The Potential for a China-Russia Military Alliance Explored

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Abstract *: China is now a major power in the international system. One axiom of the realist theory on international politics is that states will acquire power to ensure their own position and security within the system. One effective way Major or Great Powers have done this is through alliance building. Historically, China has not had much success in cultivating long-standing alliances; however, cooperation between it and its neighbor Russia have deepened. This paper, using structural and defensive realism as theoretical framework on how and why states form alliances, explores the potential China-Russia military alliance. This paper looks at both balancing power and balancing threat as justifications for Great Powers to form alliances. As both a powerful state and a potential threat, the United States serves as the prime impetus for both Russia and China to align with each other. Whether the US is an actual threat to both Russia and China is immaterial, rather it is the perception by both China and Russia that the US's military strength and stated policy of promoting democratic norms and values represent a threat to the established leadership in both countries. China is in a unique position as a near peer competitor to the US; however, with few natural allies Russia is still powerful but in a relative state of decline. Both countries benefit from an alliance to counteract American influence within their zones of influence.*

Keywords : China, Russia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Alliance, Realism, Defensive Realism, Collective Security Treaty Organization, United States, Great Power, NATO

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Introduction

Alliances have always been an important element in states' obtaining and retaining power, security, and status within the international system. They are one way in which Great Powers accrue power. China, as a nation-state, has had little historical success in sustaining alliances with peers. However, China has become a Great Power with the potential to rival the United States and other Western powers that readily rely on alliances. Thus, it would not be extraordinary for Chinese leadership to explore the potential for alliances with other peer states, as the US has done with its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance. It seems increasingly apparent that no one state can stand alone within the international system.

The most likely state that China can align with is Russia, and indeed some security apparatus already exists between the two countries. China and Russia share some commonalities; they have a similar regime type, both qualify as Great Powers with sizable militaries, and often find themselves at odds with the US. Additionally, they are neighbors with a large land border between them.

However, there is still debate as to whether these two Great Powers are in a formal military alliance, or if such an alliance can be sustained long-term. Russia and China have often found themselves at odds, especially during the Cold War (the Soviet-Sino split). Thus, there is no guarantee that an alliance would be viable between them.

Still, alliance formation is an important element of state interaction, and with China's rise, it is pertinent to ask the question if China can enter into a military alliance with a peer state, or near-peer state such as Russia. This paper will utilize the neorealist theories on why states form military alliances. Taking a theoretical overview of balance-of-power and balance-of-threat theories within the framework of structural realism, the paper looks at the potential for a China-Russia alliance based on its assumptions.

First, the paper will give a brief overview of the theoretical methodology employed. Secondly, a brief historical overview of Sino-Russo relations is needed to place any potential alliance between the two countries in the proper historical context. As a summary of Chinese-Russian relations is given, a historical background of US-Russian relations is also necessary to better understand why Russia would prefer China as an ally to the US.

Next, the paper will give an overview of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the two security apparatus that dominate Eurasia. Both Russia and China are members of the SCO, however only Russia is a member of the CSTO, but it is important to include the CSTO as it remains a viable alliance alternative for Russia. The fourth section includes how the security dilemma, and realist assumptions relate to a potential alliance between the two states. Finally, the paper will go over additional

factors that could contribute to a China-Russia alliance, followed by a conclusion, summarizing the findings.

Methodology

Structural realism, building on the assumptions of its antecedent-classical realism, will form the framework for the theoretical model. The theory of realism has originated from the writings of the ancient Greek historian, Thucydides, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War.*[1] Thucydides deduced that the reason for Sparta going to war with Athens was due to Spartan insecurity over the growth of Athenian power.[2] Thucydides made other assumptions about why city-states went to war, and so the theory of realism was born in international politics. Other scholars expounded on his ideas over the years, most notably Machiavelli in the sixteenth century, and E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau in the twentieth century.[3]

Kenneth Waltz has made probably the most important contribution to the canon of realism literature with his work *Theory of International Politics,* and it is mostly through the lens of this 'structural' realism, as well as Stephen Walt's 'defensive' realism that the methodology will be applied. Although Waltz first defined his structural realism within the Cold War bipolar world context, he has argued that his structural realism is still very relevant to the post-Cold War era.[4]

The paper will assume a multipolar world structure with a hegemon (the US) instead of a unipolar system. In a multipolar system, other poles will emerge and compete with a hegemon or balance against a hegemon while in a true unipolar world there would no other pole with which opposing states could 'rally around'. Walt defines a unipolar system as "one in which a single state controls a disproportionate share of the politically relevant resources of the system."[5] While Walt's definition is useful, and can potentially describe the current structure of world politics, it still leaves open the possibility of a counter-alliance forming. William Wohlforth defines when unipolarity begins as when the hegemon is so strong that there is no possibility of a "counterhegemonic collation forming".[6]

Walt argues that the world system is still unipolar given the predominance of American capabilities.[7] However, the US does not have omnipotent power and it cannot influence all the states within the system to follow behind it. There is at least some pushback against the US, so a true unipolar system does not exist.

The following table delineates the principal arguments and subtle differences between the two neorealist theorists who explain why states align: Waltz and Walt. The main distinction between the two is what states balance: power or threat. The distinction is a fine one but significant since not all powerful states can be construed as threats. Waltz believes that states will balance power[8], while Walt states in his *Origins of Alliances* that states will balance threat only and ignore more powerful states that pose no threat.[9]

With the US perceived as more powerful than either Russia or China, both theories' assumptions about the intent to balance are valid when applying the theoretical model to a China-Russia alliance. Especially, this is true when the anarchical nature of the international system (which both Waltz and Walt assume) is taken into consideration.[10] Certainly, it appears that Russian and Chinese policy-makers and leaders see the international system as anarchic, or at least are reluctant to view the world system through a more constructivist approach. Thus, the neorealist theoretical model is a valid lens through which to view a potential Russia-China alliance.

Table 1. Theories on Alliance Formation (Neorealist School)

Structural Realism	Defensive Realism
Main Theorist: Kenneth Waltz	Main Theorist: Stephen Walt
Principal Argument: States balance power regardless if the power emanates from a threat state.	Principal Argument: States balance threat regardless if there are more powerful states that are not threats.
Alliance Formation: States form alliances to balance power, or to bandwagon with more powerful states.	Alliance Formation: States form alliances to balance threats, or to bandwagon with more threatening states.

Historical Background

Sino-Russian Relations

Russia and China have had a precarious, and sometimes volatile, relationship in the past, particularly in the last two centuries.[11] After the Russian state was formed and the Tsars moved to consolidate territorial gains, Russian influence spread eastward. China had been a Great Power under the Manchu Empire, but constant in-fighting and foreign interventions had decayed China's Great Power status. By the nineteenth century, Russia was ascending and China was static in terms of power projection.

The first treaty that China signed with any European power was with Russia: the Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689, which established the border between Russia and China.[12] The Treaty of Kiakhta of 1727 further delineated the border, and gave Russia permission to establish a language school in the Chinese capital, Peking.[13] Russia was also the first European country to establish a diplomatic presence on Chinese territory.[14]

The treaty of Aigun was signed in 1858 during the Second Opium War; it was the first significant treaty between the two countries delineating the Russo-

Sino border, superseding both the Nerchinsk and Kiakhta Treaties, and gave Russia sovereignty over 185,000 square miles of territory.[15] Before the Treaty, Russian leaders had taken an indifferent view toward China in particular and Asia in general. Russians perceived themselves as European and looked westward, especially during the 18th century when Peter the Great was Tsar.[16] The official position of Russia's rulers became so that Russia was a part of Europe.[17]

The focus on Europe may have coincided with the preponderance of power concentrated on the continent. In the eighteenth century, the focus of the world was Europe. By the nineteenth century, it was even more apparent that Europe was the focus of the world, and China had declined precipitously vis-à-vis Europe, (evidenced by China's defeat in the Opium Wars, and the loss of territory to European powers, notably the United Kingdom).[18] Most European states saw East Asia as a region to exploit, especially given the demand within European populations for opium, silk, and other trade goods common in Asia.[19] However, in the nineteenth century Russia had taken a different approach to China; Oriental studies by Russian scholars differed from the radical Westernized trend prevalent in other European states.[20]

As the nineteenth century closed, Russia became embroiled in internal conflicts, which culminated in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks sympathized with states considered victims of 'Western imperialism' and China was viewed as being such a victim.[21] The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was organized during the summer of 1921 with help from the Comintern; there were initially only 53 founding members.[22]

The Comintern was initially a revolutionary internationalist organization, but when Josef Stalin came to power after the death of Vladimir Lenin, he transformed the Comintern into a vehicle for Soviet interests.[23] During this time China faced internal struggles for power between the CCP led by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. The 1931 invasion by Japan led to an uneasy and temporary truce between these two rivals and a focus on fighting a guerrilla war against the Japanese Imperial Army. This truce ended with the surrender of Japan in 1945. The Chinese Communists and Chinese Nationalists re-launched a full-scale war against each other. The Soviet Union, under Stalin, supported Mao. Actually, the Soviet support for the CCP went back to Sun Yat-Sen, whose ideas were influenced by Stalin.[24] In addition to intellectual support, the Soviets gave Mao's Communists military material to counteract the support the Nationalists received from the US. The war lasted until 1950 when Chiang Kai-shek and his followers fled to the island of Formosa (Taiwan) leaving Mao in full control of mainland China.

For the Soviets, having ideological Communist brethren on the USSR's borders was tantamount for its security. Already the Soviets had established a firm military presence in Eastern Europe, and those countries had subsequently adopted Communist-style governments. Additionally, Mongolia, a state bordering both the Soviet Union and China, had been influenced by the Soviets enough to adopt communism.[25] With Mao's communist takeover of China, which followed the Soviet

Union's establishment of a separate communist state on the Korean peninsula, the USSR now had a communist state on nearly all of its borders.

Being encircled by ideologically like-minded states was important for Soviet security. Ideologically, similar neighbors gave the Soviet Union more security, implying it was less likely to be invaded by other Communist states (especially if the Soviets centralized power within the Kremlin). In addition, these states could become client states, dependent on the Soviets for security just as the Soviets were dependent, to some degree on these states for security as long as they continued to be communist or aligned with Moscow.

Upon Stalin's death in 1953, which was marked by the Peoples' Republic of China officially with three days of mourning and Mao writing an article praising Stalin,[26] Nikita Khrushchev assumed control of the Politburo as the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Khrushchev's early reign was marked by a concentrated effort at de-Stalinizing within the Soviet Union.[27] Stalin's rule was marked by genocide, deportations, and summary executions, and thus many elements within the CPSU wanted to distance the party from him as much as possible. In addition to de-Stalinization, Khrushchev introduced the policy of peaceful coexistence with the US, which ostensibly the Chinese also supported.[28]

Despite Chinese concerns over Soviet rapprochement toward the US (especially regarding the Taiwan issue), the main concern for Mao and other CCP leaders in Khrushchev's new thinking was de-Stalinization.[29] Mao preferred a more ideologically pure socialism and was concerned over the new direction Khrushchev was taking international socialism. This divergence of thought became the underlying rationale for the Soviet-Sino split. Moscow was still the center of the international communist movement, but the Chinese leaders' first disagreements with the Soviets had occurred.

Khrushchev further alienated Mao by denying the People's Republic of China (PRC, as China was now known) certain nuclear technology. The Soviets had concerns with a nuclear empowered and ideologically driven China on their border, a country that could turn on the Soviet Union, and thus the Soviets would have to face two nuclear-armed states, however the Chinese did not see it as an issue.[30] Mao believed he was in an insubordinate position vis-à-vis Khrushchev and that Khrushchev would never allow China to reach equal status with the Soviet Union. The international communist movement was still going to be controlled by Moscow. Once Mao came to this realization and knew that there would be no return to the days of Stalin, the rift between the PRC and the USSR grew to the point of no return.

By 1964, Khrushchev was removed from power; however, the new Soviet leadership under Leonid Brezhnev exacerbated relations with Beijing rather than improving them. Disputes erupted over the demarcation of the border, eventually leading to armed clashes between the Soviet and Chinese troops. The armed clashes shocked and surprised Western observers who were under the impression that the Soviets and Chinese were lockstep in communist ideology, goals and outcomes.

As a result, China was left with few allies within the Comintern or throughout the international system. Isolated, it turned inward. Domestically, Mao sought to consolidate his power and initiated the Cultural Revolution, which sought to purge 'undesirables' from the ranks of the Communist party. It was not until the early 1970s when a complex series of events and motivations within the PRC and the Nixon White House led to the normalization of relations between the PRC and the US in 1978.[31] This was, of course, of great concern to the Soviet leadership and in turn contributed to détente between the Soviet and American governments.

Another source of tension is the Russian Far East (RFE) region. Due to its geographical proximity, historically it has had much more cross-border contact with China than the more European-oriented western parts of Russia.[32] The RFE region is sparsely populated, which contrasts with China's large population, which sparks concerns of a 'demographic expansion' by the Chinese.[33] The RFE is believed to have untapped natural resources, particularly energy sources, but more importantly it has a surplus of land.

With China's still growing population needing land to live on and cultivate, the RFE may be an ideal place for excess Chinese citizens to migrate. The possibility of mass migration from China causes concern in Moscow, and while there are as yet no Chinese ambitions to realize a take-over of the RFE, either overtly or covertly through migration, it still must weigh on the minds of Russian policy-makers. The RFE is not the only region of contention between China and Russia. China has had border disputes with a number of its neighbors, including Russia. However, concerns about regime stability, especially following the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, led the Chinese leadership to compromise on a number of these disputes, including with Russia.[34] Another agreement was reached between the two powers in October, 2004, when they 'divided control of two disputed river islands'; no internal threats existed to regime security at the time, so the agreement was seen as possibly a need to deepen ties with Russia.[35]

Residual issues still exist between Russia and China, but they have not prevented the two former rivals from engaging in closer relations since the end of the Cold War. Boundary and border issues have been mitigated, and high-level discussions in opening relations began even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, first in 1984 between the post-Mao leadership in China and the post-Brezhnev leadership in the Soviet Union.[36] Russia went through catastrophic changes during the 1990s as it attempted to transition from a command economy and authoritarian political structure to a free market economy and more democratic political structure. In contrast, China prospered, its economy grew by ten percent annually each year during the decade as it transitioned to a market economy more successfully than Russia. This stark contrast does highlight political and cultural differences between Russia and China, and may be a source of tension and resentment.

These post-Cold War phenomena changed the dynamics in the relative power between Russia and China.[37] China had become more ascendant in the post-Cold War era and Russia, traumatized by its inability to prevail in the Cold War and the loss of much of its territory as the Soviet Union, and its nominal allies in the Warsaw Pact has declined somewhat in relative power within the international system. The prospects for cooperation between the two countries were greatly increased because of the reversal of fortunes of the two states.[38] China's relations toward Russia developed into more positive approaches, so it was not a repeat of the superior-subordinate relationship that characterized Sino-Soviet relations before the split.[39] Russia, desperate for some economic salvation during the upheaval, and having a large surplus of unused military hardware, began selling military arms to China, which wanted to build up its own armed forces.[40] By the late 1990s Russian arms sales to China averaged $2 billion dollars a year.[41] This was a marked increase in Russian-Chinese arms transfers from the Cold War period.

Despite the reversal of fortunes of Russia in the post-Cold War era, or rather because of it, and despite their sometimes-hostile relationship in the past Russia and China continue to work closely together on a variety of issues. States do not need to be in-step with each other on every single issue in order to become allies. Even the best of allies have had disagreements over policy in the past, and have even gone to war with each other. The fact that Russia and China have had border disputes in the past does not preclude an alliance from forming between them in the present or near future, especially as those border disputes are mostly now resolved.

Russia-US Relations

As with China, Russia has often had a contentious relationship with the US. Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, opposed the US during the Cold War. While the conflict was primarily ideological in nature, and the two superpowers did not fight each other directly, they did fight in various proxy wars against each other from Korea to Afghanistan over the course of the Cold War.[42]

In the post-Cold War era, relations between the US and Russia eased but still remained tense. During the 1990s, as ethnic strife and war tore apart the former Yugoslavia, Russia and the US found themselves on opposing sides with the US opposing Serbian forces, while the Russians were sympathetic toward their longtime ally, Serbia.[43] Relations were further strained in 1999, when in order to prevent Serbian-led genocide in the province of Kosovo, the NATO led by the US commenced a bombing campaign against Serbia. Russia opposed this, refused to allow the UN Security Council to authorize the action, and even sought an immediate end to hostilities with Chinese support.[44]

In order to ease tensions after the Cold War, NATO and Russia held dialogues, first with the Partnership for Peace starting in 1994, then the NATO-Russia Council beginning in 2002.[45] The NATO-Russia Council was formed soon after the September

11, 2001 terrorist attacks, when Russian-US relations markedly improved. Russia was supportive of American intervention in Afghanistan. Rapprochement seemed to be working, yet Russian support was still limited, and Russian leadership showed concern over the American military presence in Central Asia.

Russia, in order to solidify its influence in Central Asia among its former Soviet satellites, has a military base in Kyrgyzstan with approximately 700 Russian Air Force personnel, and over 20 aircraft.[46] In fact, it was the first foreign base the Russians established since the Cold War ended.[47] Until early in 2009, the US also had an air base, Manas Air Base, in Kyrgyzstan to assist operations in Afghanistan, notably air lift. However, in 2009, the Kyrgyz Parliament voted to close the US base.[48] Kyrgyzstan and the US eventually agreed to rename the base a transit center and the US agreed to pay considerably higher rent for the right to use the facilities.[49]

With a Russian Air Force base also on its territory, Kyrgyzstan is very conscious of its relationship with Russia. Kyrgyzstan has a sizeable minority of ethnic Russians within its territory; approximately 500,000 Russians live there, which constitutes about nine percent of the population.[50] A second base proposal has been approved between the two countries, and it would be operated under the auspices of the CSTO, which both Kyrgyzstan and Russia are members of.[51]

Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the world that hosts both Russian and American troops, and this is a potential source of tension between the two countries. The 2010 coup and ouster of President Bakiyev may have been orchestrated by Russia due to Bakiyev's refusal to close the Manas Transit Center.[52] However, in the end Russia seems to have the upper hand in Kyrgyzstan with the new Kyrgyz government unwilling to renew the Manas Transit Center's lease beyond 2014, while allowing the new Russian base a lease for 49 years.[53]

Russia is in a precarious situation, and has a difficult balancing act, on one hand it has to be supportive of the US's war on terrorism since Russia faces its own threat from radical Islamists, but on the other hand, Russia is uncomfortable with American inroads into its traditional sphere of influence: Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is not the only former Soviet state that has put Russia at odds with the US. Georgia and Russia fought a brief war in 2008 with Russia annexing a portion of Georgian territory, the provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and recognized them as sovereign. The US condemned Russia's actions, and refused to recognize the independence of the two territories.[54]

Before the Georgia War, in February 2008, Kosovo, the breakaway province of Serbia unilaterally declared independence and was immediately recognized by the US and many NATO countries. However, Serbia, Russia, as well as China, and a majority of UN member states have refused to recognize Kosovo as an independent state.[55] Instead, Kosovo remains another point of contention between Russia, and the US.[56]

The new Obama Administration attempted a reset in US-Russian relations, promoting the Russia-NATO Council, and Russia seemed receptive, even allowing troops from four NATO countries, including the US, to march in the 2010 Victory Day Parade in Red Square.[57] Still, this seemed to be a small concession on the part of Russia's leadership as Chinese President Hu Jintao was also in attendance,[58] and no NATO troops were invited to the 2011 parade. Despite the reset in relations, Russia and the US found themselves at odds over the recent Arab Spring revolts, with Russia and China both abstaining from voting on the UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized a no-fly zone over Libya, and both countries vetoing a tough resolution aimed at Assad's Syria.[59]

Added to this, the US's constant push for further democratization, and respect for human rights in Russia, puts the two countries again at odds. In China, Russia has a partner that will not push for democratization or rail against human rights violations. While China and Russia have far from a perfect relationship, the two regimes are similar in make-up and see eye-to-eye on a variety of issues that neither finds itself in agreement with the US. In fact, both countries cooperate on security ventures under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Russia and China are both members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which acts as a security apparatus, or even a quasi-alliance, to counteract threats. The Charter of the SCO states two of the organization's main goals as follows: 'to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good-neighborliness between the member States,'[60] and to encourage mutual cooperative defense among other areas. In Article 3 of the Charter, the areas of cooperation are delineated and while 'counteracting terrorism, separatism, and extremism' and counter-narcotics efforts are mentioned, mutual defense is not. Although not mentioned, Article 3 leaves open the possibility as the SCO members may 'expand' the areas of cooperation by mutual agreement.

The possibility exists that the Charter of the SCO as written is intentionally ambiguous in order to forestall any effort by other states to form counter-alliances against the SCO members, or it reflects the subtlety of the states involved. It is irrelevant that the SCO Charter does not specifically state that the SCO is in fact a defensive alliance; rather, it depends on how the states act. Before the SCO was formed, on July 18, 2000 then Russian President Putin and Chinese President Jiang held a formal summit meeting in Beijing, their first meeting with Putin as President, but the eighth Russia-China summit overall since 1992.[61] In a post-summit meeting with the Chinese press, Putin said, 'China is Russia's strategic partner and […] number one foreign policy priority'.[62]

The SCO has undertaken several military exercises over the last several years, combining militaries from Russia, China, and the Central Asian republics

to improve military readiness and effectiveness.[63] These exercises are empirical evidence that the SCO is closer to a regional security alliance than a regional economic organization. To date Russia and China have had more military exercises between them than either has had with the US. This is important because both countries are learning how to integrate their forces, how to deal with command and control issues, addressing each other's weaknesses and complimenting each other's strengths.[64] Their militaries grow closer together and learn how each fights, while distancing themselves from the American military. It also can lead to camaraderie among the troops and officers leading both Russian and Chinese soldiers to see each other more and more as allies.[65] On the other hand, the US is missing an important opportunity in the absence of Russo-American and Sino-American military exercises.

The hard power capabilities of the SCO are illustrated in the graph below, which delineates the number of Army and Air Force personnel for each member state. China has the overwhelming majority of available troop strength with 79% of the total. Russia is a distant second with 15% of the total manpower.[66] The other members barely register. These numbers do not include naval forces since some of the smaller states do not have standing navies. Nor does it include nuclear arsenals for the same reason.

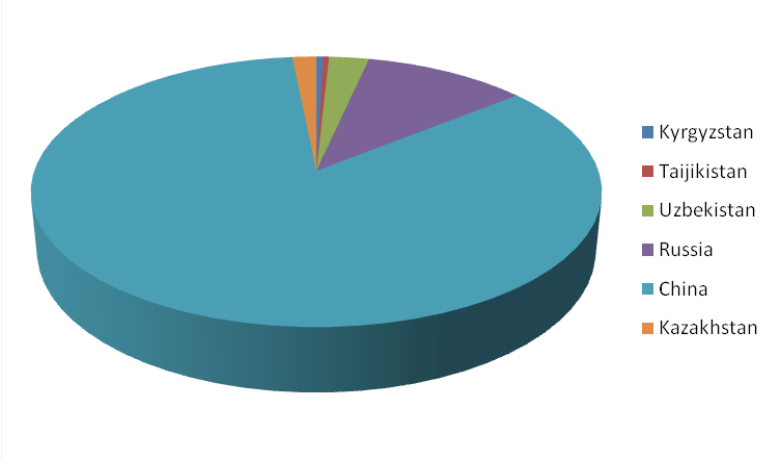

Figure 1. Military Strength of SCO Members[67]

The addition of nuclear weapons and strategic missiles to the member states' military capabilities results in greater parity within the SCO. Russia has 430 strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) compared to China's 46 ICBMs.[68] Additionally, Russia has 1,605 nuclear warheads, while China's arsenal is less than 1,000.[69] The smaller states within the SCO have no strategic nuclear weapons and thus exhibit bandwagoning attributes. With two dominating Great Powers, they have little choice but to work within the framework of the alliance.

The second graph below illustrates the military strength (again in terms of Army and Air Force manpower numbers) of the CSTO members.

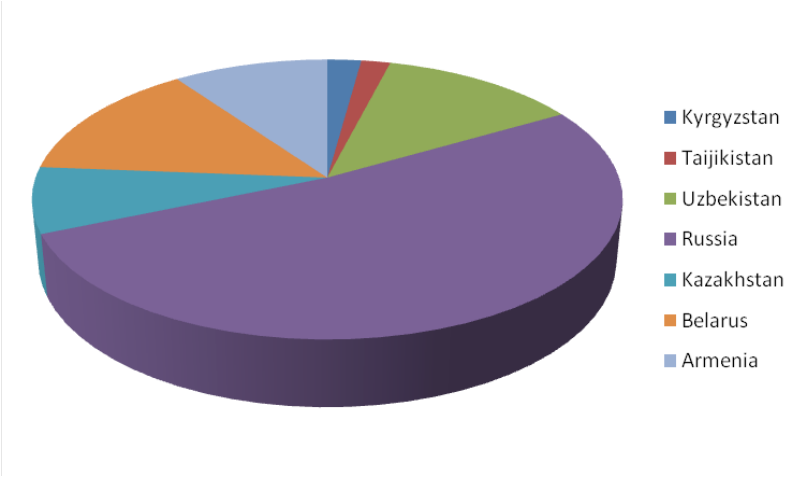

Figure 2. Military Strength of CSTO Members[70]

Since the CSTO alliance excludes China, Russia is the predominant power, however with more balance than the SCO. Russia provides sixty percent of the available manpower for the alliance, while Belarus is the second with twelve percent.[71] Russia has a monopoly on strategic missiles and nuclear warheads, and a near monopoly on naval capabilities. The difference between the two organizations is China's membership in the SCO, and Armenia's and Belarus's memberships in the CSTO.

Following the August 2008, Russian invasion of its neighbor Georgia, which the SCO did not support,[72] Russia has taken steps to increasingly militarize the CSTO.[73] In February 2009, the heads of states of the CSTO members drafted a proposal for a new Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) consisting of 16,000 troops, half of them Russian, while Kazakhstan will provide a quarter of the rest, leaving the other quarter to be filled by the other members.[74]

This arrangement has an impact on the SCO as the memberships overlap, thus Kazakhstan or the other smaller states would be hard pressed to give similar troop commitments for the SCO. Nevertheless, their contributions to the SCO are still important, particularly because they provide buffer zones across Central Asia, between Russia and China, and between regimes in the Middle East. These states also provide economic benefits, trade, and natural resources. While their limited troop strengths might be considered as a token military force, for diplomatic and political purposes both Russia and China can claim these states as allies, thus bolstering whatever clout they may have within the international system.

Military exercises are conducted by the SCO member states. A recent example occurred in February 2010, when China, Russia, and Kazakhstan joined in a military exercise under the rubric of anti-terrorism drills.[75] The exercise consisted of 400 Chinese troops, 400 Russian troops, and 3,000 Kazakh troops.[76] The number of Kazakh troops reflects partly the fact that the exercise was held in Kazakhstan, but also the need of the SCO to present itself as more than just an organization for Russian and Chinese interests. The smaller SCO member states are given a chance to receive help through burden sharing, while Russian and Chinese influences are downplayed.

The reality is however, that China is the predominant economic and military power within the SCO while Russia remains the major power within the CSTO. Two Great Powers can share an alliance as long as they do not fight for control of it. Russia can flex its muscles within the CSTO with the smaller Central Asian states, but defer to China on some issues within the SCO.[77] Game theory, properly applied can determine how both China and Russia, with a checkered history can operate within an alliance structure.

Security Dilemma

The security dilemma is a paradox in international politics -- the more a state tries to increase its own security, it decreases security for other states.[78] Within the security dilemma states have the fear of being exploited which 'most strongly drives the security dilemma'.[79] Due to the anarchical (meaning no central authority) nature of the international system, states do not and cannot afford to trust each other. Thus, the security dilemma is difficult for states to avoid; as same states increase their security, other states will feel more insecure and increase their own security and the cycle repeats. States that wish to form an alliance face a security dilemma, which is best exemplified by the prisoner's dilemma game.[80] Glenn Snyder has used N-person positive sum games, such as prisoner's dilemma, to determine alliance formation in the nineteenth century.[81]

The prisoner's dilemma is a positive sum game in which two prisoners are taken to separate interrogation rooms, wherein they are given different choices that offer both risk and reward. If one of the prisoners does not confess, he risks being 'sold out' by his ally in the other room. If he does confess, and the other prisoner does as well then he runs the risk of going to jail with his confession. However, if one of the prisoner's does confess and the other does not, then the confessed prisoner may be rewarded with a reduced sentence. If neither prisoner confesses however, then they both may be rewarded with freedom. However, neither prisoner knows what the other will do, thus the dilemma. It is much the same situation in alliance formation, for 'who aligns with whom results from a bargaining process that is theoretically indeterminate'.[82]

There are two parts to the security dilemma in alliance formation. The first part begins when states determine whether to join an alliance. In a multipolar system, states have a choice of alliances to join. The risks and rewards of joining or not joining any given alliance can be illustrated in the prisoner's dilemma. The table below shows four alliances in Eurasia that a state in that region could potentially join, with some caveats; the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), which is the collective security arm of the European Union (EU), is contingent on membership in the EU and requires its members to have certain standards with regard to democracy and human rights. Each alliance has a dominant state, a Great Power, and exists in regions that sometimes overlap with other alliances. Any other state that is a member of these alliances will have to bandwagon with the more dominant states.

Table 2. Alliance Choices for Eurasian States

ESDP Region: EU states Dominant States: France, UK	SCO Region: Russia, China, Central Asia Dominant States: Russia, China
NATO Region: Europe and the North Atlantic Region Dominant State: US	CSTO Region: Former USSR Dominant State: Russia

If a state joins the SCO then it gains the rewards from that alliance, but it also incurs the risks of being balanced by a counter-alliance from NATO or the ESDP. Likewise, the converse would be true if a state joined NATO or the ESDP. Determining whether to form or join an existing alliance structure involves a bargaining process akin to the prisoner's dilemma. A state has to weigh the costs and benefits of joining without knowing the outcome of other states' decisions to do the same. The risks of abandonment or entrapment are real, just as the rewards of protection.[83]

The second part of the alliance dilemma is after the alliance has formed, states must determine how firm they want their commitments to be.[84] The risk entails possible further entrapment in alliance commitments, as well as potential abandonment by allies in a time of need. An example of abandonment in the CSTO was Russia's invasion of Georgia. Faced with the potential of being entrapped by further alliance commitments, the other states of the CSTO declined to endorse the Russian invasion. Thus, Russia felt the reverse effect of this action, abandonment by its allies.

The security dilemma can never truly be solved since both external contingencies and the reasons for the formation of alliances are dynamic, but alliance formations afford states the ability to mitigate some of the dangers of the dilemma, since there are payoffs for undertaking risks. Thus, when it comes to the SCO, each

member state must ascertain whether the benefits of joining the alliance outweigh the costs.

The prisoners' dilemma is most commonly associated with the two-actor game laid out in Table 3. However, other strategies may be employed by states including: Chicken, Hero, Leader, Protector, Bully, and Big Bully.[85] With uncertainty within the international system so prevalent, a state cannot be sure who to trust. Indeed, even reliable allies can restrain a state's actions, such as the case of Britain restraining the US in Indochina in 1954.[86] Still, if it is deemed conducive to a state's interests to cooperate with another state in an alliance and the benefits of such an arrangement outweigh the costs, no doubt a state will take its chances and ally with that state.

Table 3. Two-Player Cooperative Game[87]

CC Mutual Cooperation	CD B gets its way.
DC A gets its way.	DD Mutual Defection

Legend: Actor A: C: Cooperative Strategy, D: Defection (non-cooperative strategy);
Actor B: C: Cooperative Strategy, D: Defection Strategy

In determining whether Russia and China will, or have, formulated an alliance, we can substitute 'Country A' with Russia and 'Country B' with China. The purpose of this game is not only to highlight the security dilemma states face, but also that at times and despite mistrust, states still need to rely on each other. Either state can restrain the other's actions with a C strategy with a double CC strategy being the most mutually beneficial for the players.[88] A DD strategy (mutual defection) is one to be avoided by the state players, if they want to continue being allies, so presumably both states will strive for cooperation over competition.

Table 4. Choices for Russia and China in a Two-Player Cooperative Game

CC Mutual Cooperation between Russia and China	CD China gets its way or defects.
DC Russia gets its way or defects.	DD Mutual Defection

The alliance will only be viable, if both states are content or have mutual cooperation or if either Russia or China gets its way and the other nation does not object. As long as there is appropriate burden sharing and generally reliable partners, there should be some flexibility among the alliance partners. That is to say, that neither Russia nor China should get their way on every given issue the alliance may confront; compromise is the key, otherwise a state may defect.

The illustrative games shown here are primarily framed in two-person games, thus excluding the smaller Central Asian states. However, the motivations of the Central Asian states for joining or maintaining the SCO may be slightly different from the Great Powers, and will be discussed in detail in the next section. The predominance of power and influence remains with Russia and China, thus the two-person game is appropriate for understanding their interactions.

Additional Factors

Another consideration states must take into account is the ideological make-up of the alliance. Walt states that countries with similar ideological viewpoints tend to ally with each other.[89] The SCO member states share similar ideological outlooks and common values as their governments are mostly undemocratic. The SCO tends to promote undemocratic norms among its members, and as yet, no democratic states have become full members; however, India is an observer, despite historic tensions with China.

India is an observer due to its close ties with Russia, and it has key strategic interests in Central Asia (e.g. Afghanistan, energy issues). Russia has encouraged India to join the organization as a full member.[90] However, China is reluctant to back India as a member due in part to historical animosity between the two countries, and the fact that China prefers Pakistan to join as a full member.[91] Having both Pakistan and India as members of a security organization is an untenable position given that tensions between the two countries remain extremely high.

Another aspect of the SCO alliance formation is 'omnibalancing'; a theory on Third World alignment devised by Steven David, who felt that balance of power theory was insufficient to fully explain why Third World countries (i.e. not Great Powers) aligned. Omnibalancing does utilize some aspects of balance of power theory as well as acknowledges the internal strife that many Third World countries experience to more fully explain Third World alignment. Leaders of Third World states with smaller militaries and less aggregate power will not necessarily decide to balance against power, or balance against threat. Instead, they are more likely to decide to balance with more powerful states that are considered 'secondary adversaries', which allows those Third World states to utilize resources against primary adversaries.[92]

Third World states will seek to appease these threats to concentrate on both external and internal threats, either of which could be the primary threat source for these leaders.[93] In order to continue staying in power these leaders will align with the state that best allows them to deal with internal threats. In the case of the SCO, the member states other than Russia and China may utilize membership in the alliance to omnibalance against more immediate threats. For example, Uzbekistan under the leadership of Islam Karimov may be more concerned with the rise of Islamic militants within Uzbekistan. It may be the case that the leadership fears undue Russian or Chinese influence, but the more immediate threat comes from Islamic militants or possibly a nascent democratic movement. Uzbekistan's limited resources mean it cannot face down all the potential threats it may face, so the primary threat or threats (those that have direct consequences for regime survival: notably internal revolt or dissention) have to be dealt with first. Thus, Uzbekistan justifies its alignment with Russia and China.

This behavior pattern is very similar to bandwagoning, with other considerations at play including the geographical proximity of Russia and China, the similar ideological make-up of the regimes, and historical ties. However, those other factors may not consider Uzbekistan's desire to exert independence of or from the Great Powers. Alignments are not permanent and come with caveats, so omnibalancing may more fully explain small state alignment behaviors. Additionally, when determining alliance partners, small states may not always be driven by threat perception, or power balancing as more powerful states do.[94] Instead, a formative event is usually the catalyst for these smaller, and thus weaker states to form alliances.[95]

When considering alliances states must account for polarity within the international system. Many of these assumptions are based on a multipolar system, but depending on how one views the US the assumption of multipolarity within the current system may not be valid. Walt, in his article on alliances in a unipolar world, explains that weaker states have essentially three options: 'ally with each other' against the unipole, 'align with the unipole' as essentially a bandwagoner, or remain neutral.[96]

In the post-Cold War era, it has become clear that the US is the dominant power; whether that equates it to being a unipole or global hegemon as Walt has argued is debatable. What is not debatable is that the US has more aggregate power within the international system than Russia and China. Both states have taken measures to counteract American power and influence, and have grown closer together as a result.[97] The SCO is just one example of cooperation. Additionally, Russia and China signed an agreement in December 1992 to cooperate on military-technical matters, one year after the Soviet Union collapsed.[98] The agreement resulted in the Russian Federation supplying China with more military hardware than all other states combined, with sales reaching over 1 billion dollars annually.[99] These sales were motivated by the severe Russian economic situation at this same

time. Furthermore, the sales also demonstrated unwillingness on both Russia's and China's part to conduct similar transactions with Western states, like the US.

Sino-American relationship became strained soon after the Cold War. In part, the tensions were due to the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, and in part due to the collapse of the Soviet Union.[100] Additionally, the issue of Taiwan may further strain relations in the future.[101] This straining of relations reflects the changes that occurred in the international system after bipolarity ended. Both Russia and China when in dialogue talk about a 'multipolar' world[102] and hardly recognize American predominance. Clearly both Russia and China desire to balance American power, but what is not as clear is whether both powers consider the US a threat to balance against (Walt) or are reflexively balancing against a state more powerful than themselves (Waltz).

It seems apparent from Russian actions and statements that it continues to see the US as a threat and will continue to balance against it.[103] This would prolong a trend of soft balancing that began soon after the end of the Cold War among second-tier powers, including Russia and China, according to T.V. Paul.[104] 'Soft balancing' precludes the forming of military alliances in Paul's view. Soft balancing is conducted by states mostly due to the liberal nature of the American hegemony; non-liberal states such as China or Russia cannot get liberal states to join them in balancing, and most liberal states do not see the US as a threat.[105]

The absence of regional, multilateral institutions in Asia also encourages soft balancing. These institutions do not exist like the institutions in Europe such as the NATO or the EU, except for the short-lived experiment of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO).[106] Instead of relying solely on multilateral organizations, the US after WWII also developed bilateral ties with states in Asia such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and South Vietnam. The SEATO failed to gain traction since the member states were relatively weak -- the power imbalance was too great between the US and the other members of the SEATO.[107]

If Waltz's and Walt's assumptions are correct about the international system, soft balancing will be replaced by hard balancing in the form of military alliances. As an alliance, the SCO could play its part, for it is a vehicle for regional security in a region where the absence of such organizations is notable.[108] The SCO supports non-liberal norms,[109] so it is unlikely that liberal regimes will utilize it to hard balance against the US. Still, the SCO succeeds as an alliance because of its exclusionary nature. It serves as a security community that has become a regional fortress instead of a source of integration, like the EU or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).[110] The SCO fosters cooperation among its members only to the extent that they balance against real or perceived threats. Its members cooperate in military training exercises, ostensibly for anti-terrorism, and despite the imbalance of military forces, they make an effort to share burdens.[111] Additionally, the members maintain ideological similarity, a resistance to democratic reform that creates enemies or threats out of those states that push those reforms onto the members.

Threat perception is another element, an important element, that factors into both the security dilemma, and alliance formation. As pointed out in the first chapter, two components, capabilities and intent, comprise the threat. For both China and Russia to perceive a threat, the threat state must have the capabilities to threaten both and the intent to do so. The hegemon within the international system is the US, and certainly has the capability to pose a threat to Russia and China.

The US accounts for the highest amount of military expenditures in the world. In current US dollars, the amount comes to 712 billion dollars as of 2009, or 46.5% of the total world military expenditures.[112] By contrast, China is estimated to spend 101 billion US dollars (688.82 billion Renminbi or RMB) on its military as of 2009, and estimates place Russian expenditures at 53.5 billion US dollars (1.60 trillion Rubles) China and Russia are the second and fifth respectively in the world for their military expenditures, totaling 5.8 and 4.0 percent of the world total, far short of the American number.[113]

The graph below illustrates the top ten countries' share of world military expenditures. Aside from the US, many important American allies (including the NATO allies) occupy the list. These ten countries account for 74% of total world military expenditures.[114] The US and its allies account for the overwhelming majority of military expenditures. Observing strictly capabilities and Waltz's theory that states will automatically balance power, we can deduce that the US has enough capability and power to incentivize other states into alliances against it.

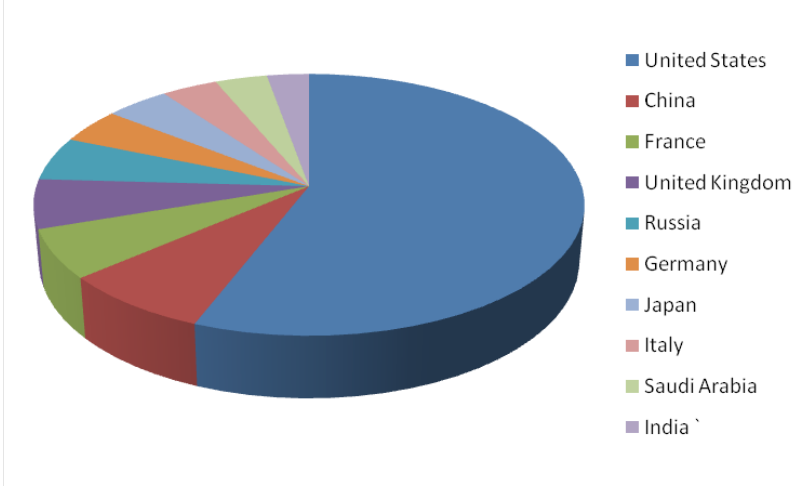

Figure 3. Percent of World Military Expenditures for Top Ten Countries[115]

However, intent needs to be shown in order for an actual threat to manifest, and thus states will align against a threat according to Walt's theory. Intent is often difficult to prove until it may be too late for the threatened state. The line below indicates

varying levels of relationships that a state may feel toward another state or group of states. The level of threat gradually rises the further away the states recede from an alliance.

Ally →Low-Level Threat → Modest Threat → High-Level Threat → Adversary

Figure 4. Spectrum of Relationships and Threats

The current Russia-US and China-US relationships respectively cannot be characterized as alliances nor are those relationships characterized by overt hostility, but that does not preclude them from limited cooperation on a particular security or foreign policy issue. The US has different policy goals than Russia and China; the US is democratic and wishes as a matter of policy to promote democracy throughout the world. Global democracy promotion runs counter to Russian and Chinese goals, which are either ambivalent or hostile to democracy promotion. Any push for an increase in democratic regimes, especially in geographical regions in close proximity to them (e.g., Central Asia), is going to generate resistance by Russia and China.

Democracy promotion is just one example of the potential threat the US poses for both Russia and China.[116] The American commitment to Taiwan as discussed earlier is another source of threat against China specifically. Another potential source of friction between the US and China and Russia is in the quest for energy resources in Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The combination of American capabilities and American intent to influence other parts of the world via democracy promotion or in order to secure resources creates a potential threat for Russia and China. The US is enough of a threat to Russia and China that they have formed an alliance with each other to check American power, despite a checkered history and potential sources of friction between them.

Currently, China and Russia appear to be in a security arrangement, which is interested in balancing threat and power within the anarchical international system with military power. The possibility of a China-Russia alliance is highly probable as this paper attempts to point out. That is not to say that such an alliance between Russia and China will lead to open war with the US or any other potential adversaries. That prospect remains unlikely. However, it does mean that those states that the alliance balances against will have to consider it when making their own strategic choices.

China is in a unique position now, as it sees its military strength rising relative to some other Great Power states. As the center of gravity of international power and politics shifts slowly toward Asia, Chinese leadership may seek out alliance partners to enhance Chinese security. Alliances are integral to a Great Power's survival, and security, within the anarchic nature of the international system, as seen by the theory of structural realism. In order to either balance power or balance threat it seems probable that China will seek to balance the US. An alliance with Russia, a slightly

weaker state then China would add a further layer of security for China within the international system.

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