

Creating A Multi-Polar World: Beijing, Moscow make case against Unilateralism

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With relations on a low simmer between Beijing and Washington, the Chinese Vice President is in town on a 5-day trip to Russia to tout bilateral relations.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday said during a meeting with Xi Jinping that Moscow and Beijing remain strategic partners.

While noting that much time had passed since their last meeting in May 2008, "the good relations, the relations of strategic partnership characteristic of our countries, have not changed."

Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping met Tuesday with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Moscow in a meeting that has been described by one Kremlin source as "*extremely cordial and productive.*"

Although Putin and Xi Jinping's meeting covered a broad range of issues, approaching bilateral relations from a multi-polar perspective was their guiding principle.

Putin told Vice President Xi Jinping, who is predicted to succeed President Hu Jintao in 2013, that Russia will continue to lend China its support on all issues, including the Taiwan problem.

"We have always supported China on most sensitive issues, including the Taiwan problem," he stated. *"We intend to further build relations with China on the basis of respect for our common interests."*

Boris Gryzlov, State Duma Speaker and Chairman of the United Russia Party's Supreme Council, reaffirmed Putin's support.

"The Chinese government is the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China, and Taiwan is an integral part of China," Gryzlov told the second inter-party dialogue conference between United Russia and the Communist Party of China on Tuesday.

The Chinese vice president, who is in Russia for five days of talks, responded by stressing the importance of addressing the mounting global issues from a multi-polar position.

"In the midst of profound transformations of the world economic order, we must take into consideration the interests of Russia, China and developing countries," Xi Jinping stressed. *"China and Russia must support them, as well as the establishment of a multi-polar world and democratization of international relations."*

Xi added that China wants Russia to *“play an important role in international and regional affairs that would be in line with its status as a great power.”*

Beijing, Moscow make case against unilateralism

Today, any mention of the need to create a “multi-polar world” is immediately understood as a rebuke of US foreign policy, which has been responsible for single-handedly pursuing real and imagined enemies ever since 9/11 broke almost ten years ago. Although there had been tremendous hope that things would change with new leadership in Washington, US President Barack Obama has yet to withdraw the American military’s boot print, which now covers a large patch of global real estate.

Putin echoed France’s concerns of an American “hyperpower” during a speech at the Munich security conference in February 2007.

“The United States has overstepped its borders in all spheres – economic, political and humanitarian – and has imposed itself on other states,” the former Russian president said in his oft-mentioned speech. *“Local and regional wars did not get fewer, the number of people who died did not reduce, but increased. We see no kind of restraint – a hyper-inflated use of force.”*

These are views that the Chinese government – which is presently engaged in a largely behind-the-scenes struggle with the United States on issues as diverse as Internet search engines to Taiwan – can readily relate to.

In early February, Beijing announced that it was considering sanctions against US aviation companies that were involved in a multibillion-dollar arms deal with Taiwan, which China maintains is an inseparable part of the Chinese mainland.

The arms deal approved by US President Barack Obama would give Taipei 60 Black Hawk helicopters, 114 Patriot missiles, and sophisticated communication systems. The total package is reportedly worth a cool \$6.4 billion.

Meanwhile, Moscow has been embroiled in its own controversy with the United States over the latter’s efforts to base elements of an anti-missile system in Eastern Europe. The Bush administration had originally been planning to base the system in Poland and the Czech Republic, but Obama “scrapped” those plans largely due to Russian concerns and the eagerness of Washington and Moscow to have a “reset” in their mutual relations.

However, Obama’s new plan (which envisions the shield being placed in Romania, and complemented with sea-based SM-3 interceptor missiles, possibly with the participation of Bulgaria) has done little to ease Russia’s fears that such a system so close to its doorstep would compromise its national security. After all, a defensive shield may become very offensive if it neutralizes a nation’s ability to protect itself.

“Russia has serious questions regarding the true purpose of the US missile defense in Romania,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Nesterenko told reporters following the announcement from Washington. *“That is why we will consistently oppose any dubious unilateral actions in the missile defense field.”*

In addition to these common concerns, China and Russia found themselves the unwitting

subjects of a highly provocative article in Foreign Affairs, the respected US political journal. In the March/April 2006 issue, Keir A. Leiber and Daryl G. Press contributed an article, *"The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy,"* which argued that *"for the first time in almost 50 years, the United States stands on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy. It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike."*

The article goes on to make disastrously inaccurate estimates about Russia's *"aging nuclear arsenal"* which many US observers even today believe is rusting out, and China's allegedly lackadaisical pace of implementing nuclear weapons.

"This dramatic shift in the nuclear balance of power stems from a series of improvements in the United States' nuclear systems, the precipitous decline of Russia's arsenal, and the glacial pace of modernization of China's nuclear forces."

This final line should be taken with a grain of salt, since the authors were writing at a time when the United States was still high on its superpower buzz: *"Unless Washington's policies change or Moscow and Beijing take steps to increase the size and readiness of their forces, Russia and China - and the rest of the world - will live in the shadow of US nuclear primacy for many years to come."*

So it was with some surprise that this comment from the Pentagon surfaced just last week.

"There are aspects to their [Russia's] nuclear doctrine, their military activities that we find very troubling," said Michèle Flournoy, the defense department undersecretary for policy.

In an interview with the Financial Times, she said that, while Barack Obama had stressed *"the importance of reducing the role of nuclear weapons . . . if you read recent Russian military doctrine they are going in the other direction, they are actually increasing their reliance on nuclear weapons, the role in nuclear weapons in their strategy."*

The interview (*"Moscow's nuclear doctrine under fire,"* March 18), however, never brought up the question of America's new reliance on anti-missile systems, which is throwing the global nuclear architecture off balance.

On other fronts

Although China and Russia criticize the United States for its overly ambitious foreign policy, the links that join these three powerful countries together are too important to be severed. Beijing, Moscow and Washington are the unwieldy participants in a cultural dance that none can quit without suffering real pain. The trick, however, is how to coordinate the steps so that the participants aren't tromping all over each others' feet.

Presently, China is the biggest foreign holder of US Treasury bonds, while at the same time the United States is the biggest purchaser of Chinese-made goods. This unique, multi-billion dollar relationship, while doing much to temper political passions, is starting to show some fissures.

Moscow and Washington watched in awe as China sailed practically unscathed through the worst global economic crisis in decades. In 2009, while the United States was bailing out its biggest banks, the Chinese economy was registering 8.7 percent growth rates. Indeed, Beijing's main concern at the moment is how to land its overheating economy without suffering a disastrous crash.

Presently, things are looking so up for China that cash-strapped Greece, which is struggling to extract itself from a cesspool of debt, turned to Beijing for emergency funds. As the Financial Times explained, *“The Chinese capital is the first port of call for countries and companies that need money.”*

The next line in the article explains why the United States is starting to complain about China’s “unfair” business practices, which include “manipulation” of the yuan, the national currency.

“The implosion of the Western financial system over two years from 2007, along with an evaporation of confidence in the US, Europe and Japan, almost overnight pushed China’s global standing several notches higher.”

China is simply doing what every country in history has done when it has acquired great economic power: expand its sphere of global influence, and sometimes at the expense of other competitor nations.

A bipartisan bill was introduced Tuesday in the US Senate aims to press Beijing to let its currency rise, instead of artificially pegging it to the US dollar. A semi-annual U.S. Treasury report due in April could trigger even greater pressure on Beijing by officially accusing China of currency manipulation.

Now it appears that China is hoping that Russia, which also has large reserves of US dollars, will support it against pressure from Washington.

Beijing hopes that Russia will support their position regarding the yuan exchange rate, Chinese Deputy Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng said in Moscow on Wednesday.

“China managed to maintain the stable exchange rate at the most difficult moment. And the yuan is not undervalued,” he said. *“I hope Russia will take an objective approach and will support China in the yuan issue.”*

China and Russia recently signed nearly \$8 billion worth of contracts and agreements that are aimed at promoting bilateral cooperation in the banking sector, industry and infrastructure projects, he added.

Following his 5-day trip to Russia, Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping will pay official visits to Belarus, Finland, and Sweden.

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