

THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN WAR ON SINO-RUSSIAN  
RELATIONS: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

by

Susan C. Turner  
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Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Director

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Department Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

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Fairfax, VA

The Impact of the Russian-Georgian War on Sino-Russian Relations: A Longitudinal  
Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts at George Mason University

By

Susan C. Turner  
Bachelor's of Arts, Political Science  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville 2006

Director: Dr. Mark N. Katz, Professor  
Department of Political Science

Spring Semester 2010  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
List of Abbreviations .....	vii
Abstract .....	viii
Introduction .....	1
1. Literature Review .....	6
1.1 Coming to a Mutual Understanding .....	7
1.2 Maximum Cooperation .....	9
1.2.1 Defense .....	10
1.2.2 Energy .....	13
1.2.3 Trade .....	14
1.3 Tenuous Cooperation .....	16
1.3.1 Border Relations .....	16
1.3.2 Power Asymmetry .....	18
1.3.3 Central Asia .....	20
1.3.4 Russian-Georgian War .....	24
2. Methodology & Hypothesis .....	27
3. Findings .....	31
3.1 Military .....	31
3.2 Energy .....	35
3.3 Trade .....	39
3.4 Border Relations .....	48
3.5 Russian-Georgian War .....	51
4. Conclusion .....	57
List of References .....	61

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1: Chinese Russian Imports (as percentage of total imports).....	43
Table 2: Chinese Exports to Russia (as percentage of total exports).....	44

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Sino-Russian Trade, 2000-2007.....	14
Figure 2: Sino-Russian Crude Oil exports.....	38
Figure 3: China's Exports to Russia (billions).....	41
Figure 4: China's World Exports (billions) .....	41
Figure 5: China's Imports from Russia (billions).....	42
Figure 6: China's World Imports (billions).....	42

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Name
BRIC .....	Brazil, Russia, India, and China
CICIR .....	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations
CIS .....	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO .....	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ESPO .....	East-Siberian Pacific Oil
IMF .....	International Monetary Fund
MFN .....	Most Favored Nation
NATO .....	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDRC .....	National Development and Reform Commission
PLA .....	People's Liberation Army
SCO .....	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
WNC .....	World News Connection



## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN WAR ON SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

Susan C. Turner

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Thesis Director: Dr. Mark N. Katz

Upon scrutinizing current Sino-Russian relations, one uncovers a carefully constructed partnership hinged upon strategic points of collaboration and laden with areas of contention. The Russian-Georgian War in August 2008 and China's decision not to endorse Russia's actions demonstrated to the world that despite the two countries' partnership China and Russia differ dramatically in the kind of power they use to situate themselves on the world stage. Consequently, some scholars have already placed the Russian-Georgian War among a long list of situations that exemplify the stagnation of the Sino-Russian friendship. This paper counters these assumptions by examining China's extended discourse on Russia after the war in order to assess the true impact of the war on Sino-Russian relations. Since the Russian-Georgian War challenged some of the very *principles* of the Sino-Russian friendship (as codified in the 2001 Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty and the SCO Establishment Charter), it is seemingly logical to think

that it would cause a rift in China and Russia's relations. My research, however, has shown the opposite to be true. Rather than disagreeing with Russia's display of hard power against Georgia and its tough stance toward America, China repeatedly chose in its domestic media to support Russia's aggressive actions and attitude. This expression of support was not limited to articles about the Russian-Georgian War, but also appeared in China's discourse on different issues, indicating that China has rethought its position as a neutral party in the relations between the United States and Russia.

## INTRODUCTION

Though analysts now can cite a long string of incidents precipitating the Russian-Georgian War<sup>1</sup>, few anticipated Russia's actions at the time of the invasion. In fact, most of the world's attention was not directed toward the Caucasus at all, but was focused intently on the 29<sup>th</sup> Summer Olympics in Beijing. Celebrating Pierre de Coubertin's dream of "solidarity, peace and friendship," China began the Olympics with a monumental opening ceremony complete with synchronized drummers, choreographed dancers, and fireworks illuminating the skies. It was an expectant and accepting debut for a country that had long espoused a foreign policy of "peaceful development" and had accumulated an extraordinary amount of soft power in a relatively short amount of time. Ironically, around the same time that China's fireworks painted the sky, its strategic partner, the Russian Federation, also displayed its power—but by drastically different

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<sup>1</sup> Events now seen as leading up to the war in August 2008 include: the Russian ban on Georgian wine and mineral water (Spring 2006), Russian construction of military base in Java (Spring 2006), Russian economic boycott of Georgia (September-October 2006), Russian assistance in attack of Georgian-controlled Kodori Gorge villages (March 2007), Russia's drop of an undetonated missile near South Ossetia (August 2007), Russia's withdrawal from 1996 CIS Sanctions Treaty (March 2008), Putin's military decree opening relations with South Ossetia and Abkhazia (April 2008), Russian destruction of a Georgian UAV (April 2008), establishment of Russian checkpoints along Inguri River (April 2008), Russian violation of Georgian airspace (July 2008), Russian participation in the military exercise "Kavkaz-2008" and the positioning of its troops along the Georgian border (August 2008). See: Svante E. Cornell, et al., "Russia's War in Georgia: Implication for Georgia and the World," Central-Asia Caucus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, August 2008, 15 Sept. 2009 <<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/0808Georgia-PP.pdf>>.

means. For the first time since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Russia sent troops onto foreign soil.

According to Russian accounts, the fighting first broke out in the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali between the Georgian military and the local armed forces minutes before midnight on August 7<sup>th</sup>, despite an earlier truce called for by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili.<sup>2</sup> Within fourteen hours, ten villages had been burnt to the ground and 2,000 people were reported dead, including twelve Russian peacekeepers. Russian Ambassador to China Sergey Razov told *Xinhua* that it was this “perfidious” attack against the South Ossetians (and against the Russian citizens residing in South Ossetia) that sparked Russian involvement.<sup>3</sup> Russian tanks arrived in Tskhinvali by 4 p.m. and began shelling Georgian establishments within the hour. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity, with renewed confidence, warned the Georgian armed forces that they faced “complete annihilation” if they remained in Tskhinvali.<sup>4</sup> The fighting continued for four more days.

On Monday, August 11th, both houses of the Russian parliament adopted an appeal by President Dmitry Medvedev to recognize the independence of both South

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<sup>2</sup> Whereas Russia begins its account of the war with the fighting on August 7, more thorough analyses of the war indicate that Russia’s action had been premeditated and were not at all a mere “response” to Georgian action. See footnote 1 for details on Russia’s actions. See also: Olga Allenova, “The First Peacekeeping War –Russia and Georgia are Fighting for South Ossetia,” *Kommersant* 9 Aug. 2008, [Countdown to War in Georgia: Russia’s Foreign Policy and Media Coverage of the Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia](#). (Minneapolis: East View Press, 2008) 395-399.

<sup>3</sup> “Russian Ambassador Defends Recognition of South Ossetia, Abkhazia,” *Xinhua* 18 Aug. 2008, 10 Sept. 2009 Accessed online via World News Connection.

<sup>4</sup> Allenova, 395-399.

Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>5</sup> On August 12<sup>th</sup>, Russia agreed to a cease-fire agreement negotiated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy.<sup>6</sup> The “Five Day War,” or as Russia referred to it, the “Peace-Enforcing Operation” had officially come to a close.<sup>7</sup> Two weeks later, Russia formally recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

While glad the War had ended, most nations were quick to show their disapproval of the invasion and Russia’s recognition of the Georgian territories. Both the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the French UN representative called the decision “regrettable” and German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that it was “absolutely not acceptable.” Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt also added his voice to the criticism, saying that Russia’s decisions amounted to “a policy of confrontation, not only with the rest of Europe but also with the international community as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> Beijing’s immediate response, although characteristically reticent, shared a similar tone, stating that Russia’s invasion had “punched a whole into the principle of [the] ‘Olympic truce’ in South Ossetia,” and had “made the world realize the fragile balance of

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<sup>5</sup> According to Medvedev, Abkhazia was recognized due to the fact that “the same fate lay in store” for it. “This is Not an Easy Choice to Make, But it Represents the Only Possibility to Save Human Lives,” Izvestia, 27 Aug. 2008, Countdown to War in Georgia: Russia’s Foreign Policy and Media Coverage of the Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Minneapolis: East View Press, 2008) 415-417.

<sup>6</sup> While the fighting stopped due to Sarkozy’s Peace Agreement, Russian troops remained in Georgia until October 10, 2008. Elizabeth Wishnick, Russia, China, and the United States in Central Asia: Prospects for Great Power Competition and Cooperation in the Shadow of the Georgian Crisis (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009) 1.

<sup>7</sup> Arkady Dubnov, “Peace Without Point 6—South Ossetia Awaits a New Peacekeeping Format,” Vremya novostei 14 Aug. 2008 Countdown to War in Georgia: Russia’s Foreign Policy and Media Coverage of the Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Minneapolis: East View Press, 2008) 410-412.

<sup>8</sup> Liu Yangtang, “The Shadows of Big Power in the Conflict in South Ossetia,” Liaowang, 29 Aug. 2008, 1 Nov. 2009 Accessed online via World News Connection.

international politics in the face of national interests.”<sup>9</sup>

At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit immediately following the Russian-Georgian War, China and the other members of the SCO, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan refused to endorse Russia’s actions. China’s only statement on the issue at the time was, “In accordance with [our] consistent and principled stance on issues of this kind, we hope the relevant parties can resolve the issue through dialogue and consultation.”<sup>10</sup> China’s “consistent and principled stance,” refers to China’s firm belief in the sovereignty of the state and its commitment to protecting it from all exogenous and indigenous threats. Until now, China shared this view with Russia. In fact, Article 11 of the 2001 Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty explicitly states that both countries agree to “oppose any action of resorting to the use of force to bring pressure to bear on others or interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state under all sorts of pretexts.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Article 20 of the Treaty requires that signatories “actively cooperate in cracking down terrorists, splittists, and extremists.” Also in 2001, Russia and China signed The Establishment Charter of the SCO which similarly expresses the significance of “sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the “non-interference in internal affairs, “and combating the “three evils” of separatism,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “FM Spokesman: China ‘Concerned’ of Situation in South Ossetia, Abkhazi,” Xinhua 27 Oct. 2008, 14 Sept. 2009 Accessed online via World News Connection.

<sup>11</sup> Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2001) 10 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/dozys/gjlb/3220/3221/t16730.htm> >.

terrorism, and religious extremism.<sup>12</sup> Several other Joint Declarations followed reaffirming these positions, including joint statements and declarations in December 2002, May 2003, October 2004, and July 2005. Consequently, one would expect that Russia's defiance of these terms (as exemplified by the Russian-Georgian War) would, at the very least, precipitate China's disassociation with Russia's actions in this regard and perhaps, even thwart future Sino-Russian cooperation. But has it?

Currently, this question remains unaddressed in the literature on Sino-Russian relations. But its answer speaks directly to the larger question of the future of Sino-Russian relations. The following section provides a concise overview of the views that have emerged in the analysis of the Sino-Russian relationship and the common areas of cooperation and contention that scholars have looked to in making their assessments.

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<sup>12</sup> Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, (Shanghai: SCO, 2001) 27 Aug. 2009 < <http://missions.itu.int/~kazaks/eng/sco/sco02.htm> > .

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Traversing the rich literary landscape vis-à-vis the Sino-Russian relationship, one recognizes the predilection of scholars and analysts to assess the Sino-Russian relationship as either an impending alliance or an opportunistic stagnating partnership. These classifications mainly derive from scholars' historical understanding of the two nations as well as their analytical evaluation of the evolution of the Sino-Russian "friendship" since 2001 (when China and Russia signed the *Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation*). This section explores the two camps of thought more thoroughly and highlights the necessity of a quantitative longitudinal analysis in authentically assessing the nature of the Sino-Russian relationship and as a means of demonstrating a shift of any of the variables in the relationship over time. The first section will explore the foundation of the Sino-Russian relationship and the events leading to the increased speculation of their intent; the second section will explain why some scholars believe the Sino-Russian relationship to be a formidable force in the future world order; and the final section will discuss the scholars that highlight the latent tensions of the Sino-Russian relationship and the subsequent fragility of their friendship.



## 1.1 Coming to a Mutual Understanding

In a speech to Russian delegates in January 2009, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao expressed his gratitude for the long-standing friendship between China and Russia. According to Wen, “The people from [China and Russia] have long been emulating each other, helping each other and sharing one fate, not only in the full flames of wartime but also in the period of domestic construction in each country.”<sup>13</sup> It is because of this, concluded Wen, that the “tree of the Sino-Russian friendship is so prosperous and fruitful.”<sup>14</sup> Regardless of how fruitful one finds the current Sino-Russian partnership, Wen’s statement regarding the rich history of the two nations’ relations is not certainly true, especially considering the many years of enmity between Moscow and Beijing. Since the two nations’ history forms the foundation of modern-day Sino-Russian relations, any assessment of the two countries’ bilateral future should first take into account how and why they came to understand one another and cooperate in the international sphere.

Due to China and the Soviet Union’s prominent roles during the Cold War, the end of the Cold War and the marginalization of both countries in the subsequent unipolar world left both China and Russia feeling disillusioned. China, in particular, experienced what Dong Yuan describes as an ‘identity crisis,’ because it no longer had leverage in the

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<sup>13</sup> Zhang Jinhai, Liao Lei, and Lu Jingli, "China and Russia Are Friends Forever -- Sidelights on Premier Wen Jiabao's Discussion With Russian Friendly Personages," *Xinhua* 15 Jan. 2009, 11 Sept. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

‘superpower balancing game’.<sup>15</sup> Instead, China, like the rest of the world, saw itself as subject to one ‘policing’ superpower—one with the self-proclaimed authority to encroach upon the domestic affairs of other states. China first experienced the ramifications of this in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, when the U.S. Congress suspended U.S. arms sales to China and attempted to make China’s Most Favored Nation (MFN) Status contingent upon the improvement of its human rights record.<sup>16</sup> Although China’s MFN status was renewed, Bush incorporated the Congress’s concerns in his ‘constructive engagement’ policy toward China in 1991.<sup>17</sup> China’s Foreign Minister Qian Qichen declared the following year that “The USA’s hegemonic stance and its attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of other states pose the greatest danger to socialist China,” and suggested that in order to “weaken pressure from Washington, China must broaden relations with Japan, Russia, South Korea, and other neighboring countries.”<sup>18</sup> Two years later, China turned to Russia—a country with its own qualms with U.S. ascendance.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jing-dong Yuan, “Threat Perception and Chinese Security Policy after the Cold War,” *Pacific Focus*, vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 1998: 56.

<sup>16</sup> Approximately six bills were introduced to link China’s human rights record to its MFN status. For a complete listing and timeline of the legal and economic actions taken by the US against China after the 1989 massacre, see the Peterson Institute for International Economics’ case study 89-2, U.S. v. China, available online at <http://www.iie.com/research/topics/sanctions/china.cfm>

<sup>17</sup> Yangmin Wang, “The Politics of U.S.-China Economic Relations: MFN, Constructive Engagement, and the Trade Issue Proper.” *Asian Survey*, vol. 33, No. 5, May 1993: 441-462.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Levin, *The Next Great Clash: China and Russia vs. the United States*. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008) 98.

<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Mark Katz notes that “Primakov hoped that Russia could emerge as the leader of an alliance of such countries [countries opposed to American hegemony]. The list of countries that the Russian press regarded as actual or potential members of this alliance varied, but included China, India, Iran, Iraq (under Sadaam), Syria, Serbia (under Milosevic), most of the CIS countries, and even France and Germany. Primakov seemed willing to build as broad and inclusive alliance of countries as possible.” Mark N. Katz. “Primakov Redux? Putin’s Pursuit of ‘Multipolarism’ in Asia.” *Demokratizatsiya*, vol.14, no. 4, Winter 2006: 145.

Compared to China, Russia's 'identity crisis' in the post-Cold War era was more severe and took the form of an acute (and prolonged) case of schizophrenia, with its foreign policy oscillating between allying with the West and allying with the East. Russia's first inclination after the Cold War was to reconcile its relations with America and join the U.S. in world dominance. Unfortunately for Russia, however, the U.S. did not share this ideal, but seemed to undermine Russian power by providing fewer post-war funds than Russia wanted and by keeping the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intact despite Russian objections.<sup>20</sup>

In the context of their seeming 'identity crises,' and shared antipathy toward the U.S., China and Russia turned toward one another for empathy, forming a "constructive partnership" in 1994, a "strategic partnership" in 1996, and a formal "friendship" in 2001.<sup>21</sup> This progression in their bilateral relations, in turn, has caused many scholars to question the nature and implications of the Sino-Russian relationship.

## **1.2. Maximum Cooperation**

In the time surrounding the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty, several scholars addressed the relationship of China and Russia in the post-Cold War context and assessed the implications of the two countries' reconciliation on international society. In 2001, for example, leading Sino-Russian scholar Elizabeth Wishnick detailed the complexity of the Sino-Russian relationship in her 2001 article "China and Russia: Brothers Again?,"

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 144-145.

<sup>21</sup> Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

identifying the “foundations for an incipient alliance.”<sup>22</sup> Several other scholars of the time echoed Wishnick’s sentiments. Nine years later many of these premonitions have waned—but not all. In his 2008 book, *The Next Great Clash*, for instance, Michael Levin argues that “a rising and resentful China in partnership with a resurgent Russia... may well signal the fourth great transformation of the Cold War and become the key to victory in *The Next Great Clash*.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Levin claims, the United States has presented itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as a power preoccupied with foreign wars and laden with domestic crises such as rising healthcare costs and a growing national deficit.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, Levin predicts that China and Russia will join forces with Iran, Iraq, and North Korea to counter U.S. supremacy. He draws this conclusion from what he sees as increasing Sino-Russian cooperation in the areas of defense, energy, and trade.

**1.2.1 Defense.** In 1989, after the Tiananmen Square student massacre, the United States and European Union imposed an arms embargo on China. Consequently, China turned to Russia as its primary arms supplier. From 1993 to 2000, China imported five Ka-28 helicopters, six warships, 48 Su-27 combat aircraft, and 263 missiles and missile launchers. China also acquired four Kilo-class submarines. In 2001, immediately after signing the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty (and arguably in response to the United States accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade), China purchased an

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick. “China and Russia: Brothers Again?” *Asian Survey*, vol.41, No. 5, 2001: 797-821.

<sup>23</sup> Levin. *The Next Great Clash: China and Russia vs. the United States* 131.

<sup>24</sup> Levin’s book was written prior to the official start of the 2008 Economic Recession and prior to the Obama Administration’s attempt to alter U.S. healthcare policy.

unprecedented 38 Su-30MKK combat aircraft from Russia, as well as a license to produce 250 SU-30s domestically.<sup>25</sup> In mid-2002, China purchased another eight submarines. As reported by the UN Registry of Conventional Arms, the years following the treaty saw an acute acceleration of Chinese arms imports from Russia, including combat aircraft from 2000 to 2004, and predominantly missile and missile launchers from 2000 to 2008. In 2006 and 2007 alone, China imported almost 2,000 missiles and missile launchers (nearly a ten-fold increase from its pre-treaty missile and missile launcher imports).<sup>26</sup>

To some extent, China's rapid accumulation of arms can be seen as fulfilling Article Seven of the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty which requires signatories to "ensure [their] own national security" by "maintaining reasonable and adequate weapons and armed forces." Of course the definition of what is "reasonable and adequate" is subject to interpretation, but considering China's relatively minimal arsenal at the time of the Treaty's signing and Russia's surplus, the ensuing transactions are not surprising. Nor are the joint military exercises that occurred in 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2007.<sup>27</sup> After all, Article Seven of the Friendship Treaty also states that "the contracting parties shall expand and deepen confidence building measures in the military field so as to consolidate

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<sup>25</sup> Ariel Cohen, "The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: A Strategic Shift in Eurasia?" The Backgrounder, #1459, 18 July 2001, Oct. 15 2009.

<<http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/BG1459.cfm>>.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations. UN Registry of Conventional Arms. 5 August 2008

<<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Register/HTML/RegisterIndex.shtml>>.

<sup>27</sup> These include the China-Kyrgyzstan antiterrorist exercises in October 2002, the five-state exercises in August 2003, the China-Russia joint military exercise, coded "Peace Mission 2005" in August 2005, "Peace Mission 2007" in August 2007 (participated in by armed forces of all member countries of the SCO), and the first joint counterterrorism exercise exclusively between China and Russia in September 2007.

each other's security and strengthen regional and international stability," and Article 16 elaborates that the two countries will exchange "military know how." Furthermore, only weeks prior to signing the Friendship Treaty, China and Russia (alongside Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional mechanism explicitly committed to confidence-building in the military field.

Even with the military cooperation between China and Russia explicitly outlined in the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty and in the SCO Establishment Charter, the military aspect of China and Russia's relationship remains the top concern of many scholars and policy makers. Levin takes this concern farther than most by explaining that a burgeoning Chinese army infused with Russian technology and a pattern of Sino-Russian military exercises in Central Asia point to China and Russia's intent to form a military alliance in the future. Levin believes that this alliance will be purposed to counter the U.S. While other might not go as far in their arguments, the issue of military cooperation between Russia and China is the one issue that pulls skeptics and alarmists together. Bobo Lo, for instance describes the SCO as "first and last a geopolitical entity whose zero-sum agenda is wrapped in a thin cloak of positive sum multilateralism,"<sup>28</sup> and Ambrosio characterizes it as "the most significant indication of a Russo-Chinese anti-hegemonic alliance."<sup>29</sup> Even if such an overt instrument in which to display collective force were absent, however,

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<sup>28</sup> Bobo Lo, Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the new geopolitics (Baltimore: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2008) 108.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, Challenging America's Global Preeminence: Russia's Quest for Multipolarity (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005) 86.

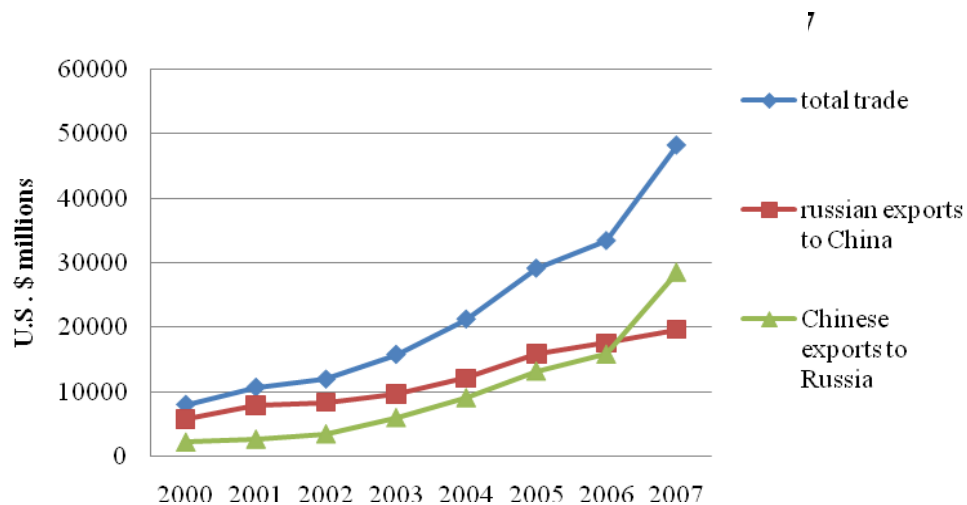
other areas of Sino-Russian cooperation cause scholars and policy makers pause including energy and trade.

**1.2.2 Energy.** In addition to Sino-Russian military cooperation, Levin cites the increasing energy trade between China and Russia as evidence of increased bilateral cooperation. Similar to arms imports, energy imports from Russia to China have dramatically increased since the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty, where China and Russia agreed “on the basis of mutual benefit,” in Article 16 to conduct cooperation in energy resources and nuclear energy. Indeed, from 1998 to 2007, Russia nearly doubled its total oil exports from 3,581 billion to 7054 billion barrels and China’s oil consumption more than quadrupled from 804 billion to 3654 billion barrels annually.<sup>30</sup> Natural gas, coal, and electricity statistics present similar patterns, albeit not as dramatic. All in all, with China as the third largest oil importer and Russia as the second largest provider in the world, the two countries were well advised to capitalize upon their friendship in this regard. As evidence of ongoing cooperation in the energy sector, Levin cites several projects pending between the two countries at the end of 2008, including: the construction of a rail connection from Pogradichny to Daqing, two pipelines from the Kovytko fields to China, and four hydropower complexes—all meant to abet China’s power demand. These projects also illustrate that even if Russia and China are not exclusive energy partners (as exemplified by the Trans-Siberian pipeline going to Japan), this particular part of their friendship is necessary for mutual stability—a point agreed upon by almost every scholar.

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<sup>30</sup> Levin The Next Great Clash 102.

**1.2.3 Trade.** The sale of arms and energy constitutes only a portion of the overall trade between China and Russia, which has increased more than six-fold in the past seven years, and contributed substantially to the increase in both China and Russia's GDPs.<sup>31</sup> China and Russia's increase in economic relations can be seen as their fulfillment of Article 16 of the Friendship Treaty which calls for economic and trade cooperation. Article 16 also emphasizes the specific desire of both China and Russia to encourage via law and circumstance economic cooperation in border regions. This area too, mentioned later as a point of tension, has been a significant component of the increase in trade between China's Northeastern provinces, namely Heilongjiang and Jilin, and the Russian Far East (RFE).



**Figure 1: Sino-Russian Trade, 2000-2007**

<sup>31</sup> Data accessed via the International Monetary Fund's Direction of Trade Statistics Database. <http://www.imfstatistics.org/dot/>



While other scholars have flirted with the idea of calling China and Russia an alliance, Levin's theory is distinct in its assumption that the Sino-Russian alliance will one day turn against the West.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Levin's argument is based upon evidence of increased bilateral cooperation between China and Russia in the areas of military, energy, and trade—all of which was outlined in the 2001 Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty. Yet, his theory, contradicts the very terms of the 2001 Friendship Treaty, as the Treaty explicitly states that the collaboration of the two countries is meant to ensure “peace, security and stability in Asia and the world,” and is *not* meant as a vehicle in which to threaten third party states, particularly in the military realm.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the Establishment Charter of the SCO states in Article Seven that “the SCO adheres to the principle of non-alignment [and] does not target any other country or region.” Both China and Russia have continually repeated these statements in the years since their signing. Thus, Levin believes that China and Russia, though truthful in their earlier claims of cooperation, are less sincere in disclosing the ultimate direction of their relationship. This conflicting view is unique to Levin and constitutes the minority view in Sino-Russian

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<sup>32</sup> Echoes of Levin's argument appear in Thomas Ambrosio's book *Challenging America's Global Preeminence* and Helen Beloposky's book *Russia and the Challengers* which both highlight areas of increased Sino-Russian cooperation and classify their relationship as an alliance. However, due to the many caveats of Ambrosio and Beloposky regarding the future direction of the Sino-Russian relationship, they would be more appropriately classified in the second camp of thought which stresses the limitations of the Sino-Russian friendship.

<sup>33</sup> Article Seven of the Treaty states that as signatories of the Treaty, China and Russia “ shall adopt measures to increase trust between their militaries and reduce military forces in the border areas...[and] shall expand and deepen confidence building measures in the military field so as to consolidate each other's security and strengthen regional and international stability,” but that “The military and military technology cooperation of the contracting parties carried out in accordance with the relevant agreements are not directed at third countries.”

literature. The next subsection outlines the majority view of scholars of Sino-Russian relations, which focuses more on the limitations of the Sino-Russian relationship.

### **1.3 Tenuous Cooperation**

Scholars that stress the limitations of the Sino-Russian relationship, while predominantly agreeing with Levin's claims of Sino-Russian cooperation in certain key sectors, also find the Sino-Russian relationship more nuanced than Levin—laden with underlying tensions and lacking the strength and the sincerity inherent in an alliance.<sup>34</sup> Erica S. Downs aptly explains it is “an engagement [that] has not yet led to a marriage, because neither country has been ready to settle down at the same time.”<sup>35</sup> Issues Downs and others emphasize that impede the advancement of Sino-Russian relations include tumultuous border relations (including problems of illegal immigration), power asymmetry in trade and energy, as well as competing influence in Central Asia.<sup>36</sup>

**1.3.1 Border relations.** Scholars that are skeptical of advancement in Sino-Russian relations argue that while the relative economic advancement of China and Russia in recent years has created new opportunities for cooperation, it has also exasperated old

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<sup>34</sup> It is perhaps important to note (as to not simplify Levin's argument) that Levin does NOT discount these later areas of tension altogether, but notes that ““these are but minor irritants in an otherwise burgeoning alliance that sees the leadership in Moscow and Beijing drawing closer together in almost all spheres of bilateral cooperation, and coordinating policy on a number of multilateral issues and in international fora—often in response to and at odds with U.S. initiatives and interests.” (106).

<sup>35</sup> Erica S. Downs “Sino-Russian Energy Relations,” The Future of China-Russia Relations: Asia in the New Millennium, Ed. James Bellacque (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010) 146-179.

<sup>36</sup> While these issues are the predominant issues cited by scholars in the second camp, Gilbert Rozman also highlights a few others including: the Korean peninsula, East Asian regionalism, U.S. relations, Japanese relations, and Indian relations. Gilbert Rozman. “The Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership.” The Future of China-Russia Relations Ed. James Bellacque. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010) 13-33.

tensions, such as those surrounding the Sino-Russian border. This is not surprising. Border disputes between China and Russia date back to the Qing Dynasty when China ceded over 1 million square kilometers of territory to Russia via the Treaty of Aigun and the Treaty of Beijing. China attempted to reclaim these lands in 1969, and despite several militarized disputes, was largely unsuccessful. In 1991, China and Russia signed a border agreement, followed by a follow-up agreement in 1995. Still, even in 2001, the border situation remained somewhat precarious. In Article Six of the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty, for instance, while both countries agreed to have “no territorial claim on the other” and resolve “to make active efforts in building the border between the two countries into one where ever-lasting peace and friendship prevail,” they also admitted to not yet coming to a full agreement on border demarcation.

The fact that China and Russia agreed to disagree in this regard, is indicative of the way in which the two have approached border relations in general—and is the primary qualm most Sino-Russian scholars have with the supposed solidity of the Sino-Russian friendship. Scholars sharing this perspective include James Bellacqua, Gilbert Rozman, Andrew Kuchins, Elizabeth Wishnick, Richard Lotspeich, Erica S. Downs, Kevin Ryan, Jing-dong Yuan, Charles E. Ziegler, Jeanne L. Wilson, Shelley Rigger, Helen Belopsky, Bobo Lo, and Richard Weitz. In fact, both Bobo Lo and Richard Weitz place border relations at the front of their discussions regarding Sino-Russian relations, mostly calling attention to the cauldron of issues catalyzed by the dramatic economic and demographic discrepancy between China’s Northeastern provinces and the Russian Far East (RFE). Essentially, while the RFE is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the

world, the Northeastern corner of China contains 100 million people, who mostly (unlike their neighbors in Southeastern China), have not yet benefited from China's newfound prosperity, and thus are more inclined to venture North (be it legally or illegally) to seek better economic opportunities.<sup>37</sup> The policies enacted by both countries in this regard have been carefully calculated as to not stir up old feelings, but as Lo explains:

“It is as if Moscow and Beijing have agreed not to delve too closely into the underlying contradictions for fear of awakening the monster. This softly-softly approach fosters an atmosphere in which both sides can talk through issues. But it also risks sliding into self-deception and complacency. For Moscow, in particular, benign interaction may obscure the importance of finding lasting solutions to unresolved problems.”<sup>38</sup>

And so the Friendship Treaty benignly states that both countries will “promote economic and trade cooperation in border areas and local regions...and create necessary and favorable conditions in this regard in accordance with the laws of each country.”<sup>39</sup>

**1.3.2 Power Asymmetry.** China and Russia have dutifully sought to fulfill their friendship obligations—especially in the economic realm, but as Lo alludes to, they have done so only by ignoring the monster in the room. And the monster is growing. The “monster” in this particular instance is the discrepancy between the economic power of China and Russia and the disproportionate benefit China reaps in their economic relationship. This is exemplified on a micro scale by the relations of the RFE and the

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<sup>37</sup> Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and The New Geopolitics* 56-69.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>39</sup> Article Six and Sixteen of the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty.

Northeastern provinces of China, as well as at the macro-level to the overall trade relations between China and Russia. Another look at Figure 3 on page 15 shows the inversion that took place in China and Russia's bilateral trade starting in 2006.

China is no longer playing the role of "little brother" to Russia, but has ascended the world stage on its own merit—and has done so more quickly than Russia—two steps at a time, while Russia climbs slowly and steadily on. This has, in turn, enabled China to build up its military to a point that some say rivals Russia's—a remark unheard of only a decade ago.<sup>40</sup> Still, the point cannot be lost that Russia believes it still has the upper hand in Sino-Russian relations.

This dynamic is particularly acute when it comes to energy. Whereas Russia has the energy that China needs (and therefore appears to be a perfect example of international supply and demand), Russia has made sure to demonstrate that it—as the supplier—has the upper hand. The starkest example of this, cited by many scholars, is the construction of the Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean oil (ESPO) pipeline, a pipeline initially planned by the Russian oil company Yukos to supply oil from Eastern Siberia, to Daqing China which was later redirected to Russia's Pacific Coast due to Japan supposedly making the Russians a better offer.<sup>41</sup> China's subsequent diversification of energy imports indicates that if it didn't before, it now acknowledges the danger in its energy dependency on Russia. It also exemplifies that like Russia, China finds its own interests

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>41</sup> The ESPO battle is a major pillar in the argument of scholars for the stagnation of Sino-Russian relations. Discussion regarding the present-day situation regarding ESPO, and what it means for the future relationship of China and Russia, is dealt with in chapter three.

more important than any friendship. As Bobo Lo elaborates:

“Faced with the twin imperatives of sustaining domestic modernization and strengthening its position in a fluid international environment, [China] will do whatever it deems necessary and possible. Inevitably, this will entail stepping over many ‘red lines’ of the past, such as ‘spheres of influence,’ and adopting a single-minded approach to the pursuit of Chinese strategic objectives.”<sup>42</sup>

Many scholars that question the sustainability of the Sino-Russian relationship agree with Lo’s assessment—especially as it relates to Central Asia—where both China and the United States have crossed the “red line” in pursuit of their self interests and compete with Russia for influence over Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

**1.3.3 Central Asia.** Much to Russia’s chagrin, the Central Asian states no longer define themselves in terms of the post-Soviet space, but have fought hard to establish their own international identities and bilateral relations. They have also become increasingly aware of their strategic geographical position—and have used it to their advantage by carefully accommodating the triangular interests of the United States, Russia, and China. Forced to play the game and abandon its sense of property, Russia has found several commonalities with China, including securing political stability in the region and balancing the presence of the U.S. and NATO.

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<sup>42</sup> Lo, Axis of Convenience 89.

Interestingly, while China and Russia share several similar aims in Central Asia, their energy relations with Central Asia do not always align perfectly. In fact, the majority of scholars on Sino-Russian relations argue that competition between China and Russia in their energy relations with Central Asia is a substantial factor stalling the advancement of their overall bilateral relations. As Charles E. Ziegler points out, China and Russia approach Central Asia from very different angles: “China and the United States, as oil importing nations, seek access to the region’s energy wealth to diversify their supplies. Russia approaches the region from the perspective of an oil and gas exporter seeking to control the transit routes of natural resources lost when the Soviet Union fragmented.”<sup>43</sup> Ziegler’s point is also separately emphasized by Bobo Lo, Richard Weitz, Elizabeth Wishnick, and Erica S. Downs who all cite Russia’s last-minute redirection of the ESPO Pipeline from China to Japan as a premier example of the limits of Sino-Russian Friendship.

Since China does not always receive preferential treatment (or even fair treatment) in the distribution of Russian and Central Asian oil, it is understandable that China continues to lobby against the idea of using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a regional “energy club” (an idea Russia has repeatedly introduced), where members could negotiate prices and restructure supply. In fact, the SCO is the quintessential space to observe the various tensions in the Sino-Russian relationship, as its member organizations have independently and collectively sought to

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Ziegler, “Russia and China in Central Asia,” The Future of China-Russia Relations: Asia in the New Millennium, Ed. James Bellacque (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010) 233-266.

use the organization as a means to promote regional cooperation in the military, energy, and economic spheres as well as resolve border disputes. As Charles E. Ziegler explains, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization encapsulates power politics in Central Asia.”<sup>44</sup>

The SCO began as the “Shanghai Five” in 1996, containing China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. In 2001, Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Five and the group changed its name to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). From the beginning, China and Russia had different ideas about the priorities of the organization. As Kevin Ryan elaborates, “China sees the SCO development in three stages: resolving border issues, focusing on security problems; and finally, establishing a single economic space. From the Russian perspective, the Shanghai Five and the SCO were first and foremost efforts at addressing regional security problems.”<sup>45</sup> The chasm Ryan highlights in the Sino-Russian perspective is exemplified by separate Chinese and Russian rhetoric regarding the SCO and in the two countries’ disparate actions as a part of the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The CSTO emerged out of the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS's) Collective Security Treaty in 1992 and includes the states of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The organization’s purpose, as expressed by its founding charter, is to maintain and nurture “a close and comprehensive *alliance* in the foreign policy, military and military technology fields and in the sphere of countering

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>45</sup> Kevin Ryan, “Russo-Chinese Defense Relations,” The Future of China-Russia Relations: Asia in the New Millennium, ed. James Bellacque (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010) 189.



transnational challenges and threats to the security of States and peoples.”<sup>46</sup> Russia’s role in particular, as the most militarized and largest signatory, is to protect the other CSTO member states and counterbalance the continued presence of the U.S. in Central Asia.

At its embryonic stage, the CSTO’s rapid deployment force consisted of a Russian military base in Kant, equipped with 15 SU-25s and SU-27s and 500 soldiers supplementing the Tajikistan force.<sup>47</sup> In 2003, the CSTO requested to join forces with NATO; with the justification being that while “NATO and the CSTO might be in different weight categories... in essence they are similar organizations because they include military components, political components, and components that deal with today's challenges.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the supposed benefits of NATO-CSTO cooperation, however, NATO remained reluctant to cooperate with the CSTO.<sup>49</sup> As a corollary, the CSTO continued on without NATO’s endorsement, and aspired to become its own regional alliance.<sup>50</sup> General Baluyevsky further explained that the CSTO “[was in response to] NATO's attempts to involve CIS states in the bloc's activity and to weaken their relations with Russia.”<sup>51</sup> In 2006, Russia announced that it planned to double both its infantry and military arsenal at Tajikistan. In July 2006, Russia and Tajikistan held a joint military exercise on the coast of the Caspian Sea, followed by a similar Russo-

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<sup>46</sup> United Nations, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Charter of the The Collective Security Treaty Organization (Chisinau: 7 Oct 2002) <[http://untreaty.un.org/unts/144078\\_158780/5/9/13289.pdf](http://untreaty.un.org/unts/144078_158780/5/9/13289.pdf)>.

<sup>47</sup> Leszek Buszynski, “Russia and the CIS in 2003,” Asian Survey, vol. 44. No. 1, January/ February, 2004: 161.

<sup>48</sup> Breffni O'Rourke, “NATO: Alliance Praises Efforts of CSTO States, But Cool to Offer of Cooperation,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2003, 15 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2003/12/mil-031203-rferl-164831.html>> .

<sup>49</sup> MK Bhadrakumar, “Russia’s Search for Collective Security,” Asia Times Online 6 March 2006, 15 Sept. 2008 < [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/HE31Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/HE31Ag01.html)>.

<sup>50</sup> O'Rourke, “NATO”

<sup>51</sup> O'Rourke, “NATO”

Kyrgyzstan exercise in October. In 2007, “Peaceful Mission Rubezh-2007” was held, in which Russia test launched several of its missiles and the Organization declared its intent to develop a more extensive military force—including four or five of the CSTO states.<sup>52</sup> In 2008, Russo-Armenian forces participated in “Rubezh-2008” command war games, and Russia proposed that Article Four of the Cooperation Security Treaty be revised to encompass nuclear weapons, so as to further protect CIS states.<sup>53</sup>

While the SCO and CSTO might seem to have similar aims, and the two did sign an agreement of mutual cooperation at the CIS summit in 2007, the discrepancies between the two organizations are telling in regards to the differences between China and Russia’s security strategies. First, the intended scope of the CSTO is much broader than that of the SCO, as exemplified by its ambitions to mimic NATO. Secondly, the CSTO was established more as a military alliance than the SCO, whose charter only gives cursory mention of the military role of the organization. In addition to the foundational differences between the CSTO and the SCO, the actions of the two organizations are also subject to analysis—especially the actions taken by each organization immediately after the Russian-Georgian War.

**1.3.4 The Russian-Georgian War.** Two weeks after Russia and Georgia signed the cease-fire agreement brokered by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev traveled to Dushanbe to attend the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual SCO Summit, where he encouraged his fellow SCO members to support its actions in Georgia and join

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<sup>52</sup> Ria Novosti, “CSTO plans to expand its military contingent,” 14 May 2007, 16 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2007/05/mil-070514-rianovosti01.html>>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Russia in recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. The Summit concluded without any statements of support or recognition. In contrast, the CSTO issued a declaration the following month stating that it was "deeply concerned by the attempt Georgia undertook to solve the conflict in South Ossetia by force..." and that it "support[ed] the active role of Russia in peace and cooperation assistance in the region."<sup>54</sup> China had won the battle in Dushanbe by influencing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan not to support Russian action, but was powerless to do the same when the same countries convened a few weeks later as a part of the CSTO.

Elizabeth Wishnick, one of the only Sino-Russian scholars to have analyzed the impact of the Russian-Georgian War, points to the disparate responses of the SCO and CSTO after the Russian-Georgian War as another example of tension in the Sino-Russian relationship. She also notes that the War caused increased competition between China and Russia in building energy infrastructure in Central Asia, indicating that the Russian-Georgian War, while representative of China and Russia's different perspectives in regional security, also caused additional rifts in the two countries relations with Central Asia. This paper seeks to expand Wishnick's research question to assess the impact of the Russian-Georgian War on the *overall* direction of China's cooperation with Russia.

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<sup>54</sup> Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, (Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Information and Press Department, Sept. 2008) 20 Oct. 2008  
<[http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/39ae7686f5ea1126c32574c20032f125?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/39ae7686f5ea1126c32574c20032f125?OpenDocument)>.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY & HYPOTHESIS

Anyone wanting to measure the impact of the Russian-Georgian War on China's cooperation with Russia could not do so by reading China's official response to the event. As Dmitri Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Center acutely observes, the "Foreign Ministry of China took its time before issuing an essentially pointless statement."<sup>55</sup> Of course, as is typical with China, the statement was *purposefully* pointless—representing yet another example of China's calculated diplomacy. After all, China and Russia are strategic partners, and for China to overtly disagree with Russian action as other international leaders had done, would not sit well with Russian leadership. China's domestic news also exemplified calculated neutrality, with the majority of articles refraining from expressing any kind of direct opinion regarding Russian actions.

How then could one attempt to measure the actual impact of the war on China's cooperation with Russia? In some ways, as shown above, the Chinese media offers little information—especially if one wishes to find the answer directly. In other ways, however, since the Chinese media is state-owned, it relays information endorsed by the Chinese government and thus serves as an accurate proxy of China's political position on a given international issue. If, for example, after the war, China wanted to deemphasize

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick, Russia, China, and the United States in Central Asia: Prospects for Great Power Competition and Cooperation in the Shadow of the Georgian Crisis (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Feb. 2009) 140.

its relations with Russia, it is likely that its media outlets would reflect this reality by attributing fewer articles to instances of Sino-Russian cooperation and even fewer articles emphasizing the two countries' longstanding bilateral relations. If, on the other hand, Sino-Russian cooperation increased after the war, one would expect more articles touching upon Sino-Russian cooperation. One might also expect a large amount of propaganda spouting the beneficial nature of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. In order to see which of these outcomes is true, I used the *World News Connection* (WNC) to collect all Beijing news articles containing the word "Russia" in the title and lead paragraph from August 7, 2008 to April 1, 2009.<sup>56</sup> This resulted in a total dataset of 865 articles pulled from eight Beijing-based news sources. The news sources included: *Xinhua*, *Peoples Daily Online*, *Chinese Military Online*, *Outlook Weekly Online*, *Chinese Network News Broadcast*, *China Youth Daily Online* and transcripts from *China Central Television* (CCTV).

Compared to other nations, Russia was the third most talked about nation in China after the war, ranking only behind the United States (referenced in 2065 articles) and Japan (referenced in 1182 articles). Of course, the high frequency of Chinese news articles regarding Russia after the war only indicates China's increased interest in Russia and/or its increased interactions with the Federation. It does not tell us why China is interested in Russia or the result of the two countries interactions. For example,

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<sup>56</sup>The *World News Connection*® (WNC) is a searchable, online news database of international, open source non-U.S. media. The material in WNC is gathered by the Open Source Center (OSC). \*\*\* It is important to note that while the majority of articles analyzed here can be generally classified as strict editorials (and thus can be considered secondary sources), some of the articles contain the direct text of speeches, treaties, and declarations and thus are primary sources.

knowledge of a meeting between China and Russia's two premiers or the two countries' attendance at a particular summit, does not tell us whether or not both countries came to a mutual agreement or if action was taken to advance their bilateral relations on a given issue. This can only be known by exploring the two countries' interactions further by more in-depth analysis.

In order to perceive the tone China took toward Russia after the war, I read and analyzed all 865 articles and categorized each according to its general theme, as indicated by the article's title, text, and WNC descriptors. As is to be expected, the majority of articles directly dealing with Russia could be classified within the five areas of cooperation outlined above: defense, energy, trade, border relations, and Central Asia. Other popular categories of Sino-Russian relations exemplified by the articles analyzed included cultural exchanges, the Middle East, and the Korean nuclear negotiations (in the context of the Six Party Talks).

Examples of articles which fell outside of these categories (and those that dealt with Russia only indirectly) include an article discussing the International Theatre Festival in China (and Russia's rendition of Romeo and Juliet), an article discussing the plight of the red ibis (an endangered animal once prevalent in China, Russia, Korea, and Japan), and a string of articles in September 2008 regarding China's first spacewalk (following the U.S. and Russia).<sup>57</sup> Since such articles do not speak to the level of cooperation between China and Russia, I have excluded them from my analysis. This also

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<sup>57</sup> "International Theater Festival Comes To China," Xinhua 12 Oct. 2008, 10 Nov. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection.

"China Presents Pair of Endangered Red Ibis To ROK," Xinhua 17 Oct. 2008, 10 Nov. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

applies to the many articles that dealt primarily with China's cooperation with a third party and only referenced Russia as an aside. An example of an article falling in this category would be one which discusses the details of Wen Jiabao's recent visit to Kazakhstan and mentions in its conclusion Wen's next appointment with President Medvedev.<sup>58</sup>

Even after putting aside such articles, I was left with 318 articles with which to measure Sino-Russian cooperation.<sup>59</sup> As such, in the following section I outline the level of Sino-Russian cooperation indicated by the articles in the areas of defense, energy, trade, border relations, and Central Asia after the Russian-Georgian War. I also include a final section on Chinese news articles referencing the war itself, as these to paint a picture as to the future direction of Sino-Russian relations. Where appropriate, qualitative data has been supplemented by quantitative data in order to exemplify that certain cases of cooperation, i.e. the signing of a certain deal, is an example of a broader shift in Sino-Russian relations in that area.

Unlike other scholars on Sino-Russian relations, I do not argue it is fair to cite the Russian-Georgian War and China's decision not to recognize the statehood of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as just another example of the two countries' divergent foreign policies. Instead, I believe that since the war seemingly undermined some of the very principles of the Sino-Russian friendship, it is an important enough event to assess it in

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<sup>58</sup> "Chinese Premier's Upcoming Visit To Kazakhstan To Be Milestone in Bilateral Cooperation: Kazakh PM," *Xinhua* 26 Oct. 2008, 5 Nov. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

<sup>59</sup> Other areas include: space, bilateral relations (either Russia's relations with another country or China's relations with another country), tragedy/crisis, North Korea/nuclear proliferation, and the Middle East.

its own right. I also believe that measuring China and Russia's level of cooperation after the war is a good indicator of the future direction of the two countries' bilateral relations—especially since it speaks to both countries' preference of principle or pragmatism. As for my own hypothesis, I believe that China and Russia have chosen to look beyond their disparate conceptions of sovereignty exemplified by the war to continue their pragmatic political agenda of bilateral cooperation. This suggests that Sino-Russian relations are perhaps stronger than most scholars suppose, showing that an isolated event of disagreement does not speak to the progression of the two countries' relations as a whole. Data supporting this conclusion would suggest that the majority of scholars on Sino-Russian relations are errant in their assessments that the Sino-Russian partnership has stalled.



## CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

This section details the interactions between China and Russia after the Russian-Georgian War as they relate to defense, energy, trade, border relations, Central Asia, and the Russian-Georgian War. In addition to elaborating upon the actual interactions themselves and their results, this section also speaks to the overall tone China had toward Russia after the war by extracting and analyzing specific language from the articles. Where appropriate, I have supplemented my qualitative evidence with statistical data in order to further substantiate my argument.

### 3.1 Military

Read as a whole, China's military discourse after the war paints an interesting picture of how China views the international security environment after the Russian-Georgian War as well as its own relationship with Russia. Many Chinese news articles, for example, point out that 2008 brought several "destabilizing factors" as well as "new developments" to the world military sphere.<sup>60</sup> In many instances, China leaves this vague. In other cases, however, Chinese articles explicitly cite the Russian-Georgian War as the "new development" that occurred in 2008 contributing to the increase of "unsafe, unstable and

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<sup>60</sup> See: Luo Zheng, "Strategic Consultation Between General Staff Headquarters of Chinese, Russian Armed Forces Held," Jiefangjun Bao Online 28 Nov. 2008, 1 Oct. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection. ; Tao Shelan, "Strategic Consultation Between General Staff Headquarters of Chinese and Russian Armed Forces Held in Beijing," Zhongguo Xinwen She 23 Dec. 23 2008, 1 Oct. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection.

uncertain factors” in international security.<sup>61</sup> An article in February 2009 draws even broader conclusions, explaining that “The armed clash between Russia and South Ossetia caused [China] to understand clearly that the strategic balance of international interests is extremely fragile; once it is broken, in the end, war is still the way to solve the problem.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, according to China, the Russian-Georgian War exemplifies the reality that *Realpolitik* is still very much in practice, and China, which usually emphasizes its neutrality, now wants to play the game.

Interestingly, although China casts the war in a negative light, it never goes so far as to blame Russia for the events that transpired. Nor does it ever criticize Russia’s use of hard power. Instead, China uses the war (and the tumultuous security environment it created) as justification for advancing *its own* hard power, including increasing its military expenditures and furthering its military cooperation with Russia.<sup>63</sup> As one *Peoples Daily Online* article explains:

“In conforming to *new development* in the world revolution in military affairs, China needs to increase its investment in the compound development of army mechanization and informatization...and adequately

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<sup>61</sup> For example, [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#) authors Li Donghang and Lu Desheng summarize Xiong Guangkai in their article "CIISS Annual Conference Held in Beijing" December 26, 2008, as saying "...the international situation is stable in general, but the unsafe, unstable and uncertain factors have increased significantly, the turbulence and even war in local regions have new developments, of which, the Russia-Georgia armed conflict is a typical example, showing the strong feature of 'minor conflict with grand strategy.'" See also: Zho Feng, "Top 10 International Military News in 2008," [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#) 4 Jan. 2009. 30 Nov. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection; and Dong Guozheng "2008 Military Situation Gives Food for Thought," [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#). 13 Jan. 2009. 1 Dec. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang Long and Xia Chengxiao, "Getting Rid of Long-Standing Misconceptions About Diversified Tasks," [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#) 17 Feb. 2009, 10 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>63</sup> "China, Russia Vow To Deepen Military Ties," [Xinhua](#) 11 Dec. 2008, 15 Sept.. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

Shelan, "Strategic Consultation Between General Staff Headquarters of Chinese and Russian Armed Forces Held in Beijing."

increase advanced technological weapons and equipment as well their supporting facilities, improving the army's core military capabilities for winning local wars under informatized conditions.” (italics added).<sup>64</sup>

Another article states, that “In the face of the current complicated and volatile international situation,” China should prioritize close military cooperation with Russia to ensure “stability and peace in the Eurasian region and the world at large.”<sup>65</sup>

The fact that China cites the Russian-Georgian War as a reason for the aggrandizement and modernization of its military makes sense. After all, the Russian-Georgian War exemplifies a successful case of separatism—the very thing China fears most—and it would be in China’s self-interest to prevent the chance of contagion by building up a strong military force. China’s use of the Russian-Georgian War as reason to advance Sino-Russian relations, however, seems less logical considering Russia’s role in *supporting* the separatists of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the War. To make sense of China’s argument here, one must look at it in light of historical context. At the Twelfth Annual Congress in 1980, for example, Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping expressed his belief that hegemony begets local warfare.

In October 2008, more than 25 years after Deng’s speech, and one month after the Russian-Georgian War, *Chinese Military Online* included an article explaining recent changes to the strategic guidelines of the People Liberation Army (PLA) as they

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<sup>64</sup> Wei He, "A Thorough Analysis of China's National Defense Expenditures," [Renmin Ribao Online](#) 23 March 2009, 9 Oct. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

<sup>65</sup> Shelan, "Strategic Consultation Between General Staff Headquarters of Chinese and Russian Armed Forces Held in Beijing."

represented the actualization and continuation of Deng's beliefs. The article, while discussing the ideological progression of the PLA over the past thirty years, liberally quoted Deng Xiaoping in justifying the PLA's past, present, and future military strategies. It was he, claims the article, that "...reached the scientific conclusion that peace and development were two themes of the current world, which changed the original viewpoint that the danger of warfare was imminent."<sup>66</sup> In reaching this conclusion, Deng claimed that while the potential for 'big wars' had subsided, local wars would inevitably continue—with hegemony at their root. As a consequence, China's primary strategy going forward was to promote peace by opposing hegemony.

Applying Deng's logic to the present, China is less likely to find fault with Russia than with the United States for the Russian-Georgian War since it believes that the undercurrent of the war was caused by U.S. supremacy. The argument follows that the Russian-Georgian War was a result of increasing destabilization in Central Asia brought on by U.S. interference in the region. As such, China's response was not to decrease its military cooperation with Russia, but to *increase* it in order to balance the power of the United States. China's intent to further its bilateral relations with Russia in this regard is not only exemplified by its positive rhetoric, but also by the numerous high-level meetings that took place after the Russian-Georgian War between Russian and Chinese

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<sup>66</sup> Zhao Shiqiang and Qiang Zhonghe, "Major Strategy Complying with Times' Development Trend, Scientific Decision Affects Nation's Future and Destiny - Strategic Values of Our Military's Strategic Guidance Thinking Change," Jiefangjun Bao 19 Oct. 2008, 9 Sept. 2009 Accessed online through World News Connection.

<sup>54</sup> For more information see: Susan Turner, "China and Russia and the Multipolar World Order: the Danger in the Undefined," Asian Perspective, vol. 33, No.1, Spring 2009: 159-184.

leaders.<sup>67</sup> These meetings, in turn, yielded the following documents: a memorandum of understanding on the development of heavy helicopters (October 2008), a Letter of Intent between China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation and Russian Helicopters on the purchase of civilian helicopters (October 2008), the ratification of the 2009-2012 Outline for Implementing the Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation (November 2008), the successful launch of a direct phone line between China and Russia's chiefs of staff (December 2008), the agreement for a joint-military exercise in 2009 (December 2008), and joint participation in a joint military exercise in Pakistan (March 2009)<sup>68</sup>

### **3.2 Energy**

At the same time that China and Russia agreed on the joint research and development of civilian heavy helicopters in October 2008, Hu and Medvedev also agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Oil Sphere. Concurrent with the Memorandum was an agreement between China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC)

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<sup>67</sup> The following exchanges between Chinese and Russian leaders were recorded in the Chinese press between August 13, 2008 and April 1, 2009: The 13th regular meeting of the premiers (October 2008), a meeting between Wang Gang, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and Svetlana Goryacheva, secretary of the Central Committee of A Just Russia (December 2008), a meeting between Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission and visiting Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov (December 2008), a meeting between Hu Jintao and Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov (December 2008), and a meeting between Ma Xiaotian, deputy chief of general staff of the PLA, and Antonov, deputy chief of staff of the Army of the Russian Armed Forces (March 2009).

<sup>68</sup> Yuan Fang, "China, Russia Deal on Heavy Helicopters Expected Soon," Zhongguo Wang 13 March 2009, 12 Dec. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection; "China, Russia to Hold Anti-Terror Exercise in 2009," Xinhua 10 Dec. 2008, 20 Dec. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection; and Dong Guozheng, "Perspective a 'Matter of Common Practice,'" Jiefangjun Bao Online 8 March 2009, 20 Dec. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection.

and Russian Transneft on the construction and operation of an oil pipeline from Skovorodino, Russia to Daqing, China. According to the agreement, the pipeline would run for 70 kilometers in Russian territory and approximately 960 kilometers in Chinese territory. Furthermore, after the completion of the pipeline's construction, the Russian Petroleum Company and CNPC would sign a new long-term crude oil purchase and marketing contract, thereby, realizing "the goal of long-term crude oil trade cooperation between Russia and China," according to one Chinese article.<sup>69</sup>

Still, even if China and Russia's energy cooperation was on the incline, most scholars would note that these deals did little to remediate the damage done earlier by the ESPO pipeline going to Japan. After all, some of China's harshest rhetoric regarding Russia was spurred precisely by this situation. As Erica S. Downs noted March 2006, Chinese Vice Minister of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) Zhang Guobao stated that "Currently, the Sino-Russian pipeline is one step forward, two steps back. Today is cloudy with a chance of sun while tomorrow is cloudy with a chance of clouds, just like a weather forecast."<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, time has done little to temper Russia's self-seeking behavior, as it continues to hold the upper hand in energy and has no qualms with exploiting its advantage. On January 1, 2009, for example Russia suspended its natural gas supply to the Ukraine due to the Ukraine's refusal to pay Russia's demanded price. Russia had

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<sup>69</sup> An Pei and Zhang Yi, "China Petroleum Company Signs Agreement in Principle on Branch Line of Russia's Far East Crude Oil Pipeline," *Xinhua* 9 Nov.2008, 10 Dec. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

<sup>70</sup> Downs, 161.

more than doubled its asking price in a year's time. According to Russia, this was due to the increase in Gazprom's purchasing price.<sup>71</sup> According to China, Russia was upping the cost of its natural gas in order to compensate for the recent drop in oil prices.<sup>72</sup> Rather than begrudge Russia for renegotiating its prices and striking a hard deal with the Ukraine, however, the Chinese media focused on what the dispute meant in geopolitical terms and praised Russia's "tough stance" on the issue.<sup>73</sup> China explained that the larger battle between Russia and the Ukraine was not over oil, but involved Russia's anger over the Ukraine's continual efforts to join NATO, its pro-American position in the Orange Revolution, and its support of Georgia in the Russian-Georgian War. Thus, claimed one article, "It is generally believed that conflicts between the two neighbors may be avoided only if Kiev modifies its pro-Western stand."<sup>74</sup> According to China, the whole of Russia and the Ukraine's energy problems could be traced back to political differences.

This paper employs similar logic by looking at the level of Sino-Russian cooperation in different areas after the Russian-Georgian War to see if the war marks a divergence in the two countries' politics. Interestingly, as with China and Russia's military cooperation, the war did not seem to detrimentally affect Sino-Russian energy relations. If China found any fault with Russia for the Russian-Georgian War, it certainly

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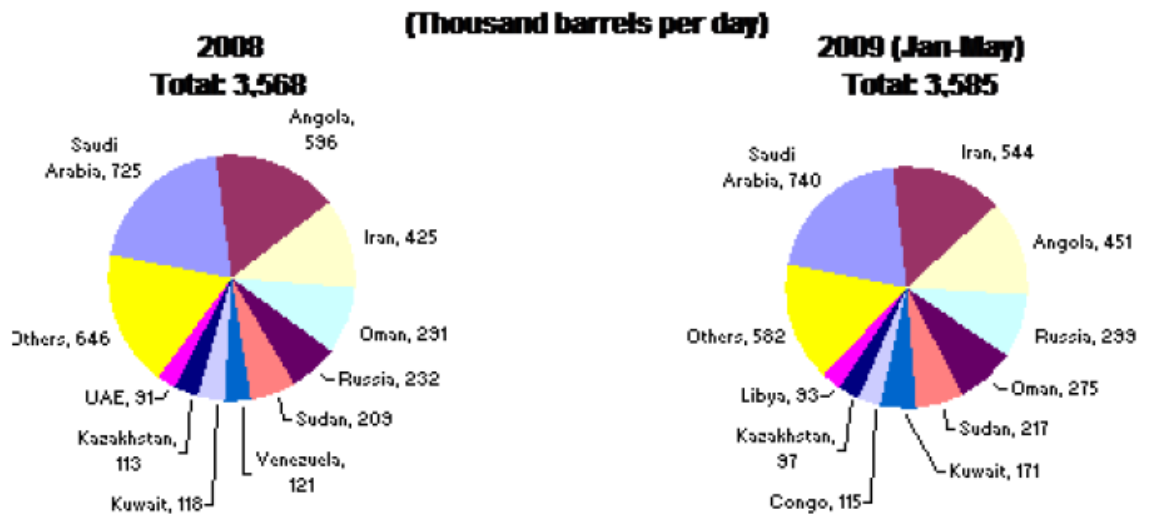
<sup>71</sup> "Russia-Ukraine gas row heats up," Renmin Ribao 8 Jan.2009, 22 Dec. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

<sup>72</sup> "CASS Member on Natural Gas Prices Dispute Between Russia, Ukraine," Jiefangjun Bao Online 14 Jan. 2009, 22 Dec. 2009 Accessed through World News Connection.

<sup>73</sup> "What Is Behind Russia-Ukraine Gas Dispute?" Xinhua 15 Jan. 2009, 22 Dec. 2009 Accessed through the World News Connection.

<sup>74</sup> "Economic, Political Wrestling Behind Russia-Ukraine Gas Row," Xinhua 3 Jan. 2009, Jan 10 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

didn't reflect this in its oil imports. In fact, as illustrated in Figure 4, oil imports from Russia to China actually *increased* after the War. Furthermore, neither Russia's invasion of Georgia nor its "freeze-out" of the Ukraine prevented China from lending Russia \$25 billion in February 2009. The conditions? A guaranteed pipeline spur from the ESPO and a twenty year supply of oil. Finally, with the "Loans-for Oil Deal" signed February 17, the ESPO pipeline situation was resolved.



**Figure 2: China's Crude Oil Imports by Source**

Source Note: Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: China: July 2009

To conclude based on qualitative and quantitative data that the Russian-Georgian War had a negligible effect on Sino-Russian energy cooperation or that the War caused an increase in China and Russia's energy cooperation, fails to take into account the



underlying impact of a significant third factor: the world financial crisis. In fact, Erica S. Downs concludes that China and Russia experienced a “breakthrough in energy relations” in 2008 *despite* the Russian-Georgian War and *because* of the world financial crisis.<sup>75</sup> But were China’s political and economic interests truly pitted against one another, with one temporarily taking precedence? A thorough reading of Chinese news articles indicates not. Instead, China’s decision to use the Russian-Georgian War as justification for further collaboration with Russia indicates its underlying support of Russian action. Furthermore, China’s explanation of the War in terms of Russia versus the U.S. (expounded upon later) speaks clearly to China and Russia’s shared political agenda of balancing U.S. power. The next section examines China and Russia’s economic relations as affected by the independent variables of the Russian-Georgian War *and* the World Financial Crisis—since both are valid events likely to influence China’s foreign policy decisions.

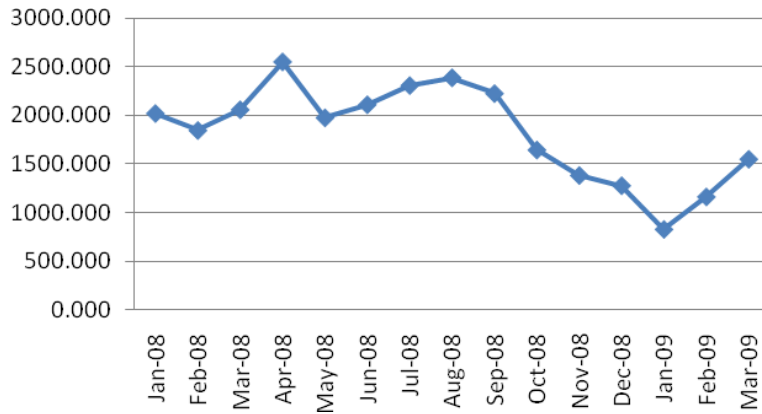
### **3.3 Trade**

The volume of Sino-Russian trade reduced by more than half between August 2008 and March 2009. However, as discussed in regards to China and Russia’s energy cooperation, the concurrent timing of the Russian-Georgian War and the World Financial Crisis convolutes any attempt at a causal argument. For instance, how are we to know if the downturn in China and Russia’s economic cooperation was due to the war or the economic crisis? In this particular instance, this can best be answered by comparing the

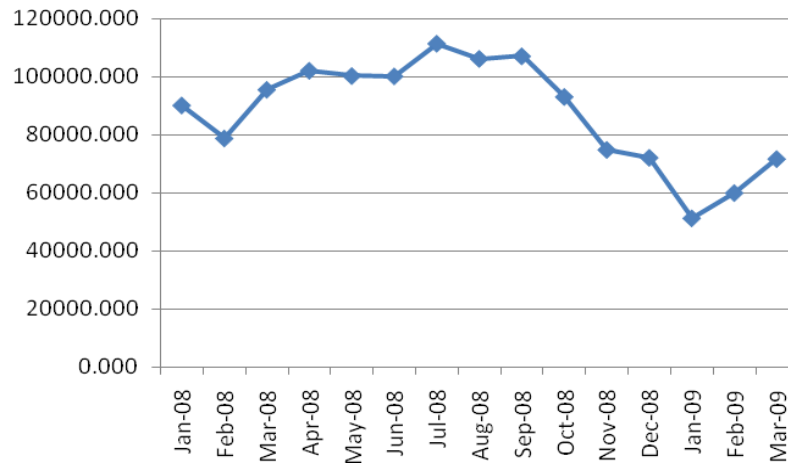
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<sup>75</sup> Downs, 147.

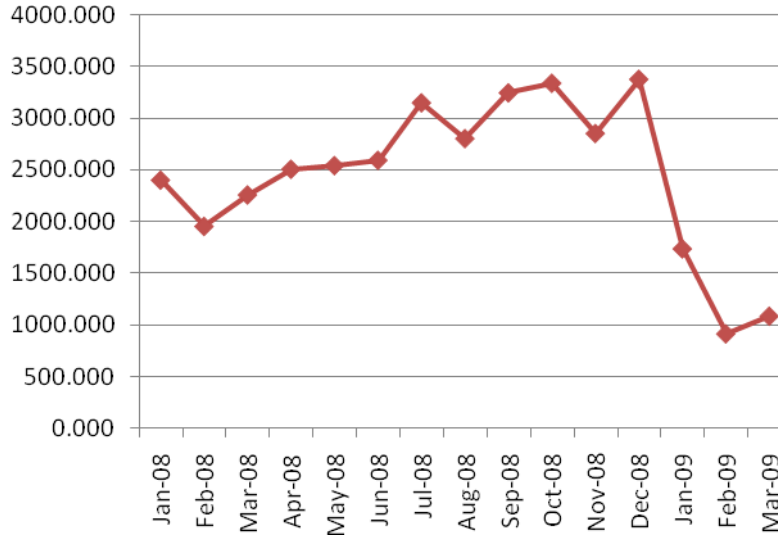
trend in China's trade with Russia against China's trade with the rest of the world (Figures 5-8). If the trade patterns appear substantially similar, one could conclude that the same independent variable likely impacted both outcomes. And since the World Financial Crisis and not the Russian-Georgian War was likely the predominant variable impacting world trade figures in 2008 and 2009, it is fair to conclude that *if* China's trade with Russia and China's trade with the world appeared to reflect similar patterns, *then* China's trade with Russia would likely have been more influenced by the World Financial Crisis than by the Russian-Georgian War—a variable unique to the Sino-Russian situation. Looking at the figures below, this theory appears accurate.



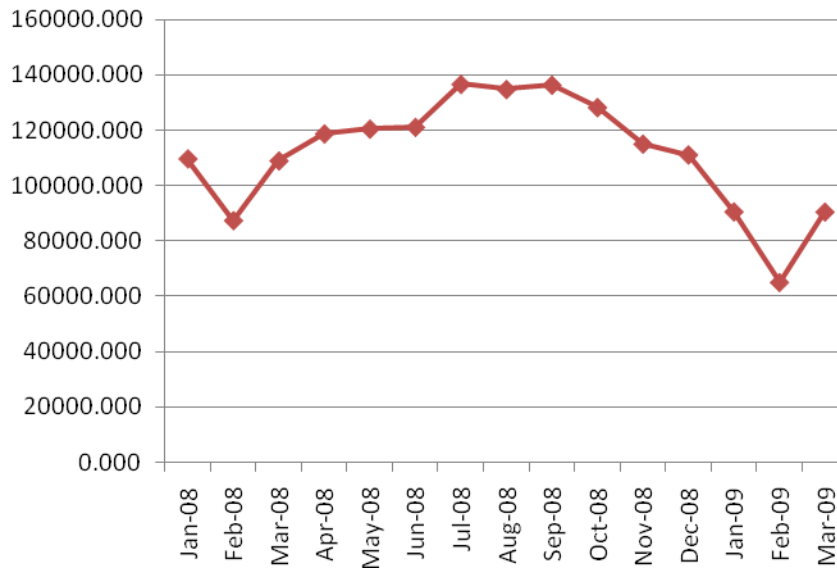
**Figure 3: China's Exports to Russia (in billions)**



**Figure 4: China's World Exports (in billions)**



**Figure 5: China's Imports from Russia (in billions)**



**Figure 6: China's World Imports (in billions)**

One could also get an accurate idea of China and Russia’s overall trade over time by measuring China’s imports to and exports from Russia as a proportion of its total world imports and exports (tables 1 and 2). Changes in this figure over time would indicate a change specifically in China and Russia’s trade relationship. As illustrated in the tables below, China’s imports from Russia remained relatively static throughout the months examined, hovering around 2 percent. In contrast, China’s exports to Russia declined from 12.5 percent in January 2008 to 10.8 percent in November 2009 with dramatic deviations in the months between, ranging from 17.6 percent in December 2008 to 6.6 percent in March 2009.<sup>76</sup> Since both the high and low export statistics occurred after the Russian-Georgian War, it does not appear that the War itself had a significant impact on the two countries’ trade relationship. Instead, both set of statistics indicate that Sino-Russian economic cooperation continued at the same level after the War as before it.

**Table 1: Russian Imports to China (as percentage of total imports)**

Month	Jan-08	Feb-08	Mar-08	Apr-08	May-08	Jun-08	Jul-08	Aug-08
Imports	2.2%	2.3%	2.2%	2.5%	2.0%	2.1%	2.2%	2.2%
Month	Sep-08	Oct-08	Nov-08	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09
Imports	2.1%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.6%	1.9%	2.2%	2.3%
Month	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09	Dec-09
Imports	2.7%	2.5%	2.0%	2.1%	2.2%	nya	Nya	nya

<sup>76</sup> It is important to note here that I extended the time period of study by six months, from March 2009 to September 2009 in order to more accurately show the trend in export statistics. The table ends with September 2009, because as of the time of this writing (March 2010), this was all the data made available through the IMF’s Direction of Trade Statistics database.

**Table 2: Chinese Exports to Russia (as percentage of total exports)**

Month	Jan-08	Feb-08	Mar-08	Apr-08	May-08	Jun-08	Jul-08	Aug-08
Exports	12.5%	12.6%	12.0%	12.0%	12.0%	12.2%	13.3%	11.6%
Month	Sep-08	Oct-08	Nov-08	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09
Exports	13.1%	14.1%	14.0%	17.6%	10.0%	7.7%	6.6%	6.8%
Month	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09	Dec-09
Exports	6.9%	7.6%	11.4%	10.2%	10.8%	nya	Nya	nya

\*nya = data not yet available

The data above indicates that there was not a significant shift in Sino-Russian trade cooperation as a consequence of the Russian-Georgian War in August 2008. Instead, overall, Sino-Russian trade paralleled the pattern of world trade in 2008 and 2009, which was adversely impacted by the World Financial Crisis.

Whereas quantitative data can isolate events and identify correlations more easily, qualitative data can more easily provide insights into the nature of the relationship between two (or three) variables. In this instance, since the Russian-Georgian War seemingly contravened many of the shared principles between China and Russia, we look to Chinese news articles to explain why this did not deter China from advancing its economic relations with Russia and to what extent the World Financial Crisis influenced China's decision to further its economic cooperation with Russia. An overall assessment of the impact of the World Financial Crisis on China's perception of the Russian-

Georgian War and its overall cooperation with Russia will be analyzed at the end of this paper. For now, however, we look more precisely at the discussion of Sino-Russian trade in the Chinese media and how China perceived this component of the Sino-Russian relationship in light of the Russian-Georgian War and the World Financial Crisis.

The World Financial Crisis originated with the sudden decline of liquidity in the U.S. banking system and the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market. Consequently, consumer confidence in the United States was shaken, U.S. imports declined, global banks became reluctant to lend money, and stock markets in the U.S. and U.K. steadily declined. Perhaps not surprisingly, China's media coverage of the crisis avoided blaming the United States outright. Instead, like the Russian-Georgian War, China used the crisis to exemplify to the rest of the world the inherent danger of a unipolar world system and the stability brought by collective power—an idea Russia and China had jointly advocated for years. In the particular case of economics, China chose the World Financial Crisis as its platform to push for the involvement of several different multilateral coalitions in international finance decisions, including the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) and its regional neighbors as well as its bilateral economic relations with Russia.

The primary grouping of nations China emphasized in its economic articles was the BRICs. China's emphasis on the cooperation of the BRIC economies in combating the crisis did not cease with the Russian-Georgian War. In fact, only a few days after the War, when most of the world was still furrowing its eyebrows at a revanchist Russia, the Chinese media highlighted Russia's role within the BRICs as a "locomotive of the world

economy.”<sup>77</sup> The idea that the world’s financial recovery hinged upon the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China continued with the “Summer Davos” Forum in October, where China pointed out that, in contrast to the U.S., each of the BRIC countries’ GDP had *increased* over the past year. In November, at his speech before the G20 summit, Hu Jintao used the strength of the BRIC economies to justify their inclusion in future international financial regulation.<sup>78</sup> Hu’s proposal at the November Summit was followed in March, by the BRICs issuing their first-ever joint communiqué calling for greater representation in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

In addition to the BRICs, China also felt it important to highlight the importance of regional cooperation amidst the backdrop of global recession. At the Second High-Level Forum on Northeast Asian Economic and Trade Cooperation in September 2008, for instance, China proposed the establishment of an inter-governmental regional cooperation mechanism between Mongolia, DPRK, Russia, Japan, and itself.<sup>79</sup> China also agreed at this time for a joint sea route between China, Russia, the DPRK, and Japan.<sup>80</sup> China addressed its Central Asian neighbors, including Russia, through the SCO. In fact, the primary focus of the SCO Summit in August 2008 –held immediately after the Russian-Georgian War—was not on separatism or the “new developments” in international security (although these things were certainly discussed), but was on how

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<sup>77</sup> Liu Hong, "Rise of Emerging Markets Reshapes Global Economic Map," Xinhua 25 Aug. 2008, 5 Feb. 2009 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>78</sup> "Hu Jintao, Makes Proposals for International Financial System Reform," Xinhua 16 Nov, 2008, 5 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>79</sup> "PRC Commerce Minister 2 Sep Urges Establishing Regional Co-op Mechanism," Xinhua 4 Sept. 2008, 6 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>80</sup> "Four NE Asian Countries To Start Trial Operations of Joint Sea Route Next Month," Xinhua 4 Sept. 2009, 6 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.



the members of the SCO could effectively and collectively combat the negative effects of the World Financial Crisis. Among the documents signed at the summit was a memorandum on bank cooperation.<sup>81</sup>

In many ways, as made apparent in China's discourse regarding the BRICs and its regional neighbors, China saw the financial crisis as reason for further cooperation with Russia –both multilaterally and bilaterally.<sup>82</sup> Neither its rhetoric nor its actions in this regard waned as a consequence of the War. In fact, in October 2008, only one week after Russia withdrew its troops from areas adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Chinese Commerce Minister Chen Denming met with his Russian Counterpart Elvira Nabiullina to discuss trade and investment between the two countries. At the time, Chen explicitly expressed his satisfaction with current Sino-Russian economic cooperation and noted the significance of the two countries collaboration in the future to combat the world's credit crunch.<sup>83</sup> Chen and Nabiullina's meeting was followed by the Third Sino-Russian Economic Forum, the 13<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Premiers, as well as a side meeting between Hu and Medvedev at the G-20 Summit. Though each of these meetings

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<sup>81</sup> "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit Held in Tajik Capital," Xinhua 28 Aug. 2008, 11 Feb 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>82</sup> An October 14 Xinhua article relays that "According to Chen [China's Commerce Minister], closer cooperation between China and Russia bears even more extraordinary significance at the moment when the world's financial markets are troubled by the credit crunch." "China, Russia To Boost Trade, Investment: Ministers," Xinhua 14 Oct. 2008, 11 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection

<sup>83</sup> A similar statement was issued in the weeks that followed by Andrew Ostrovsky, deputy chief of the Far East Institute of the Russian Academy of Science, who claimed that "Closer cooperation between Russia and China will prevent the ongoing financial crisis from inflicting bad influence on the real economy of the two countries." Ostrovsky went on to argue for China and Russia to use the Chinese yuan or the Russian ruble as a settlement currency in bilateral trade rather than the U.S. dollar since the drop in the U.S. dollar could cause losses in both sides of a settlement. "Closer Russia-China Ties Help Both Countries Amid Financial Crisis: Russian Scholar," Xinhua 27 Oct. 2008, 12 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

encompassed many aspects of the Sino-Russian relationship, bilateral trade was inevitably in the spotlight. One Chinese article, for example, aptly entitled “Opportunity is Rare, Prospects Are Broad,” asserted the following:

“In the new situation, in which the international situation is undergoing accelerated change, and the economic development in China and Russia is speeding up, it is particularly necessary for the two sides to join hands in opening up a new situation of bilateral relations, especially economic and trade cooperation, between the two countries and push them to a new height.”<sup>84</sup>

As the article’s title suggests, China saw the World Financial Crisis as a unique opportunity for it to further its cooperation with Russia, without much ado from the international community. It also saw this time as a convenient to use economics to patch up some of the long-standing border disputes between it and Russia.

### **3.4 Border Relations**

As was mentioned earlier, one of the many areas cited by scholars as impeding the advancement of Sino-Russian relations is the two nations’ border relations. China and Russia have had a long history of battling over border demarcation and even today, scholars note, tension exists as to the imbalance between the population and prosperity of China’s Heilongjiang Province and the Russian Far East (RFE). Still, China and Russia continue to advance relations in this regard—even after the Russian-Georgian War. In

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<sup>84</sup> Tian Bing, "Sino-Russian Cooperation - Opportunity Is Rare, and Prospects Are Broad," Zhongguo Xinwen She 20 Nov. 2009, 15 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

October 2008, for example, China and Russia held a ceremony unveiling the boundary markers for the eastern section of China-Russia boundary and signed the "Additional Protocol Between the PRC Government and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Eastern Section of the Boundary Between China and Russia." According to Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang, the event and document represented the resolution of "Sino-Russian border issues left by historical reasons" and should be seen as a solid step forward in the two country's shared commitment to the Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.<sup>85</sup>

Just as eight months only provides a snapshot into the long-standing relations of China and Russia, so one event (in this case the ceremony of the Sino-Russian boundary) does not indicate the dissolution of all tension in China and Russia's border relations. With that said, however, it is worth note that at least *one* positive event or agreement occurred in each of the conflict-laden areas of Sino-Russian cooperation (defense, energy, trade, and border relations) during the eight months after the Russian-Georgian War. This is worth noting, because such cooperation seems to contradict many of China's previous positions.

Looking at the situation logically, one would expect China to distance itself from Russia after the Russian-Georgian War due to three factors: First, China adamantly disagrees with *any* act of separatism and has repeatedly categorized separatist groups as terrorists in order to gain additional control over their activities and limit the threat they

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<sup>85</sup> Lin Liping, Li Shijia, and Xu Song: "Chinese Foreign Ministry Says: The Settlement of Sino-Russian Border Issues Left by Historical Reasons Reflects the High Level and Special Characteristic of Sino-Russian Strategic and Cooperative Partnership," Xinhua 14 Oct. 2008, 20 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

pose to the state. This is exemplified in many of China's internal documents as well as many of the documents it signed with Russia. Second, China also has made it very clear that it considers the sovereignty of the state paramount in international relations. China has little respect or tolerance for nations that attempt to interfere in the internal matters of other nations, especially China's. Lastly, according to the majority of scholarship on Sino-Russian relations, China prioritizes its relations with the United States *above* its relations with Russia. As scholar Bobo Lo explains, "For all the anti-hegemonic and multipolar bombast, Russia and China's chief preoccupations and interests are with the West, not each other."<sup>86</sup> So in a situation like the Russian-Georgian War, when both the U.S. and EU are highly critical of Russian action, and China claims the Russian-Georgian War could spark a "New Cold War," between Russia and the United States, you would think that China would temper its own relations with Russia to match the pace of its Western counterparts. This, however, is not the case.

Rather than simply keep quiet as to why Russia invaded Georgia or why Russia upset the West, China has been quite vocal as to the *real reason* behind the conflict. And if China actually believes its own propaganda (an "if" that will be discussed in more detail at the conclusion of this paper), then the majority of scholars on Sino-Russian relations have misjudged the future of Sino-Russian relations and the U.S. policy makers who have long taken for granted China's peaceful and agreeable demeanor, might want to take a thorough look at the China that presented itself after the Russian-Georgian War.

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<sup>86</sup> Lo, 194.

### 3.5 The Russian-Georgian War

Whereas Chapter 2 delineates Sino-Russian relations into five distinct areas of cooperation (including defense, trade, military, border relations, and Central Asia), I have chosen in Chapter 3 to digress from this format and combine my findings regarding China and Russia's cooperation in the context of Central Asia with China's overall perception and coverage of the Russian-Georgian War. This decision is due to the fact that China often explains the war as the eruption of long standing tensions between the United States and Russia in Central Asia. This rationale could not have been discovered by reading only Chinese news articles which directly reference the Russian Georgian War, but was revealed by my reading of Chinese news articles pertaining to Central Asia.

In reading Chinese news articles discussing Central Asia, one finds in many instances, that the Chinese accounts of the Russian-Georgian War do not actually describe the event as being a war, but use alternate, euphemistic language instead, such as the "accidental incident," the "Caucasus crisis," and a "minor clash with a grand strategy." In addition, instead of beginning the story with Russia's advancement on South Ossetia, China begins its account of the event with Georgia's "sudden attack" on South Ossetia on August 7<sup>th</sup>—thereby making Russia out to be the hero.<sup>87</sup> What is most interesting about China's portrayal of the War, however, is not so much its naming of the event or its distortion of the details, but more its use of the War to illustrate a broader conflict in international relations—the conflict between Russia and the West. For

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<sup>87</sup> Bihong, "Seesawing Marks EU-Russia Ties in 2008"

example, in assessing the international security landscape of 2008, Chairman Xiong Guangkai told *Xinhua* :

“What is worth thinking deeply about is that the Russia-Georgia conflict broke out against the strategic backdrop of Russia in rapid recovery of national strength and the U.S and Europe busying in pushing forward with their drive of eastward expansion, hence with a deeper strategic background of geopolitics and complicated historical root. Therefore, we should not confine ourselves to taking a purely military view of the conflict, and what's more, its strategic impact on the international security situation is far from coming to a close.”<sup>88</sup>

In other words, the Russian-Georgian “conflict,” was not about separatism , but about Russia’s desire to balance Western power. It wasn’t merely a military matter, it was a calculated, political maneuver. Ji Zhiye, Vice President of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), reiterated Xiong’s point in a CCTV interview in September 2008. According to Ji, the Russian-Georgian War was a direct consequence of "the United States wanting to contain Russia and Russia wanting to counter the containment.” “Since the Cold War ended,” said Ji, “the United States has continually been eating away at Russia's strategic domain through NATO's expansion.”<sup>89</sup> The following month, another article claimed that the current Russo-U.S. relationship resembled the relationship of the two nations prior to the First World War, where “If one side lashes the core interest of the other side by its own marginal interest, it is sure to give

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<sup>88</sup> “Leading Features of the International Security Landscape in 2008,” Renmin Ribao 5 Jan. 2009, 12 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>89</sup> “OSC Report: PRC TV Program Discusses Russian-Georgian Conflict, ‘New Cold War,’” China-OSC Report 6 Sept. 2008, 12 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

rise to a counterattack.”<sup>90</sup> The article goes on to explain that this is precisely what happened with the Russian-Georgian War. A December 2008 article expounds upon this argument saying that rather than “the apparent differences over South Ossetia's sovereignty,” the Russian-Georgian War was really Russia’s response to NATO’s expansion *and* “Washington's insistence on deploying anti-ballistic missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic.”

Now with the “real players” of the war identified, the question remains as to whose side China is on. Of course, considering China’s usual reticence, one would expect that China would only go so far—and no further. However, China has grown more brazen over time and in this particular instance, China most certainly has taken sides. One of the best articles illustrating China’s disapproval of the United States in its role in Central Asia, comes from an August 14th *China Weekly* article entitled, "Those Who Betray You Are Usually the One You Trust the Most.” The article notes that prior to the Russian-Georgian War, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili trusted US President George W. Bush to bring security and assistance to Georgia. Now, however, the article states, Georgia finds itself being used as a "chess pieces" in a game between the United States and Russia.<sup>91</sup>

Just as China has taken to casting the United States in a negative light, it has praised the assertive role of Russia. Time and time again in every area of cooperation,

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<sup>90</sup> Huang Zing, “Has ‘New Cold War’ Era Come?” Renmin Ribao 6 Oct. 2008, 12 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

<sup>91</sup> Sun Ruijun and Bao Erwen, “Marked Changes in World’s Political, Economic Landscape,” Xinhua 28 Dec. 2008, 12 Feb. 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

China has indicated that it respects Russia's role as a rising nation—and also respects the way it has chosen to “stand up” to the United States. Interestingly, the juxtaposition between the United States and Russia in this regard is not confined to articles on Central Asia, but appears in other seemingly unrelated articles. For instance, a November article appearing in the *People's Daily* on the series of Somali pirate attacks on cargo vessels, indicated that while many nations had expediently sent ships to thwart future attacks, the U.S. seemed indecisive on future action. The article further quoted a researcher at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies as stating that while the United States had yet to produce “any substantial outcome” regarding the Somali attacks, Russia had taken a more pro-active response. The researcher went on to equate Russia's “fast emergence” in Africa with other changes in the country's external strategies, such as resuming its long-range flights of bombers “capable of striking targets deep inside the U.S.” and its “firm” position regarding its “conflicts with Georgia.”<sup>92</sup>

Whether or not this particular observation is a personal belief of the researcher or not, the significant point is that the *People's Daily's* chose to publish it, and the state chose not to censor it. This of course is also the significance of the other interviews mentioned.

Another area in which China portrays the United States as perhaps lacking in judgment is in the case of the World Financial Crisis. In most instances, of course,

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<sup>92</sup> "Why Somali pirates not be halted from harassment?," Renmin Ribao 25 Nov. 2008, 11 Sept. 2008 Accessed through the World News Connection.



China's discussion of the crisis remains on topic regarding economic issues. However one telling article couples the United States' failed economic regulation with its "policy of unilateralism and expansionism," and questions the sustainability of U.S. strength. By contrast, the article states that "Russia's flexing of strong muscles in the international political arena in the outgoing year indicated a marked recovery of its strength."<sup>93</sup>

The sincere belief in Russia's rise and the United States' decline warrants China's further cooperation with Russia. Until now, China has been careful not to paint its partnership with Russia as in any way meant to counter the United States. However, its recent rhetoric indicates that perhaps this shift might happen sooner than expected. A December 2008 *Chinese Weekly* article on the United States' plan of setting up new military bases in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan presents one example. The article states that the United States has long been trying to deploy long-range early-warning aircraft in a military base in Central Asia and is presently paying close attention to Russian and Chinese activities in the region. The article concludes by stating that the Central Asian situation is no longer dominated by one country, and that "no country can do whatever it likes in the region."<sup>94</sup>

It is most interesting that China has chosen *not* to focus on Russia's obvious unilateral action in the Russian-Georgian War, but has instead focused repeatedly on the unilateralism of the United States. Considered in tandem with China's belief that the

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<sup>93</sup> Ruijun and Erwen.

<sup>94</sup> "PRC Daily Views US Plan of Setting Up Military Bases in Central Asia," *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao Online* 22 Dec. 2008, 14 March 2010 Accessed via World News Connection.

Russian-Georgian war represents a “proxy war” between the United States and Russia, such remarks as the one above take on new meaning—as does China’s overall tone in many of the areas discussed herein. When China expresses its support for Russia “flexing its strong muscles” or “baring its teeth,” it is not patting Russia on the back for standing up to Mikhail Saakashvili, but to George W. Bush. Even if China did not sign Russia’s communiqué at the SCO Summit in August 2008, its domestic reports in the eight months that follow speak loudly as to where China stands on the issue. China’s cooperation with Russia in every area after the war reiterates China’s decision in this regard.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

On March 15, 2010 the front page of the *Washington Post* included an article warning that the World Financial Crisis has created a “newly powerful China” no longer hesitant to defy Western nations with its remarks and policies.<sup>95</sup> The instances the article cited as exemplifying this new attitude include China’s position at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, its insistence on maintaining the current value of the yuan, and its renewed crackdown on internet security. The article claims that China’s firm position shows the beginnings of a larger shift of China pulling away from the West. “China has long felt bullied by the West,” the article claims, “and its stronger stance is challenging the long-held assumption shared among Western and Chinese businessmen, academics and government officials that a more powerful and prosperous China would be more positively inclined toward Western values and systems.”

I submit this paper as evidence that these recent occurrences do not mark the beginning of China turning away from the West, but exemplify the continuation of a shift started much earlier. As this paper illustrates, even in an eight-month time period, language indicating China’s disapproval of U.S. action is evident in almost every area of China’s discourse. What the *Washington Post* article does not predict, however, is *who*

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<sup>95</sup> John Pomfret, “Newly powerful China defies Western nations with remarks, policies,” The Washington Post, 15 March 2010, A1.

China will partner with if not the U.S. The present longitudinal analysis of Sino-Russian cooperation after the Russian-Georgian War indicates that Russia is a likely candidate. After all, as shown herein, China has advanced its cooperation with Russia in every aspect, including defense, energy, trade, border relations and in Central Asia.

The fact that the Russian-Georgian War did not disrupt this growth is notable—as is China’s reaction in its domestic press to the war and the events thereafter. It is not surprising that China in no way focused on the liberation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia (and Russia’s recognition of their statehood) considering its own fight against separatism. It is also perhaps not surprising that China, as an international actor seeking to maximize its own self-interest, would collaborate with Russia in areas which would benefit it. These assertions are expected and are compatible with the current majority perspective of scholars on Sino-Russian relations. Less expected, however, is China’s use of the Russian-Georgian War to highlight the increasing tension between the United States and Russia and China’s blatant support of Russia. This “twist” in the story supports the outlying argument of Michael Levin who warned that China and Russia are now operating together to counterbalance the United States.

Indeed as a Chinese proverb states, "Soil can be accumulated into a hill, but it cannot be achieved in the blink of an eye," so China and Russia’s alliance has been built over time and is best measured in small deposits. Accordingly, rather than use anecdotes to give a “snapshot” of Sino-Russian relations, as done by the *Washington Post*, this study provides a more in-depth perspective by measuring the strength and direction of the Sino-Russian relationship over time through hundreds of Beijing news articles. Contrary

to common opinion, the evidence herein suggests that the Sino-Russian relationship, rather than stagnating against China and Russia's separate interest in partnering with the United States, is actually growing stronger and taking a markedly anti-American tone.

Of course tone does not necessarily precipitate action, and thus I cannot extend my argument further than is warranted. I cannot, like Levin, claim that war between the United States and China and Russia is imminent. This makes for a good book, but not sound policy. Similarly, I cannot argue that eight months of analysis is sufficient to explain the next few years of Sino-Russian relations. Explaining a trend with shorter longitudinal data is always dangerous. What I can and do argue, however, is that China, since the Russian-Georgian War, has let down its rhetorical guard and shown to be less neutral than in previous times. Of course there have always been instances in which China expressed its opinion, but rather than U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, or the accusation that China was participating in currency manipulation, the Russian-Georgian War did not warrant China's response—and it certainly didn't warrant China's backlash against the United States. By all accounts, the U.S. wasn't even involved in the war. Thus for China to see this as an opportunity to express to its people its agreement with Russia and its disapproval of U.S. supremacy is telling. It can no longer be assumed that China and Russia's first objective in international affairs is to establish firm ties with the United States. Operating under that premise and ignoring the evidence presented here could prove perilous.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Susan C. Turner graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Tennessee with a Bachelor's of Arts in Political Science and Legal Studies. She is currently a Master's student at George Mason University in Political Science with a concentration in Comparative Politics. She is the author of "China and Russia and the Multipolar World Order: The Danger in the Undefined" *Asian Perspective*, vol. 33, no.1, (Spring 2009), pp. 159-184. Turner will continue her studies at George Mason as a Ph.D. student in the fall of 2010.