

# **Primakov Redux? Russia and the “Strategic Triangles” in Asia**

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## **Introduction**

The idea that Russia is now seeking to maintain its interests to the maximum in any region is an accepted reality. And for Russia to do this, it seems it has increasingly employed the tactics of a “balance” foreign policy. Firstly, Russia, in an era of globalization, has encouraged the formation of bilateral and multilateral coalitions “against a superpower” and, secondly, has been cautiously shifting its foreign weight from one great neighbor to another in order to deter a stronger power, which could threaten its security. In a sense, Russia’s “balance” policy should be considered according to two different dimensions.

In an Asian context, the duality of the “balance” policy is mostly illustrated in the Russian approach vis-à-vis China, India and Japan. In the first dimension, Russia relies on China and India to form a “strategic triangle” to lessen the influence of the US on the region. In the second dimension, not wanting to play second fiddle to China or allow China to “expand” in the Russian Far East, Russia is said to have enhanced its “traditional friendship” with India while maintaining cordial relations with Japan. On energy projects such as the construction of an oil and gas pipeline in Siberia and the Far East, the so-called “China-Japan rivalry” has become tediously commonplace, allowing Russia to maximize its interests.

Generally speaking, the two dimensions hardly function together in sync. Often, they interact with each other; when Russo-Chinese relations deteriorate, or either Russo-US or Sino-US relations improve, the “coalition against a superpower” does not serve well, while the “deterrence to a neighboring power” functions. However, as Russo-Chinese relations have stabilized and developed, the former has been emphasized.

Evgenii Primakov, the former Russian foreign minister and premier, is well known for his revitalization of a “balance” foreign policy. (To be exact, the “balance” policy was partly begun at the end of 1992, which was followed by then Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev’s call for the withdrawal of the “Atlantic” position in 1994.) He accelerated the so-called “Eurasian” orientation of Russia’s foreign policy, which, Russia envisioned, would encourage its Eurasian neighbors not to overly rely on the West, revitalizing Russo-Chinese and Russo-Indian interactions. Meanwhile, he also cautiously confirmed alignment within the region, e.g., adjusting the “balance” between North and South Korea, while bringing the “Japan card” into play.<sup>1</sup>

The two dimensions of the “balance” policy were also recognized in Russia’s foreign policy approach toward Asia. In April 1996, when President Boris Yeltsin advocated a “Russo-Chinese strategic partnership” on Primakov’s suggestion, the declaration was naturally understood to be a “counterbalance” to the US. After that, Russia and China repeatedly made joint statements favoring a “multipolar world,” while sometimes denouncing “unipolar domination.” On the other hand, Russia also sought to develop relationships with other countries, not just China. Russia also tried to make a similar “partnership” with both India and Japan, with the former succeeding and the latter failing because of Japan’s stubbornness over the “northern territories” issue. At the beginning stage of the “balance” policy, it was next to impossible for Russia to rely on China. The border dispute along the Amur, Ussuri and other rivers and Chinese migration problems in the Far East fanned anti-Chinese sentiment among

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<sup>1</sup> On Russia’s “balance” foreign policy both in the West and in the East, including the Primakov era, Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, 3rd ed. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005); Concerning Japan, observe Primakov’s vigorous, active approach toward Japan, including certain plans to resolve the border issue, from the end of 1996 to 1998.

Russian foreign policy elites. Similarly, in the 1990s, Chinese specialists strongly doubted whether Russo-Chinese relations could be improved.

A more nuanced “balance” policy indicated a sudden change in 1998. When Primakov visited Delhi in December 1998, he emphasized the possibility of building a triangle based on the “strategic partnerships” of Russia, China and India,<sup>2</sup> supposedly as a “counterbalance” vis-à-vis the US. Although his slogan was catchy, both China and India immediately rejected the proposal.

Eight years have since passed. The situation has been changing dramatically. In the summer of 2005, Russia and China jointly conducted a military exercise as a likely performance “against a superpower.” Both Russia and China take pride in knowing that their relations are at their most developed in history.<sup>3</sup> Russia and India have also reemphasized their “strategic partnership” many times. The first dimension of the “balance” policy seems to have overcome the second. Is there a possibility of the “strategic triangle” making sense in Asia? Will Primakov’s intelligence prove to be successful in the long run?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Agence France Presse*, December 21, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> *BBC Monitoring*, May 30, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> The topic of “Primakov redux” is recently the focus of many specialists, e.g., the last national convention on the AAASS held in Salt Lake City (USA) organized a panel on it. On other analyses, Julie M. Rahm, “Russia, China, India: A New Strategic Triangle for a New Cold War?” *Parameters*, 31, no. 4 (Winter, 2001/2002); Mary Burdman, “Potential for ‘Strategic Triangle’ Cooperation Grows,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, 29, no. 47 (December 6, 2002); Matthew Oresman, “Fear Not the Russia-China-India Strategic Triangle,” *In the National Interest*, 1 no. 16/17 (December 25, 2002–January 1, 2003); Vladimir S. Myasnikov, “The Strategic Triangle of Russia, China, and India: the Eurasian Aspect,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, 30 no. 13 (April 4, 2003); Sergei Blagov, “Russia-China-India: An Axis of Denials,” *Asia Times* July 3, 2003.; Harsh V. Pant, “The Moscow-Beijing-Delhi ‘Strategic Triangles,’” *Security Dialogue*, 35, no. 3 (September 2004); Nivedita Das Kundu. “Russia-India-China: Prospects for Trilateral Cooperation,” *Aleksanteri Papers*, 3 (2004); Joseph Ferguson, “US-Russia Relations: Further Strategic Disconnect,” *Comparative Connections: A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, [http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/cpc/cpc\\_jul05/cpc\\_jul05e.pdf](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/cpc/cpc_jul05/cpc_jul05e.pdf); Stephen Blank, “Primakov’s Russia/India/China Triangle Nears Realization,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 2, no. 79 (April 22, 2005): Some seek to find a future perspective on the triangle partly to “counterbalance” the US and partly to stabilize and develop a region that the triangle could influence. Others deny the importance and function of the triangle because of the lack of coincidence or the divergence of real interests among Russia, China and India. Basically, most analyses share a similar character. However: 1) the “balance” factor is overestimated in the triangle with no or slight consideration for border or bilateral factors; 2) the

The aim of my article is to shed some light on the truth behind “Primakov redux.” In the first section, I will discuss in detail the behind-the-scenes story of Sino-Russia relations developing as a main axis of the “strategic partnership” based on Primakov intelligence. Although some analysts emphasize the factor of “balance” with the US in the foreign policy process, the dynamics of the Sino-Russian “partnership,” which is heavily influenced by border management, have been the driving force in a bilateral context, particularly after the Cold War. The logic of the process is conveniently termed “border politics” in the article in contrast to a “balance” factor. I will illustrate how border politics have played a role that goes beyond any “balance” factor in Sino-Russian relations.

In the second section, I shift my attention to South Asia. An axis of Russo-Indian relations should here be basically reviewed from the standpoint of “balance” policy. However, the presence of China and Pakistan has made border politics a factor in the region. Regional relations have had a complicated history even during the Cold War, and even bilateral relations between Russia and India, which lack a shared border, seem to be influenced by other regional powers and the US. The story begins with a short overview of the Cold War and Russo-Pakistan relations.

In the third section, I conceptualize a theory from phenomena observed in the first and second section. I categorize these state-to-state relations into two lines: that of “border politics” and that of “free hand.”<sup>5</sup> I put each line on triangles within certain quadrangles around Eurasia. Although the diagrams are abstract representations of reality, the salutary lesson of “Primakov redux” should be informative.

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Russia-China-India triangle is examined in a quadrangle including the US without deliberate reviewing of other triangles on Eurasia, relating to Pakistan or Japan. They are inclined to touch on current affairs in the interaction in the short term but are short on structural analysis regarding relations between the states concerned in Eurasia.

<sup>5</sup> For these conceptions, see the last section in this article: Eurasian Triangles Reviewed.

## The Upturn of Border Politics: The Russo-Chinese Partnership

### Sino-Russian Relations in the 1990s

The first test of Russia's "balance" policy was its Chinese relations. Can these relations be evaluated from a "balance" point of view? Did Russia make a "strategic partnership" with China in order to offset US influence in the region?

For a better appreciation and understanding of Russo-Chinese relations, let us look back to the 1990s. During that time, Russia and China "officially" enjoyed good relations under the slogan of "constructive partnership," declared in September 1994. They exchanged high-ranking officials and various delegations and missions as a sign of their "constructive partnership." However, Russo-Chinese relations were in crisis mode over border issues. In particular, Chinese "migration" and border demarcation were the most pressing issues of the time.<sup>6</sup>

It is well known that 1992 was a significant year both for Russia and China. The newly born Russia was rushing toward "regime transition" and adopted new economic policies, particularly "border openness" and "liberalization," in order to introduce a market economy. The Chinese leadership, while astonished by the sudden decline of the father state of socialism, considered the breakup of the Soviet Union as not only a crisis for China's regime but as a golden opportunity for Chinese businesses. In the spring of 1992, Deng Xiaoping, in his now famous "Southern Speech," emphasized the importance of economic improvements over other socialist values. Then, cities in the northern frontier close to the Russian Far East were declared open gates by the central government to encourage "reform and openness." At the time, a notable increase in the number of people flowing across border points between Russia and China was clearly discernible. Many citizens on both sides seized the opportunity to do business on the other side of the border on a non-visa basis, which has allowed Russian and Chinese citizens to visit each other's countries free of charge since 1988.

From 1992 onward, many Chinese "business" persons started to use the non-visa basis to earn money in the Russian Far East and Siberia. This

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<sup>6</sup> On the details of the negotiations, see IWASHITA Akihiro, *A 4,000 Kilometer Journey along the Sino-Russian Border*, *Slavic Eurasian Studies* 3 (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2004), 10–31.

had a drastic impact on the Russian people. There is a striking demographic gap between the roughly seven million in the Russian Far East and more than 100 million in the Chinese North East. In addition, while many Russians left the Russian Far East, where living conditions had continually spiraled downward since the breakup of the of the country's previous economic system, the infiltration of Chinese goods and peoples into the vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union was noticeably on the rise. Statistics suggest a mutual economic "supplement" between Russia and China, but the extremely negative reaction to the Chinese presence in Russia's Far East market was a cause of great concern during this time.

This idea that the Chinese might rush to retake their previous land because of Russia's weakness reached panic proportions just after 1994, when the Russian government initiated a series of visa controls against the entry of Chinese citizens, and conducted a number of police operations to weed out "illegal" Chinese residents following the requests of some local bodies on the Russian side of the border. In 1996, a sort of quasi-prophet, Tamara Globa, spread the word that a war with China was imminent. Some residents rushed to question military officials about a would-be Russo-Chinese war. The rumor of an outbreak of war between Russia and China spread like wildfire throughout Russia, despite denials to the contrary by the Russian authorities. This is the story of the Sino-Russian border area around the time that Moscow and Beijing declared their "constructive partnership" in 1994.

### **The Birth of a "Strategic Partnership": Making Sense of a "Balance" Foreign Policy?**

Against this backdrop, the 1991 eastern border agreement<sup>7</sup> that had been reached between the Soviet Union and China had taken on a special meaning. The fact that many islands on the Amur and Ussuri Rivers and some portions of land in the Primor'e Krai were about to be transferred to China was leaked to the press and sensationalized.

The Primor'e Krai assumed an assertive position among the border regions. Disputed territories were not concentrated on the islands found on rivers such as Damanskii Island, the famous Soviet-Chinese battlefield of

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<sup>7</sup> See, *Sbornik rossisko-kitaiskikh dogovorov, 1949–1999* (Moscow: Terra Sport, 1999), 117–125.

1969. The “Chinese threat” was seriously becoming a matter of real concern. Not only the Primor’e Krai but also other border regions in Russia followed suit, although the degree of complaint and criticism against China were obviously differentiated.

As a result, most of the border demarcation works covering the Amur and Ussuri Rivers had to be delayed until the end of 1996. Russia had to finish all the works on the 1991 agreement by the end of 1997 because a deadline was legally imposed by the Russian parliament. If the works had not been finished by that time, the 1991 agreement would have been invalid and the Russo-Chinese border would have turned to lawlessness. Foreign Minister Primakov and his aids repeatedly appealed to the public that the Russian government was obliged to accelerate the works to guarantee the agreement.<sup>8</sup> These were the realities on the ground in 1996, when Russia and China declared their “strategic partnership.”

At the beginning of 1996, President Yeltsin signed an order for the acceleration of border demarcation works. Then, the Primor’e governor protested against pressure from Moscow that the Primor’e transfer the disputed lands to China. Because of this protest, the Russian government was forced to halt the demarcation works in the Primor’e.

Behind these political maneuvers, Moscow tried to complete its negotiations over other demarcation works on some islands downstream of the Amur River in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. A deal was clinched in April 1996 just before Yeltsin’s departure for China. On the way to Beijing, Yeltsin was suddenly hit with a good idea. He urged his aide to propose to the Chinese the new term of “strategic partnership” in place of “constructive partnership.” The Chinese side hesitated in accepting it at first because, they felt, it implied “alliance” against others, and were concerned how emerging China-Russian relations would appear to the West. Finally, China agreed to accept the expression. According to a Chinese source, it is true that Yeltsin suddenly proposed it but Primakov suggested the idea beforehand when he was inaugurated chief of the Russian intelligence service.

Nevertheless, the actual meaning of “strategic partnership” was too vague both for Russia and China, and attempts to come up with a suitable definition remained elusive. The only content that all parties agreed on was that it should never mean “against a third party” or “alliance.” They

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<sup>8</sup> *Interfax*, April 5, 1996; April 18, 1996; *Tikhookeanskaia Zvezda*, March 8, 1997.

repeated that these were a new type of relations in the post-Cold War era, but nobody was able to provide the persuasive details.<sup>9</sup>

### **Multilateral “Strategic Partnership” Fashioned**

As Primakov expected, the “strategic partnership” has been advocated year by year. Russia and China soon discovered that the “strategic partnership” could be effective and repeatedly inserted common declarations and statements, which implicitly criticized the foreign policy of the US. Neither challenges over the border nor the background of the “partnership” are fully understood. However, a simple interpretation from the point of view of a “balance” policy was beyond the behind-the-scene facts, as I have illustrated above.

The “strategic partnership” was at last accepted by China. China decided to advocate it as a “new type of international relations” and declared a “strategic partnership” with the US in 1997. The term “partnership,” which was rarely used except in certain cases as with Russia and Brazil, has been applied and modified for France, the UK, Japan, Turkey and South Africa. 1996 was the opening year both for “strategic” and “partnership” in China. In turn, Russia also rushed to declare a “strategic partnership,” particularly with India, the EU and CIS countries.<sup>10</sup>

This important phenomenon was that “partnership” applied not only to bilateral relations, but also to multilateral relations. Just after the Russo-Chinese declaration on the “strategic partnership,” a correspondent for a Russian military newspaper, *Krasnaia Gazeta*, commented that the relationship could be widened or multilateralized, i.e., with India.<sup>11</sup> The Shanghai Five, a predecessor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, was organized in the same year. It appeared to be a model of multilateral “partnership.” It should be noted that the Shanghai Five was created as a coordinate body for the security and stability of the former Soviet-Chinese border. And since 1996, China has also accelerated a multilateral approach

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<sup>9</sup> Innumerable interviews with Russian and Chinese colleagues in Moscow, Vladivostok, Beijing, Shanghai and Harbin since 1993. Some uncited sources in the article are provided by them.

<sup>10</sup> With Japan, the “creative partnership” was declared in 1998. Japan cautiously downplayed the term “strategic” because of its own “territorial issue” vis-à-vis Russia.

<sup>11</sup> *Krasnaia Gazeta*, April 30, 1996.

to its foreign policy toward Asia and has emphasized the importance of diplomacy with neighboring countries as one of its major orientations.<sup>12</sup>

Following the tide of creating multilateral “partnerships,” Primakov, then premier, made his now famous speech calling for the formation of a “strategic triangle” between Russia, China and India during a visit to Delhi in 1998. Negative reactions immediately followed from both China and India. First, both of them worried that a sudden spread of a “strategic partnership” multivectorized among the three giants in Eurasia would naturally be interpreted as a cause for alarm among surrounding countries and the US. Second, China did not take Russia’s goodwill very seriously in 1998 and neither did India need serious cooperation with Russia compared with the US. Most importantly, China and India recognized that relations were far from the stage of “partnership.” One Indian specialist laughed at the possibility of a “strategic triangle” because India had for some time maintained a “non-strategic partnership” with China.<sup>13</sup>

### **Russo-Chinese Relations Elevated**

Despite the declaration and reputation of the “strategic partnership” between Russia and China established in 1996, relations developed at snail’s pace. The promise to boost trade ties between the two countries to the \$20 billion level by 2000 was not realized. Border negotiations were deadlocked over a couple of remaining disputed points: Heixiazi Island near Khabarovsk and Abagaitui Island on the Argun River. The 1991 agreement, excluding the two points above, was juridically reconfirmed in 1999. In September 1999, when Russian sinologists began to emphasize a would-be “strategic triangle” between Russia, China and India during a symposium session held at the Institute of the Far East in Moscow, a correspondent from a Chinese newspaper did not take their reports very seriously, and a Russian diplomat criticized the idea for its impracticality.<sup>14</sup> A prestigious Chinese academic journal on Russia

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<sup>12</sup> See Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s New Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2003); TAKAGI Seiichiro, “Chugoku to Minami Ajia” [China and South Asia], *Minami Ajia no Anzenhosho* [South Asian Security] (Japan Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Interviews and dialogues with Indian colleagues in Delhi since 2001.

<sup>14</sup> This was heard from discussions during a symposium held at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies in Moscow in September, 1999. See, *Kitai na puti modernizatsii i reform; tezisy dokladov X mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii “Kitai, kitaiskaia tsivilizatsiia i mir:*

mentioned that Russo-Chinese relations are on a second axis that is easily influenced by Russo-US and Sino-US relations. The better the latter becomes, the worse the former becomes, and vice versa.<sup>15</sup>

Just after his inauguration, Russian President Vladimir Putin was eager to visit to Europe in early 2000. He welcomed US President Bill Clinton in Moscow in early June, while waiting until July to visit Beijing. The joint statement published there on missile defense unveiled a different approach between Russia and China.<sup>16</sup> China was afraid that the new Russian president was overly pro-western at China's expense. Even when President Putin paid his first visit to India in October 2000, a high-ranking Chinese correspondent suggested in an internal report that this trip may have been held to counter China as a part of Russia's "balance" foreign policy.

Emerging problems in relations were, however, worked out through bilateral cooperation, particularly over the border region, which kicked off

*istoriia, sovremennost', perspektivy*" (Moscow, 22–24 September, 1999), T. 1–2 (Moscow, 1999). Bilateral interaction at the researcher level between Russia and China has continued and expanded since then. A force driving Russian toward trilateral cooperation including India is stirred up by the Institute of Far Eastern Studies. See *Kitai v XXI veke: shansy, vyzovy i perspektivy: tezisy dokladov XI Mezhdunarodnoĭ nauchnoĭ konferentsii "Kitai, kitaiskaia tsivilizatsiia I mir: istoriia, sovremennost', perspektivy"* (Moskva 27–29 sentiabria 2000 g.) (Moscow, 2001); Rossiia-Kitai-Indiia: novye vyzovy i ugrozy XXI vek, *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 6 (2001); S. V. Uianaev ed. *Vzaimodeistvie Rossii, Indii i Kitaiia v XXI veke: problemy, perspektivy, napravleniia* (Moscow: Institut Dal'nego vostoka, Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, 2004), vol. 1–2.

<sup>15</sup> *Dongou Zhongya yanjiu*, 2000, no. 1, 86–87.

<sup>16</sup> Take the example of the Russo-Chinese summit in July, 2000, as an illustration. We understand that Russia and China advanced their "Strategic Partnership" at the same time and collaborated to fiercely criticize the NMD and TMD sponsored by the US. We should, however, note the differences between the Russian and the Chinese texts on the issue of the Joint Declaration on Anti-Ballistic Missiles: 1) Both China and Russia strongly "oppose" the TMD in Chinese, while they only "protest" against it in Russian. 2) The TMD that they both criticize is "closed" and "one that could destabilize the region." 3) It suggests that an "open" TMD, including China and North Korea, might be acceptable from Russia's point of view. Russia could negotiate with the US to stop the NMD in proposing an "open" TMD not only in Europe but also in East Asia as a substitute for it. China could use the Chinese version of the Declaration to pointedly emphasize to the West the strong will of China and Russia against the TMD. This is the art of diplomacy, where both sides do not necessarily come to close the real gap between them concerning a key issue in the international field although they do display a strong will to show their "common" stance to the world.

during the later years of the Yeltsin period. Successful enforcement of the 1991 agreement, strict management of Chinese migration, joint control of the border regime and other border cooperation had a positive effect in stabilizing the border region. It was undoubtedly shown that border cooperation had moved forward, regardless of any divergence of opinion or disputes between governments. Then, Putin urged the conclusion of a “neighborly friendship and cooperation” treaty, which Jiang Zemin had proposed to Yeltsin earlier, in order to solidify the basis of Russo-Chinese relations. On the eve of signing of the treaty in July 2001, it was reported that Putin, wanting to bring the border dispute to an end, repeatedly argued for a compromise on the remaining border disputes, although it was unrealized.

After both of them successfully completed the treaty and played up the “partnership,” new challenges emerged in the aftermath of “9/11.” Russia and China immediately responded to US President George W. Bush’s call for a “united front” against “international terrorism.” If the Chinese view on the Sino-Russian axis mentioned above were true, Russo-Chinese relations had again hit another stumbling block.

In fact, bilateral relations were neither disturbed nor worsened. In addition to border stability and cooperation, economic relations gradually developed: \$8 billion in 2000, \$17.7 billion in 2001, and \$11.0 billion in 2002. Russian arms sales to China were also progressive, with the sale of A-50 AWACS going through in November 2000, while deals over an upgraded SU-27K jetfighter and six submarines were finalized (the total amount is said to have been around \$1.5 billion). It went beyond the estimated arms sales of \$1 billion, at that time. Since 2000, energy issues have been at the top of their agenda. China’s urgent demand for oil and gas made possible the close cooperation over the construction of a pipeline through Siberia and the Far East. The move was put forward during a Mikhail Kasiiyanov-Zhu Rongji meeting in September 2001. The Russo-Chinese treaty provided the full basis for further cooperation, and was not influenced by outside factors.

President Putin, just after his meeting with Jiang Zemin in June 2002, praised Russo-Chinese relations: “The recent improvement in Russo-US relations never ignores Russo-Chinese relations, and the latter reaches a higher level than the former because of the existence of the friendship

treaty.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, problems soon emerged between Russia and China: China’s unfriendly attitude toward Russia’s entry into the WTO (China countering it with a demand that Russia lift its “barrier” policy against “Chinese migration” as a condition for Chinese support), problems over Russia’s “dumping” of Russian exports, such as steel and chemical fertilizer, and Khabarovsk’s severe reaction and propaganda over the Heixiazi Island issue. By the end of 2002, Putin was describing Russo-Chinese relations as “friendly but businesslike.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Breakthrough: The New “Partnership”**

In March 2003, Hu Jingtao was selected as the new president of China. For his first trip abroad, he chose Russia. To say that Russia and China were somewhat irritated by Bush’s unilateral approach would be an understatement; the presence of the US army in Central Asia for an undetermined period of time, and the US invasion and its subsequent occupation of Iraq being the most obvious irritants. Nevertheless, Russia and China did not closely coordinate against the US-UK “collation” on Iraq. Russia leaned upon a French initiative to soften the UN resolution on sanctions against Iraq. China cautiously watched the process but did not make its position clear at first.<sup>19</sup>

For the most part, rapid economic interactions between the two countries started in 2003. In 2003, the trade volume hit \$15.6 billion (up \$4.6 billion from 2002) which, if the negative effects of the SARS epidemic on the economy in May of that year are considered, is a tremendous achievement. It reached \$21.2 billion in 2004 and \$25.2 billion in 2005. Meanwhile, some twenty-four SU-30 jetfighters (at a cost of almost \$1 billion) were sold in 2003, while the total amount of arms sales reached \$2 billion. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov visited Beijing and concluded the sale of six S-300 missiles. Nevertheless, when economic issues were internationalized, the Russo-Chinese “partnership” remained “businesslike.” Problems related to the proposed Siberian pipeline illustrate the realities of Russo-Chinese relations. Despite repeated Chinese calls for a route to go through China, Russia did not

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<sup>17</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 3, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, December 2, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> For more on China’s approach toward the Iraq War, see Willy Lam, “China’s Reaction to America’s Iraq Imbroglio,” *China Brief*, 4, no. 8 (April 15, 2004).

finalize it, and in September 2003 put its final decision on hold. Instead, Russia emphasized the importance of a direct route to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>20</sup> A drastic push for better “relations” was brought about by the border arrangement. In October 2004, Russian President Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao declared that Russia and China had successfully resolved the remaining border dispute by cutting each disputed island, Heixiazhi and Abagaitui Islands, in half. The two presidents were proud of the results and declared it a “win-win” compromise. They also strongly suggested that it could potentially be applied as a model to other border disputes around the globe.<sup>21</sup> The present condition of Russo-Chinese relations would not have been possible without defusing and resolving the border issue first, with little chance of bilateral cooperation in the vital areas of energy and arm sales. Who would have imagined an oil and gas pipeline crossing over the Amur River or a joint military exercise prior to the border dispute being resolved? With regional stability enhanced, mutual trust between the two countries has grown. As shown in this article, basic challenges to Russo-Chinese relations originated mostly from border disputes. The better the situation of the border, the better the relations. Lessons gained from Russo-Chinese relations suggest that they have not been a secondary axis, and have been affected little by the US. It is a considerably independent variable, basically controlled by bilateral factors, and has been particularly modified by border politics in the aftermath of the Cold War.

## **Balance Policy Resurgent: The Russia-India Partnership**

### **South Asia as a Place for Primakov Intelligence**

India’s position on Russian foreign policy sounds different from China’s. India is far from Russia and has no shared border. Russia and India are rarely antagonistic toward each other, and are able to cooperate when there is a strong need to do so. In this sense, India seems to offer a perfect opportunity for Russia’s “balance” foreign policy. Reviewing post-Cold

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<sup>20</sup> *RFE/RL Newswire*, September 26, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> On the final arrangement of the border negotiation on the remaining issue, see Iwashita Akihiro, “An Inquiry for New Thinking on the Border Dispute: Backgrounds of ‘Historic Success’ for the Sino-Russian Negotiations,” in *Crossroads in Northeast Asia*, ed. Iwashita Akihiro, *Slavic Eurasian Studies* 6, vol.1 (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2005).

War Russian foreign policy toward India, close attention should be paid to the two Soviet periods of “balance” policy before and after the Russo-Chinese military conflict of 1969.

The first period began with India achieving independence from British rule in 1946. Combatting US influence was Russia’s top priority at the time. Russia never supported India unilaterally and balanced its position between India and Pakistan to maintain its interests against the US. In the 1950s when Pakistan joined the SEATO and the Baghdad Pact under the auspices of the US, The Soviet Union sought to weaken US influence in South Asia. Nikita Khrushchev supported India’s position on Kashmir (that it belonged to India), which brought India closer to the Soviet Union, and then proposed to offer Pakistan economic aid and atomic technology for peaceful use in order to make a rapprochement with Pakistan. In the 1960s, the Soviet Union revised its complete support for India on the Kashmir issue (Russia now believing that it should be negotiated between the parties concerned, while still backing India’s position) and signed a barter trade agreement with Pakistan. In 1965, Pakistan’s president visited Moscow and Premier Aleksei Kosygin, as a show of goodwill, organized the “Tashkent meeting” to mediate between the belligerents India and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> China’s active influence was

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<sup>22</sup> We easily see certain amounts of studies on Russo-Indian relations with most of them focused on the “balance” between the US and Russia over South Asia in the first period of the Cold War. Even after Chinese presence increased in the region, the tendency to view things through the lens of a “balance” policy within the Russia-China-India-Pakistan quadrangle remains strong. See William J. Barnds, *India, Pakistan, and the Great Powers* (New York: Praeger, 1972); Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Policy toward India: Ideology and Strategy* (Cambridge: Mass., 1974); Richard B. Remnek, *Soviet Scholars and Soviet Foreign Policy: A Case Study in Soviet Policy towards India* (Durham: N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1975); Bhabani Sen Gupta, “Soviet-Asian Relations in the 1970s and Beyond: An Interperceptual study,” *Russian Review*, 37, no. 2; Stephen Clarkson, *The Soviet Theory of Development: India and the Third World in Marxist-Leninist Scholarship* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Rajan Menon, *India and Soviet Union: A Case Study of Inter-nation Influence* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1979); Robert C. Horn, *Soviet-Indian Relations: Issues and Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Hafeez Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); V. D. Chopra, ed., *Studies in Indo-Soviet Relations* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1986); S. Nihal Singh, *The Yogi and the Bear: Story of Indo-Soviet Relations* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1986); Peter Duncan, *The Soviet Union and India* (London: Routledge, 1988); Sanjay Gaikwad, *Dynamics of Indo-Soviet Relations: the Era of Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1990).

growing in the region. China's geopolitical position toward South Asia is different from Russia's. China has a shared border with Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. China and India had serious disputes over the border and the status of Tibet.<sup>23</sup> In the mid-1950s, China and India sought a policy of "good neighborliness" over the border to achieve a "balance" against the US, but it did not last long. War erupted on the border. The Soviet Union did not fully side with China, and this later proved to be one of the reasons that Soviet-Chinese relations deteriorated. Why did the Soviet Union not fully support China? It is true that the Soviet Union was tired of Chinese aggression against the US, exemplified by Mao Tsedong's assertion about a possible nuclear war against the US. The underlying reason was that South Asia was, for the Soviet Union, a space for "balancing" vis-à-vis the US. The Soviet Union seemed not to realize that Sino-Indian border antagonism could exceed the centripetal force between India and China against the US. The dissymmetry of India's positioning between Russia and China should have been considered.

After the border clash between the Soviet Union and China in 1969, the meaning of a South Asian space for the Soviet Union shifted to another dimension of the "balance" policy: "deterrence of a neighboring power." The Soviet Union was inclined to rely on India to deter China, while China and Pakistan strengthened the axis in reaction. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the US strongly assisted Pakistan while India went out of its way not to criticize Soviet action. In South Asia, Soviet-Indian relations functioned as a balance against the China-Pakistan axis backed by the US. South Asia was the perfect place to test Primakov's maxim.

### **Back from Inertia to Balance**

In the late Gorbachev era, Perestroika foreign policy, which assigned higher priority to the US, Europe and China, did not pay much attention to India. However, Mikhail Gorbachev visited India twice in 1986 and 1988 and played up their "traditional friendship" to others. In particular, the former was famous for the "Delhi Declaration." However, the declaration, entitled "For Principles of Non-Nuclear and Non-Violence in the World," obviously followed a Gorbachev initiative on the "disarmament of nuclear

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<sup>23</sup> For details on the conflict, see Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Cape, 1970).

weapons” and a “new world order” on the basis of the “New Thinking.” The declaration was provocative to the US and was closely related to the unsuccessful Reykjavik summit with US President Ronald Regan in October 1986. On the other hand, India had concerns over Gorbachev’s Vladivostok speech in which he urged Russia to “reconcile” with China and put forth his idea of building a comprehensive security regime in Asia.<sup>24</sup>

At the time, the Soviet priority in Asia was with China and the war in Afghanistan. After 1989, when Gorbachev withdrew the Soviet army from Afghanistan and paid a historic visit to Beijing, India was low on the Soviet Union’s foreign policy priority list. In this context, its relations with Pakistan had a chance of improving, but Pakistan overestimated the “Delhi Declaration” as a sign of close partnership between the Soviet Union and India. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze’s visit to Islamabad did little to improve Soviet-Pakistan relations. Gorbachev next turned his attention to improving its ties with Japan. India officially kept its position as best partner in South Asia for the Soviet Union, but economic relations were downsized. In fact, bilateral trade had waned to somewhere between the \$3 billion and \$4 billion level, similar to its bilateral trade with China, but below that with Japan. Soviet-India relations were nominal at best and a de facto vacuum at worst. Neither the Soviet Union nor India showed much interest in improving their relations.

Following the birth of the new Russia, the early foreign policy of Russia was more pro-Western than Gorbachev’s, but it did not necessarily ignore its Asian “far neighbors”: Gennady Burbulis visited in May and Ruslan Khasbulatov visited in August 1992. At the end of 1992, Foreign Minister Kozyrev, departing from Russia’s pro-Western policy, naturally reminded his fellow Russians of India’s importance. He tried to redefine Russo-Indian relations in the post-Cold War period.<sup>25</sup> President Yeltsin visited Delhi and signed a friendship and cooperation treaty, as well as certain agreements such as rescheduling of Indian debt and military cooperation, including rocket technology transfer.

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<sup>24</sup> For details on Gorbachev’s memorial on India, see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i Reformy*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Hovosti, 1995)

<sup>25</sup> See Andrei Kozyrev, *Preobrazhenie* (Moscow: Mezhdunapodnye Otnosheniia, 1995), 247–249.

It is, however, apparent that the new treaty was a step back from the previous one: the new treaty omitted the word “peace” and the clause “mutual consultant in crisis.” Military cooperation was also suspended. President Yeltsin suspended the transfer of technology to India, accepting US concerns regarding the situation. Their economic relations faltered as well: less than one billion dollars from 1992 to 1994, and not exceeding more than \$2 billion since 1995. In contrast, India’s new open economic policy was given a warm welcome by the US, and India enjoyed a sort of honeymoon with the US because of the keen attention paid to Asia by the Clinton administration, which came to a halt following the exposure of India’s nuclear capabilities in May 1998. Russo-Indian relations are the only variable subordinate to US-Indian relations or to US-Russian relations. The better the latter becomes, the worse the former becomes, and vice versa.<sup>26</sup>

Following the deterioration of US-Russian relations in 1994, Russia began to urgently retreat from the prolonged inertia of Russo-Indian relations. Russia did not hesitate to sell its most sophisticated weapons to India; big deals concerning the sale of MIG–29, Su30–MKI, S–300 and submarines were quickly and satisfactorily arranged. Energy cooperation including the construction of an atomic station and space exploitation facility was advanced. India’s traditional dependence on Soviet weapons in the Cold War and Indian tactics of maintaining its distance from the US caused India to move toward accepting a Russian proposal. After the US imposed an economic embargo on India after India’s nuclear experiment in 1998, Russia only verbally criticized India and did not participate in the embargo. With Russia seeming to be a good “card” for Indian interests, Primakov visited Delhi and disclosed the idea of a “strategic triangle.” India considered its relations with the US extremely important and vital to its interests, and much to Russia’s dismay, maintained a cool attitude toward Russia.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For Russia’s “indifference” to India, see Frederic Grare, “India, China, Russia and the for Global Power Status: Strategic Partnership or Strategic Competition,” in *India, China, Russia: Intricacies of an Asian Triangle*, ed. Gilles Boquerat and Frederic Grare (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2004), 58.

<sup>27</sup> See YOSHIDA Osamu, “Indo to Kyusoren: Kokusai Kankei no Renzokusei to Soui” [India and the ex-Soviet Union: Continuity and Difference in International Relations] in *Roshia Gaikou no Genzai* [Russian Foreign Policy Today] (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2004): 106–118.

Here, it is important to note the new dynamics of Russo-Indian relations that emerged in the mid-1990s. An independent Central Asia became a contributing factor to the dynamics in their relations. Although India and Russia have no shared border, the area between the two countries had begun to transform, which had an effect on Russo-Indian relations. Since the early 1990s, India has been concerned about the stability of Central Asia because of the ruling Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan that had the potential to adversely affect the Kashmir issue. The disputed region of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan shares a border with both China and Afghanistan. Border politics in this context are analyzed with the presence of Pakistan in the region.

### **Pakistan in Border Politics**

While the differences between the Russian approach to India and the Indian approach to Russia were apparent, Pakistan kept a close eye on Russia. To insure its own security against India, Pakistan sought to “balance” the great powers in the region. Undoubtedly, the major actors are the US, China and Russia. Although the US has been Pakistan’s most important partner, US support of Pakistan has been contingent on Pakistan’s ability to contain or conduct war against such “big enemies” as the Soviet Union in the Cold War era or the Taliban and al Qaeda in the “post-9/11” era. US concerns about Pakistan’s Islamic statehood and political instability, e.g., repeated military coups, also need to be factored in. In contrast to the political regime of Pakistan, which leaves little to be desired or emulated, the US admires Indian democracy. The better US-Indian relations, the worse US-Pakistan relations.

Concerning the Soviet Union, Pak-Soviet relations were relatively good in the 1960s, but after Russo-Chinese military conflicts and the third Pak-Indian war, they deteriorated (although it should be noted that Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did visit Moscow in 1974, so relations were not completely frozen). The decisive halt to relations happened after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan was now a de facto “enemy” of the Soviet Union.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Soviet-Chinese reconciliation changed the basis of Soviet-Pak relations. But Gorbachev’s “indifference” (particularly on Pakistan) to South Asia and the collapse of the Soviet Union lessened the chances of drastic improvement.

Although the new Russia attempted to develop relations with Pakistan in late 1992 and early 1993, President Yeltsin proclaimed that Russia was not prepared to provide military assistance to Pakistan. Pakistan was disappointed over Russia's lack of interest in developing ties. Foreign Minister Kozyrev's visit to Islamabad in April 1994 did little to improve relations. Moscow expressed a cool attitude toward Premier Benazir Bhutto who was eager to visit Russia in December 1994. Russo-Pak relations did not move forward.<sup>28</sup>

Compared to the slow pace of developing Russo-Pak relations, Pakistan's approach to Central Asia was rapid and dynamic. In particular, Pak-Uzbek and Pak-Turkmen relations went ahead with top leaders and high-ranking officials making mutual and repeated visits, with Premier Nawaz Sharif visiting Tashkent in March 1992 and President Islam Karimov visiting Islamabad in August 1992. (He visited Delhi in January 1993). President Saparmurat Niazov visited Islamabad in August 1994 and March 1995, while Benazir Bhutto visited in October 1994. Relations with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan soon followed. (If the civil war in Tajikistan had not occurred, Pakistani relations with Tajikistan could have been more advanced in the mid-1990s.)<sup>29</sup>

Pakistan's approach to Central Asia was different from that of India's; it focused on and was active in neighboring countries that have a shared border with Afghanistan. The Taliban regime created in Afghanistan pushed Pakistan to show its goodwill in support of the security and integrity of the Central Asian countries.

The Taliban's highjacking of an Iliushin aircraft in August 1995 pushed Russo-Pakistan relations forward. Russia worked closely with Pakistan, while requesting the release of Russian hostages, with which Pakistan readily complied. When the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in the summer of 1997, Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Kahn visited Moscow and agreed with Primakov to build pragmatic relations for resolving regional issues, and exchanged views on the affairs of

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<sup>28</sup> On general trends of Soviet/Russo-Pak relations, see Khaled M. Sheikh, *Foreign Policy of Pakistan*, 2nd ed. (Lahore, 2004); Imran Shanzad, *Foreign Policy of Major Powers* (Lahore, 2001) and *Journals of Strategic Studies* (The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad).

<sup>29</sup> On details of Central Asian-Pak relations, see Railia M. Mukimdzhanova, *Strany Tsentralnoi Azii: Aziatskii Vektor Vneshnei Politiki* (Moscow: Nauchnaia Kniga, 2005), 86–101.

Afghanistan and the Tajikistan peace process. In March 1998, Deputy Chair of the Upper House Vasilii Likhachev, and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigorii Karasin visited Islamabad to emphasize the importance of the Russo-Pak partnership. Even after the exposure of Pakistan's nuclear program in May 1998 following the revelations of India's nuclear program, Russia's criticism remained only verbal. Russia recognized the need to collaborate with Pakistan for regional stability. It is also worth noting that Pakistan played a major role during the Tajikistan peace process. In the summer of 1999, Pakistan and Iran were invited to the "6+2" conference in Tashkent that came about mainly through Russian initiatives.

Russo-Pak relations seemed to enter a new era, but General Pervez Musharraf coup put a stop to that in October. Russia again doubted that Pakistan could be a reliable partner. In January, the Russian Foreign Ministry blamed Pakistan for promoting "international terrorism," including in Chechnya. President Putin, nevertheless, tried a "balance" policy to show Russian influence over South Asia. In September 2000, however, Pakistan, in turn, expressed its distrust of Russia to Sergei Iastrzhembskii, Putin's presidential envoy to Islamabad. In Pakistan's eyes, the Russo-Indian "honeymoon" played up by Putin's visit in October 2000 was interpreted as a revival of Russia's one-sided reliance on India. It seemed that Putin hoped to trumpet his "successful diplomacy" and the Russian presence in South Asia like the successful trip to Pyongyang on the way to a G7 summit in Okinawa, Japan, in 2000.<sup>30</sup> However, the realities around South Asia (as well as the Korean Peninsula) are often beyond Russia's diplomatic ability, and Putin's similar attempt to mediate an Indo-Pak confrontation (after "12.13" of 2001 in Delhi) was also snubbed by both India and Pakistan, which accepted the US initiative for dialogue later.

In the context of border politics influencing Pakistan's foreign policy, it is natural that Pakistan was eager to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a way to improve regional stability and development. Pakistan was the first country to apply for observer status, which was rejected following strong objections by Tajikistan who expressed serious concerns over Pakistan's backing of the Taliban in Afghanistan and by Russia who was fearful of arousing Indian concerns about the SCO.

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<sup>30</sup> *Hovoe vremia*, 2000, 41, 18–19.

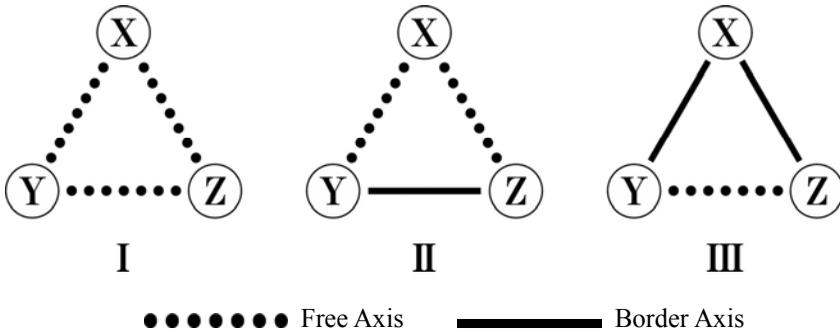
The events of “9/11” changed the regional alignment of Central Asia. All of the parties concerned joined the US call to unite against “international terrorism.” Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan welcomed the presence of the US military and Russia accepted it. Pakistan withdrew its support of the Taliban regime and joined the US coalition. India also supported the mission. After the Afghanistan war, interaction in the region was encouraged and widened to include South Asia with a new regional order emerging.

Dissymmetry of the regional axis in South Asia is also accounted here. For India, relations with Russia and Central Asia do not necessarily seem to be related to its direct interests, and Central Asia itself sounds like the kind of place for India’s “balance” foreign policy, while for Pakistan, the Central Asia region sounds decisive in the security and stability of its shared border with Afghanistan. India has recently been looking to demonstrate its commitment to Central Asia and has shown interest in the SCO, while maintaining a cooler stance toward the SCO than Pakistan. For Russia, as far as the outer border of the former Soviet Union is concerned, namely the Tajikistan and Uzbekistan border vis-à-vis Afghanistan, border politics could also influence Russo-Pak relations. In this scenario, Russo-Pak relations sound different from Russo-Indian relations, with Russia enjoying a “balance” policy regarding the latter. The small triangle of Russo-India-Pakistan is similar to the big Russo-China-India triangle from the viewpoint that each consists of a dissymmetric axis, i.e., border politics and a balance policy, as I briefly mentioned in the Introduction. I now direct my attention toward conceptualizing a hypothesis to explain the above phenomena.

## **Eurasian Triangles Reviewed: Border and Balance**

For a theoretical wrap up, we can draw three models consisting of two lines: a border axis (unbroken line) and a free axis (dotted line). My hypothesis is that a border axis is independent and stronger than a free axis. A free axis presents the possibility of a free hand for the actor, but it would be influenced by the border axis within the triangle and other axes or factors outside the triangle.

**Figure 1: Basic Models on Triangles**



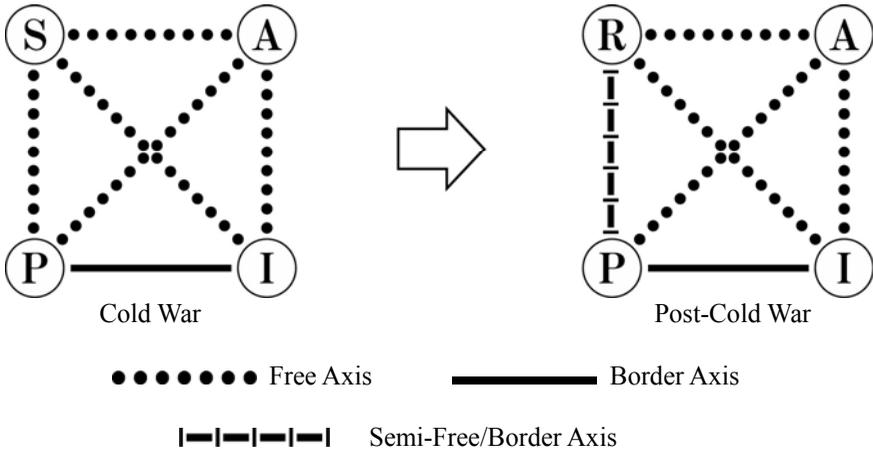
Type I X, Y and Z axes are even and can enjoy a free hand within the triangle for their own interests. In Type II, the border axis Y-Z has gravity. X can enjoy a balance approach toward Y and Z. If a zero-sum game is in play, the Y-Z axis is down in the interests of X, and the Y-Z axis is up, against the interests of X. In short, X attempts to keep the Y-Z axis down for its own benefit, while Y and Z tend to improve the Y-Z axis (defusing border problems and turning border regions into peaceful and prosperous areas) for their individual benefit. Type III border politics heavily regulate the triangle. The Y-Z axis has more freedom than the other two axes. When either the X-Y or the X-Z axis is down, the Y-Z axis is up. If both axes on X are down, this might encourage Y and Z to form “allied” relations. Then, X would be out, rushing to seek a stronger actor out of the triangle. The important point is that the triangle’s stability and development depends on the X-Y and the X-Z axes, not on the Y-Z axis. Type III is much more difficult to manage compared with Types I and II.

From Type IV, we can infer that all axes on the three actors are border axes. But in fact, we do not need this type to analyze regions. Rather, we should prepare one more line, this time illustrated by a semi-dotted line to indicate a semi-free (or semi-border) axis. In the case where two countries have a shared but short border, the situation changes. Although relations could be influenced by border politics to a certain extent while enjoying the balance game, border politics play less of a decisive role in determining the direction of relations.

**Quadrangles on South Asia**

Now we use three types of triangle (I, II and III) with three lines (border, free and semi-free axes). Put a quadrangle on South Asia and break it down into triangles as follows.

**Figure 2: Quadrangle A: Soviet Union (Russia)-US-India-Pakistan**



If you draw the Soviet-US-India and Soviet-US-Pakistan triangles, you will notice that they are Type I. Now draw the Soviet-India-Pakistan and US-India-Pakistan triangles. They are Type II. As I mentioned above, within Type II, Actor X can enjoy a free hand against Y and Z. The Soviet Union and the US should be put in X. In short, the quadrangle has a full basis that functions as a “balance” policy. Some US specialists as well as Russian and South Asian specialists mostly prefer to analyze the region from the point of view of a “balance” policy. Quadrangle A coincides with these researchers’ tastes.<sup>31</sup>

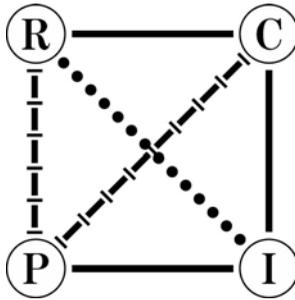
In the post-Cold War era, considering the amalgam of Central Asia and the emerging Pakistan border area, the Russian and Pakistan axis is being gradually influenced by border politics (as shown in the previous

<sup>31</sup> See note 22 above.

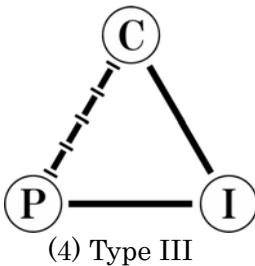
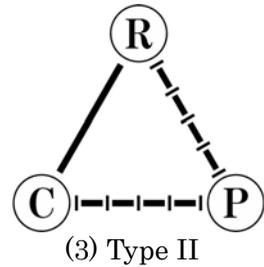
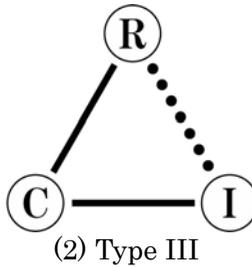
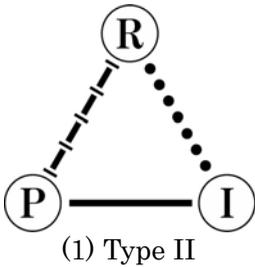
section). I will explain nuances of the Russo-Pak border transformation in the region a little later.

When we put another quadrangle on South Asia, including China, the situation changes completely.

**Figure 3: Quadrangle B: Russia-China-India-Pakistan**



Quadrangle B has complicated axes. If you break down the triangles into a figure, you can see that there are two Type II's and two Type III's.



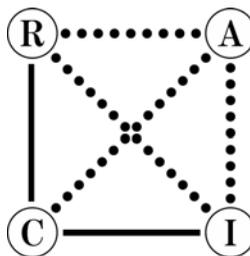
Russia-Pakistan-India Triangle (1) and Russia-China-Pakistan Triangle (3) are semi-Type IIs. Russia and Pakistan have a relative advantage in each triangle in achieving a “balance” policy. In the absence of another heavy factor, it suggests that Russia and Pakistan have a chance to develop relations. In turn, China and India face challenges within Triangles (2) and (4). For instance, if China has problems with Russia and India, China could accede to the other power (such as Pakistan at the regional level or the US at the global level) outside of the triangle. If India has problems with China and Pakistan, India should accede to a great power (Russia or the US). In another option, both countries are obliged to defuse border issues and stabilize relations with their neighbors. This is a condition for the triangle to function smoothly.

The challenges of “the Russo-China-India triangle” are also easily seen. For the triangle to function properly, both the Russia-China axis and the China-India axis need to be strengthened, and the Russia-Indian free line must be supported by some special reasons such as forming an “alliance” against China. As the China factor that brought Russia and India together diminished, both Russia and India, now having a free hand in relations to realize their own benefits, should have encouraged other bases to develop relations further. Then, both actors would naturally watch the actor out of the triangle. The US should be invited into the quadrangle to review the regional dynamics.

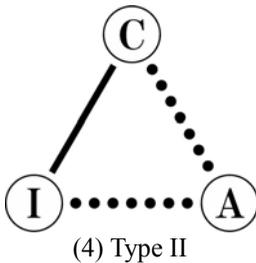
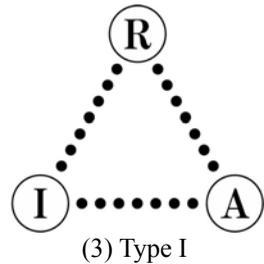
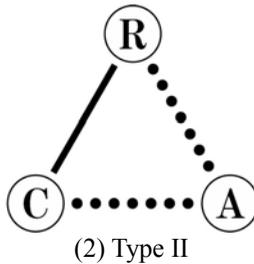
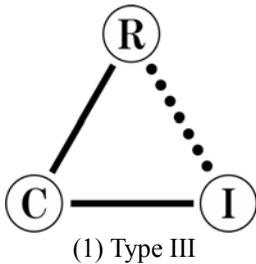
### Quadrangles on Eurasia

The Russia-US-China-India quadrangle goes beyond South Asia. It covers Eurasia as a whole:

Figure 4: Quadrangle C: Russia-US-China-India



At a glance, the quadrangle is strongly influence by China. Here is the breakdown:

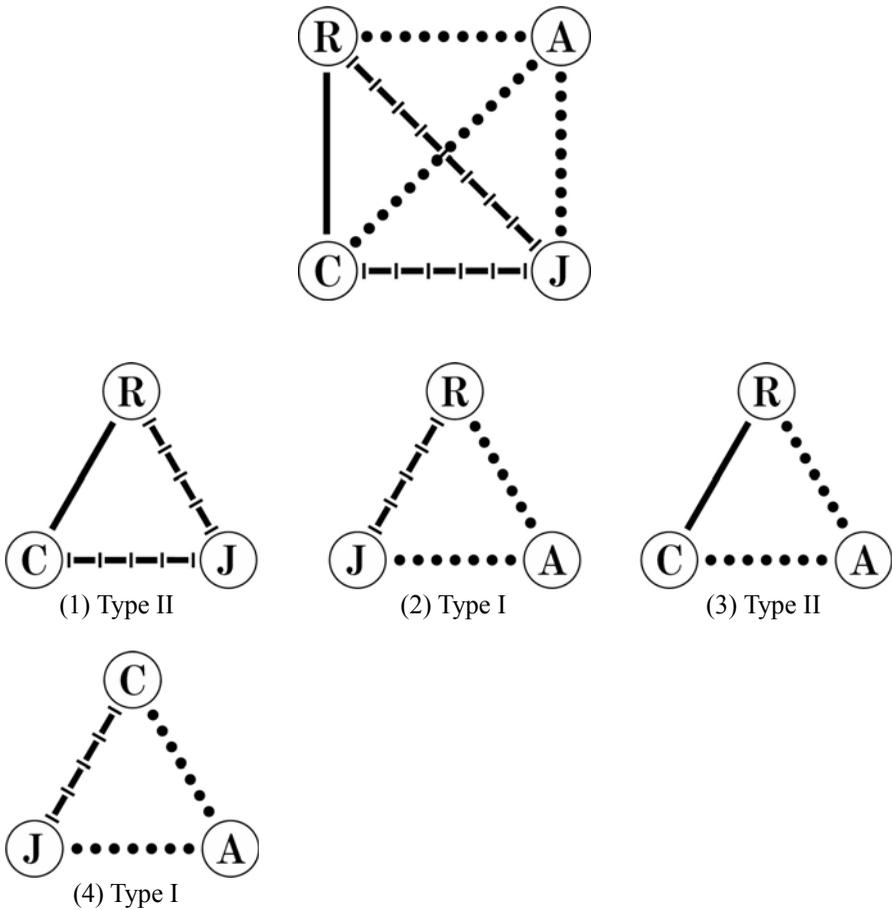


The US advantage within the triangles is apparent. The US can enjoy a “balance” policy toward both Russia-China (2) and China-India (4). On the other hand, China, Russia and India are inherently conditioned to improve border relations with their neighbors for their own interests to deter the US “balance” game. In Particular, China, double locked by the border axis, has a strong motivation to stabilize the border vis-à-vis the US approach. In turn, as the Russo-China axis or the China-India axis improve, it could diminish the US free hand. In this context, “Primakov redux” could be served by China’s goodwill. In the Cold War, as mentioned earlier, China was pressed by both Russia and India over the border and then rushed out of the triangle to invite the US at the expense of its two neighbors. But now, with the upsurge of border politics in the region, China could have more of a “free” hand vis-à-vis the US. However, India does not necessarily look to be following the path set out by China. Figure (3) shows India’s even position in the Russia-US-India triangle. This structure might not push India toward the “Primakov redux” as was the case with China. As for the realities of the Russia-China-India triangle,

as Russia-China relations reach a historic high (suggesting that little room remains for improvement) and Russia-India relations develop smoothly (albeit not very dynamically), the possibility of the “Primakov redux” mainly depends on China-Indian border politics.

For a comparative analysis of the quadrangle and its implications for Russian foreign policy, we refer to the quadrangle on Northeast Asia, which includes Japan.

**Figure 5: Quadrangle D: Russia-US-China-Japan**



Japan is basically in an advantageous position vis-à-vis China and Russia in the triangle. But the US factor determinately controls Japan's foreign policy. Japan could not fully enjoy the advantage after World War II. In the post-Cold War period, Japan has had relatively free access to Russia. However, the balance approach toward the Russia-China axis does not seem to work well as illustrated by the pipeline route issue from Siberia to China or the Pacific Coast. It is a good illustration of border politics influencing a balance policy. Border stability and development gives both Russia and China an incentive to enhance the interests of each other vis-à-vis not only Japan but also the US.<sup>32</sup>

## **Conclusion: Beyond the Balance Game**

Considering the structural relations of the triangles within quadrangles, the Primakov expectation on the Russo-China-India framework could be realized by having lessened the influence of the US balance approach toward the region. However, as Russia and China improve their "strategic partnership" to levels not seen before, little room remains to maneuver against the US unless they push their relations forward as in the "alliance" of the 1950s. In addition to this, Russo-Indian relations also act as the main channel for the triangle because the axis is easily influenced by the "balance" policy in the region. At last, the future of the triangle deeply depends on China's will to improve its ties with India (particularly on the issue of border politics) and partly on India's endeavor to keep its interests away from the US regarding the "balance." It does not seem that Russia will play a leading role in the triangle. If recent positive tides of the triangle continue, it will undoubtedly be moved forward mostly by a China-India rapprochement. In this sense, the "Primakov redux" has the fate of always being betrayed. If Russia tries to encourage the triangle artificially or overly commit to a "balance" game against the US, Russian

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<sup>32</sup> As Japan has a semi-balance line vis-à-vis Russia and China, the parties concerned (Japan and Russia, Japan and China) seem to lack the will to resolve the border issue. If border politics played a decisive role in building relations, negotiations over the problem would have been conducted more seriously and thoroughly. For more on the topic, see IWASHITA Akihiro, "Opyt Rossiisko-kitaiskikh pogranichnykh peregovorov: primenim li on k territorial'nomu voprosu mezhdru Rossiei i Japoniei?" in ed. IWASHITA Akihiro and Dmitrii Krivtsov, *Vzgliad vne ramok starykh problem: opyt rossiisko-kitaiskogo pogranichnogo sotrudnichestva* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2005).

foreign policy will realize meager results with Russia losing face in the region as it recently did in South Asia.

On the one hand, the dissymmetry of the triangles in the region should be considered by Russian foreign policy makers before airing the “romantic” slogan of “balance” policy.

On the other hand, border politics vis-à-vis a neighboring country can potentially offset a “balance” game played up by certain actors with a free hand. Stimulating the function of a non-revitalized triangle within the quadrangle on Eurasia could serve Russia’s interests more effectively. In this sense, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, starting from border cooperation, provides an opportune test for Russian foreign policy on border politics. As cooperation on the border develops in Eurasia, the role of a “balance” policy, particularly employed by the US, will diminish. It could be of some direct benefit to Russian interests. China, surrounded by many neighboring countries and naturally restrained by border politics, maintains its status at the top of the organ.

As for some of the implications of this analysis, Russia now has a chance to develop a new Eurasian alignment by pouring resources into unseen axes, which have the potential to develop border cooperation. The most notable axis is Russo-Pak relations. As seen in the previous section, the Russia-Pakistan axis has a free hand (particularly shown in the triangle including the US). Border politics on the India-Pakistan and China-India axes have long deterred such relations but they have moved forward to some extent despite difficulties. In addition, Russo-Pak relations have the potential to develop border interaction through transformed “buffer” regions such as Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization could promote the Russia-Pakistan axis more intimately. When the axis works well, Russia enjoys dual benefit in border politics and in a “balance” policy vis-à-vis others.

Another alternative for Russia seems to be Japan. Closely observing the triangles in the region, border politics basically regulate the Russia-China axis. It is true that the axis functions more heavily than the China-Japan axis or the Russia-Japan axis. However, in turn, it could offer breathing space to normalize and develop both China-Japan and Russia-Japan border politics. For Russia, with the border politics vis-à-vis Japan improved, it could create a new dynamism to push the politics forward toward the China-Japan axis. Then, a space where balance politics rarely function would develop and expand. It could contribute to

the interests of not only Russia but also most of the parties concerned in the region.

Border politics are the main driving force creating a new order within Eurasia. For Russian foreign policy, an initiative beyond a balance policy would be more appropriate than stubbornly adhering to the slogan of “Primakov redux.”