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The Arms Trade in Russian–Chinese Relations: Identity, Domestic Politics, and Geopolitical Positioning

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Why would a declining power help arm a neighboring and once-hostile rising power? Current international relations literature cannot explain relationships in which one powerful country contributes directly to its long-term relative decline in order to make smaller, short-term gains. This study focuses on one example, the Treaty on Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, signed in Moscow on July 16, 2001. Presenting evidence that this alliance embodies a relationship that is based primarily on sales of arms from Russia to China, the authors argue that this association cannot be explained by current theory. Three variables appear most important to understanding the arms sales element of this case: declining relative position discloses the structural factors behind Russia's actions; domestic policy explains its willingness to make what had appeared as rash sacrifices; and identity issues explain the core motivations and interests of each actor.

In a little-noticed ceremony pushed even further into the background by the events of September 11 and thereafter, the Treaty on Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China was signed in Moscow on July 16, 2001. The treaty was not, according to its signatories, a traditional "alliance." China's president Jiang Zemin and Russia's president Vladimir Putin were both at pains to insist that the agreement was not directed against any third country. Spokesmen for both parties further declared that the treaty was not about military cooperation. The spokesman for the United States Department of State agreed: "It doesn't have mutual defense in it or anything like that." Other U.S. officials were reported to have said that the treaty "falls far short of being an alliance" (Perlez, 2001; Tyler, 2001a).

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Many students of alliance politics, however, would conclude that those concerned “protest too much.” In their influential study of international alliances, Ole Hovi and his colleagues (Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan, 1973:4) defined an alliance as “a formal agreement between two or more nations to collaborate on national security issues.” Stephen Walt’s oft-quoted study (1987:12) relaxed this definition somewhat, defining alliance as “a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.” The Russian–Chinese Treaty meets the more stringent test of formality, and several of its provisions (especially Articles VII, VIII, and IX) refer to military cooperation and to cooperative responses to threats to the security or territory of the parties. While it is true that the published treaty does not spell out specific military measures, it does require that, in situations endangering peace or where aggression is threatened, “the agreeing sides will immediately make contact with each other and hold consultations in order to eliminate the emerging threat” (*New York Times*, July 17, 2001). In their classic study of alliance and war, J. David Singer and Melvin Small (1968:266) classify this type of alliance as an “entente”—as opposed to a defense pact or non-aggression pact. Other treaties that are unquestionably security alliances, such as the 1970 U.S.–Japan Security Treaty (Holsti, 1979: 115), are similar in specifying consultations as the formal requirement following an attack.

Scholars have generally explained the drawing together of Russia and China in structural realist or balance-of-threat terms,¹ and they have reached a near consensus that both countries are seeking to balance the power of the United States (Wilson, 2002:11–12), or at least to draw American attention to their respective interests. Relatively little attention has been given, however, to a puzzle which this alliance poses—namely, why Russia would enter into an alliance with China that is based primarily on arms sales. For in forging and formalizing this alliance, Russia has demonstrated its willingness to transfer sophisticated weapons technology to a powerful neighbor with which it has a long history of conflict.² It is our purpose here to explore the conditions under which, contrary to the expectations of international relations theory, one powerful country would sacrifice its long-term relative position vis-à-vis a potentially threatening neighbor in order to make smaller, short-term gains—a situation puzzling to both realist and constructivist theorists of international relations. In doing so, we highlight the relatively ignored domestic political and ideational factors that affect foreign policy. We conclude by attempting to place the Sino–Russian treaty in the context of the subsequent U.S.-led “war on terrorism.”

¹ See, e.g., Anderson (1997); Blank (1998); Dittmer (2001); Garnett (1998); and Wishnick (2001a). Some simultaneously draw on domestic politics (e.g., Gill, 1998; Wishnick, 2001a) and occasionally ideational issues (e.g., Blank, 1998; Dittmer, 2001).

² Because the puzzle is why Russia would enter into this kind of agreement, our evidence and analysis will focus on that country’s point of view—even though Jiang Zemin has acknowledged publicly that it was he who first proposed the treaty to Putin. Suggestions that Jiang sought the treaty in order to shore up his domestic standing run counter to recent scholarship (Lampton, 2001:28) describing a Chinese foreign policy apparatus that is increasingly secure, professionalized, pluralized and decentralized. Rather, we agree with Jeanne Wilson (2002:11) that “China’s timing in proposing it suggests that geostrategic factors played an important role.” However, not at all debatable is China’s motivation for acquiring sophisticated arms and weapons technology. States seek to acquire arms from abroad in order to expand their military capabilities beyond what they are able to obtain from local resources. Sometimes this is done primarily for domestic reasons: to secure support of military elites, to build the state’s prestige and reputation, to expand the regime’s capability for dealing with domestic unrest or rebellion, and to acquire critical technologies that allow modernization of domestic arms production. Or the motivation may be primarily external: to acquire deterrent or defense capability against a perceived threat, including specific technologies that are not locally available; to add “muscle” to back up a state’s position in negotiations; or to prepare the armed forces for war, sometimes with the objective of acquiring specific territories or resources. A long-term objective might be to develop the capability to become an arms exporter, using adaptation of technologies acquired from its own arms imports (see, e.g., Dittmer, 2001; Wishnick, 2001b).

Theories of Alliance Behavior

Mainstream political science presents a number of possible explanations of alliance formation; however, none of its theories are able to explain the arms trade that forms the basis of Sino–Russian relations. Kenneth Waltz (1979:93, 99) and other *structural realists* suggest that powerful structural forces compel weaker powers, irrespective of their histories and domestic conditions, to join together in temporary alliances with other weak countries.³ Because they are concerned with relative gains, arms sales (especially to potentially threatening neighbors) are puzzling to structural realists. *Balance of threat realists* like Steven Walt, by contrast, explain alliance formation generally by focusing on four variables: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and perception of aggressive intentions.⁴ An application of this theory to the Sino-Russian case would focus on specific interests and decisions of the United States—such as NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe, security ties with Japan and Taiwan, and plans for a missile defense shield—in order to understand the factors that have driven these erstwhile adversaries into each other’s arms. Their responses would be seen as attempts to balance not the power of the United States but the threats inherent in its policies.

There are alternative theories in the realist arsenal which are less commonly applied to this case. “*Bandwagon*” realists, like Randall L. Schweller (1994), argue that in the face of no imminent threat—and when there are potential benefits for doing so—states will ally (or “bandwagon”) with the most powerful country, not with lesser powers. The argument that “status quo” states tend to ally with each other against “revisionist states” could potentially be applied to the present case.⁵ A fourth realist theory, by Steven David (1990), argues that leaders in developing countries will sometimes ally with hegemonic states. By “*omnibalancing*” against domestic threats, David argues, such states buy time to deal with more imminent domestic threats to regime or personal survival.

The various proponents of *constructivism* (Adler, 1996; Ruggie, 1998; Wendt, 1999) emphasize the importance of inter-subjective identities and ideas in understanding international relations. Adler and Barnett’s edited volume on security communities (1998) illuminates factors, including technology, identity, and common perceived threats, which instigate and deepen interpersonal understandings, sometimes leading to affinity and even lasting alliances. In spite of contrasting assumptions made by realists and constructivists, some scholars have attempted a fusion between these two theories. One notable attempt is from Henry Nau (2002), who combines “national identity” variables with realist assumptions. Most realists determine the interests that nations pursue by assumption. Nau, however, focuses on national identity to ascertain the interests that motivate countries in the global arena.⁶

We shall return to these theories after very briefly reviewing the development of the Sino–Russian alliance and more fully exploring its arms sales dimension.

³ As Waltz (1979:127) argues, “Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side, they are both more appreciated and safer, provided of course, that the coalition they join achieves enough defense or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking.”

⁴ It is the subjective *perception* of the intention that is key to understanding alliance, at least for Walt (1987:25): “Perceptions of intent are likely to play an especially crucial role in alliance choices.”

⁵ A variation on the bandwagoning argument holds that Russia is feigning an approach to China in hopes of improving its ability to bandwagon with the United States, and thereby attracting additional aid or trade. According to this view—suggested to us by an anonymous reviewer—Russia is “playing the China card.”

⁶ Neoliberal institutionalists, while prominently engaged in challenging realist theories, have traditionally shied away from security issues, and therefore we do not consider their theories here.

Arms Trade Between Erstwhile Antagonists

Normalization of the relationship between Moscow and Beijing was neither quick nor easy. The USSR had signaled its interest in settling its costly conflict with China as early as 1981, but not until Mikhail Gorbachev came to power did Moscow show willingness to satisfy the conditions Beijing had laid down for its resolution (Wishnick, 2001a:parts 1 and 2). Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in May 1989 symbolized the end of the Cold War between the two Communist giants. Two years later they announced an agreement on delimitation of 98 percent of their border—a deal that was reaffirmed by the successor states to the USSR (by the Russian Federation in March 1992 and by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in October of that year). Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin held seven summits between December 1992 and December 1999. The gradual escalation in the rhetoric used to describe these presidential visits—from a “constructive partnership” to a relationship “determining the fate of the twenty-first century” (Donaldson and Noguee, 2002:276–77)—served as a barometer of the changed atmospherics in the Sino–Russian relationship or, at any rate, of the way in which Moscow and Beijing wanted the world to view it. A note that grew progressively louder in their communiqués was opposition to the “hegemonism” and “unipolarity” practiced by an unnamed power and their mutual dedication to a “multipolar world.”

The improved relations between the former adversaries brought an easing of tensions on their border and a renewal of trade. Although the two states never managed to conclude an agreement over the last disputed sections of their border, they did achieve a significant reduction in the military presence on both sides of the border. Beginning in 1997, discussions of such issues were held in the context of a new forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, involving the leaders of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and (eventually) Uzbekistan (the “Shanghai Six”). Despite an ambitious target, set in 1994, of achieving a trade volume of \$20 billion by the end of the decade, Sino–Russian trade actually declined as a result of tightened Russian visa requirements—imposed in the face of a rising tide of Chinese immigration (most of it illegal) into the sparsely populated Russian Far East. Indeed, by the end of Yeltsin's term as president, trade had stagnated at just over \$6 billion a year—the largest component of which was Russian weaponry sold to China.

These arms sales were not unprecedented. Within a Cold War alliance framework in which both sides allied to balance the power of the U.S., the Soviet Union had played a major, if short-lived, role in the 1950s in modernizing China's military forces—especially its air force—and building its defense industry, while remaining cautious in holding back its most advanced technologies. During the lengthy conflict with Moscow, China had largely pursued Mao Zedong's principle of “self-reliance.” But in the 1980s, as its rate of economic growth began to rise in the wake of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, China had also ventured out onto the world arms market to purchase weapons from Western countries eager to support China against the Soviet Union. However, the Western response to the Chinese regime's brutal repression of the democracy movement included an embargo (which proved short-lived) on new arms sales to China. Since the reopening of China's political and economic ties with Gorbachev's USSR occurred at this very time, it appeared that if China were to pursue its goal of advancing its military modernization, the USSR again was the only logical source of supply. As noted by Bates Gill and Taeho Kim (1995:72):

[W]ithin only days of the Tian'an'men crackdown, the Chinese leadership made approaches to Moscow for access to technologies and financial support to replace those expected to be lost from the West. The collapse of the Soviet Union also removed the principal strategic motivation behind Western, and especially U.S., transfers of weapons and technologies to China, so that China had to turn elsewhere.

At the very moment that the end of the Cold War brought a dramatic drop in the world demand for arms, China's military was appearing on the market, its pockets fuller than ever before. Indeed, during the dramatic period of economic expansion in China in the 1990s, the resources available to the Chinese military have increased by about 75 percent, even though military expenditures as a share of GDP have steadily declined (SIPRI, 1999:349). But China had not altogether jettisoned the "self-reliance" principle, and it was determined not to again become dependent on a foreign supplier for its military strength. Accordingly, what China primarily sought on the market was not "off-the-shelf" weaponry, but access to the technology that would allow Chinese industry to produce modern weapons locally.⁷ Thus, even when Western suppliers reopened their doors to Chinese buyers, China continued to make few acquisitions from non-Russian sources (with the exception of Israel), in part because of unhappy memories of the earlier experience with Western sanctions, but largely because of the West's reluctance to sell technology along with arms (Gill and Kim, 1995:91–96).

The newly forged rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing coincided not only with China's renewed appetite for foreign arms but also with a serious depression in Moscow's defense industry. The virtual collapse of the Soviet military-industrial complex, which only accelerated after the breakup of the USSR, resulted primarily from the drastic cut in the weapons acquisitions budgets of the Soviet/Russian military—itsself a result of Gorbachev's arms control agreements with the U.S. According to Russian government figures, between 1991 and 1995, 2.5 million of 6.1 million employees left the defense sector; in 1996, only 10 percent of the industry's capability was being utilized. A large part of the orders that were placed by the Russian military went unpaid; at the beginning of 1998, the government owed 18.5 trillion rubles to defense enterprises (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:15–16).

Simultaneously, the world market for arms, on which the USSR had been a major player, declined drastically, in part because of the negotiated settlement of a number of regional conflicts in the Third World. By 1991 the market for arms in the developing countries had dropped to \$28.6 billion, down sharply from \$61 billion in 1988. It continued to decline in the immediate post-Soviet years, reaching \$15.4 billion in 1995, before rising again in the second half of the decade, to about \$20 billion in 1999 (Shenon, 1996).

Russian defense industry lobbyists argued that the total collapse of their sector would be disastrous for the country. The impact of the expected loss of jobs would be especially severe in some regions and localities (especially in Siberia and the Far East), where defense enterprises were often the sole industry. Defense ministry officials were alarmed at the prospect that the closing of numerous plants and design bureaus could terminate research and development of new technologies, exacerbating the decline of the Russian military. In the view of some military and industry specialists, this outcome could be averted only by means of a systematic effort to rebuild the volume of Russian arms exports. Stephen Blank (1998:359) reports that "in 1997 defense producers were told that they had to sell conventional systems until the year 2005 and that supervision would be minimal." Estimates of the revenues that could be produced ran as high as \$30 billion. Figures approaching this size were, however, utterly unrealistic. A worldwide cut in defense budgets, combined with a glut of surplus weapons on the market, meant that the competition for orders of new weapons would be extremely stiff. Moreover, not only had the peak Russian sales in the 1980s resulted in part from the Iran–Iraq

⁷ As General Liu Huaqing, at the time China's most senior active-duty officer, put it in 1993: "When we stress self-reliance, we do not mean that we will close the door to pursue our own construction. What we do mean is to actively create conditions to import advanced technology from abroad and borrow every useful experience...to mainly rely on our own strength for regeneration, while selectively importing advanced technology" (Gill and Kim, 1995:56).

war, but the reported actual revenues that past sales had produced were highly inflated. An estimated 44 percent of reported sales were thought to be fictitious (Gaddy, 1996:91)—a result of inflating prices or financing with “soft” credits. Nevertheless, defense lobbyists apparently succeeded in persuading the “reformers” in Yeltsin’s government that valuable funds needed for conversion of the defense industry could be obtained from foreign sales (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:18–19).

As a result of a determined sales effort, Russia reversed the decline—though revenues fell far short of predictions. In 1995 sales totaled 65 percent higher than in the previous year. Although cash receipts in that year were only about \$3 billion, Russian sources claimed that this was still twice the amount that actually flowed into state coffers in 1987, when announced sales were almost entirely financed with “soft” credits. As an indicator of the importance of rebounding arms exports to the Russian defense economy, exports in 1995 were said (Felgengauer, 1995; Golotiuk, 1996) to constitute half of the industry’s total revenues. In the closing five years of the 1990s, according to calculations of the respected Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2000), deliveries of Russian arms amounted to \$14.6 billion, compared to \$53.4 billion for the United States in the same period. China and India together have accounted for about 70 percent of recent arms sales from Russia (*Jane’s*, 2001). In spite of the Soviet experience with “soft” credits, however, the Russians have not moved to a strictly “cash and carry” basis for their arms sales. Only about 60 percent of revised 1996 and 1997 revenues were said (Felgengauer, 1997b; Makienco, 1998) to have been collected in convertible currencies.

The relatively large amount of revenue brought in to the cash-strapped Russian economy by arms exports has sparked a scramble for control of arms sales. Until the practice was ended in 1997, large banks were able to profit from the use of funds deposited from sales, which sometimes never reached the factories that manufactured the weapons (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:67). In August 1997, Yeltsin decreed that the chief Russian arms export agency, Rosvooruzhenie, would be put under the supervisory control of a commission chaired by the prime minister. In a new division of labor, Rosvooruzhenie was given responsibility to deal with foreign sales of arms and military equipment, while a new agency (Rossiiskie Tekhnologii, or Russian Technologies) was established to sell licenses, and another (Promeksport, or Industrial Exports) to sell obsolete used arms and spare parts. Defense enterprise representatives complained bitterly about this system. Not only did it prevent all but a few of the firms from negotiating their own contracts, but it also reduced their hard currency earnings by allowing a sizable commission to be taken by the state agency (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:ch. 3).

Continued reports of corruption and inefficiency prompted Putin to reconsolidate arms exports agencies in 2000. The new agency, Rosoboroneksport, was placed under the direction of Andrei Belianinov, a former KGB official. In the future, the president and not the prime minister was to chair the supervisory commission on “Military Technical Cooperation with Foreign States” (the Russian euphemism for arms sales), although a closer level of scrutiny would be provided by the Ministry of Defense. Putin’s decree listed certain types of weaponry approved for export and certain countries eligible to receive them. The Cabinet of Ministers, formerly heavily involved with arms exports, would in the future be consulted only when proposed sales were linked to foreign debts or required government financing.

Most analysts agree that Russia’s commercial motivations have dominated in its arms sales relationship with China. In this context, Russia all but abandoned the cautious approach to arms sales it had taken in the 1950s. The first exchange of military visits in several decades occurred in June 1990, and resumed arms sales were apparently on the agenda. The following May, Moscow agreed to sell 24

SU-27s to China.⁸ Reportedly, only 35 percent of the sales price was to be paid in hard currency. The rest was to be paid as barter, in the form of foodstuffs and consumer goods. However, whereas the barter method initially constituted about three-fourths of Chinese payments, China's growing dollar trade surpluses have enabled Russian negotiators to arrange for hard currency payment in recent contracts (Felgengauer, 1997a).

Combat aircraft have continued to be the chief component of Russian deliveries; China has now purchased at least six dozen transcontinental SU-27 fighters, which are capable of making the Beijing-to-Moscow trip in two and one-half hours with one mid-air refueling. In 1999, China concluded an agreement, valued at more than \$2 billion, for 40 to 60 SU-30s—two-seat multipurpose fighters capable (with certain modifications) of carrying nuclear weapons. Other categories of purchases which have been concluded or which are being discussed include naval vessels (Sovremennyi-class destroyers equipped with supersonic missiles, two Kilo-636 diesel-powered submarines,⁹ and less advanced Varsha-vianka submarines), S-300 surface-to-air missile complexes, T-72 tanks, Smerch multiple rocket launchers, and the technology for advanced gas centrifuges used in uranium enrichment and for MIRVed missiles.

From China's standpoint, however, the most significant purchase break-through came as a result of the October 1992 visit of Deputy Defense Minister Andrei Kokoshin, which resulted in an agreement to transfer significant technology and production rights. In 1995 China agreed to pay about \$1.4 billion for the technology and licenses to manufacture the SU-27 at a factory in Shenyang province. The Russian press reported concerns that China would thereby free itself of the need to purchase aircraft from Moscow in the future, and that if China made minor modifications to the plane's design, it might even become a competitor in the export market. (Indeed, by 1999 China had already climbed to fourth place in global arms sales¹⁰). Russian officials were quoted as saying that Russia needed the contract to save its defense industry, and that profits from the contract would be plowed back into development of new aircraft technology. But another account (Bagrov, 1996) claimed that there was no prospect of a new generation of Russian-made planes in the foreseeable future, and that officials were simply trying to cover up a major blunder on the part of Russian negotiators, the circumstances of which were scheduled to be discussed even in a special meeting of the Security Council. Subsequent reports (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:67) claimed that part of the funds from deals such as this were siphoned off by Yeltsin's senior aides into foreign bank accounts, some of which were tapped for the president's 1996 re-election campaign expenses. Such examples of the domination of weapons sales by private and political interests, and the surrounding air of corruption, have led one analyst (Blank, 1997) to describe the result as the "privatization" of Russia's security policy in Asia.

Even though the Russians have withheld some of the most advanced technologies sought by China, there is little doubt that their assistance to the modernization of China's armed forces has been a significant positive contribution to their bilateral relationship. In addition to the SU-27 contract, other forms of technology transfer are taking place. Large numbers of Russian scientists and engineers with long-term contracts are working in Chinese design bureaus and defense plants, Chinese

⁸ The SU-27 "Flanker" air superiority aircraft, comparable to the F-15 in performance, has a long range, advanced avionics, and a wider array of mission capabilities.

⁹ The Kilo Class submarines would be a significant addition to China's aging submarine fleet. [It] is diesel-powered and is designed for both anti-surface and anti-submarine (ASW) roles. With a maximum submerged speed of 17 knots and cruising range of 9500 km, it has an endurance of 45 days under the surface with a crew of 51" (Gill and Kim, 1995:62).

¹⁰ In the 1994-98 period, China's chief customers (SIPRI, 1999:426) were Thailand, Iran, Myanmar, and Pakistan. For the latter three states, Beijing was the only available supplier.

engineers are training at Russian facilities, and more than 100 joint production projects have been launched. And yet these contacts are said (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:92) to be carried on within strict limits:

[T]his cooperation should not be overestimated: it is far from being a relationship of real allies in terms of depth and openness. Despite the seriousness of the partners, their motives are pragmatic and sometimes selfish. There is no real cordiality or frankness in their relations. They are cautious and even suspicious of each other's intentions and motives....Russia does not permit the export of its most advanced weapons systems and technologies and is not completely satisfied with the financial conditions of its arms deals with China. China is concerned about the risk of over-dependence on Russian arms supplies.... Regardless of their common interests, they will keep some distance between them where military and security matters are concerned.

Russian arms sales to China are so prominent in their bilateral relationship that they represent the main link between the countries, one that motivates and forms the basis of their deepening relationship. As Yury Tsyganov (1999:307–8) noted, “the emergence of a military and political Sino–Russian alliance seems inconceivable as their geopolitical and strategic national interest do not coincide.... At the same time, both countries are ready to develop military-technical cooperation, one of the major driving forces for their current ties.” The authors of a RAND study of China’s “grand strategy” (Swaine and Tellis, 2000:119) reach a similar conclusion. In their opinion, China’s “relations with Russia are oriented primarily toward reducing the chances of political and military conflict between the two former antagonists and acquiring critical military technologies that cannot be obtained [elsewhere].... Although this essentially arms procurement relationship has now been baptized as a ‘strategic partnership,’ it is so only in name.”

Reassessing Theory

Before assessing the theories introduced in the first section, we briefly underscore two critical elements of this case that any complete theory must explain. First, a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and China established a relatively weak alliance, with vaguely worded promises of military and economic cooperation. This agreement, reached after years of a roller-coaster relationship, occurred in the context of declining hostility between Russia and China, as well as a steep Russian economic decline, mirrored by China’s rise. Second, the alliance was established within the context of rapidly increasing sales of Russian arms to China. These sales of sophisticated weaponry form the central nucleus of the relationship between the two countries. These deals are coupled with a domestic conflict in Russia over the control of the arms industry, and a lingering coolness in the contacts between Russians and Chinese below top leadership levels.

In light of Russia’s decline and the rise of the U.S. to such a level of power as to be considered a hegemon,¹¹ *structural realists* argue that Russia and China’s relationship is intended to balance U.S. power. A structural realist framework is used implicitly by most Western academics and analysts focusing on the subject. Such scholars point to geopolitical factors such as Russia’s decline, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and the country’s inability to compete effectively with the United States. The Russians thus sought out China, a rising power, to balance the hegemonic power of the United States. Structural realists would also be comfortable with the fact that these two powers were

¹¹ There is consensus among realists that the U.S. should be considered a hegemon; debate has focused (e.g., Wohlforth, 1999; Layne, 1993) on how long U.S. hegemony will last in the post–Cold War period.

antagonists in the recent past, were friendly before that, and are now warming again.¹²

Overall, however, structural realism's explanation is inconsistent with this case. First, the military component of the alliance is weak and vaguely worded. Neither side can reasonably expect the degree of commitment from the other needed to balance U.S. power.¹³ Second, because it is driven solely by balance of power considerations, structural realism offers little assistance in understanding the timing of the relationship. Why would Russia and China choose to enter into this relationship now, and not earlier, such as just after the Soviet Union collapsed, as one might expect if power balances were truly the prime mover of the international system? Third, this bilateral relationship is marked by intermittent efforts on both sides to reach out to the United States, even as each worked to resolve mutual differences with the other. If both countries, in spite of their intentions, balance for structural reasons against the stronger side, how could we explain the attempts of both Russia and China to bandwagon from time to time with the United States? As Schweller points out (1994:75), such bandwagoning behavior is inconsistent with the expectations of both structural realism and balance of threat realism, both of which expect balances, not bandwagons.

Finally, structural realists are ambivalent about the extent to which nations concern themselves with their long-term or short-term geopolitical position relative to other countries. Do nations favor promotion of short-term gains at the expense of their long-term interests, or will they rather accept short-term sacrifices in favor of their long-term interests? Structural realists do not agree on this point, so many try to have it both ways, making post hoc adjustments in their theory to fit empirical situations.¹⁴ In this case, to explain Russia's actions, structural realists would be compelled to argue that simply to balance power in the short run, Russia would be willing to arm its short-term ally, China (since, to structural realists, all alliances are temporary). Moreover, it would do so without any immediate military threat to its survival, and in almost total disregard of its own medium- and long-term interests and positions vis-à-vis every other country, as well as its immediate position vis-à-vis China. These are heroic assumptions indeed.¹⁵

This is especially true given structural realists' track record of arguing the opposite—that short-term gains should not be pursued at the expense of long-term position. For example, noted structural realist John Mearsheimer (2001:46) recently fretted that the United States is eroding its long-term position vis-à-vis China by “cozying up” to that country while ignoring China's gradual rise relative to itself and other major powers such as Russia. Mearsheimer argued that the United States should sacrifice the dividends—such as economic benefits and deterrence of war in the short term—that continuing “engagement” with China make possible in order to shore up its position over the long term. If it does not

¹² To structural realists, neither history nor domestic considerations deserve a place in analyzing alliances.

¹³ For a classic discussion of fear of abandonment within alliances see Snyder (1984).

¹⁴ For example, in a lecture at George Washington University (Oct. 31, 2002) John Mearsheimer argued that, while he believes Russia will eventually join an alliance with the U.S., India, and others to balance against China's rising power, it now sells arms to China because China's power is not yet fully realized. This is inconsistent with his argument that powers like the U.S. do not and should not sacrifice their long-term interests for short-term gains, and it is an excellent example of structural realists trying to “have it both ways.” If Mearsheimer concludes that China is rising and that Russia should beware, why shouldn't Russia (which realists assume makes decisions based on full information) reach the same conclusion?

¹⁵ As is Mearsheimer's argument, in the same, that Russia's arms sales to China are not inconsistent with the claims of structural realism, because they prop up Russia's severely depressed economy. But this is at base not truly a realist position, since structural realists like Mearsheimer are purportedly most concerned about relative power. Russian arms sales to China will erode Russia's power—even in light of the modest gains to its economy—especially if Mearsheimer is correct in arguing that China will emerge as Russia's main adversary. Russia's arms sales appear to violate Mearsheimer's own precept, described below, that powers should not sacrifice their long-term interests for short-term gains.

make sense to Mearsheimer that the United States should sacrifice its long-term position for short-term gains, it should make even less sense to him for Russia to seek much more ephemeral short-term gains from arms trading at the expense of not merely “engaging” but *arming* a neighboring nation that many fear could become a regional, if not global threat. We contend, therefore, that structural realism cannot be used to explain why Russia is sacrificing its long-term position for so few short-term gains.

Structural realists could respond that, with Russia’s arms industry in a tailspin, sales to China would shore up its strategic might, dependent as it is upon improving the competitiveness of its weapons technology, much discredited during the 1991 Gulf War. From this perspective, arms sales would indeed contribute to long-term security, to the extent that they enabled Russia’s defense industry to invest in regaining its competitive edge. The problem with this argument, however, is that the revenue which has derived from Russia’s arms sales has not in fact been channeled into capital reinvestment projects. As we have demonstrated above, these funds have been the object of a competitive scramble, and a large chunk of them have apparently been siphoned off for short-term political purposes. Some funds have been provided to the state budget (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999:66–67). The extent to which short-term economic motivations have prevailed over security concerns is evident in this conclusion drawn by a respected study (Wishnick, 2001a: 144) of the issue: “Chinese purchases have proved so important to the cash-starved defense industry, especially in the Russian Far East, that officials representing these sectors have managed to override concerns within the military regarding the possibility of a long-term threat from a resurgent China.”

However, it is increasingly apparent that revenues from exports will not in fact be sufficient to ensure the survival of the industry, and that eventually the hard decisions about major reductions will have to be made (Anderson, 1997; Anthony, 1998:15). Indeed, the prospects for this mounted in 2001, when the Russian cabinet approved a reform program that would close more than half of the arms factories. The reform, by one account (Putilov, 2001: 12), “should put an end to the current situation, in which limited defense budget money available is spread thin among dozens of plants and does not suffice either to reequip the Army or to develop next-generation military hardware.” We will say more below about the quite substantial reasons for arguing that the provision of arms to a powerful and distrustful neighbor has indeed increased the threat to Russia’s security.

Balance of threat theory better explains the alliance between Russia and China, though it too fails to explain the arms sales. According to this theory, nations can be expected to balance threat, not power, as structural realists suggest. Russia and China established this alliance hoping to balance a number of common threats they perceive from the United States and other countries. Russia and China are clearly worried about the long-term prospect that “unilateralist” Kosovo-style actions might be taken by the United States against their own territorial interests (Chechnya, Taiwan, and Tibet come immediately to mind). In the estimate (Pomfret, 2001) of Lu Nanquan, deputy director of the Russian Studies Center of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the relationship “now is the best it has ever been...China and Russia have come this far because of the United States.” Second, both Russia and China are concerned about military threats that the United States potentially presents to their interests. Both sides opposed modification of the 1972 ABM Treaty, fearing that deployment of missile defenses by the United States might diminish the potency of their own strategic forces. In the East Asian security environment, the U.S. could threaten Chinese and Russian interests not only through unilateral actions but also by encouraging Japan—the former adversary of all three—to enlarge its offensive military capabilities. Even without U.S. sponsorship, a resurgent Japan could pose a threat both to the regional balance and to the separate vital interests of China and Russia.

A third source of possible threat that could trigger the “consultations” required by the new treaty has already arisen in Central Asia, in the form of externally supported Islamic extremist and separatist movements. These threaten Russia’s Islamic-majority territories as well as China’s Xinjiang region;¹⁶ they also endanger the newly independent states of Central Asia, four of which have joined with their larger neighbors as the “Shanghai Six,” pledging that they would work together against “terrorism, separatism, and extremism” and for restoring stability in the region (Rosenthal, 2002).¹⁷

Fourth, not surprisingly, each state also has its own individual security concerns, not necessarily shared by its partner to the same degree (Burles, 1999:48). For Russia, further enlargement of NATO threatens to leave it isolated in the European security environment. China, as the rising power, is more eager than Russia to see the U.S. presence in Asia diminished. The threat from the U.S.—in the form of Washington’s defense arrangements with Taiwan—is much closer for Beijing than for Moscow. The military presence of the United States, and the potent weapons it sells to Taiwan, are constant reminders to China of the limits on its option of using force to compel reunification. China’s opposition to missile defense is more sweeping than Russia’s, since Beijing strongly opposes theater missile defenses of the type that could be used to protect Taiwan. Although the U.S. government argues that the defensive weapons it sells to Taiwan present no threat to mainland China, any change in the balance of power in the region that increases the difficulty of retaking Taiwan by force is inherently threatening to China.

Russia, on the other hand, has proposed theatre missile defense as an alternative to the Bush proposal. Although Russia declared its opposition to Taiwan independence in the text of the new treaty—a clause China almost certainly insisted upon as a condition for its signature—Moscow would certainly not welcome hostilities in the Taiwan Strait.¹⁸ Finally, with regard to China’s territorial disputes in the South China Sea, China undoubtedly feels constrained by the United States–Japan security alliance, whereas Russia has not only declared its lack of concern about this alignment, but also would probably be alarmed if the U.S. were to withdraw from the region.

If most of these perceived threats remained unspoken in the announcement by Russia and China of their new partnership, even more hidden from view was a threat that each state undoubtedly perceived—the *potential threat posed to it by the other state had the two chosen not to align*. Their rapprochement in the late 1980s had enabled the former deadly rivals to demarcate most of their common border—an enormous achievement not only for them but also for regional and even global security. But both recognized that the border conflict could be revived if the overall relationship were to deteriorate.¹⁹ Moreover, each could cause the other enormous misery if it were to encourage or support separatist movements among volatile minority populations. Left unbound, each would be free to enter into coalitions that might threaten the other, such as a Russian alliance with India, a Chinese alliance with Pakistan or Iran, or a combination of either one with the United States. Given their history, their proximity, and the range of potential issues between them,

¹⁶ While China’s concern about the security and stability of its Western provinces, especially Xinjiang, is in part a pretext for continued repression, China faces a genuine threat to its security in those areas, and the threat of domestic terrorism remains high.

¹⁷ Anderson (1997:47–59) argues that this region is also a source of potential tension between the two powers.

¹⁸ Anderson (1997:63) notes that Russia’s economic interests are also served by the Taiwan issue, since Chinese tension with Taiwan increases Beijing’s demand for Russian-made weapons.

¹⁹ As Stephen Blank (1998:354) has noted, the dispute over the entire border could still be reopened: “Russian officials carefully note that China turned down Russia’s request that the border treaties be negotiated in perpetuity and instead insisted on a renewal clause for 2010. Thus in 1995, analysts in Russia’s Institute of World Economy and International Relations wrote that the future threat posed by China is the most serious in the hierarchy of national security threats confronting Russia.”

perhaps Russia and China concluded that forming a partnership removed the deadliest possible threat.

Moreover, balance of threat theory, compared to structural realism, better explains many of the elements of the alliance. First, concerning the timing of the alliance, several threats (such as NATO expansion and the NMD issue) have recently become especially salient (Wishnick, 2001b: 798–800; for a dissenting opinion see Garnett, 1998:15). Second, Russia and China's bandwagoning behavior corresponds fairly well to the degree of threat each has felt from the United States. Especially when supplemented by bandwagoning theory—to address conditions under which nations will bandwagon with, not balance, the hegemon—balance of threat theory explains the Russian–Chinese alliance fairly well. However, balance of threat theory is incapable of explaining the extent of Russia's arms sales to China. If Russia perceived the U.S. threat as imminent, it would be justified in arming its ally to deter that threat. Since the U.S. threat to Russian interests appears more distant, however, balance of threat theory cannot explain these sales. Moreover, such sales simultaneously erode a country's relative position and contribute to threats it faces from other nations.

Moreover, both theoretical and empirical factors suggest that Russia perceives China as a more proximate threat. Three of Walt's key variables—aggregate power, offensive power, and especially geographic proximity—each suggest that Russia could perceive China as potentially threatening. Moreover, while Russia's sales to China are unlikely to enhance the alliance's ability to balance threats from the U.S., they do make a sobering contribution to China's rise in military prowess. According to one Western specialist (Blank, 1998:353–54), “many Russian political figures and military leaders privately worry about selling China advanced conventional weapons and technologies at a time when modernization of Russia's naval and nuclear forces in the East is all but impossible.” Russian military sources have expressed envy that Beijing is receiving more modern equipment than their own units possess. An article in the Russian press in June 2001 (Grigoryeva and Safronov) said: “many Russian weapons designers and military leaders tell of their concern with our neighbor's growing military might. And yet they add that Russia needs these arms sales more than anyone else....China accounts for about 40 percent of Russia's total arms sales to foreign countries.” The source of concern is that the benefits of this relationship are all too one-sided. China appears to be gaining the modernization of its navy and air force, while Russia is getting modest hard currency earnings, at a level far lower than needed to bail out its defense industry, thereby further postponing difficult but necessary adjustments in its economy. An apt summary of the apparent disparity in the relationship is provided by Sherman Garnett (2001:52):

The most important near-term consequence of Sino-Russian partnership is a negative one: the Russian contribution to Chinese military modernization. For the foreseeable future, China will have an enduring need for Russian military technology and systems, while Russia will have a variety of reasons to sell.... Russia's own economic reasons and the ideological motivations of some in the Russian foreign policy community create incentives for sales, not restraint. These sales—and the broad defense and technology cooperation that is linked to them—could in time alter regional military balances...in East and Southeast Asia or the Taiwan Strait.

The one-sidedness of the arms trade is doubly puzzling because of the potential threat China represents to Russia.²⁰ The incompatibilities and incongruities

²⁰ China, on the other hand, sees Russia as less of a threat. As Garnett (1998:18) argues, “Chinese experts on Russia were nearly unanimous in emphasizing the weakness of Russia and the disappearance of a military threat

between Russia and China in four major arenas are great enough to cause many on both sides to perceive the other as potentially threatening, thereby suggesting the presence of the fourth of Walt's balance-of-threat variables: perception of aggressive intentions. The incompatibility of Russia and China begins in the arena of strategic vision, especially regarding the Asia-Pacific region. Russia, having already experienced a serious decline in its economic, political, and military strength, is essentially a status quo power in the region, clinging to territories and positions it won during the Tsarist and Soviet periods. Moscow seeks to reduce regional tensions while it concentrates on rebuilding its strength. It seeks to minimize or eliminate threats and maintain dominant influence within its security zone, which encompasses not merely the territory of the Russian Federation, but the entire Commonwealth of Independent States. Both regionally and globally, Russia opposes "hegemonism" and seeks a multipolar balance, with a special role for itself as a great power with a mission to bridge European and Asian civilizations. Although its military strength has declined, Russia seeks to maintain its strategic deterrent and its technological superiority over all other states in Asia. It seeks to integrate its economy with those in the Asia-Pacific region, although its major economic orientation is toward the West.

China, on the other hand, is essentially a revisionist power, seeking to gather the economic and military capabilities to dominate the region and to compete with the United States on the global stage (Blank, 1998:356). In order to do so, it needs continued access to energy resources in Russia and Central Asia, as well as to Russia's advanced military technologies. China is determined to gain its territorial objectives in Taiwan and the South China Sea, while retaining its position in Tibet and increasing its influence over Mongolia and the states of Central Asia. It seeks to maintain military superiority over India and Japan, in part through its ties with Pakistan and Korea, and in part through reducing the U.S. presence in the region. It seeks to preserve its advantageous economic relationships with the West without conceding to its demands for altering its internal political and social practices.²¹

Second, in the economic arena, Russia and China have experienced one of the most stunning reversals of economic position in recent history.²² Once one of the most industrially advanced, Russia's economy has declined to almost half its former value, with more than one-third of its people living below the officially defined subsistence level, and it must now contend with the label, "Upper Volta with rockets." Once one of the world's poorest countries, China's GDP now ranks third in the world, depending on the way it is measured, and its rate of growth is the fastest of all major countries—destined, in the view of its optimists, to regain its former glory. Even with its 1.3 billion population continuing to grow, and Russia's 146 million continuing to decline, China is on course soon to surpass Russia on a GDP per capita basis.²³ Not only are the directions of their economies diverging, but the lack of complementarity has also caused their trade to stagnate, as noted above. China seeks to satisfy its demand for advanced industrial equipment not in Russia, but in the West. Apart from energy and arms, the remaining portion is localized in border areas—so-called shuttle trade—and involves foodstuffs and cheap consumer goods. The management of Russian–Chinese trade is plagued with

from the north for the foreseeable future. These experts were confident that long-term developments would remain favorable to China."

²¹ This divergence in strategic vision underscores why Schweller's bandwagoning theory, which expects like-minded nations to ally together (e.g., revisionist powers with revisionist powers), cannot by itself explain the Russian–Chinese alliance, much less the arms trade between the two.

²² This reversal might more accurately be called a reversion, given China's lead over Russia which lasted from the 14th to the 19th centuries. For a brief and excellent summary see Dittmer (2001).

²³ It should be noted, however, that many Western economists (e.g., Brandt and Zhu, 2000:422) doubt that China has maintained its recent high levels of economic growth.

contract violations, corruption, disorder, and distrust (Sato, Tian, and Koh, 1999; Supian and Nosov, 1999).

Third, the demographic arena over the long term is bleaker still, especially for Russia's border regions of Siberia and the Far East.²⁴ Although abundant mineral and energy resources are found in these regions, they are the most economically and politically troubled. Capital investment in this area had fallen by 1995 to 18 percent of 1990 levels. Along with capital, the region's labor resources were also declining; it lost 9 percent of its population in the 1990s, in spite of a large influx of foreign immigrants, both legal (primarily Korean) and illegal (primarily Chinese). As noted above, a policy of open borders was reversed in 1993, when Russia imposed strict visa requirements, thereby shutting down much of the shuttle trade. With population density ten times larger on the Chinese side of the border than on the Russian side, however, it is estimated that there may be 7–10 million Chinese living in Russia by the middle of the century. Strong resistance by the regional political authorities, together with acute fears of the "yellow peril" on the part of the Russian population, have made it especially difficult for Moscow to implement the immigration and investment programs that will be necessary if this critical region is to be developed to its full potential. The sobering conclusion of Dmitri Trenin (1999:36), deputy director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, is that "Russians must realize that if they cannot ensure development of the Far East and Siberia, Russia will lose those territories one way or another and somebody else will then develop them."

In the opinion of Trenin and other informed observers, a fourth arena of fundamental Russian–Chinese divergence is their mutual distrust and indifference to one another's culture. While the summit meetings of the two leaderships have been marked by ostentatious cordiality, this may well diminish with the coming generational change in China, which will remove the last of the Russian-speaking Soviet-educated elite. Their successors—like the current Russian political elite—came of age politically at a time when the Sino–Soviet conflict was at its height and contact between the two peoples was at a minimum. At the level of the masses, the residual effects of years of hostile propaganda will be difficult to surmount. Especially in the Russian Far East, high levels of criminal activity and corruption have not contributed to good feelings. As one study, (Miyamoto Wang, and Park, 1999:204) concluded, "Levels of trust between Chinese and Russians and between Japanese and Russians hover near the bottom of any scale of measurement." Despite the fact that contacts between the peoples are freer than ever, there is no significant tourism, and cultural ties are artificially channeled through a Soviet-style "friendship society." As Trenin (1999:39) summarizes the situation:

Russians do not show any active interest in China, its language, and culture, and prefer that the Chinese learn their language. The Russians do not quite understand the image that the Chinese have of Russia. Russian imperialism for the Chinese is not a propagandistic cliché but part of their history. Contacts between officials, be they government or military, are shallow...many Russians are terrified at the prospect of a significant Chinese population appearing in Russia.

Most Russian analysts appear to believe that China's near-term foreign policy ambitions are directed toward Taiwan and the South China Sea, and that her interests in stability in Central Asia parallel those of Russia. Russian-made equipment may indeed enable Beijing to obtain a regional advantage in force-projection capability in a future Taiwan crisis; the *Sovremennyi* destroyer's cruise

²⁴ See Anderson (1997) and Dittmer (2001:407). According to Wishnick (2001b: 808), resentment over economic and demographic issues with China spans the Russian political spectrum.

missiles have a combat range of 300 miles, are reportedly resistant to U.S. air defense systems, and will allow China to test the naval superiority of the United States in the East China Sea. China's growing capability, in support of a doctrine that is oriented toward local and limited wars on or near its borders and that emphasizes mobility, lethality, and preemption, is making other regional powers uneasy, and may stimulate a new arms race in the region. Nevertheless, the chief policymakers in the Kremlin appear to perceive no real danger to Russia in such contingencies.

Expressing this viewpoint, former defense minister Pavel Grachev declared (Donaldson and Noguee, 2002:282) in 1995 that "China poses no threat to Russian security now and will not in the near future." Moreover, he asserted that if Russia did not sell arms to China, some other country would.²⁵ Eighteen months after Grachev stated that he saw no threat, his successor included China on a list of potential enemies of Russia. He was hastily corrected by Evgenii Primakov's foreign ministry, which was then eagerly pushing the notion of a Russia-China-India "triangle" to balance U.S. "hegemony."²⁶ Over the next few years such thinking "marginalized voices in Moscow pointing to a potential threat from China" (Wishnick, 2001a: 151).

But Defense Minister Igor Rodionov seemed to be voicing what many Russians were thinking. This dissenting view, taking note of the demographic imbalance between Russia and China in the Far East, sees a long-range potential for conflict between the two continental powers. From the perspective of these observers, even with respect to the nearer term, by closely associating with China and by selling it arms, Russia risks upsetting the delicate military balance in Asia and even being drawn into China's territorial disputes with Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan, and ultimately the United States. As one Western specialist (Garnett, 2001:53) summarized: "Russia's short-term advantages from arms sales and defense cooperation may well not be compatible with long-term Asian stability and Russia's role there."

For these reasons, balance of threat, even as it improves upon structural realism, leaves many gaps in our understanding of this case. Other theories do less well. Schweller's *bandwagoning* theory can explain very little. His argument casts light on a minor element of the case (why both states at various points have attempted to improve their relations with the United States), but does not begin to explain why the alliance between Russia and China was established in the first place. Moreover, his theory assumes that bandwagoning will occur in times of low threat, a condition not enjoyed by either country. Finally, bandwagon theorists expect that like powers ally with each other (e.g., revisionist with revisionist, status quo with status quo), but, as we have seen, in this situation the opposite appears to be the case. The theory also has nothing to contribute on the arms sales issue.

David's "*omnibalancing*" theory (1990:236) misses the mark primarily because it "rests on the assumptions that leaders are weak and illegitimate and that the stakes for domestic politics are very high." While Russia faces a degree of instability and even violent conflict within its borders, its regime is neither as fragile nor as illegitimate as David's theory assumes. His theory applies to ex-colonial countries ruled by rapacious, self-centered dictators who act in coordination with other Third World countries. Although none of this applies in this case, we find attractive David's core argument that domestic threats can cause states to act in the

²⁵ Although he does not identify the source, Dittmer (2001:409), in the course of his research, seems to have heard this argument, which he then proceeds to generalize: "In interviews, the Russians dismiss Western concerns that their weapons sales might upset the military balance, pointing out that if they do not sell arms to the PRC, some other country will, with the worst conceivable consequences for Russian security." This notion, of course, runs counter to the opinion (e.g., Blank, 1998; Gill and Kim, 1995) that China is limited in its sources of arms.

²⁶ The notion of such a triangle—which seemingly minimizes the seriousness of the Sino-Indian rivalry—was "promptly disavowed by both India and China" even though it "resonated with some segments of the Chinese leadership" (Wilson, 2002:11).

international arena in ways that seem to undermine their national interests. We apply this argument below.

Constructivism, too, explains little by itself. The two nations share few norms, they do not have a long history of friendship, and they lack even basic affinity on either the elite or mass level. The atmosphere of mistrust which persists would not allow constructivists to expect bilateral arms trade of such dimensions. Society-level contact through trade and immigration seems to worsen the situation, contrary to the expectations of some constructivists. As Evgeniy Bazhanov (1998:84) describes the Sino–Russian case, “Human contacts in general create constant friction.” The identity issues of constructivism, moreover, lead to inconsistent expectations in this case. Russia identifies itself variously as a European power (Wishnick, 2001b: 802) and as a bridge between Europe and Asia (Dittmer, 2001:410). Therefore, we can reasonably expect that Russia could turn in either direction. In any case, neither the alliance nor the arms sales can be based on cultural affinity or common norms. Nevertheless, as we argue in the next section, a number of ideational and identity issues are important for understanding this case. We now introduce a new approach, consisting of three variables that explain our central puzzle.

A New Approach

None of the theories we have examined can explain fully why these two countries entered into a military alliance based on the arms trade when doing so would harm one participant’s geopolitical position. The relationship between the two countries, based as it is on trade in arms, represents a paradox that mainstream political science theory of all stripes cannot adequately explain. Apparently, under some conditions, major powers sacrifice their long-term position for short-term gains, a phenomenon we cannot understand through traditional theories of international relations. In this section, we will focus on three variables that undergird the conditions under which nations would make such a choice.

We develop this set of hypotheses cautiously, based as it is on one case. There are some other cases in which our hypotheses should apply, although that will have to be resolved empirically. Possible cases not involving Russia include Israel’s sale of arms to China, which then sells arms to Israel’s enemies. In an earlier era, the U.S. sold scrap metal to Japan prior to World War II, despite obvious implications adversely affecting U.S. security.

The most direct parallel of a sacrifice of long-term security interests for short-term economic gains is raised by Russia’s announced intention to resume the sale of arms to Iran. In the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement Russia had bowed to U.S. pressure to halt new sales of arms to Iran. In return for this sacrifice, Washington had agreed to provide opportunities for Russia to earn hard currency by launching Western space missions from its facilities. But this infusion of earnings did not ease the pain felt by the defense industry at the loss of an estimated \$4 billion in earnings from sales to Iran. According to a well-informed Russian journalist (Felgengauer, 2000), the Russian defense industry spent the years since 1995 “pressuring the Kremlin in every conceivable way to cancel” the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, pleading that tens of thousands of jobs were at stake.

When the existence of the agreement leaked in the American press during the 2000 U.S. presidential election, the Russian government seized on the breach of confidentiality to unilaterally withdraw from the deal. Concerns were expressed in the Russian press that the country’s hasty reentry into the Iranian arms market could lead to an escalation of tensions in the Middle East as well as a breach in Russia’s relationship with the United States. There is no doubt that the prospect that Iran might hasten its acquisition of nuclear weapons or the missiles to deliver them because of the Russian exports has been a major concern in the United States—and should be possibly even a greater worry for Moscow, given Iran’s

proximity and the destabilizing potential of its Islamic fervor. One journalist (Sychova, 2000) concluded, however, that the management at Rosoboronekспорт, “which is trying to establish its credentials by rapidly bringing in foreign-exchange earnings, couldn’t care less about international stability.” Once again, short-range domestic benefits seemed to be overriding long-range security interests in the arms export calculations made by Russia’s decision-makers.²⁷

Variable 1: Declining Power

First, an important element of the explanation is the decline of a major power. Based in part on the assumptions of structural realism, declining powers are expected to look to alliances to shore up their position vis-à-vis more dominant powers. In this case, the decline of Russia’s position was the major factor behind its decision to approach China as a potential partner.²⁸ Since structural realism cannot explain Russia’s sacrifice of long-term position in favor of the short term and its willingness to ally with a past and potential rival, we need to add two additional elements to this theory.

Variable 2: Domestic Politics

Foreign policy decisions can be shaped by the contests for influence among groups and individuals, thus raising to the fore in Yeltsin’s or Putin’s Kremlin, not wholly unlike Khrushchev’s or Gorbachev’s before, the question of *kto kogo* (who is prevailing over whom). While competitive elections are a new part of the Russian political landscape, within the Kremlin struggles over competing policies and struggles for power continue to be closely linked. In the case of Russia’s arms sales to China, there is evidence (Wishnick, 2001b: 814) that politicians at the right and left of the spectrum have been opposed. The basic foreign policy division in post-Soviet Russian politics has been among Westernizers, pragmatic nationalists, and orthodox nationalists (Donaldson and Noguee, 2002:125–33). At times (1992 and after September 11, 2001) the former view has prevailed and Russia has sought to join Western institutions, but for most of the 1990s, the pragmatic nationalist position enunciated by Evgenii Primakov—combating U.S. “hegemony” by way of a combination of Russia with China and others—has been dominant. As we noted above, the politicians who hold this viewpoint have tended to marginalize those who are more concerned about the long-term threat posed by Chinese power.

A second way in which domestic politics has figured in this case focuses on the importance of the Russian arms industry, and Moscow’s effort to stave off its collapse. Generally speaking, the domestic goals for states selling arms are twofold: first, to benefit the national economy by acquiring profits—usually in hard currency—and supporting employment; and second, to support and strengthen the state’s defense industry and maintain its long-term viability by achieving economies of scale, preserving infrastructure, and recouping research and development costs. Both are critical elements in Russia’s decision to sell arms to China. Desperate to stave off the collapse of an industry crucial to its economy and security and to earn urgently needed hard currency, Russia is compelled to ignore

²⁷ Tor Bukkvoll (2002) documents the shifting fortunes of the Russian military-industrial complex in its efforts to lobby the government to ease restrictions on arms sales to Iran. In this case, as in the Chinese case, not only were the short-term profit motivations of the defense industry paramount, but also the interests of the Russian military and those of the defense industry did not naturally coincide.

²⁸ Unlike some structural realists, however, we do not argue or assume that the decline of a major power sparks a hegemonic war. Such an expectation is not inherent in the assumption that major powers seek, for structural reasons, to maintain or improve their positions. (For detailed discussion see Gilpin, 1981; Kegley, 1993; Lebow, 1994; Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994; Wohlforth, 1994/95.)

even its short-term relative position, and ally with—and even arm—a powerful and potentially threatening neighbor.

Contemporary international relations theory—assuming that economic motivations are subordinated to national security—is blind to situations when domestic economic crises can trump national security interests. Most international relations theorists who focus on domestic politics willingly concede this point, and focus on the effect domestic politics has on international political economy.²⁹ Though Waltz himself argues that economics is always linked to the security position of all nations, traditionally economic concerns have taken a back seat to national security. When compelled to choose, most theorists agree, nations will sacrifice the former in favor of the latter. Often, as in this case, the two are inseparably linked.

The task at hand then is to identify the conditions under which an economic crisis is so pressing that its solution becomes one of the most urgent national security issues. For this, we borrow from the core idea behind David's theory of "omnibalancing." According to David (1990:235–36), Third World leaders, compelled by domestic crises, "will appease—that is, align with—secondary adversaries so that they can focus their resources on ... more immediate and dangerous domestic threats." The idea that countries will under certain situations address extremely urgent domestic crises even at the expense of their international positions resonates throughout this case. Russia's economic crisis necessitated sacrificing the nation's long-term balance with China, which represents a tertiary threat compared with the economic crisis and the threat from the United States. Russia sold arms to China in order to buy time and secure resources needed to ameliorate its most urgent issue, stabilizing its economy and domestic arms industry. As noted above, David's theory, by itself, cannot explain any element of this case. However, for our purposes, we merely need to borrow the idea that states in decline facing urgent domestic crises will "balance" against their most urgent threats; in cases such as this, those threats are domestic, not foreign. However, besides the material interest in addressing its economic crisis, Russia (together with the other key actors in this case) is also motivated by more fundamental issues of identity that constitute each country's interests.

Thirdly, we emphasize the importance of domestic non-state actors. We have already described the ways in which the Russian arms industry has taken initiatives on its own—beyond the control of the defense ministry—to find markets for weapons systems, pursuing its own interests even when these conflict with national interests (Wishnick, 2001a:188). Toward the end of the Yeltsin presidency, the Russian central government appeared to lose some of its ability to control particularistic interests, resulting in the spread of critical technologies to states that might threaten Russia in the future (Anderson, 1997:70; Garnett, 1998:14, 25–27).

Variable 3: Identity

Finally, we borrow from constructivism to understand the core motivations and interests of Russia, China, the United States, and even Europe, which explain their actions in this case. To analyze these interests, we relax realism's rationalist assumptions and analyze each country's norms and motivations. Henry Nau (2002) usefully merges realist assumptions with constructivism's concern for identity and norms by focusing on "national identity," or the domestic values that form a core consensus that defines norms for legitimate use of force against other societies. These rules form a core identity that defines a nation's actions on the international

²⁹ Domestic politics remains one of the most under-theorized causal variables in international relations. Most international relations theorists who focus on domestic politics as an independent variable (Downs and Rocke, 1995; Milner, 1997; Goldstein and Martin, 2000) focus on political economy. Very few besides David focus on international responses to domestic crises.

stage. By focusing on such issues, we can understand, not through assumption but through knowledge of nations themselves, the core interests and motivations of each country, as each sees them.

Russia's status and identity as a superpower remain important to its conception of its self-importance and role in the international arena. For a significant segment of the foreign policy and security elite in Russia, fear of U.S. domination is mixed with wounded pride and resentment, which is evident despite Putin's insistence (Wishnick, 2001b: 806) that, "Russia is strong enough to respond on its own to any changes in the sphere of strategic stability." The ineffectiveness of the Kozyrev-Gaidar "bandwagoning" strategy of 1992–93 deepened this sense of humiliation and betrayal, while demonstrating the theorists' proposition that some states are simply too weak to profit from efforts to bandwagon with stronger ones. As the declining power—and so recently a superpower—Russia now endeavors to demonstrate that it is still a great power whose interests must not be ignored. In East Asia, it seeks to forestall a situation in which it simply becomes irrelevant to the solution of such security issues as the Korean conflict. In its relations with Japan, Russia may hope to leverage its treaty with China to provide Tokyo with additional incentive to compromise on their territorial dispute.

China's sense of identity is also important here. It stresses the importance of Taiwan as an integral part of China and places the return of the island to Chinese sovereignty as Beijing's most important foreign policy goal. Although the U.S. does not present a direct threat to the Chinese mainland, a China that defines itself in this way does see a threat in U.S. actions—including its proposed missile shield—that seemed designed to place Taiwan permanently beyond China's reach. China's identity as Asia's most important and powerful country clashes with the goals and interests of the United States.

On the other hand, the United States' sense of identity as "global policeman" promotes its activism and engagement in the region, bringing U.S. policy apparatus too close for the comfort of both Russia and China. The Clinton administration's involvement and even intervention to stop human rights violations and ethnic conflict in other areas also raises concerns for both countries.³⁰ Both are nervous about prospects that the Bush administration's sense of America's identity as global enforcer in its battle against terrorism might lead it to establish permanent military bases in or near Afghanistan—and perilously close to their own borders. To the extent that the European Union and NATO project a sense of identity of Europe that appears to permanently exclude Russia, this also expands Russia's sense of threat. Constructivism raises these issues of identity and meaning, and they are clearly important for understanding the genesis and underlying structure of the problem. Moreover, these issues are not of derivative value; rather, they form the basis not merely of preference but also of the very actions that each actor deems appropriate.

In sum, we identify three variables (relative decline, domestic politics, and identity issues) that appear most important to understanding the arms sales element of this case. Declining relative position discloses the structural factors behind Russia's actions; domestic politics explains its willingness to make what had appeared as rash sacrifices; and identity issues explain the core motivations and interests each actor pursues. This framework may be useful in studying the relatively narrow range of cases in which a declining power faces domestic crises that potentially require the sacrifice of its long-term relative position. Further work will need to be conducted on a wider range of cases before we can confidently assert the importance of these variables.

³⁰ Most Western human rights organizations argue that the Clinton administration's involvement was insufficient, especially in places such as Rwanda and Bosnia. Nevertheless, important political and military leaders in both Russia and China perceive the U.S. in this way.

The Russian–Chinese Alliance After September 11: How Much Has Changed?

In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States, there were clearly major changes in the orientation of American foreign policy. President George W. Bush declared that the “war on terrorism” would be the “singular focus” of his administration’s foreign policy, and that all states would need to choose whether they were “for us or for the terrorists” in this struggle. Vladimir Putin was reportedly among the first foreign leaders to sign on to the coalition against terrorism. China also declared its enlistment in the cause. Both states clearly saw the American-led effort against al Qaeda as a means of dealing with perceived Islamic extremist threats to their own security.

In Russia’s case, Putin offered to share intelligence on Afghanistan and al Qaeda and he raised no objection to overflights by American forces or their use of bases in former Soviet states of Central Asia in the military campaign against the Taliban. Simultaneously, he softened his stance on NATO enlargement and his objections to U.S. national missile defense, and he announced his intention to close Russian facilities in Cuba and Vietnam. China was less quick and less visible in its reaction and had less to contribute to the military action in Afghanistan, but it was no less forthright in condemning terrorist activities.

Some commentators hailed Putin’s new stance as evidence that “the Cold War was finally over” and that Russia had at long last decided to “join the West”; the American Secretary of State declared (Tyler, 2001b) that “seismic changes of an historic scale” had occurred in U.S.–Russian relations. For our purposes, the essential questions are these: in the face of the terrorist threats, has the threat perceived by Russia and China from the United States faded into insignificance, and have these two states now chosen a strategy of *bandwagoning* with the United States? If so, is there now even less foundation for a Russian–Chinese alliance?

In the Russian case, it is possible that Putin has not cast his lot definitively with the West, but rather is keeping his options open (Legvold, 2001). Typically cautious, Putin appears to be anxious not to leap too far in front of his countrymen’s opinions, and he probably left his November summit with President Bush awaiting signs that Washington would reciprocate Russia’s moves with positive steps of its own. Items on Moscow’s “wish list” probably included a desire for U.S. assistance with Russia’s debts and with her bid for membership in the World Trade Organization. The Russians also appeared to seek a genuine modification of NATO’s relationship with Russia, incorporating Moscow’s views more fully into deliberations on European security, as well as an agreement on a “strategic bargain” that would trade Russia’s willingness to wink at U.S. missile defense tests (under the continuing umbrella of the ABM Treaty) for deep cuts in the two sides’ offensive nuclear arsenals. Such a “grand bargain” would indeed have altered the Russian balance of threat strategy, with its insistence on multipolarity, and in the process would have vitiated the developing process of balancing with China against American “unilateralism.”

There is evidence that military and security elites, including some in high ranks in the Kremlin, still suspicious of America’s long-term intentions in the Central Asian region, were opposed to Putin’s cooperative stance. Public opinion surveys indicated that the public too was generally skeptical (*Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 2001a, 2001b; Wines, 2001). In the face of this skepticism, Putin conducted a meeting with parliamentary deputies after the November summit in which he discussed his expectations that reciprocity would be forthcoming from Washington. In this meeting, he appeared less cautious than usual, risking the assessment that Russian–U.S. relations had undergone a “qualitative change.” He was quoted (Golygin, 2001) as having told his audience that “anyone who sees our cooperation as a tactical move prompted by recent events in the world is deeply mistaken. We are talking about a program of long-term partnership.”

The initial American response to Putin's gambit could not have been encouraging to the Russian leader. The fine print on the Western offer for expanded Russian participation in NATO strictly limited the sphere of issues to be covered and gave the Russians no veto over military actions. Moreover, NATO has announced its intention to enlarge the alliance to the Baltic area of the former Soviet Union. President Bush backed away from the rumored agreement that would have preserved the ABM Treaty, while allowing it to serve as a fig leaf covering further testing of a missile defense system. Although Putin chose to characterize this decision as a "mistake" rather than a threat to Russian security, it was clear that the Kremlin was disturbed. Although a treaty limiting offensive systems was negotiated, Moscow was displeased with Washington's statement that much of the announced reduction in its offensive strategic arsenal would be accomplished by storing rather than destroying decommissioned warheads.

Moreover, despite the success of the U.S. campaign to dislodge the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, it appeared that the American military presence in Central Asia might endure longer than the Russians had anticipated, and this prospect undoubtedly raised new suspicions about Washington's continuing efforts to gain a competitive advantage over Moscow in the production and transportation of the region's rich petroleum resources. But the biggest obstacle to Russia's continuing cooperation with the United States appeared to lie in their emerging disagreement (Friedman, 2001) over where the next U.S. move against global terrorism should come, as evidence mounted that Washington was seriously considering extending the military conflict to Iraq—one of Russia's long-time partners. Likewise, U.S. military actions against North Korea or Iran—the other members of President Bush's "axis of evil"—would certainly be opposed by Moscow.

Veteran press commentator Stanislav Kondrashov (2001:6) probably best summed up the sentiments of Russian foreign policy analysts who were warning Putin that if he clambered aboard the American bandwagon, thereby abandoning the balancing strategy that had characterized Russia's foreign policy in recent years, he risked abandoning both Russia's allies and its interests:

It is extremely important to be on good terms with America, but we should not lie down and let it walk all over us, even for the sake of fighting international terrorism. It would be more natural for us to make overtures to Europe and form a bloc with it when America's pretensions to world hegemony become too absolute. We must not forget China and India either.

As far as China is concerned, Kondrashov is probably correct in suggesting that it may have felt "forgotten" by Russia in the wake of the September 11 attacks. While China expressed its sympathy with the American people and refrained from attempts to block U.S. military responses to the terrorist attacks, its most visible diplomatic effort was to heighten anti-terrorist activity in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—seen in some quarters (Rosenthal, 2002) as possibly "a counterweight to growing American influence" in Central Asia.³¹ Beijing could not have welcomed Putin's renewed interest in cooperation with NATO or his willingness not to raise a fuss about American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. Nor could it have been pleased with Putin's evident interest in coordinating his policies with Bush's. Indeed, we find no evidence that—only months after having signed a treaty of alliance with China that pledged close consultations in the face of emerging threats—there was any high-level effort by the Russians to coordinate policies with those of their new ally. Once again, the evidence seems to bolster our conclusion about the weakness of the Russian–Chinese alliance.

³¹ China, like other nations, has used the war on terror in part as a pretext to deal with a number of domestic difficulties.

However, there is one external factor that could yet transform a weak alliance into a stronger one. If the United States dashes Putin's expectations and denies Russia the anticipated benefits of bandwagoning, Moscow could still return to a balance of threat strategy. Specifically, if Washington chooses to pursue as the next targets of the "war on terrorism" states such as Iran and North Korea, in which Moscow and Beijing have long-standing interests, and if it chooses to turn aside Russia's and China's efforts to negotiate less threatening arrangements for missile defense, for the role of NATO in European security, and for the sale of arms to Taiwan—in short, if it persists in its stated determination to pursue its interests in these areas unilaterally, if need be—then the threat that Russia and China perceive in the posture of the United States can become ominous enough to create strength in an alliance that currently lacks it.

The mutual determination of Russia and China to counter this American threat would replace arms sales as the foundation of the relationship, as balance of threat theory would expect. Constructivism would agree: a common and imminent perceived threat can suffice to begin the process by which two countries identify with one another. Therefore the United States would potentially be creating not just allies, but friends. Either way, an increasing sense of threat from the United States is likely to strengthen this now relatively unsteady basis for alliance.

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