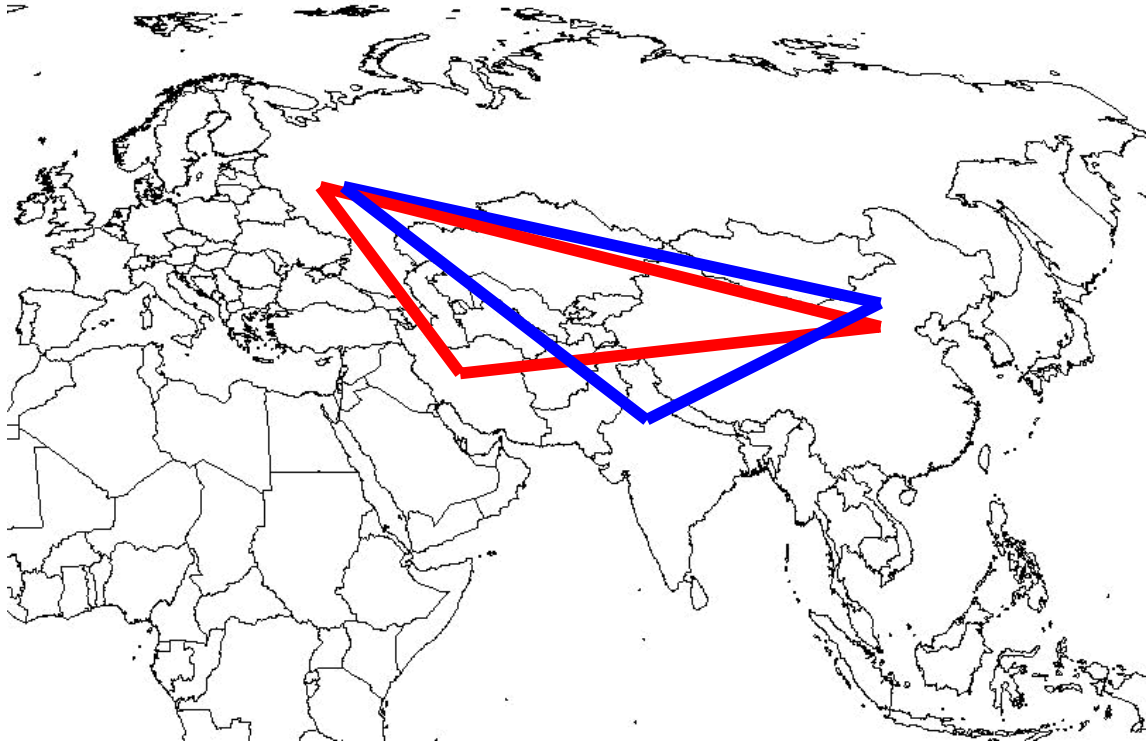


NEW STRATEGIC TRIANGLES IN EURASIA AND THE QUESTION OF A NEW COLD WAR IN THE MAKING



Summary:

Security analysts are increasingly turning their mind's eye to Russo-Sino-Indian pacts or the Russo-Sino-Iranian relationship. Those states are increasingly seen as forming strategic triangles at Eurasia's borders. To be sure, engaging in detailed analysis on the strengths or weaknesses in their relationship and shared goals is important. Yet claiming to pay witness to a "blueprint for a new Cold War" or an alliance "counterbalancing US and Western interests" is wild guesswork and is ultimately unhelpful in formulating foreign and defence policy.

Keywords: Strategic Triangle, New Cold War, Russia, China, India, Iran, Primakov.

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INTRODUCTION

John J. Mearsheimer's article "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War" laments the passing of the Cold War as a strategic error of the US.¹ Mearsheimer however was careful to avoid perceiving or fabricating a new Cold War where none exists. Similarly Harsh V. Pant's valuable contribution "The Moscow-Beijing-Delhi 'Strategic Triangle: An Idea Whose Time May Never Come'"² is cautious of promoting smoke and mirror threats to US hegemony.

Others take a different approach. Julie M. Rahm explains that China and Russia fear NATO and radical Islam more than they do each other. For Rahm, the Russo-Chinese partnership is acquiring stronger anti-US undertones and a strategic partnership between China, Russia and *India* is a "blueprint for the next Cold War".³ The US National Intelligence Council report "Global Trends 2015" forecasts that a Russian–Chinese–*Indian* strategic triangle may emerge to counterbalance US and Western influence in 15 years (2000-15).⁴ Others see a Russo-Sino-*Iranian* triangle as more deserving of urgent analysis.⁵

The US military presence in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan – that is, in Russia's near-abroad and Moscow's soft under-belly – is a source of tension for Russia. George W. Bush's warnings to Vladimir Putin serve to remind Russia that their world is shrinking. Bush has warned that Georgia's sovereignty "must be respected by all nations" – meaning Russia must restrain their policies towards a region that was once considered their exclusive zone of influence.⁶ Bush has also criticised how rule of law, human rights and press freedoms are treated in Russia.⁷

As the US criticises Russia, milks Eurasian energy resources and position themselves for geo-strategic advantage for conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq and feasibly Iran – the likelihood of a new Cold War might seem imminent to some. Yet that is an unreasonable conclusion to draw from current evidence, the ability of Russia and their close associates to tackle US hegemony is unrealistic.

Russia's economic and political constraints will mean that Russia cannot challenge global hegemony, at least in the near future. An alliance (a strategic triangle) between Russia, China and a third (either India or Iran) will not end US hegemony although it may mitigate it. As such, the tensions among these nations herald that a Cold War is *not* imminent and propaganda of a new Cold War should be avoided.

RUSSIAN ANXIETY OF ITSELF DOES NOT RESULT IN A "NEW" COLD WAR

Russian anxiety over the US surrounding Russia has two sources. First there is the historical legacy of the Cold War. Both the US and Russia as the two poles of the Cold War, struggle to overcome their historical Cold War paranoia. Both nations were victims of their own propaganda apparatus during the Cold War which specialised in demonising "the other". Secondly there is the pragmatic agenda of Russia wanting to maximise their control of energy resources and Eurasian influence in a region that was once in the exclusive Russian sphere of influence. Russian control in Eurasia is increasingly difficult with the growing US presence in Eurasia.

1 John J. Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War", *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol.266, No.2, August 1990, pp.35-37, 40-42, 44-47, 50.

2 Harsh V. Pant, "The Moscow-Beijing-Delhi 'Strategic Triangle': An Idea Whose Time May Never Come", *Security Dialogue*, Vol.35 (3), 2004, p.311-328.

3 Julie M. Rahm, "Russia, China, India: A New Strategic Triangle for a New Cold War", *Parameters*, Winter 2001-02, pp.87-97.

4 National Intelligence Council (US), "A Dialogue About the Future with Non-Government Experts", <http://www.cia.gov/nic/NIC_globaltrend2015.html>, accessed 20 June 2005.

5 Jephraim P. Gundzik, "The Ties that bind China, Russia and Iran", *Asia Times*, 4 June 2005, <<http://atimes.com/atimes/China/GF04Ad07.html>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

6 White House: Office of the Press Secretary, "Bush Addresses Tens of Thousands in Georgia's Freedom Square", 10 May 2005, <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush359.html>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

7 Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, "Bush Criticizes Russia on Rights", <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/2/9153B43A-2452-4FD8-AD9B-1739C6B30CCD.html>>, accessed 8 August 2005.

See also, Steven R. Weisman, "Rice Reminds the Russian of Obligation to Democracy", *New York Times*, 20 April 2005.

Following 11 September 2001, the US and NATO were quick to expand eastward into Russia's immediate zone of influence: establishing bases at Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan. Russians ask why NATO continues to expand when Russia no longer poses a threat. When no reasonable explanation is forthcoming some speculate that the US is pursuing a new US-Russian conflict, possibly even a new Cold War.

An aggressive US attitude to Eurasia can be seen in their encouragement of the former Soviet states of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan sending missions to NATO. The US succeeded in inducing Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia to become full and equal partners of NATO.⁸ The US may have lost some influence over Uzbekistan but their influence in the region will be revealed by quickly relocating their forces into Azerbaijan as they are expelled from Uzbekistan.⁹

Russian murmuring of the US surrounding them is very different to talk of a strategic triangle positioning against the US. Russian anxiety has resulted in some writers' use of the Cold War phrase without analysis of their ability to counter the US being appropriately considered. They are threatened by the US entering the Russian sphere – fear that the US will attack or control Russia and others – rather than Russia posing a direct threat to US hegemony as is considered here.

RUSSIA'S ECONOMIC CONDITION HINDERS THEIR CHALLENGING HEGEMONY

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow began to look for markets to sustain their massive military-industrial complex which – after downgrading – is estimated to consist of 1,600 defence enterprises and two million staff.¹⁰

With the creation of GUUAM (GUAM augmented with Uzbekistan) in 1997, Georgia, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan¹¹, Azerbaijan and Moldova formed a politico-economic union to blunt Russia's influence in Eurasia.¹² Russia looked for new markets turned to China, India and Iran as market opportunities and energy resources in the Caucasus and elsewhere were stolen. Selling munitions to China, India and Iran is one way that Russia pays its bills.

Despite the impetus for Russia and others to cooperate on select issues, serious questions should be raised as to the ability of Russia to service their international debts let alone challenge global hegemony.

Senior US figures believe that Russia cannot afford to threaten US hegemony even with a strategic triangle. The US Republican Dick Armey has claimed Russia had become "a looted and bankrupt zone of nuclearised anarchy".¹³ The House Banking Committee chairperson James Leach said Russia was "the world's most virulent kleptocracy".¹⁴

Middle-income states – like Russia, China, India and Iran – even with a significant military-industrial-complex lack the ability to compete with the massive technological research and military-security

8 Oana Lungescu, "Nato sets date for big expansion", Friday, 27 February, 2004, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3493560.stm>>, accessed 20 May 2005; BBC News, "Bush welcomes new NATO members", *BBC News* (World Edition), Monday 29 March 2004, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3578837.stm>>, accessed 20 May 2005.

9 Cyrus Safdari, "Azerbaijan close to Deal on Hosting US Forces: Report", *Agence France Presse*, 3 August 2005.

10 Marina Vigdorichik, "General Information" International Forum "High Technology Of The XXI Century", *In Russia*, <<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/inimr-r1.nsf/en/gr123357e.html>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

11 Uzbekistan has recently alerted GUUAM members of its intention to leave that organisation, this may signify a slight reversal of the anti-Russian sentiment trend in Eurasia.

12 Ilan Berman (ed), "Tashkent Turns East", *Eurasia Security Watch*, No.85, 13 May, 2005; John C. K. Daly, "Uzbekistan Drops GUUAM From Its Eclectic Foreign Policy Menu", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.2, Issue 91, Tuesday, 10 May 2005.

13 Andrei Schleifer, Daniel Treisman, "A Normal Country", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2004, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20040301faessay83204/andrei-schleifer-daniel-treisman/a-normal-country.html?mode=print>>, accessed 20 May 2004.

14 *Ibid.*

infrastructure of the US. Those wishing to actively oppose US hegemony on major issues must be able to financially and politically survive being denied access to lucrative US markets. They must do that whilst acquiring some semblance of conventional military and nuclear missile parity with the US.

Russia continues to suffer from a poor investment climate due to unclear property rights. President Vladimir Putin's announcement that important sectors crucial to Russia's national security interests including energy would remain or be brought under state control is a further disincentive to foreign investment.¹⁵ Russia needs investors to contribute to the ~€30 billion needed to keep its energy sector viable over the next 25 years.¹⁶ For this reason and in the tradition of the Cold War the only way for Russia to pose a real symmetrical threat is through a strategic alliance, an alliance that distributes the risks and the costs of tacking hegemony among several states.

THE RUSSIAN SEARCH FOR A STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

Post-Soviet Russia has begun to search for partners to form a high level security complex – a strategic triangle. Two potential examples of Russia's new interests are (i) the so-called, Russo-Sino-Indian triangle and (ii) the Russo-Sino-Iranian triangle. Yet as can be seen below, strategic triangles do not automatically or inexorably amount to challenging global hegemony. The triangular grouping mentioned in this article share a pact to challenge hegemony in fiction only; they lack the level of trust and ambition to move in unison against the US.

(i) Russo-Sino-Indian Strategic Triangle

The concept of a Moscow-Beijing-Delhi strategic triangle is attributed to the vision of the former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov during his visit to India in 1998.¹⁷ Primakov sees the shared direction and problems facing Russia, China and India as furthered by a strategic triangle.

As a précis of the binding aspects of their relationship, Russia is the biggest supplier of defence equipment to India, and both are jointly developing the “Brahmos” anti-ship missile.¹⁸ China is Russia's main weapons customer, purchasing an estimated \$1 to 2 billion of Russia's \$4 billion military exports.¹⁹ India (like Russia) is demonstrating its loyalty by acknowledging China's sovereignty in Tibet. India has pledged not to allow anti-Chinese political sentiment in India. The armies of India and China plan to hold unprecedented joint counter-terrorism and peacekeeping training programmes in 2005-6.²⁰ Furthermore, all three are burdened by militant Islam – in Chechnya, Xinjiang and Kashmir – to name but a few unifying factors.

Aside from their commercial ties and efforts at combating terrorism, the prevailing factors such as those promoting a Primakov triangle as a cause for a new Cold War do not carry much weight. In 2005, China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao stressed the similarities between Russia, China and India and encouraged “coordination and cooperation” between the three countries as a means of promoting international peace and security.²¹ Jiabao's statement could be read as a high level endorsement of a strategic triangle between Beijing, Moscow and New Delhi. That is, if Jiabao hadn't used the same

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Petroleum and Mining Job Portal, “Russian Energy Sector Needs Foreign Funds”, <<http://www.pmjobs.net/NewsView.aspx?id=2212>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

¹⁷ Yevgeny Primakov, *Towards Russian: The New Crossroads*, London, Yale University Press, 2004, p.317.

¹⁸ Pant, “The Moscow-Beijing...” *op.cit.*, p.317.

¹⁹ Andrew Kuchins, *Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership*, in Andrew Kuchins,(ed.) *Russia After the Fall*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,2002, pp. 204–219, p.212.

²⁰ India Monitor, “India, China troops to train jointly”, *Indian Monitor*, <<http://indiamonitor.com/news/readCatFullNews.jsp?ni=7351&ct=India-China>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

²¹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Ireland, “Premier Wen Jiabao Meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin”, 28 September 2004,

<<http://www.chinaembassy.ie/eng/NewsPress/t162452.htm>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

phrases in relation to Malaysia²², India²³, Sri Lanka²⁴, Pakistan²⁵ and the US.²⁶ Jiabao's statements cannot be construed as promoting a security alliance when such words are statements of goodwill rather than impenetrable loyalty. Furthermore if China was truly interested in cementing a global relationship with Russia they could have sided with Russia, France and Germany in working against the presence of US led multinational force (MNF) in Iraq.

Even if Russia and India could cooperate on select issues, the China-India relationship lacks the glue of a Barry Buzan "security complex" resulting in a strategic triangle of significance. In 1998 China was identified as India's primary security threat and India's defence minister wrote to the US president justifying Indian nuclear tests as a response to the threat posed by China.²⁷ New Delhi has traditionally viewed China as its most serious strategic competitor in labour industries. And, China continues to deny India's claim to 90,000 km² of land in Arunchal.²⁸

China may be talking-up their relationship with India but at the same time China has been engaged in military technology transfers with Pakistan to the chagrin of India. This is hardly the type of reliable and trusting relationship that would topple a global hegemony in the near future.

China purchases weapons production licenses from Russia but they are not about to isolate themselves from other weapons manufacturers. China too keenly recalls the year 1960, when the USSR withdrew thousands of their weapons technicians from China.²⁹ This serves to explain why China purchases production licenses for weapons from Russia rather than just the weapons.³⁰ China wisely avoids an over-reliance on nations with which they have traditionally had a tense relationship.

The US and India will develop a mutual vision in eight major initiatives including developing better cooperation in commerce in space, civil nuclear energy and dual-use technology.³¹ As part of the deal India are expected to purchase \$5 billion worth of conventional weapons from the US.³² On this, George W. Bush has told India's Prime Minister Singh that:

...he will work to achieve full civil nuclear energy cooperation with India as it realizes its goals of promoting nuclear power and achieving energy security. The President would also seek agreement from Congress to adjust US laws and policies, and the United States will work with friends and allies to adjust international regimes to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation

22 The Economic and Commercial Section of the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Kuching, "Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with His Malaysian Counterpart Abdullah Ahmad Badawi", 24 November 2004, <<http://kuching2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/bilateralvisits/200411/20041100001891.html>> accessed 20 August 2005.

23 Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Lesotho, "Indian President Kalam Meets with Premier Wen Jiabao", 13 April 2005, <<http://ls.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t191524.htm>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

24 Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Iran, "Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka", 11 August 2003, <<http://www.chinaembassy.ir/eng/dtxw/t130777.htm>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

25 Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, "Premier Wen Jiabao Meets Visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali", 18 August 2003, <<http://www.chinaembassy.org.zw/eng/xwdt/t149314.htm>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

26 Washington Post, Interview with Wen Jiabao: A Complete Transcript From Chinese Premier's Meeting, *Washington Post*, 21 November 2003, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A6641-2003Nov22¬Found=true>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

27 Pant, "The Moscow-Beijing..." *op.cit.*, p.318.

28 *Ibid.*, p.321.

29 Jyotsna Bakshi, "Russia-China Military Technical Cooperation: Implications for India", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXIV, No.4, July 2000.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Office of the Press Secretary (Whitehouse), "The United States and India, Strong Global Partners", the Whitehouse website, 18 July 2005, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/07/20050718-8.html>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

32 Dafna Linzer, "Bush Officials Defend India Nuclear Deal", *Washington Post*, Wednesday, 20 July 2005.

and trade with India, including but not limited to expeditious consideration of fuel supplies for safeguarded nuclear reactors at Tarapur.³³

Such amicable activities do not convey the blue print for the new Cold War that Julie Rahm talks of and casts doubt on the Global Trends 2015 forecast of an anti-US triangle emerging by 2015. The US is improving upon their relationship with India to act as an ally against Islam and to maintain pressure on Pakistan to cooperate with the US. The US can be expected to soften their stance on India's nuclear program to expedite influence in the region.

(ii) Russo-Chinese-Iranian Strategic Triangle

In 1997 Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani called for Russia, China and Iran to strengthen their economic and political ties.³⁴ Since then Russia, China and Iran have formed bilateral partnerships to regulate US influence in Eurasia. To be sure, these partnerships will pose political challenges to the US in Asia and the Middle East.

This loose coalition will try to block Western especially Washington's inroads into Eurasia, particularly in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. There will be continued objections to US foreign policy in the Middle East and East Asia. China and Russia will continue to voice opposition to the development or deployment of a Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system in East Asia and they will increasingly voice unified foreign policy statements. Iran will support Beijing and Moscow in these efforts. This is especially the case as Iran is labelled as part of an axis of evil, and their nuclear programs are criticised by the US. These are however only defensive postures in a strategic triangle.

Russia and Iran's access to the lucrative oil and natural gas of the Caspian Sea is another cause for cooperation. China is about to become the world's second largest oil consumer and they have little oil of their own. All three countries will increasingly cooperate in developing Central Asia's energy resources and distribution-transport capability, countering the Taliban influence in the region and opposing the area's Sunni-based militant Islamic groups.

Such cooperation has been observed for a considerable period of time. In March 1996, the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said Iranian-Russian relations were "at their highest level in contemporary history".³⁵ Reciprocating this Iranian sentiment, Russia's then Deputy Foreign Minister Albert Chernyshev reaffirmed Russia's willingness to stand with Iran against the US. Chernyshev said "Our country opposes the isolation of Iran in the system of international relations that America demands. We believe we can cooperate with Iran. We are doing that now and will continue to do so".³⁶

The known form of Russian-Iranian military cooperation has been the supply of SS-4 medium-range missile technology.³⁷ Israeli officials who briefed US intelligence agencies in February 1997 reportedly produced a copy of a \$7 million contract between NPO Trud and the Iranian program covering the transfer of equipment related to SS-4 medium-range missiles.³⁸ Iran's Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group (SHIG), the government military-industrial company in charge of developing and manufacturing

33 Office of the Press Secretary (the Whitehouse), "Joint Statement Between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh", the Whitehouse website, 18 July 2005.

<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/07/print/20050718-6.html>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

34 Jamestown Foundation, "...As Iran Proposes Cooperation Between Iran, Russia and China", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.3, Issue 88, 5 May 1997.

35 Robert O. Freedman, "Russia and Iran: A Tactical Alliance", *SASIS Review*, 17:2 (1997).

36 *Ibid.*

37 Clifford Beal, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 February 1999, p.5.

38 "Shahab 4", *GlobalSecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/iran/shahab-4.htm>, accessed 20 June 2005.

J. Michael Waller, "Israeli Report Details Russian Aid to Iranian Nuclear Weapons Program", *Russia Reform Monitor*, No. 317, 23 September 1997, American Foreign Policy Council, Washington, D.C.,

<<http://www.afpc.org/rm/rm317.htm>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

ballistic missiles, has concluded several contracts with the Russian Central Aerohydrodynamic Institute. The contracts are said to include the construction of a wind tunnel for missile design, manufacture of model missiles and creation of related software. Washington has concluded that Russia is at best turning a blind eye to Russian military-industrial transactions with Iran.³⁹

Russia has insisted that its nuclear ties with Iran respect international agreements and Moscow has defended Tehran's right to develop its civilian atomic energy industry. Correspondingly, Moscow has resisted pressure to end its nuclear cooperation with Iran, which Washington suspects of seeking to develop a nuclear arsenal. Russia has also helped Iran build a nuclear reactor at Bushehr. Since then the US has black-listed ten of Russia's companies suspected of providing nuclear research to Iran.⁴⁰

China is believed to have supplied Iran with 30 to 50 M-11, 280 km range, single-stage, solid propellant missiles and wheeled transporter-erector-launcher (TEL) vehicles.⁴¹ In addition to carrying an 800 kg high explosive warhead, the M-11 is thought to be capable of delivering up to a 20 KT nuclear warhead, chemical agents and also fuel-air explosives or high explosive submunitions.⁴²

The Chinese company Great Wall Industries Corporation has been sanctioned by the US for supplying missile-testing telemetry technology to Iran.⁴³ After the 1991 Gulf War, Iran embarked on a naval modernization program, which included acquiring from China the C-802 anti-ship cruise missile. By mid-1997 Iran reportedly possessed ~ sixty ship-launched C-802s.⁴⁴ The level of non-military cooperation is on the rise also. China's National Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec) has signed a \$100 billion contract with Iran to purchase 10 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year for 25 years and has purchased 50 percent of the Yadavaran oilfield.⁴⁵

Beijing has echoed Moscow's opposition to UN action against Iran. After concluding the historic gas and oil deal between China and Iran in October 2004, China's Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing announced that China would not support UN Security Council action against Iran's nuclear energy program.⁴⁶

Opposition in Moscow and Beijing to UN Security Council action against Iran is significant; Russia and China enjoy a Security Council veto power. Iran has powerful friends in the UN. As such a Russian-Sino-Iranian strategic triangle seems possible. But, regional cooperation to protect their near abroad from US divide and conquer strategies cannot be construed as inexorably leading to a Cold War. Like the involvement of China and Russia with India, the triangle is a vehicle to protect their markets and the regions resources not toppling hegemony.

39 Charles P. Vick, "Shahab-4", <<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/iran/missile/shahab-4.htm>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

40 A. William Samii, "Khatami Suffers A Diplomatic Illness", *GlobalSecurity.org*, Vol.2, No. 49, 13 December 1999, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/1999/49-131299.html>, accessed 20 August 2005.

41 Frank J. Gaffney Jr, "China Arms the Rogues", *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1997, <<http://www.meforum.org/article/360>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

Frank Gaffney Jr., Director - Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., served in senior positions in the Reagan Defense Department in 1983-87, with responsibilities for U.S. nuclear forces & arms policy.

42 Andrew Feickert, "Iran's Ballistic Missile Capabilities", Congressional Research Service (CRS), 23 August 2004.

43 Daniel A. Pinkston, "Testimony of Daniel A. Pinkston Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission", Hearing on China's Proliferation Practices and Its Role in the North Korea Nuclear Crisis, 10 March 2005, p.6.

44 *Ibid*, p.6.

John Bolton, "Coordinating Allied Approaches to China", Remarks at co-sponsored event by Tokyo-American Center and the Japan Institute for International Affairs, Tokyo Japan, 7 February 2005. <<http://state.gov/t/us/rm/41938.htm>>, accessed 20 August 2005.

45 John Calabrese, "The Risks and Rewards of China's Deepening Ties with the Middle East", *Jamestown Foundation: China Brief - Special Issue on China and the Middle East*, 25 May 2005.

Sharif Shuja, "Warming Sino-Iranian Relations: Will China Trade Nuclear Technology for Oil?", *Jamestown Foundation: China Brief - Special Issue on China and the Middle East*, 25 May 2005.

46 Jephraim P Gundzik, "The Ties that Bind China, Russia and Iran", *Asia Times* (Online), 4 June 2005, <<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/GF04Ad07.html>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

CONCLUSION

For most of the last century Russia, by way of the Soviet Union, included the regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Since “the late unpleasantness” as Robert De Niro politely called the Cold War in the movie “Ronin”, the Kremlin has disengaged from much of the Middle East and Latin America but maintains an interest in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, but their grip grows weak.

Russia’s neighbours (particularly China) remain pragmatic in their relations with each other so as to embrace power and profit when the opportunity presents itself. Therefore the US can prevent joint Russian, Sino, Indian and Iranian efforts to monopolize Eurasia by making concessions to select nations in the pact or outside of it by way of small states in the region. But the ability of those nations to fund a serious challenge to US global hegemony through an alliance remains a fantasy.

Strategic-triangle states have not indicated an interest in militarily contesting hegemony. They will defend their homeland and possibly their near abroad, but again, this does not amount to a new Cold War that will rain down upon the US.

Russia lacks real combat capability beyond its borders. Only token forces can be projected outside of Russia and not at first and second-tier nuclear states.⁴⁷ It is true enough that China and India are known to be nuclear weapons states but they cannot project their forces globally. Christensen says:

China lacks a blue-water navy, and it lacks the ability to project power past its shores and in the air. China also lacks high-tech capabilities within its military. It lacks the personnel and training necessary to compete with first class modern militaries. It’s got a very, very long way to go.⁴⁸

Iran for its part may or may not be a nuclear-weaponised state but it is not a military-powerhouse and in strike power will be the weakest corner of a Russo-Sino-Iranian strategic triangle. According to Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies:

Iran imported \$2.0 billion worth of arms during 1996-1999, and \$600 million from 2000-2003. Iran signed \$1,700 million worth of new arms agreements during 1996-1999, and \$500 million in new arms agreements during 2000--2003. This level of arms imports, however, is only about 35% to 50% of the level of imports necessary to recapitalize and modernize all of its forces. It also helps explain why Iran lacks advanced new C4I systems, and has not been able to modernize its air forces, ground based air defences, or develop major amphibious warfare capabilities. Iran is seeking to compensate in part through domestic military production, but as yet, its present defence industry is not producing either the quality or quantity necessary to solve its problems.⁴⁹

As such, it is acceptable to talk of strategic triangles for regional security and also the purpose of mitigating US influence. Much of the commentary on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – supports this

⁴⁷ Jason D. Söderblom, “Nuclear Deterrence Strategy: Iran and Third Tier Nuclear Deterrence”, World-ICE Group, <<http://world-ice.com/Articles/Iran%20Deterrence.pdf>>, accessed 20 June 2005.

⁴⁸ Thomas Christensen, “The Chinese Military and Post 9/11 Sino-US Relations”, *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Autumn 2002, <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~asiactr/haq/200204/0204a001.htm>> , accessed 20 August 2005. Thomas Christensen is Professor of Political Science at MIT. His research and teaching focus on international relations theory, the international relations of East Asia, and China’s foreign relations. He is the author of *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, Princeton University Press, 1996; and *Theater Missile Defense and Taiwan’s Security*, Orbis, Winter 2000.

⁴⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Iran’s Developing Military Capabilities”, Working Draft: 8 December 2004, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), <http://www.csis.org/burke/mb/041208_IranDevMilCap.pdf>, accessed 22 August 2005.

conclusion.⁵⁰ Yet declaring a blueprint for a new Cold War requires more elaborate analysis than merely pointing to Russia and others “feeling threatened” or having certain “common regional interests”.

As far as the US National Intelligence Council report is concerned a strategic triangle emerging by 2015 is a reasonable conclusion to arrive at. Although such a triangle will act as a “counterweight” to mitigate US influence rather than a “counterbalance” to US interests as is worded in their report. The phrase “counterbalance” conjures up images of some type of evenness, equilibrium, or bipolarity.

Julie Rahm’s declaration of a blueprint for a new Cold War seems tailored to support her concluding remarks that the “US must build a multinational missile defense network that would protect everyone involved against attacks or accidental launches” and the US needs to “increase intelligence gathering with regard to China, Russia and India”.⁵¹ It is not unusual to hear the military lobbying for bigger budgets, more resources, cutting edge technology and less oversight. That might explain a sensational blueprint of the future.

Tough and probing questions must be addressed when predicting a Cold War. For instance, oil accounted for 29.1 percent of China’s energy needs in 2000 and will account for an estimated 51.4 percent by 2010. China became the world’s second largest consumer of petroleum products in 2004 with a total demand of 6.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d).⁵² China’s oil demand is projected by Energy Information Administration (EIA) to reach 14.2 million bbl/d by 2025 with net imports of 10.9 million bbl/d.⁵³ To state the obvious, access to oil is crucial to China as is foreign direct investment (FDI). According to the EIA, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the US are China’s most important sources of FDI. China is massively outmatched militarily (even in a strategic triangle), China depends on oil coming through the Persian Gulf (heavily patrolled by the US navy) and FDI flows from the US and its allies.⁵⁴ Why and how then would China directly and seemingly unnecessarily threaten US hegemony?

Bourgeoning Eurasian alliances even where security complex conditions are present will not inexorably lead to a Cold War. Such is the significant difference between a pragmatic regional security cooperative as compared to sensationalist claims of a new Cold War thwart US hegemony.

⁵⁰ Sun Zhuangzhi, “New and Old Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Sino-Central Asian Relations”, *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol.3, No.4, Summer 2004, pp.600-612.

⁵¹ Rahm, *op.cit.*, p.96.

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