

**ONLY INTERESTS ARE PERMANENT:
RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS
AS A CHALLENGE TO AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY**

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For the last half century, the U.S. approach toward Moscow and Beijing has been profoundly affected by the approach that each of these capitals has adopted toward the other. In the 1950s, for example, American officials debated whether the two communist giants were in fact at odds, a debate finally settled by the Damanskiy Island clashes at the end of the 1960s.

In the 1970s, the U.S. sought to play up China's differences with Moscow in order to contain a then still-expansionist USSR, a policy which represented an important extension of and some would argue condition for success of our longstanding containment doctrine.

Now, given the continuing decline of the Russian Federation in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concomitant and dramatic rise of China economically, politically and militarily, we are again forced to consider how we should craft our policies toward the two and especially toward the latter..

Consequently, I want to commend you Mr. Chairman and also the members of this Congressional Caucus for holding hearings on this most fateful question and to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak before you.

Because I fear that all of us are too often driven by shifting headlines in this and other areas – by positive ones like the Chinese decision to de-link its currency with the dollar or by negative ones like the role of Russia and China in using the Shanghai Cooperation Council to call for the closure of American bases in the countries of Central Asia – I would like to ask that we look beyond these headlines and thus will use my time today to look at some of the fundamental forces driving the relationship between Moscow and Beijing.

I want to begin with the now classical but often forgotten observation of some of the most capable diplomatists that countries do not have permanent friends or enemies,

but they do have permanent interests. That goes for the Russian Federation. It goes for China. And it goes for us.

And I want to argue that the underlying interests of the Russian government and the underlying interests of the Chinese government will both push them together toward cooperation in certain areas and drive them apart in others, a situation which means that we must be prepared to navigate between them rather than concluding as we have sometimes sought to do in the past all that we should back one of these countries against the other once and for all.

In an effort to make a contribution to this process, I would like to outline for you what I see as the five most important elements driving Beijing and Moscow together and the five most important interests driving them apart and then suggest how the U.S. can best position itself to advance its interests.

Doing so as I hope to show today will require from us a more agile diplomacy and a more vigorous assertion of American power on behalf of our national interests than we have sometimes demonstrated in the past. But I believe that is a precondition of our success in a world almost certain to be far more challenging and dangerous in the future than it has been in the past.

Where Russian and Chinese Interests Converge...

Moscow and Beijing have many common interests, but there are five that are clearly at the top of their respective lists.

First, each of them is interested in asserting its power against the United States, the Russian leadership because it finds itself in a position of decline and the Chinese because it believes itself to be headed toward the status of a super power. Consequently, the two will come together as they did earlier this month doing so helps them stand up to Washington.

Second, each of them is terrified of instability and is willing to use authoritarian measures at home and abroad to try to reign it in. At home, both face serious challenges from their own minority populations, the Russians in the northern Caucasus and the Chinese in Xinjiang. Indeed, they have a common interest in seeing themselves continue in at least their current borders, something that is not entirely likely over the course of the next decade or so. And abroad, they oppose any loosening of control especially in the Central Asian countries that could spread like wildfire into their own territories.

Third, each of them is concerned about the consequences of nuclear proliferation and the prospect that sooner or later terrorists will get their hands on and then use nuclear weaponry. They are thus going to work together and advocate a far harsher international regime to prevent that from happening.

Fourth, each of them is especially frightened by Islam – Moscow is already the largest Muslim city in Europe and the Russian Federation will have at least an ethnic Muslim majority by 2030, and Beijing has within its borders far more than 100 million Muslims. Consequently, they are both struggling to come up with strategies that contain Islam and the terrorism associated with parts of that faith without inflaming things further, something neither has been able to do so far but that both will work together to try to devise.

And fifth, each of them is interested in restricting the rise of new powers independent of themselves, the Russians are especially concerned about the European Union and the Chinese about India. They are in this sense then status quo powers even though in many respects each of them is challenging existing power relationships around the world.

...Where Russian and Chinese Interests Diverge...

But in many ways, these common interests, which often are the focus of American concerns, are outweighed by a divergence in the positions of the two Eurasian giants.

First, the Russian Federation is a declining power while China is a rising power. For much of the 1990s, it could even be described as a failed state, as a country without an effective central government. President Putin is working to reverse that, but he has not yet completed what is invariably a difficult task. Beijing knows this and knows that it is going to be the dominant power in the region in the future. That makes cooperation difficult – neither party is willing to accept the junior partnership position that the other is prepared to offer – and almost certainly sets the stage for more conflicts.

Second, the two have clashing economic interests. Russia is an exporter of raw materials – petrochemicals now and water in the future – while China is an importer of the same and a producer of goods for export. Those conflicts are likely to intensify given the failures of the Russian economy beyond the natural resources sector and the growth of the Chinese economy almost everywhere but there. Everything we know about economics tells us that will lead to conflict of one kind or another.

Third, population densities on the Russian side of the Sino-Russian borders are now at levels not seen since the Neolithic period, while those on the Chinese side are large and growing. Some Russian nationalists see this as a threat, even projecting that China will move north militarily at some point. Such concerns are almost certainly overblown at least in the short term, but they inevitably feed Russian racism and Chinese resentment and make cooperation much more difficult.

Fourth, the Russians conceive of themselves as a European power most of the time, while the Chinese know they are not. That limits Moscow's freedom of action: if it becomes too cozy with Beijing, it will not be able to present itself as the European state most of its leaders believe it to be. But it also means that the Chinese look in different

directions and with a different time horizon than do the Russians, considering Asia as China's natural sphere of influence and thinking in centuries rather than months and years as Europeans and Americans tend to do.

And fifth, perhaps most important of all, neither of them is used to cooperating for very long with anyone else. Both see themselves as leaders of independent civilizations, and they are not going to defer to another on a long-term basis if they can avoid it. That is something the foreign policy elites of these two countries have been very clear about even if we in the United States with our almost inevitably more short-term approach have generally ignored.

...And What the U.S. Can and Must Do About It

What does all this mean for American policy? Let me point to three lessons that I believe we need to focus on if we are to advance American national interests in dealing with China and with the Russian Federation.

First of all, we need to be clear about the most important reality out there: the Russian Federation is a declining power, and China is a rising one, something we occasionally say but that we have not made a centerpiece of our foreign policy strategy. Your Caucus has already made an important contribution to this necessary shift, and I for one am very pleased about that.

Second, we need to remember that these two countries sometimes are going to cooperate and sometimes are going to be opposed to one another *regardless of what we do*. That means we need to understand the Russia-China relationship and allow it to work for us rather than getting ourselves involved when we don't need to be or concluding that there is an emerging alliance that will survive for long enough to threaten us.

And third, we need to understand that we will have to commit more resources not fewer to counter the rising power of China and to deal with the declining power of the Russian Federation. Beijing already threatens our interests now and will do so even more in the future. But despite much media and diplomatic hype to the contrary, Moscow does as well and does so in ways that we have not been willing to pay attention to.

I am convinced as I said at the outset that we thus would be making a mistake either to assume that we need to embrace one of these countries to contain the other – something that may have brought short-term benefits in the past but that is unlikely to do so in the future – or worse that we should adopt some kind of “dual containment” of the two.

Instead, we need to be ready to remain engaged with but prepared also to oppose both, a difficult task but one that should not – indeed, must not – be beyond our capacity as a nation.

Again, thank you very much for asking me to participate today.