets the dialogue regarding strategic actions by the United States to gain an advantage moving forward in the twenty-first century.

The early decades of the 1900s witnessed both China and Russia revolting against centuries old dynasties and monarchs. In 1912, the Qing dynasty collapsed after years of internal strife in China.<sup>15</sup> Russia's civil war began during World War I. Both civil wars devastated the economies of Russia and China, each suffering massive loss of life. In Russia, the civil war

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 113-147.

<sup>15</sup> Shambough, *China and the World*, 26.

resulted in Tsar Nicholas II being executed and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922.<sup>16</sup> In 1929, Joseph Stalin became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1929 and led the Soviet Union through the initial decades of the Cold War. Although the Guomin Dang, led by General Jiang Jieshi, was recognized by the world as the ruling party within China, the CCP was formed in 1921 and opposed the Guomin Dang between 1927 until 1937 when a truce was agreed upon to join forces against an invading Japanese force during the early stages of World War II.<sup>17</sup>

Despite Chinese and Russian civil wars, both nations provided limited support to factions within the others' conflict. The Guomin Dang of China supported the anti-Lenin forces in Manchuria and after World War II the Soviet Union gave material and military support to the CCP until the Japanese invasion of China in 1937.<sup>18</sup> Joint Chinese and Russian control of the Manchurian Chinese Eastern Railway led to a brief military clash between China and Russia in 1929 followed by tension in the 1930s along China's western border province of Xinjiang.<sup>19</sup> The United States played a minor role in both nations' internal affairs during these periods of civil unrest but later intensified military support and diplomatic relations leading into World War II highlighted by the recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933 to 1945) predicted the coming world war, and the need for allies. Despite the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union,<sup>20</sup> the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941, spurring the United States to extend material support to include food and oil, commonly referred to as the Lend-Lease

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<sup>16</sup> John L. H. Keep, "Nicholas II: Tsar of Russia," Britannica, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-II-tsar-of-Russia/Abdication-and-death>.

<sup>17</sup> Drew Middleton, *The Duel of the Giants: China and Russia In Asia* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Edmund O. Clubb, *China and Russia: The Great Game* (Columbia University: Columbia University Press, 1971), 254-265.

<sup>20</sup> "German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/German-Soviet-Nonaggression-Pact>.

program, to the Soviets. The Roosevelt Administration understood that supporting the Soviet Union against Germany in the early stages of the war would shorten the length of hostilities and save American lives in the eventual fight for Europe. Additionally, at the Yalta Conference in February, 1945, President Roosevelt secured Soviet support against the Japanese once Germany was defeated by the Allies.<sup>21</sup>

Although the United States provided more support to the Soviet Union, inroads were made with Chinese leader General Jiang Jieshi resulting in the United States providing the majority of military assistance to the Guomin Dang's fight against invading Japanese forces.<sup>22</sup> Like the Soviet Union in Europe, President Roosevelt understood that Japanese men and material expended in China would decrease Japan's combat effectiveness against the United States in the Pacific.<sup>23</sup> Although the Soviet and Chinese forces provided the bulk of the forces fighting the Germans and Japanese, the United States was the dominant actor in the triangular relationship during World War II due to a robust military industrial complex and ability to influence actions worldwide.

Challenges to the United States' hegemony followed the defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945. Concerned with protecting the western border of the Soviet Union, Stalin moved to secure territory in Europe, leading to the opening stages of the Cold War. China returned to internal fighting between the Guomin Dang and CCP resulting in the Guomin Dang's retreat to Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China on mainland China. The Soviet Union provided support to Mao during the last phase of the Chinese civil war and the United States continued to recognize General Jiang Jieshi as the legitimate ruler of China despite the Guomin

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher D. Sullivan, *Harry Hopkins: FDR's Envoy to Churchill and Stalin* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "When the United States and China Were Allies," *The Diplomat*, August 21, 2015, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/when-the-us-and-china-were-allies/>.

<sup>23</sup> Sullivan, *Harry Hopkins: FDR's Envoy to Churchill and Stalin*.

Dang losses.<sup>24</sup> China and the Soviet Union created the Peking-Moscow alliance on February 14, 1950 solidifying the Sino-Soviet relationship through the 1950s.

The first significant test of the relations between the United States, China, and the Soviet Union came in 1950 with the invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces. The United States responded with military force, in conjunction with the United Nations, that engaged with Chinese forces joining the North Korean effort in late 1950.<sup>25</sup> The United States, appreciating the potential for another global conflict or use of nuclear weapons, did not deploy forces into China and eventually signed the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953. The conflict in Korea demonstrated the capacity for limited cooperation between the Soviet Union and China in the 1950s that included Soviet support to China through military sales, technical expert exchanges, economic aid, and joint support to the North Korean government.<sup>26</sup>

Sino-Soviet relations strained in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Following the death of Stalin in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev, followed by Leonid Brezhnev, led a new era of Soviet economic reforms that damaged the rapport with Mao's CCP. Mao accused both Soviet leaders of not adhering to the core Marxist-Leninist ideals and degrading into socialist imperialism.<sup>27</sup> The Soviets were critical of China's "Great Leap Forward" economic policy leading to the death of 35 million Chinese and closing China to the world.<sup>28</sup> The Sino-Soviet split was evident to the West by the early 1960s with the removal of Soviet support to China and an increased anti-Soviet propaganda and rhetoric by the CCP. The Sino-Soviet tensions increased in 1969 over border disputes in Manchuria. Additionally, ideological disagreements between China and the Soviet

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<sup>24</sup> Sullivan, *Harry Hopkins: FDR's Envoy to Churchill and Stalin*.

<sup>25</sup> Kissinger, *On China*, 122-129.

<sup>26</sup> David A. Graff and Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005), 274.

<sup>27</sup> Middleton, *The Duel of the Giants: China and Russia In Asia*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Union created a competition within the communist movement worldwide.<sup>29</sup> Finally, both the Soviet Union and China supported North Vietnam during the United States intervention to assist the South Vietnam government in the 1960s but the cooperation was disjointed and not akin to the level seen during the Korean conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Recognizing an opportunity and the need for a partner against the Soviet Union, and the potential to influence North Vietnam's primary base of support, President Richard M. Nixon of the United States worked to open relations with China. Henry Kissinger led the diplomatic effort with two visits in 1971 followed by Nixon in 1972. Despite the United States still recognizing the Republic of China, which controlled only Taiwan and other minor islands, Nixon remarked "There is no reason to leave China angry and isolated" and his diplomacy resulted in the "Shanghai Communique" of 1972 between the United States and China. The Shanghai Communique led to the creation of liaison offices in both China and the United States opening the door for military sales, economic growth, and tipping the balance of the triangle toward China and the United States aligned against the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup>

Deng Xiaoping succeeded Mao after his death in 1975. Deng Xiaoping continued to open China to the world and increased cooperation with the United States regarding science, technology, and trade. The Joint Communique on the "Establishment of Diplomatic Relations" in 1979, and Deng's visit to the United States that same year, highlighted the strengthened relationship and included diplomatic recognition of Beijing, not Taipei, as the capital of China.<sup>32</sup> The Sino-United States relationship continued into the 1980s with President Ronald Reagan and Premier Zhao Ziyang sharing reciprocal visits in 1984.<sup>33</sup> Although the Soviet Union enjoyed

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<sup>29</sup> Middleton, *The Duel of the Giants: China and Russia In Asia*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 164-170.

<sup>31</sup> Kissinger, *On China*, 267-274.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-367.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

domestic political stability in the 1970s, the Russian economy stagnated and militarily involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s created additional friction between the three nations.

The power dynamics within the Sino-Russian-United States triangle shifted again in the late 1980s when General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, brought economic and political reforms to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev also increased talks with China in an attempt to ease tension along the Sino-Soviet border.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, the United States, and the West had a visceral reaction to China's brutal suppression of protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Based on human rights violations and China's anti-democratic stance highlighted by Tiananmen Square protests, the United States imposed sanctions against China.<sup>35</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 dominated the last decade of the twentieth century. Following Gorbachev's attempts to reform the country in the late 1980s, coupled with economic and military failures and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin was elected President of the Russia Federation and oversaw a disastrous transition to a free market economy.<sup>36</sup> Both the United States and China reached out to the newly independent Russian Federation to influence the political and economic future of Russia.

Improved Sino-Russian relations in the 1990s followed the signing of the Constructive Partnership in 1992 and a formal declaration of a strategic partnership in 1996. These diplomatic agreements culminated in the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation* signed by Russia and China in 2001.<sup>37</sup> With Sino-Russian border demarcated, China and Russia increased economic

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<sup>34</sup> Stokes and Smith, "Facing Down the Sino-Russian Entente," 138.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *In Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 563.

<sup>36</sup> Theodore P. Gerber and Michael Hout, "More Shock Than Therapy: Market Transition, Employment, and Income In Russia, 1991–1995," *American Journal of Sociology* 104, no. 1 (Summer 1988): 1-10, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1086/210001>.

<sup>37</sup> Stokes and Smith, "Facing Down the Sino-Russian Entente," 138.

closeness based on China's growing need for natural resources and desire for Russian military sales. Vladimir Putin became President of the Russian Federation in 1999 and continued the Sino-Russian relationship with initiatives to build a joint nuclear power station in the Jiangsu Province<sup>38</sup> and Russia's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Council.<sup>39</sup> In addition to military sales, Russia and China conducted joint military exercise in 2005, setting the foundation for future joint military events through the first two decades of the twenty-first century.<sup>40</sup>

The United States continued to pressure China regarding its treatment of Taiwan, culminating with a show of force in the Taiwan Strait by the Administration of President William J. Clinton. The naval show of force followed the United States bombing of the China Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1999. Despite the United States' insistence that it was an accident, the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade further increased tensions between the nations.<sup>41</sup> Despite diplomatic and military flashpoints, the United States and China increased economic ties between the United States and China, expanding trade for both nations. Additionally, the United States, China, and Russia were able to find common ground on antiterrorist activities following terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001.<sup>42</sup> The triangular relationship following the Cold War positioned the United States as a global leader with an economically rising China and Russia attempting to regain an international power position.

Barrack Obama, President of the United States between 2009-2017, attempted to strengthen relations with China and Russia while appreciating China's growing economic

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<sup>38</sup> "Taiwan Nuclear Power Plant," NS Energy, accessed January 5, 2020, <https://www.nsenerybusiness.com/projects/tianwan-nuclear-power-plant/>.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution* (New York: Oxford Press, 2019), 214.

<sup>40</sup> Vasily Kashin and Alexander Lukin, "Russian-Chinese Security Cooperation In Asia," *Asian Politics & Policy* 10, no. 4 (2018): 614-632, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12423>.

<sup>41</sup> Congressional Research Service, *U.S. – China Relations*, Susan V. Lawrence, Caitlin Campbell, Rachel F. Fefer, Jane A. Leggett, Thomas Lum and Michael F. Martin, R45898 (2019): 10, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence, et al, *U.S. – China Relations*, 9.

prominence and Russia's military capabilities. Despite President Obama's 2009 promising visit to Moscow, the Russian military annexed Crimea during the Ukrainian Civil War in 2014. Tensions further escalated between the United States and Russia following the 2015 deployment of Russian forces to Syria in contradiction to the United States' efforts to remove the Asad regime. China continued to strain the Sino-United States relationship by increasing historical claims in the South China Sea and by joining Russia in critical United Nation votes against the United States regarding international security matters. The United States, although engaged in multiple conflicts in the Middle East, publicly proclaimed a pivot to the Pacific to increase its influence in the region and enacted harsh sanctions against Russia for Russian military actions in Crimea.<sup>43</sup>

Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2016 and transitioned from a policy of cooperation to competition with China. In a series of national security documents starting in 2017, the United States began identifying China, and specifically the CCP, as the primary threat to the United States in the twenty-first century. Although meetings occurred between President Trump and China's leader Xi Jinping that resulted in joint actions against North Korea, multiple areas of friction still existed between the United States and China.<sup>44</sup> Tension between the United States and China between 2015 and 2020 increased regarding Taiwan, Hong Kong, China's claim to islands in the South China Sea, treatment of Uyghur minorities, and ongoing trade inequities. The Trump Administration attempted to offset trade imbalances with tariffs and bans on Chinese products in 2018 resulting in a trade war between the two nations lasting until 2020.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the United States approved arms sales to Taiwan

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<sup>43</sup> Kenneth G. Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," *Brookings*, December 21, 2011, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>.

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence, et al, *U.S. – China Relations*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ryan Hass and Abraham Denmark, "More Pain Than Gain: How the United States-China Trade War Hurt America," *Brookings*, August 7, 2020, accessed January 23, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/07/more-pain-than-gain-how-the-us-china-trade-war-hurt-america/>.

and India followed by the *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act* in 2020.<sup>46</sup> Current tensions increased during the COVID-19 pandemic which strained both nations internally and resulted in mutual accusations and increasing mistrust.

Since 2016, China and Russia continued to strengthen economic and military ties with construction of oil and gas pipelines and further joint military exercises.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, with a decreased possibility of military engagements along the Sino-Russian border, Russia concentrated forces to counter NATO expansion in the West and China focused on the South China Sea and potential adversaries in the East.<sup>48</sup> The strategic triangle is currently weighted toward a strong Sino-Soviet relationship where both nations desire regional dominance with global influence, leaving the United States to counter both in an attempt to maintain a leading position in international affairs.

### India: Russia's Alternative to China

Recently, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was quoted saying “I want to assure the Nation that the sacrifice made by our soldiers will not go in vain. India’s integrity and sovereignty are supreme for us, and no one can stop us from defending it.”<sup>49</sup> Although directed toward the current Chinese leadership, Modi’s comment encapsulates China and India have historically quarreled over the shared border, competition for influence in Asia, China’s

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<sup>46</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, Public Law 116-145, (2020) (Sect 134, 2), accessed January 18, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ145/PLAW-116publ145.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Yu Bin, “China-Russia Relations: Russia’s Pride and China’s Power,” *Comparative Connection* 16, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 1-5, accessed January 3, 2021, <http://cc.pacforum.org/2015/01/russias-pride-chinas-power/>.

<sup>48</sup> Pavel K. Baev, “The Limits of Authoritarian Compatibility: Xi’s China and Putin’s Russia,” *Brookings*, June 7, 2020, accessed January 23, 2021, [https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2020/06/FP\\_20200615\\_the\\_limits\\_of\\_authoritarian\\_compatibility\\_xis\\_china\\_and\\_putins\\_russia.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2020/06/FP_20200615_the_limits_of_authoritarian_compatibility_xis_china_and_putins_russia.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> Abhinav Sahay, “Nobody Should Have An Iota of Doubt: PM Narendra Modi’s Message to China In Five Quotes,” *Hindustan Times*, June 17, 2020, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nobody-should-have-any-iota-of-doubt-pm-narendra-modi-s-message-to-china-in-five-quotes/story-SSo9ih05CjIqZEvYiLuJKP.html>.

relationship with Pakistan, the Dalai Lama and the Tibet region. Despite India's attempts to remain neutral during the Cold War, India frequently turned to Russia for military aid and the United States for economic opportunities.<sup>50</sup> To gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century, the United States should encourage the positive Indo-Russian relationship in an attempt to weaken the Sino-Russian bond and strengthen the strategic relationship between India, Russia, and the United States. Although the United States will have to backtrack on previous policies aimed at drawing India from Russia, if the United States advocates for arms and natural resources sales from Russia to India in addition to working with India and Russia to counter China within existing international organizations, the Sino-Russian relationship can fracture.

Despite India's status as the first non-communist country to recognize the CCP as the legitimate government of China in 1950<sup>51</sup> and China's current position as India's largest trading partner,<sup>52</sup> multiple divisive issues exist that strain the Sino-India relationship. First, China's support to Pakistan during the India-Pakistan War of 1971 provided a lasting grievance against China that India still harbors. China's support to Pakistan did not cease after the 1971 conflict and continued through clashes between India and Pakistan in the Kashmir region and other military and political matters.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, Chinese soldiers advanced across the line of control, the internationally recognized border between China and India, in 1962 sparking tension in the region that have lasted for decades and resulting in armed conflict in 1967, 1987, 2017, and 2020.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Shambough, *China and the World*, 283.

<sup>51</sup> H.E. Sun Weidong, "70 Years of Diplomatic Relations Between China and India:1950-2020," *The Hindu*, March 31, 2020, accessed December 20, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/brandhub/70-years-of-diplomatic-relations-between-china-and-india-1950-2020/article31219737.ece>.

<sup>52</sup> Sumant Banerji, "What An Irony! Mainland China Beats US to be India's Biggest Trade Partner In H1FY21," *Business Today*, December 4, 2020, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/no-cheeni-kum-china-overtakes-us-to-become-india-biggest-trade-partner-in-fy21/story/423954.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Shambough, *China and the World*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> Iftikhar Gilani, "Timeline – Clashes, Standoffs Between the Indian and Chinese Armies," *Anadolu Agency*, July 16th, 2020, accessed February 5, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/timeline-clashes-standoffs-between-chinese-and-indian-armies/1879115>.

Additionally, the Sino-India border conflict is magnified by India's recognition of the Dalai Lama as the leader of the Tibetan people.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, China has attempted to block India's growth as a regional and international power on several occasions. Most notably, China blocked the United Nations' consideration to add India to the United Nations Security Council despite the concurrence of the United States and Russia.<sup>56</sup> China's growing economic influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, in addition to creating a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, highlights China's intention to dominate the Asian market, further limiting India's potential growth. The economic, military, and relational differences between China and India has, and will continue to be, a stimulus for India to foster international relationships outside of the Chinese sphere.

Russia has benefited from India's desire for superpower alliance in the past. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the USSR was India's primary external supporter and supplier of arms highlighted by Soviet support for India in the 1971 war against Pakistan.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, in 1971, the *Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation* was signed between the Soviet Union and India and the creation of the India-Russian Intergovernmental Commission was established to handle military and economic matters between the countries.<sup>58</sup> The success of the India Russian Intergovernmental Commission should be encouraged by the United States with the fostering of additional joint construction projects similar to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.<sup>59</sup> The

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<sup>55</sup> Shambough, *China and the World*, 255.

<sup>56</sup> Shambough, *China and the World*, 334.

<sup>57</sup> Sanskar Shrivastava, "1971 India Pakistan War: Role of Russia, China, America and Britain," *The World Reporter*, October 30, 2011, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.theworldreporter.com/2011/10/1971-india-pakistan-war-role-of-russia.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Nivedita Kapoor, "India-Russia Ties In a Changing World Order: In Pursuit of a Special Strategic Partnership," Observer Research Foundation, October 22, 2019, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-russia-ties-in-a-changing-world-order-in-pursuit-of-a-special-strategic-partnership-56877/>.

<sup>59</sup> Rezaul H. Laskar, "Russia Continues Work On Kudankulam Nuclear Plant, Training Indian Pilots for Manned Spaceflight," *The Hindustan Times*, August 11, 2020, accessed January 24, 2021,

Indo-Russian relationship continues to prosper with meetings between India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, encouraged by Russia's support for India's permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

With an appreciation of past and current grievances between India and China, and China's weariness of a strong India-Russian relationship, the United States should look to increase ties between Russia and India. The area of military arms sales provides the first, and quickest venue for increased Indo-Russian cooperation. Already a highpoint in the Indo-Russian relationship, an increase in sales of Russian high end military arms may be viewed by China as an attempt by the Russians to prepare India for potential conflicts with Pakistan or along the Indo-China border. Additionally, by expanding the military sales market in India, Russia would not be as reliant on military sales to China. Finally, the sale of weapons and military related technology to India by Russia may drive China to move away from Russia regarding joint military exercises.

The United States can promote increased Russian military arms sales to India in the future by simply not opposing the transactions. In 2018, the United States imposed sanctions on India for purchasing of the S-400 Missile Defense Systems from Russia. The sanctions had minimal effect but the message sent by the United States to India was clear and has limited further large-scale military sales between Russia and India.<sup>60</sup> Despite the United States' concerns about growing Russian influence in the area, in regards to weakening the more important long-term Sino-Russian relationship, the United States should encourage military sales between the nations. Doing so will seed mistrust between China and Russia and provide Russia with an alternative to China for military arms sales.

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<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/russia-continues-work-on-kudankulam-nuclear-plant-training-indian-pilots-for-manned-spaceflight/story-6I457MHHSYKlwsUn6qpwwK.html>

<sup>60</sup> Sanjeev Miglani, "India's Friction With U.S. Rises Over Planned Purchase of Russian S-400 Defense Systems," *Reuters*, January 15, 2021, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-usa-missiles-exclusive/exclusive-indias-friction-with-u-s-rises-over-planned-purchase-of-russian-s-400-defence-systems-idUSKBN29K2DO>.

In addition to military arms sales, trade of raw materials, natural gas, and oil can be manipulated to diminish the Sino-Russian relationship. Although the Chinese have a strong network of physical infrastructure and trade agreements established by the BRI, Russia and India also have the advantage of the North-South Transport Corridor and a history of working together on economic matters.<sup>61</sup> The United States should work within the G20 and other international economic organizations to encourage Russian sales of raw material, natural gas, and oil to India. If successful, Russia will have increased access to an alternative market for these goods and, similar to military sales, Russia will decrease its economic dependence on China. Additionally, increased sales of natural resources to India, through Russian-India established economic agreements, could potentially detract from China's BRI expansion. A reduction in BRI growth will inevitably weaken China's control in Asia and set an example for other nations in Asia and Africa that the future of commerce does not have to traverse on BRI infrastructure.

Finally, the United States should identify policies where China and Russia differ regarding India. Using China's veto of India's permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council as an example, the United States should publicly speak out in support of India, in unison with Russia. Future opportunities may arise within the UN, Nuclear Suppliers Group, and the G20. Also, international organizations that do not include the United States, such as the ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting (ADMM), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the associations of five major emerging national economies referred to as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), can provide opportunities for areas where Russia, India, and United States could cooperate.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Nicola P. Contessi, "In the Shadow of the Belt and Road Eurasian Corridors on the North—South Axis," *Reconnecting Asia*, March 3, 2020, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://reconnectingasia.org/analysis/entries/shadow-belt-and-road/>.

<sup>62</sup> Aileen S. P. Baviera, "China's Strategic Foreign Initiatives Under Xi Jinping: An ASEAN Perspective," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 57-79, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/S2377740016500032>.

The United States has spent decades attempting to pull India away from Russian influence only to see the Indo-Russian relationship remain constant. Meanwhile, while maintaining its military and economic relationship with India, Russia has strengthened ties with China. Although it could be argued the current Indo-Russian relationship presents a challenge to the United States, a long-term and strong Sino-Russian relationship, based on anti-United States rhetoric, presents the strongest threat to the United States' world hegemony. Additionally, the United States has more to offer India economically and the benefits of maintaining the Indo-United States relationship for India outweighs pursuing an Indo-Russian partnership that excludes the United States.

In an attempt to weaken China's regional military and economic dominance and global influence in the mid-twenty-first century, the United States should foster an atmosphere conducive to an enhanced military and economic relationship between Russia and India. By doing so, China's economic leverage over Russia may decrease and China will see an Indo-Russian alliance that threatens its dominance in the region. China's potential frustration resulting from increased ties between India and Russia may persuade China to reduce cooperation with Russia on current and future international matters. Additionally, Russia and India desire equal footing with China and detest being seen as the weaker partner in the relationship. By encouraging the Russian-India military and economic relationship, the United States can provide Russia a pathway to the status it desires and reduce China's ability to dictate future military, economic, and political agreements between the nations. Strengthening the Indo-Russian relationship will require the United States to place the long-term objective of weakening the Sino-Russian relationship ahead of immediate concerns of Russian military influence.

## Border Issues

The Chinese obsession that the Chinese people were humiliated in previous centuries has led to hostilities between Russia and China in the past and is again showing signs of weaving

back into the Chinese narrative under Xi Jinping.<sup>63</sup> The United States should exploit potential border issues between China and Russia in an attempt to drive a wedge between the two nations. By doing so, China and Russia may be less likely to cooperate on other long-term military and economic matters, thereby, weakening the overall relationship.

In his 2018 address to the cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point, former Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, presented his view of China's order of strategic priorities under Xi Jinping's leadership. First, is the retention of control by the CCP. Preserving the CCP hold on the PRC is followed by the concept of unifying China by reacquiring land the Chinese government believes were illegitimately taken away from China during the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> The concept of reintegrating lost lands to India, Russia, and other border nations is a core priority in current Chinese domestic and foreign relations.

At the same time, Russia's lasting fear of the "Yellow Peril," which encompasses the notion of unchecked Chinese immigration into Russia's far eastern regions, drives an anti-Chinese narrative in Russia. In the words of Alexander Shaikin, former head of border control at Russia's Federal Border Guard Service "The Chinese are now invading Russia with suitcases."<sup>65</sup> Combined sentiments from Russia and China regarding disputed border areas provides proof of a significant source of friction between China and Russia and could result in degrading relations between the nations similar to the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s.

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<sup>63</sup> Neha Banka, "Explained: Why 160-Year-Old Vladivostok Has a Chinese Connection," *The Indian Express*, July 7, 2020, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-160-year-old-vladivostok-has-a-chinese-connection-6493278/>.

<sup>64</sup> Kevin Rudd, "Understanding China's Rise Under Xi Jinping, Address to Cadets at United States Military Academy, West Point" (lecture, United States Military Academy, New York, March 5, 2018), 2, accessed October 20, 2021, [https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/201901/Understanding%20China%27s%20Rise%20Under%20Xi%20Jinping\\_1.pdf](https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/201901/Understanding%20China%27s%20Rise%20Under%20Xi%20Jinping_1.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Nicklas Norling, "China and Russia: Partners With Tensions," *Pluto Journals* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 33-48, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42909161>.

Historically, border issues between Russia and China have been a recurring problem for centuries. Russian concerns of a southern invasion by the Mongols and China's fear of outsiders drove defensive actions by both nations through the middle ages. The expansion of Russia into Siberia in the seventeenth century led to multiple engagements with the Mongols and indigenous Siberians that required diplomatic agreements between Russia and China to solidify a peaceful border. The Chinese and Russian governments signed the *Treaty of Nerchinsk* in 1689<sup>66</sup> which established the border along the Argun and Shika River followed by the *Treaty of Kyakhta* in 1727, which formed the current Mongolia-Russia border.<sup>67</sup> China's modern claim to an unjust Sino-Russian border is anchored in the nineteenth and early twentieth century agreements, labeled by the Chinese, as the "Unequal Treaties." Specifically, the *Treaties of Tientsin and Aigun* in the 1850s, followed by the Convention of Peking in 1860, saw the Qing Dynasty, who ruled China from 1644 to 1912, relinquish control of territories that became the modern Russian province of Primorsky Krai, along with the Golden Horn Bay, and its capital and sea port, Vladivostok.<sup>68</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the Soviet Union recognized Mongolia as an independent nation despite China's attempt to retain its northern province<sup>69</sup> and hostilities ensued between Russia and China in the Manchurian region over control of the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1929. Intense fighting between the Soviet and Chinese forces in the region resulted in diminished diplomatic relations and ceased all railroad commerce between the Soviet Union and China in

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<sup>66</sup> Middleton, *The Duel of the Giants: China and Russia In Asia*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> US Department of State, "China-U.S.S.R. Boundary," *International Boundary Study*, no. 64, February 13, 1978, 4, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140817014321/http://www.law.fsu.edu/library/collection/LimitsinSeas/IBS064.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "Dangers Of Building Ultra Patriotism as Chinese Claim Vladivostok as Haishenwai," *Russia Briefing*, July 8, 2020, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/dangers-building-ultra-patriotism-chinese-claim-vladivostok-haishenwai.html/>.

<sup>69</sup> US Department of State, "China-U.S.S.R. Boundary," *International Boundary Study*, No. 64.

1929.<sup>70</sup> The Chinese Civil War, Japan's invasion of China in the 1930s, and Russia's initial engagements with Germany in the early stages of World War II placed many border disputes on hold as attention and resources were directed toward Japanese and German adversaries.

Following the Allied victory of World War II in 1945, and the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, relations improved between the Soviet Union and fellow communist nation China, now led by the CCP. The easing of border tensions would be brief as the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s culminated in the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969. Although never declared a war by either side, and lasting only seven months, both nations deployed over 500,000 troops to support operations on Damansky Island along the Ussuri River in Manchuria. Ending in a cease fire and return to the status quo, and despite increased trade along the border in the 1980s, the border dispute would linger until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the signing of *Treaty of Mutual Friendship* in 1992.<sup>71</sup>

The newly formed Russian Federation, led by President Boris Yeltsin, withdrew its troops from Mongolia and Russia's far east region in 1992 in an attempt to consolidate Russian forces in the west and demonstrate good faith to the Chinese government. The withdraw of Russian forces led to the signing of the *Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Economic Cooperation* in 2001 and the Complementary Agreement between China and Russia in 2004 in which Russia ceded 340 square kilometers in Manchuria and China dropped all additional territorial claims.<sup>72</sup> The Sino-Russian relationship of the early twenty-first century has attempted to place international military and economic matters ahead of border disputes to encourage better cooperation between the two nations on global issues. Cooperation between Russia and China allows China to focus efforts on the South China Sea and Russia to look west without the fear of

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<sup>70</sup> Lewis Siegelbaum, "Chinese Railway Incident: Seventeen Moments In Soviet History," Michigan State University, accessed January 20, 2020, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1929-2/chinese-railway-incident/>.

<sup>71</sup> Banka. "Explained: Why 160-Year-Old Vladivostok Has a Chinese Connection."

<sup>72</sup> Herbst, "The Coming Russian-Chinese Clash," 2.

military action along the shared border. Although the current Sino-Russian relationship may seem a success, recent statements by Chinese officials, journalist, and academics have started to put the longevity of the Complementary Agreement of 2004 into question.

Comments by Russian officials in July of 2020, celebrating the 160 year anniversary of Russia's founding of Vladivostok, spurred intense debates over social media and a negative response by the state-owned China Global Television Network.<sup>73</sup> The Chinese quick and intense response provides a modern example of the Chinese claim to rightful ownership of the area the Chinese refer to as Northern Manchuria. Vladivostok, once called Haishenwei, and controlled by the Chinese Qing dynasty, represents a symbolic location that embodies Chinese historical grievances and a Russian strategic priority as the home port of the Russian Pacific Fleet.<sup>74</sup>

The China-Russia western border also holds historical claims that remain unresolved in the Chinese narrative. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, China was forced to negotiate the current western border with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Russia.<sup>75</sup> Many within the Chinese government feel the current western border is not accurate, according to traditional Chinese claims, and are beginning to voice opinions within political and academic mediums calling for change.<sup>76</sup> Most notable, the Pamirs Mountain Range in Tajikistan was highlighted by Chinese historian Chol Yao Lu as contentious. Lu harkened back to pre-nineteenth century and the "Unequal Treaties" in an attempt to explain why the Pamirs Mountain Range is rightfully Chinese land. The acquisition of the Pamirs Mountain Range would advance Chinese nationalist rhetoric and increase China's ability to project power in central Asia.<sup>77</sup> Although Tajikistan

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<sup>73</sup> Banka, "Explained: Why 160-Year-Old Vladivostok Has a Chinese Connection," 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid."

<sup>75</sup> Herbst, "The Coming Russian-Chinese Clash," 1.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Goble, "Beijing Implies Tajikistan's Pamir Region Should Be Returned to China," *The Jamestown Foundation*, July 30, 2020, accessed January 17, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/beijing-implies-tajikistans-pamir-region-should-be-returned-to-china/>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2.

separated from the Soviet Union in the 1990s, it is likely that Russia would intervene to maintain the current Tajikistan-Chinese border.

The United States should instigate future debate and negative discord between Russia and China regarding the Sino-Russian border. First, the United States can levy information outlets through academia institutions, news media, and Department of Defense and Department of State releases. Creating space for, and furthering, the conversation within Chinese and Russian citizens regarding past perceived transgression would be the intent of a border messaging campaign. Although the United States Government has no direct ability to mandate academic research and publications within private and state sponsored universities, the Department of Defense does promote research projects and supports defense related journals within military academic environments. Through increased visibility within military journals, Chinese and American academics, think tanks, and Chinese and American news media outlets may feel compelled to contribute and expand the Sino-Russian border conversation.

Additionally, the United States Department of Defense and the Department of State routinely publish official documents intended for consumption by the American public with the knowledge that foreign governments are influenced by these texts. Of note, the Trump Administration's National Security Strategy in 2017,<sup>78</sup> followed by the Department of Defense's National Military Strategy in 2018,<sup>79</sup> included harsh language signaling to China and Russia a shift in opinion and intention toward both nations. Following National Security Strategies and National Military Strategies should include language regarding concern over raising Chinese and Russian border tension in both Vladivostok and China's northwest border. Similarly, the

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<sup>78</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing, 2018).

Secretary of State regularly speaks at domestic and international events and forums where mention of this topic can easily be incorporated.

The United States can monitor the effectiveness of the Sino-Russian information campaign through open source intelligence by tracking the frequency and instantaneity surrounding Sino-Russian border rhetoric. Although initiated within American venues, Chinese and Russian citizenry would be the target audience, thereby prompting both governments to respond. Specifically, if the Chinese government perceived an increase in support for actions against Russia in Vladivostok and the Pamirs Mountain Range, China may be compelled to take more aggressive action. As the border topic feeds into an already increased sense of Chinese pride, Xi Jinping could use this as a political ploy to strengthen his control over China by diverting attention away from domestic issues. Russia has shown no signs of, nor would it be military or economically favorable, considering a return of these areas and would contest any suggestion to do so. Although the effects of promoting an undecided border may take time to cascade into verbal sparring between Russia and China, the effectiveness could be tracked and actions adjusted to gain success.

Others may argue that the relationship is currently strong between China and Russia and cannot be threatened by a perceived border dispute that was settled over a century and a half ago. Also, naysayers could reference the multiple agreements signed by both nations over the past several decades as evidence that Russia and China have moved beyond this matter and are focused on larger and more international threats and that the leadership of China and Russia would not allow the border matter to interfere with the current partnership. Finally, cynics could highlight the United States' challenges in conducting information operations and scoff at the ability of the United States Government to orchestrate a long-term influence campaign resulting in successfully raising the border issue between China and Russia to a point of significance.

Sceptics of using an information campaign to intensify the border dispute between China and Russia fail to appreciate the history of the two nations. Research of the historical Sino-

Russian relationship shows that the current relationship is an exception in time and not the norm. Viewing the other through a lens of distrust and a security threat predates the current entente and has not left the Russian or Chinese collective consciousness. Russia loathes its new role as junior partner in the current Sino-Russian relationship and would dispute any verbal or physical move by China to reclaim Vladivostok<sup>80</sup> or Chinese pressure on Tajikistan to retake the Pamirs Mountain Range.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Chinese leaders' intentions are clear regarding a return to the "Middle Kingdom" which includes the return of Chinese perception of unjustly lost lands.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, Chinese nationalism has flourished within the Chinese middle class and academia with dissenters to the notion of a growing China being silenced.<sup>83</sup> Both China and Russia have shown a willingness to put national pride ahead of an unnatural partnership. Finally, despite the inherent difficulties in creating and implementing a long-term cross-governmental information campaign, the United States has shown growth in the information operations field. The establishment of the United States Cyber Command and refocusing of existing intelligence organizations toward information operations provides the capability and capacity to plan and conduct an information operation of this nature.

Historical frustrations between China and Russia, combined with rising ambition within both nations, provides an opportunity for the United States to exploit lingering border issues between China and Russia. The abnormal current state of affairs does not reflect the history of strife between China and Russia and is susceptible to manipulation. Through a coordinated effort, originating in the confines of American universities, think tanks, media outlets, and the

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<sup>80</sup> Herbst, "The Coming Russian-Chinese Clash."

<sup>81</sup> Goble, "Beijing," 2.

<sup>82</sup> Vladimir Remyga, "The Comeback of the Middle Kingdom," *BRICS Business Magazine*, October 20, 2020, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://bricsmagazine.com/en/issues/english-issue-1-25-2020>.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin Wilhelm, "Xi's Boldest Critic Is the Latest Target of China's Crackdown on Dissent," *World Politics Review*, July 8, 2020, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/28897/xi-s-boldest-critic-is-the-latest-target-of-china-s-crackdown-on-dissent>.

Departments of Defense and State, the notion of a disputed border between China and Russia can be highlighted to the Chinese and Russian citizenry. Ideally, the current Sino-Russian relationship will suffer due to a surge in conversation regarding the border issue resulting in decreased Russian and Chinese cooperation on other military and economic matters. Although a disputed border may not lead to modern Sino-Russian split, it can contribute to crumbling an anti-American Sino-Russian partnership and benefiting the United States in decades to come.

## The Arctic

In 2011, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, United States Navy Admiral James G. Starvridis, warned “the Arctic could become an “icy slope toward a zone of competition, or worse, a zone of conflict.”<sup>84</sup> His prediction has proven correct regarding competition as the United States, Russia, and other Arctic nations jockey to manipulate the Arctic expanse while China leverages regional and global influence to gain a lasting stake above the Arctic Circle.<sup>85</sup> Through coordinated and long-term policies supporting Chinese claims in the Arctic, and rebuking Russian attempts to dominate the Arctic region, the United States can exploit tensions between China and Russia regarding access, control, and authority in the Arctic. Fueling conflicts between China and Russia in the Arctic can contribute to an overall degradation in the Sino-Russian relationship and potentially place the United States in a strategic advantage in the twentieth century.

Decreased ice coverage has opened new sea lanes and access to once unattainable natural resources. As temperatures rise in the Arctic twice as fast as the global average, the landscape is rapidly changing creating new opportunities for nations with Arctic interests.<sup>86</sup> Although the

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<sup>84</sup> Conn Hallinan, “The Big Chill: Tensions In the Arctic,” *People’s World*, November 24, 2014, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/the-big-chill-tensions-in-the-arctic/>.

<sup>85</sup> Ling Guo and Steven Lloyd Wilson, “China, Russia, and Arctic Geopolitics,” *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2020, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/china-russia-and-arctic-geopolitics/>.

<sup>86</sup> Guo, “China, Russia, and Arctic Geopolitics.”

United States' Department of Defense 2019 Arctic Strategy accessed the current possibility of conflict in the Arctic as low, it addressed many challenges regarding Arctic sea routes, increasing military activity, and concerns of future freedom of navigation and overflight.<sup>87</sup> These concerns have led to intensifying the level of competition between the United States, China, and Russia.

Russia has consistently voiced its desire and territorial rights to the majority of the Arctic region based on the 24,000 miles of Russian coastline above the Arctic Circle. In addition to Russia's long history in the Arctic, Russia has economic interests in the region due to the large amount of oil, natural gas, and other natural resources which are vital to the struggling Russian economy. For example, natural gas in the Russian controlled zones of the Arctic constitute seventy percent of Russian proven reserves, which are essential to maintaining Russia's status as a leading natural gas supplier in the world.<sup>88</sup> Russia also operates multiple ports and support facilities along Arctic northern sea routes which are maintained by the world's largest ice breaker fleet used to open routes and guide ships in the area.<sup>89</sup> Finally, Russia sees the Arctic region, similar to the view of the United States, as vital to homeland defense. With additional seas lanes opening and ease of navigation increasing, the threat from the North by the United States and other NATO nations is ever expanding.

In addition to Western nations, Russia also sees China as a threat to its influence in the Arctic. In 2018, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China released China's Arctic Policy. The Chinese Arctic policy makes China's intentions to operate in the Arctic clear and proclaims its right to influence Arctic matters due to the self-endowed title as a "Near-Arctic State." Relying on current international organizations such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and reviving historical claims, such as the *Spitsbergen Treaty*

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<sup>87</sup> United States, Report to Congress, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, June 2019, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>88</sup> Guo, "China, Russia, and Arctic Geopolitics," 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

of 1925, China makes a case for a role in the Arctic. With a condescending tone, the Chinese government's stated goals of understanding, protecting, developing, and participating in the governance of the Arctic are clear.<sup>90</sup> Masked by scientific diplomacy, with the maiden voyage of the Xuelong 2 research platform, the Chinese government is attempting to diversify shipping routes and cut transportation times.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, the Chinese government is investing in a future Chinese fleet of ice breaker ships and the promotion of the Polar Silk Road to expand the BRI into Arctic countries.<sup>92</sup>

The current Sino-Russian relationship is portrayed as one of friendship and cooperation, but the Arctic issue has strained the recent unnatural alliance. Highlighted in 2007, when Russia boldly planted a flag on the sea bed of the North Pole to lay future claim to resources in that area, Russia's expansionist intentions were clear.<sup>93</sup> Furthering Russia's desire to limit Chinese exploration of the area, Russia blocked Chinese scientific vessels in 2012 along northern sea routes which forced the suspension of the expedition. The blocking of critical Arctic routes was followed by Russia's attempt to block China's observer status on the Arctic Council.<sup>94</sup> Although sanctions imposed on Russia by the West, due to Russia's annexation of Crimea, strengthened the Sino-Russian relationship, actions by Russia in the early decades of the twenty-first century show a wiliness by Russia to engage China regarding access to the Arctic region.

To provoke future disagreement between Russia and China, the United States can take several actions to set a stage where China and Russia oppose each other in the Arctic. First, the

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<sup>90</sup> The Chinese State Council Information Office, *China's Arctic Policy* (Beijing, China, 2018), 1-6, accessed January 3, 2021, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Conn Hallinan, "The Big Chill: Tensions In the Arctic," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, November 13, 2014, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://fpif.org/big-chill-tensions-arctic/>.

<sup>94</sup> Patricia Zengerle, "China Granted Observer Status On Arctic Governing Council," *Reuters*, May 15, 2013, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-arctic-council/china-granted-observer-seat-on-arctic-governing-council-idUSBRE94E0IJ20130515>.

United States should work to amend and ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Under its current revision, the United States does not agree that United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is sufficient to govern the Arctic and Congress has chosen not to ratify it. Not ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is a mistake by the United States and missed opportunity to join, and provide a leading voice to a significant organization that can arbitrate disputes in the Arctic.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, and in relation to the Sino-Russian relationship, the United States can advocate on the rights of nations to enjoy the freedom of navigation and overflight in the Arctic. Increased involvement by the United States will add a voice to the Chinese dialogue surrounding unimpeded movement in the Arctic and a likely negative Russian response.

Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea by the United States is in keeping with the Department of Defense's 2019 Arctic Strategy as it supports the United States' desired Arctic end-state. By working with other Arctic nations to amend the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea document to pass the United States Congress, the discussion could elevate the debate regarding the Arctic and potentially lead the way for future Arctic operations by the United States. Most important, it will strengthen the rules-based order in the Arctic by lending the credibility of the United States to United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea thereby providing a forum for the United States to counter Russian antagonist behavior in the Arctic.

Next, the United States can invest financial resources and talented personnel to the Arctic Council. As one of the eight member nations, that includes Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Russian Federation, charged with implementing policy in the region,<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ashley Postler, "UNCLOS In the Arctic: A Treaty for Warmer Waters," *Georgetown Security Studies*, February 24, 2020, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2020/02/24/unclos-in-the-arctic-a-treaty-for-warmer-waters/>.

<sup>96</sup> "Arctic States, 2021 Arctic Council Secretariat," Arctic Council, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://arctic-council.org/en/about/>.

the United States can ensure that it advocates for matters favorable to Chinese movement in the Arctic. Additionally, increasing participating and money granted toward the Arctic Council's six working groups<sup>97</sup> will expand the American footprint in scientific exploration of the Arctic and allow the United States to work with Chinese scientist to explore the area above the Arctic Circle in the name of science. Additionally, encouraging China's involvement in the Non-Governmental Organizations such as the International Maritime Organization and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea<sup>98</sup> will allow the United States to take advantage of the China's resources to further the United States' environmental goals.

Finally, and similar to the suggested method to stoke the Sino-Russian border disagreement, the United States can make subtle changes in subsequent Arctic strategies to signal support for limited Chinese claims in the Arctic. Although the Department of Defense's reports to Congress regarding the Arctic nest within the National Military Strategy's goals and priorities,<sup>99</sup> following reports can downplay the negative assessment of nefarious Chinese intentions in the Arctic while continuing to highlight aggressive and unjust actions taken by Russia in the Arctic. Additionally, if the United States joins the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and is successful in increased Chinese participation within the sub organizations of the Arctic Council, those actions should be stressed. These proclamations will message the United States' intent on working with China in the Arctic despite other areas of friction between the countries.

These suggested changes in policy will likely encounter resistance from some within the United States and abroad. Those that believe that China's expansion should be countered at every turn could argue that any help given to the Chinese, regardless of the issue, only emboldens them

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<sup>97</sup> "Arctic Council Working Groups, 2021 Arctic Council Secretariat," Arctic Council, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://arctic-council.org/www/en/about/working-groups/>.

<sup>98</sup> "Arctic States Non-Governmental Organizations, 2021 Arctic Council Secretariat," Arctic Council, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://arctic-council.org/www/en/about/observers/>.

<sup>99</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing, 2018).

to further expansionist efforts. Additionally, by advocating for or including China in international organizations that govern the Arctic, the United States would open a Pandora's box that could not be closed in the future if the strategic situation changed. Finally, fear of increased financial gains by easing China's ability to expand the BRI through the Polar Silk Road<sup>100</sup> will lead many to point to predatory lending and the negative impact that current BRI actions have on multiple third world nations.<sup>101</sup>

Although the zero-sum argument is understandable, based on the negative perception of past Chinese actions and China's stated intent to return to a major global power by the year 2049, the opportunity presented to escalate a divisive issue between Russia and China outweighs the risk. The United States should view, and determine an appropriate response to, China's growth by issue and region. A simplistic automatic negative response to any cooperation with China will rob decision makers in the United States the opportunity to advance specific agenda items. Additionally, advocacy for, and inclusion of, China in arctic governing bodies can be regulated on a recurring basis by adjusting the level of cooperation, financial input, and Chinese activism within each assembly. Finally, the concern of contributing to a growing Chinese financial juggernaut is eclipsed in the Arctic due to growing national security concerns of the United States regarding Russian military threat. As Russia continues to tighten control over northern sea routes and lay claim to more territories, these areas will inevitably be used for military power projection.<sup>102</sup> Backing an increased Chinese presence in the Arctic will aid in the deterrence of Russian growth and subsequently benefit the homeland security of the United States.

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<sup>100</sup> The Chinese State Council Information Office, *China's Arctic Policy* (Beijing, China, 2018), 1-6, accessed January 3, 2021,

<sup>101</sup> Dylan Gerstel, "It's a (Debt) Trap! Managing China-IMF Cooperation Across the Belt and Road," *Center For Strategic & International Studies*, October 17, 2018, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/npfp/its-debt-trap-managing-china-imf-cooperation-across-belt-and-road>.

<sup>102</sup> Sergey Radchenko, "The Sino-Russian Relationship In the Mirror of the Cold War," *Springer Link*, January 16, 2020, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42533-019-00030-x>.

As the conversation of the Arctic intensifies on the global stage, the United States, Russia, and China will continue to seek a competitive advantage. The United States is in a unique position to leverage its membership in the Arctic Council, possible ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and initiate a public information campaign promoting China's increased involvement in the Arctic that will likely strain the Sino-Russian relationship. Russia's distaste for being portrayed as the subordinate in the current Sino-Russian alliance and Russia's national pride will not let them concede to China in the Arctic. The United States, through a long-term domestic and international approach, can goad a Russian reaction in an attempt to drive a wedge between Russia and China in an attempt to gain a strategic advantage in the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

The contentious and enduring Sino-Russian-United States relationship presents the United States opportunities to exploit the differences in Chinese and Russian national interest to gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century. To accomplish the stated goal, research was initially focused on the historical relationship between the three nations to properly understand the events and actions that resulted in the current connections between the countries. Enabled by a massive amount of opinion and academic works on this topic, three insights were gleaned and guided the remaining research of this paper.

First, the current relationship between Russia and China is unnatural. Disputes over the Sino-Russian border and influence on the Asian Continent have plagued the Sino-Russian relationship for centuries and will likely remain unresolved. Second, China is a rising power and its growth will influence world events in the twenty-first century. Alternatively, Russia currently finds itself unable to regain the Super Power status enjoyed during much of the twentieth century which drives the Russian narrative domestically and abroad. Finally, any initiatives the United States determines to pursue in an attempt to fracture the Sino-Russian relationship must transcend

the current leaders and politics of the day in each country. The three recommendations were chosen for these reasons and will hold a prominent position in the global political landscape throughout the twenty-first century.

## Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this monograph are not intended to serve as an all-inclusive list of possible options afforded to the United States regarding the Sino-Russian relationship. Instead, recommendations serve as three options based on insights derived from research and the recommendations longevity in future dialogue regarding the United States, China, and Russia. For instance, India has the world's second largest population, shares a border with China, and India's history is shaped by relationships with Russia and the United States. Next, rising Chinese rhetoric and the CCP's information campaign to return China to Middle Kingdom status, opens the Chinese population to manipulation that may adversely affect the Sino-Russian partnership. Finally, as the Arctic Circle releases itself to increased explorations and exploitation, the United States, China, and Russia will each increase individual efforts in the Arctic to boost regional dominance and expand global influence.

## Further Research

As with most research endeavors, this monograph attempted to advance the conversation, not provide a finite answer regarding the United States' management of the current and future Sino-Russian relationship. Additional research is required to glean a full understanding of the political environment within India and the Indian people's appetite to intensify economic and military engagements against China, with Russia and the United States as allies. Additionally, continued research into the growing cyber capabilities within the United States and its ability and authority to pursue an information campaign on the magnitude sizeable enough to influence Chinese public opinion is warranted. Finally, as the Arctic ice shifts, and a greater understanding of the changing environment is obtained, the possibilities for movement and harvesting of natural

resources will expand, placing more international attention on the Arctic region. Further investigation into these areas may illuminate more specific and timely actions that can augment the proposed recommendations.

## Final Thoughts

As Everett Dolman counsels his readers in *Pure Strategy*, victory is but a moment in time.<sup>103</sup> The Sino-Russian-United States relationship is not something that can be won and it will never be completed. Preceded by hundreds of years of interactions between the nations, our current time will be followed by numerous decades dominated by domestic and global affairs not yet predicted or understood. The United States must embark on policies that continue to place the nation in positions of greater advantage. With an appreciation that actions in India, along the Sino-Russian border, and above the Arctic circle will have second and third order consequences, the United States must continually reexamine and adjust strategies to create distance between China and Russia and gain a strategic advantage in the mid-twenty-first century.

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<sup>103</sup> Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle In the Space and Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

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