

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS AFTER CRIMEA:  
EXAMINING THE PATH LEADING TO A FORMALIZED ALLIANCE  
AND THE THREAT TO U.S. SOFT POWER MANAGEMENT

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mom and dad, Barbara and Fred Kessler, for always reinforcing the importance of education and objective thinking throughout my life. Because of you I learned to explore my interests and passions that have helped me become well rounded. I will forever be grateful for your constant love, support, and endless dedication as wonderful, caring, and loving parents.

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS AFTER CRIMEA: EXAMINING THE PATH LEADING TO A FORMALIZED ALLIANCE AND THE THREAT TO U.S. SOFT POWER MANAGEMENT

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Chinese and Russian relations have reversed in the Post-Cold War era as they have spent the past quarter century improving their friendship status. As a result a gradual upward trend in friendly relations and agreements has occurred, including periodic upgrades that take it to the next level. This gradual increase in relations can be seen as a precursor to a formalized strategic alliance as well as a reversal of the U.S.-China-Russia triangle balance of power that tilts it into their favor. Moreover, economic sanctions placed on Russia as a result of their annexing the Crimean region from Ukraine in 2014 has forced them to abandon most of their Western interests while pivoting them to Asia instead. We're now seeing agreements and deals between Russia and China streamlined which indicates a formal alliance is in the making. To determine if this is the case, this paper utilized qualitative analysis as well as the realist theory in international relations and the rational choice theory. A comparative case study was also designed to look at reasons and circumstances that force governments to enter into formal alliances. Overall, the evidence indicates that an alliance to counter U.S. soft power projection is in the making.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy fundamentally consists of a constant assessment of other countries' power potential, perceived vital interests, and relationships with other states, in an attempt to maximize one's own country's freedom of action with the ultimate purpose of ensuring the achievement of the nation's vital interests—the core of which is survival.

—Reed J. Fendrick (U.S. Army War College 2012).

### OVERVIEW

Since the end of the Cold War the U.S. has continued to utilize the same grand strategy of preponderance that helped it defeat the Soviet Union. Christopher Layne mentioned in his 1997 paper, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing, America’s Future Grand Strategy” that:

The key elements of this strategy are creation and maintenance of a U.S.-led world order based on preeminent U.S. political, military, and economic power, and on American values; maximization of U.S. control over the international system by preventing the emergence of rival great powers in Europe and East Asia; and maintenance of economic interdependence as a vital U.S. security interest. The logic of the strategy is that interdependence is the paramount interest the strategy promotes; instability is the threat to interdependence; and extended deterrence is the means by which the strategy deals with this threat (Layne 1997, 88).

However the post-Cold War era created an enormous power vacuum in the international system. The end result is it is now showing signs of evolving into a new multipolar era where emerging countries and markets have the potential of becoming super powers in the near future. BRIC countries like China, India, and Russia fall into this category and they each have different political and economic systems that rival that of Western democracies now. Moreover, they have also benefitted greatly from two decades of globalization and interconnectedness, however it has evolved into a highly competitive international environment that challenges Washington’s ability to project soft power, including its capacity to replenish it.

The U.S. is still the top leader in global security and global political economy however these nations who are beginning to rival American preponderance are finding non-conventional methods such as hybrid warfare to increase their power, influence, and prestige in international relations. China and Russia in particular are major culprits in using hybrid warfare to challenge Washington in various forms such as disinformation, propaganda, politics, law, diplomacy, espionage, intellectual property theft, cyber warfare, and subversion operations. In addition Western sanctions in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea has forced Russia to expand eastward and strengthen its ties to China and other Asian powers. This has been considered by experts to be a survival policy by the Russian government, however it has shown strong indications of evolving into a more serious political, economic, and security partnership that can lead to a formal alliance. Overall this has made it more difficult for the U.S. to balance or tilt the trilateral relationship it has had with China and Russia since the inception of the Cold War in its favor. Essentially, this paper is asking what are the challenges facing the U.S. in replenishing and expanding its soft power leverage while countering a growing Sino-Russian hybrid threat?

### **Research Question and Hypothesis**

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that the likeliness of a Sino-Russian alliance is highly probable since the last quarter century has seen an upward trend in friendly relations and agreements, including periodic upgrades that take it to the next level. Their bilateral relationship has significantly evolved since the Russian annexation of Crimea and their pivot to Asia in response to the sanctions that were imposed on them by the United States and European Union in 2014. It is also apparent that the Russians are not on equal footing with the Chinese as their economic, political, and military clout in the international system has diminished immensely since the end of the Cold War. Russia is considered being more of a junior partner

and Russian foreign policy circles talk about the concern of a Chinese threat as well. However their dwindling relationship with the West has resulted into a maturing partnership with China as they utilize each other's needs to serve their own purposes while aligning on issues of national, global, and strategic importance. Determining the likeliness of an alliance required the author to ask the main fundamental question of this thesis, which looked at whether there is an actual axis alliance between China and Russia or if it is just a partnership based on singular mutual self-interests.

This question is crucial since it provides the basis of determining whether there is an actual alliance or not. It also helped determine the potential impacts a Sino-Russian alliance or strategic partnership may have on U.S. interests via hybrid warfare and if it is realistic in either the short or long run. In addition this paper also looked at how bilateral relations between Russia and China after Crimea can challenge the replenishment and expansion of U.S. soft power capabilities too. It attempted to recognize and pinpoint current and potential threats that closer China-Russia relations will have in determining the future of the U.S.-China-Russia triangle.

The research questions required the use of two hypotheses' in this thesis as they are both inter-related:

***Hypothesis #1:*** A China-Russia alliance has been made more realistic since the Russian annexation of Crimea, which poses a serious threat to American soft power replenishment and projection in the world.

***Hypothesis #2:*** A China-Russia alliance would rely more on joint and individual hybrid warfare tactics in the short term while strengthening their conventional warfare capabilities.

The research conducted for this thesis provided evidence that both hypotheses' are provable. In order to come to an effective conclusion this thesis utilized independent variables

such as policy, power, geopolitical interests, national interests, and relationship dynamics between these three countries. These variables helped determine how they impact the potential formation of a Sino-Russian strategic alliance.

### **Purpose Statement**

The aim of this thesis was to determine if Russia and China are developing a stronger partnership that could lead to a formal alliance or if they are simply utilizing numerous points of shared national interests in the short term. This thesis also studied the potential impacts of a stronger relationship between Russia and China. It ascertained whether a mutual partnership in countering U.S. interests via hybrid warfare is realistic, temporary, or in the long run. In addition this paper reviewed how it could challenge the replenishment and expansion of U.S. soft power capabilities too.

### **Research Method and Variables**

The use of rational choice theory and realist theory in international relations was very appropriate in the theoretical framework of this research topic. These two theories have been very popular in examining the U.S.-China-Russia relationship both during and after the Cold War. They played a crucial part in answering the two given hypotheses', which are the following:

***Hypothesis #1:*** A China-Russia alliance has been made more realistic since the Russian annexation of Crimea, which poses a serious threat to American soft power replenishment and projection in the world.

***Hypothesis #2:*** A China-Russia alliance would rely more on joint and individual hybrid warfare tactics in the short term while strengthening their conventional warfare capabilities.

Each of these hypotheses' required a crucial evaluation of multiple variables such as policy, power, geopolitical interests, national interests, and relationship dynamics between these three countries. These variables aided in the evaluation process of determining if there is indeed a potential for a Sino-Russian alliance to evolve out of its existing strategic partnership. In addition the use of qualitative analysis was suitable for analyzing the research pertaining to both of these hypotheses'. After all, this is an endless topic that is still evolving in real time and will require review of previous and current research on this topic.

### **Limitations**

The limitations associated with the research pertaining to this topic consist on popular belief that it is unlikely that a formalized Chinese and Russian alliance is possible. However the sanctions placed on Russia in 2014 over the Crimean annexation has caused Moscow to abandon many of their interests in the West. Several of the agreements that have been placed on the backburner or stalled in the past between the Chinese and Russian governments have been streamlined these past couple years. In addition China is increasing their efforts to be less reliant on the West and invest more into their regional strength and influence in Southeast and East Asia. In terms of great power politics and competition these two nations are showing signs of using non-conventional methods in countering U.S. influence since both of their conventional military capabilities are not currently on par with the United States. The evolving characteristic of these great power dynamics and balance of power in an international system that is becoming more multipolar is worthy for more in-depth research and analysis.

There continues to be an abundance of new articles and think pieces pertaining to this topic as it continues to evolve. However in many cases they are reported in different and singular themes that don't always portray the big picture analytical perspective. Many resources tend to

cover the topic in categories and focus on certain aspects of the situation. However this author hasn't found much written on what exactly a China-Russian alliance or at least a stronger strategic partnership using hybrid warfare would mean for U.S. soft and smart power projection. Ultimately this could have a huge impact on the balance of power in the international system.

### **Summary**

The remaining chapters will go into extensive detail on the background information of the issues and concepts pertaining to the research topic. It will also include an analysis of the research collected regarding the potential for a formalized China-Russia alliance to occur. Chapter 2 will execute a review of pertinent literature and concepts that will help the reader understand the issues revolving around the topic. Incorporating the literature and concepts in this thesis will help the reader more fully comprehend the major themes that the paper addresses:

- Understanding the concepts of hard power, soft power, and smart power;
- U.S. soft power in decline during the rise of a new multipolar system;
- A U.S. reversal of strategic leverage in the U.S.-China-Russia Triangle; and
- A review of existing arguments pertaining to China and Russia being formally aligned or just a strategic partnership.

Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology used to collect and analyze the data with the intention of viewing the topic with a realist lens. The methodology used will be aimed at solving the research questions as well as determining the provability of the hypotheses' in this thesis. Chapter 4 will consist of the findings and analysis portion of this paper. This section will take into account both the research questions and hypotheses' in order to fully explain the outcome of this paper. Chapter 5 will conclude with a summary of this paper's findings and analysis portion as well as offering future areas of research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This literature review will discuss the evolving strategic and friendly partnership between China and Russia after the Cold War and in particular after the Russian annexation of Crimea. It will review the concepts of hard power, soft power, and smart power that have been in great discussion by scholars and foreign policy experts since the end of the Cold War era. There is an ongoing discussion in foreign policy and national security circles where the U.S. capabilities to grow and manage its soft power projection is in a period of decline since it is dealing with an increasingly multipolar and competitive international system. In addition it will look at how these elements apply to the U.S., China, and Russia geopolitical relationship and the trends leading to a formalized Sino-Russian alliance.

Given the possibility of a China and Russian alliance this literature review will also include the repeated use of hybrid warfare tactics used by them as part of their bread and butter foreign policy implementation tools. This will be critical to review as both nations conventional military capabilities are much smaller and limited in global projection than those of the U.S. However, non-conventional tactics like hybrid warfare have been areas they have developed a consistency in effectiveness and a mutual collaboration would be problematic to U.S. soft power projection. Frank Hoffman of the Potomac Institute notes that hybrid warfare consists of an enemy incorporating a diverse range of types of warfare that can be a combination of “conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, and formations, terrorists acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder” (Hoffman 2007, 8). This can be implemented by both state and non-state actors and can be done by separate or the same units

depending on the strategy and tactic being used. He goes on to say that it is intended to impact the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict and it can be gained at all levels of war (Hoffman 2007, 8).

The pertinent literature regarding this topic revealed both overarching and relative themes. This is a topic that has evolved over the years and thus an endless amount of literature has been written about it. However this thesis is focused more on recent events that greatly impacted the topic. Most of the reviewed literature has been mainly based on sub-themes related to the evolving and current relationship between the U.S., China, and Russia since the annexation of Crimea. There have been some sources that covered it but not as extensively since this is still a pressing situation. Therefore this literature review will explore the following themes pertaining to the formalization of a Sino-Russian alliance and the implications it would have on U.S. hard and soft power capabilities via the use of hybrid warfare.

### **Understanding the Concepts of Hard Power, Soft Power, and Smart Power**

The first theme will begin by reviewing the concepts of hard, soft, and smart power in international relations. It is necessary to review this since the U.S.-China-Russia relationship deals with it on a regular basis. In addition they also utilize elements of power in different and unique ways that are appropriate for their foreign and domestic agendas. This thesis would otherwise lack the necessary clarity in understanding the vast importance in which hard, soft, and smart power concepts are used in great power politics between these three nations. When characterizing the differences between hard and soft power, Joseph Nye mentioned that:

Soft power is the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals. It differs from hard power, the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will (Nye 2003).

## *Hard Power*

The discussion of hard and soft power began in 1990 by Joseph Nye's Foreign Policy article on the topic as it began addressing the changing use of American power in the post Cold War era (Nye 1990). In it he mentioned that hard power is often associated as being the more aggressive form of foreign policy as it deals in more direct and coercive policy implementations. This is implemented by incorporating either or both direct military and economic policies like use of force and sanctions (Wilson 2008, 114). By doing this, hard power serves as a forceful approach to influence and control the political, geopolitical, and economic policies and internal dynamics of other states. In return this is done to benefit the national interests of the state by exercising the use of hard power on the lesser powerful one.

However, Nye expresses the opinion that hard power is less relevant as it is more costly and riskier than applying soft power capabilities that are aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the people being influenced in the first place (Nye 1990). In addition there are instances where hard power may supersede use of soft power, particularly when all available options and resources have been exercised and exhausted. For instance the two Persian Gulf Wars went through massive diplomatic channels and dialogue sessions, at the UN Security Council, that heavily debated and attempted to resolve the issues peacefully. They both resulted into diplomatic failures and the policy of hard power was sanctioned to coerce the enemy at the time. The Balkan wars of the 1990s are another prime example as the UN and NATO elements were originally limited in involvement in the conflict. It wasn't until the infamous genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia that ignited a public outcry and a NATO military response was used to force the Serbs to withdraw from the area and caused all parties to commit to the peace process. This was very influential in the US defense community thinking as it illustrated that air power

with clear and decisive objectives could play a crucial role in ending conflicts like it did between the Bosnian and Serb forces (Global Security 2016).

While serving under the Bush and Clinton administrations, U.S. General Colin Powell was very much involved in each of these examples of hard power being used as a last resort. He emphasized a doctrine that focused on answering questions that determined if use of military power was necessary for the interests of U.S. national security. He felt addressing the need for a new national military strategy was crucial since the post Cold War era saw a rapid increase in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions (Powell 1993). The questions he raised make up the following:

1. Is it a vital national security interest threatened?
2. Do we have a clear attainable objective?
3. Have the risks and costs been fully and frankly analyzed?
4. Have all other nonviolent policy means been fully exhausted?
5. Is there a plausible exit strategy to avoid endless entanglement?
6. Have the consequence of our action been fully considered?
7. Is the action supported by the American people?
8. Do we have genuine broad international support? (Walt 2013).

Cohen mentions that the Powell Doctrine originated from the experiences and policy failures that came out of the Vietnam War (Cohen 2009). This raised the issue of incorporating the use of military power based on strategic interests, the ability to reach a decisive victory, and the gaining of public support for the endeavor. Although the Powell Doctrine isn't mandatory and not always implemented, there is a growing consensus in the foreign policy, defense, and national security communities that the Powell Doctrine still has a place in determining use of hard power as a foreign policy tool, given recent experiences in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Moreover, experts like Hoffman believe that although imperfect, the Powell Doctrine still serves as useful guidelines for ensuring that, "fundamental questions about purpose, risk, and costs were addressed up front" (Hoffman 2014). It may not answer all the questions or lead to a successful

outcome but it does provide policy and military planners a basis to work with when deciding or implementing hard power.

### **Soft Power**

Although hard power is often considered a short term and quick solution to solving or ending a conflict or threat, it still does not always solve the problem in the long term. This is where the concept of soft power kicks in and deals with impacting the hearts and minds of citizens of another country and its policymakers. Joseph Nye who is a big proponent on the use of soft power explained it in his book, “The Benefits of Soft Power”, that “co-optive power is the ability to shape what others want and can rest on the attractiveness of one’s culture and values or the ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices in a manner that makes others fail to express some preferences because they seem to be too unrealistic” (Nye 2004). Soft power is typically classified under diplomacy and cultivating it takes time and patience to witness the leverage growth of it to flourish among the intended recipients of a country or region of the world. Squandering such leverage or misusing it could have severe implications to the nation that cultivated it in the first place.

This non-military, social, diplomatic, and cultural approach is usually a standard method to incorporating soft power leverage in states. Nye mentions that the successful outcome is highly likely if it is incorporated in a state or region where the people and governments tend to admire the values, emulate the actions, and aspire to generate the success of the country seeking to influence them via soft power diplomatic mechanisms (Cristo 2005, 99). In addition Gallarotti adds that soft power leads to voluntary action that causes consented volunteerism to willingly change while hard power forces change and has a higher potential for creating new conflicts out of the old (Gallarotti 2011, 29-30). He mentions one example of this being Germany at the end

of the First World War where the Treaty of Versailles placed harsh restrictions on their economic and political power which ultimately lead to the formation and escalation of Adolf Hitler, Third Reich, Holocaust, and World War II twenty years later. This example is also relevant to current day Russia as ongoing tensions with the United States and the West are leading them more towards a stronger economic, political, and security union with China that enables the Russian state to survive and thrive with minimal reliance on Western-dominated international institutions.

### **Smart Power**

The debate over soft versus hard power evolved in 2004 where Nossel created a new term in her Foreign Affairs articles called “Smart Power”. She recognized the benefits in hard and soft power as she reviewed the Bush administration trying to incorporate both after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the Iraq war that began in 2003 (Nossel 2004). She saw a need to tailor policies that required both since the military after conducting acts of hard power could also serve in a humanitarian and diplomatic role. Nossel felt this could be done via the experienced and trained officer core that specialized in peacekeeping, stabilization, and humanitarian missions and alliances with numerous international institutions such as the United Nations (Nossel 2004). In this case smart power would address the relevancy of utilizing hard and soft power in different doses and elements.

In fact Nossel provided the example of a young 22-year-old U.S. Army sergeant, Henry Kissinger, who was assigned to serve as mayor of a German town while it was under U.S. occupation during and after World War II ended (Nossel 2004). This shows that stabilization after a conflict is needed and the military can play a role in spearheading soft power policy but Nossel stresses on the importance of experienced and trained specialists to deal with it.

Otherwise if implemented poorly it could potentially lead to soured relations with the locals that could eventually lead to renewed conflict and a less favorable image of the smart power actor.

These concepts of hard power, soft power, and smart power will be referred throughout this thesis since each of these countries utilize them in different degrees that are either deliberate or unintentional. In addition these three concepts make up the heart of the U.S., China, and Russia relationship, also known as the U.S, China, and Russia Triangle, in regards to the balance of power, level of containment, and collaboration between these top three nations in the international system. The use of smart power can lead one to conclude that strategic and tactical uses of soft power and hard power can be closely and loosely intertwined. However as Nossel mentioned in her Foreign Affairs article that it depends on the practitioners implementing the policy as well since the goal of using smart power tends to be tailored for a specific purpose and outcome (Nossel 2004).

### **U.S. Soft Power Decline: Rise of a New Multipolar System**

The next theme that this literature review will cover is the ongoing discussion that the U.S. is losing its ability to project soft power throughout the world. This ties in with the hard, soft, and smart power concepts mentioned above as well as being tied very closely to the over all topic of this thesis. The status of American soft power and role in the world has been covered greatly in foreign policy, national security, and intelligence circles since the Cold War ended in 1991. Moreover, literature in this subject covers how the disintegration of the Soviet Union caused a major power vacuum in the international system that evolved into a different type of uncertainty that had not been prevalent during the Cold War.

In fact this current era has seen more emphasis regarding the rise in violent non-state actors, increases in acts of terrorism and transnational crime as well as increases in

peacekeeping, humanitarian, and military intervention operations occurring worldwide since the Cold War ended. This has taken place during an era where globalization has streamlined the process of interconnectedness among states from an economic and political angle. In addition this brings into question the role of American preponderance in the world as well as the future role of traditional alliances, policies, and international institutions that originated from the Cold War like the UN and NATO. The following sub-themes will elaborate on this further.

### **Diminished Soft Power Management Capabilities**

The U.S. track record since the Cold War has caused scholars and experts to discuss the current state and future of American soft power management and projection. In 2004, Joseph Nye wrote an important article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, which discussed that American soft power, was in a state of decline due to the growth of anti-Americanism spreading into the world and the failure of U.S. soft power policy to counter it (Nye 2004). He argues that the Cold War was the mechanism that kept American soft power growth and expansion manageable and able to preserve American legitimacy throughout the world. The Vietnam War was used as an example of this in his paper as American legitimacy and soft power recovered quickly after the conflict between the U.S. and North Vietnamese had ended (Nye 2004). However Nye argues that the elements and processes used to maintain it such as public diplomacy and U.S. information programs are not operating to the extent they were during the Cold War.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were both examples where enhanced American soft power was needed in order to combat the growing anti-Americanisms that grew from it. Nye's article was written during the Bush administration's involvement in relying heavily on hard power to deal with Iraq, Afghanistan, and the War on Terror. Bush often gets criticized for relying too much on use of hard power without strengthening and utilizing American cultural and

diplomatic capabilities. But this pre-dates the Obama administration whose foreign policy consisted relying mainly on the use of soft power without fully cultivating and maintaining its potential. Looking at the 2010 and 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy papers that the White House produces every five years is evidence of this agenda given the heavy emphasis on liberal international relations ideals and less on realism (NSS 2010 and NSS 2015, U.S. Diplomacy 2017). To reinforce Nye's point, a lack of a Cold War mindset has limited U.S. diplomatic and cultural efforts in properly combating the growing anti-American sentiments occurring throughout the world. This is becoming more problematic to U.S. global leadership within an international system that is continually evolving into a more multipolar and competitive world. This will especially be more problematic for U.S. global leadership since there is a great probability that there will someday be a more formalized China and Russia strategic alliance.

### ***Rise of the BRICS: A New Multipolar Era***

Shashi Tharoor reiterated in his article a point that Nye also mentioned regarding the growth of soft power in the information age belonging to the country that tells a better story about itself (Tharoor 2016). He elaborates that the U.S. has essentially been the better story with ideas, opportunities, and attractiveness. However its soft power mechanisms were not equipped to handle the negative backlashes that came with the policies in areas like Iraq, Afghanistan, War on Terror, and Guantanamo detainees.

Instead he discusses that this public diplomacy decline has enabled the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) to gain in soft power capacity as well as telling their story as rising super powers (Tharoor 2016).

The Burrows and George article called, "Is America Ready for a Multipolar World?" discusses this further and emphasizes on the need for the U.S. to be more prepared in dealing

with a multipolar world (Burrows and George 2016). This article also references and correlates with the 2008 volume of the National Intelligence Council's report called, "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World", in collaboration with Chairman, C. Thomas Fingar and other esteemed experts. This document specifically warns U.S. policymakers on the following:

Historically, emerging multipolar systems have been more unstable than bipolar or unipolar ones. Despite the recent financial volatility—which could end up accelerating many ongoing trends—we do not believe that we are headed toward a complete breakdown of the international system, as occurred in 1914-1918 when an earlier phase of globalization came to a halt. However, the next 20 years of transition to a new system are fraught with risks. Strategic rivalries are most likely to revolve around trade, investments, and technological innovation and acquisition, but we cannot rule out a 19<sup>th</sup> century-like scenario of arms races, territorial expansion, and military rivalries (Global Trends 2025, 2008).

They argue that the BRIC countries are beginning to compete on a more equal level with G7 states and in some cases even surpassed developed economies, like China who is now second behind the U.S. in GDP. The rise of BRIC nations who were once developing and emerging markets are now on the verge of creating a new multipolar system, that hasn't been seen since the First World War (Burrows and George 2016). However they also add that this new era of rising multipolarism lacks the resemblance of the previous period that took place during the First World War, which lacked the global interconnectedness of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization. In addition, Burrows and George added that as a result U.S. soft power policy will have to adapt and enhance its capacity since the international system is becoming more competitive and multipolar.

The theme of rising BRIC nations and entering into a new multipolar era is very relevant to this thesis topic as it covers extensively the circumstances of the U.S., China, and Russia relationship since they are the leaders in shaping this new international system. Whether there is

an actual Sino-Russian alliance or partnership based on mutual interests, it will continue to impact the way in which the United States develops and maintains its soft power projection.

### **U.S.-China-Russia Triangle: A Reversal in Strategic Leverage**

This next theme will review the current and historical dynamics of the U.S., China, and Russian relationship. It has led scholars and experts to notice that in recent years there is a growing reversal of great power leveraging that is occurring. After all these three states began this complex relationship at the outset of the Cold War and continues to play a crucial role in U.S. foreign policy and national security after it ended in 1991. It is currently Spring 2017 and a quarter of a century since the Cold War ended. However the dynamics between these three countries continue to lack the tranquil and amicable relationship that had been symbolic of the end of the Cold War.

The China and Russian relationship will have a direct impact on U.S. foreign policy, as all three of them tend to carry a lot of weight in global politics. This is also known as the U.S., China, and Russia Triangle that is based on former U.S. National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger's "Triangular Diplomacy". Kissinger implemented this during the Richard M. Nixon presidency, in order to improve U.S. relations with China during the Cold War while weakening their strategic relationship with Russia at the time (U.S. State Department Archive 2017). This was considered a major coup in favor of the U.S. as China and Russia were originally aligned with similar political and idealistic beliefs. A China-Russia alliance would have made it harder for the U.S. to win the Cold War, which is why President Nixon had Kissinger begin the process of thawing relations between the United States and China in the early 1970s.

### *A Post-Cold War Reversal?*

The China and U.S. relationship during the Cold War managed to be a mutually beneficial one as China helped the U.S. counter what they perceived as the Soviet threat as well as helping each nations grow in economic power. It especially helped China grow into the rising super power it has become. However authors like Stokes mentions that this triangle power balance has shifted since the end of the Cold War where Russia and China are both in a growing position of countering U.S. preponderance in the world (Stokes 2017). In other words, this triangle relationship between these three countries has reversed in China and Russia's favor in this current period as Moscow and Beijing are in a position to collectively counter American soft power projection. This in essence is potentially putting the U.S. in the position where the Soviet Union was in during the Cold War.

*I believe if Washington had a more positive attitude towards Moscow, then the end result would be that we had good relations between the U.S. and Russia and eventually the Russians would be part of the balancing coalition against China.*

*– John Mearsheimer (Khlebnikov and Shevchenko 2016).*

This has been an evolving issue since the end of the Cold War, however it has escalated since the U.S. and European Union imposed sanctions on Russia in 2014. This was a Western retaliation to Russia's annexation of Crimea in Ukraine and their use of hybrid warfare tactics to achieve it. The sanctions have prompted Russia to abandon most of their Western economic interests in order to commit to an Asian pivot aimed at strengthening ties with China as well as stabilizing their economy and national interests. However this questions Russian stability given that their economy is already considered to be in dire straights and is affecting their decision-making and negotiating power in the numerous deals they have streamlined with China since the Crimean annexation.

The consensus among scholars and experts is that Russia is the junior partner in its dealing with China as they lack the abundance in political, economic, and diplomatic leverage that the Chinese currently possess. Unlike China, the Russian government never cultivated a vast global economic and investment relationship with the West. This is why China has been among the top beneficiaries of globalization since the Cold War ended. In fact Zbigniew Brzezinski mentioned in his speech to the Nobel Peace Prize Forum that Russia is in the position that the Chinese government had been in during Henry Kissinger's "triangular diplomacy" policy in the early 1970s (Brzezinski 2017).

### **China and Russia: Formally Aligned or Partnership of Interest**

The Sino-Russian relationship has grown steadily since the end of the Cold War but many experts note that it has streamlined since Russia's Crimean annexation and Asian pivot as a result of Western sanctions. This has led to a closer monitoring of their bilateral relationship in hopes of determining the likeliness of an actual formal alliance in the making or determining if it is just a strategic partnership based on mutual interest. The sub-themes in this section will be centered on arguments pertaining to those who consider a formalized Chinese-Russian alliance being highly unlikely versus those who think it is extremely likely.

#### **Strategic Partnership Argument #1: China's Western Interests**

Historically the Chinese and Russian governments have been wary of each other's policies and agendas since their national interests haven't always correlated well with each other. There is a group of policymakers and thinkers who have long thought it unlikely to see a formal alliance between China and Russia happen. Angela Stent of the Transatlantic Academy mentions in her May 2016 paper, "Russia, China, and the West After Crimea" that Russia has been minimalized as a result of the Western sanctions imposed on them. Instead of aligning with

Russia, Stent argued that China is serving as their protector while shielding them from the full impact of the sanctions (Stent 2016, 17).

She also adds that the notion of China and Russia working towards a bipolar world order with the two of them countering the U.S. and its allies on the other side is unrealistic. Stent points out that China has deep economic relations with the U.S. and is not interested in jeopardizing it and their access to Western technology and markets. After all their trade with the U.S. and European Union is ten times larger than trade with Russia. Moreover Stent stresses on the notion that China is focused more on seeking “an international role commensurate with its new, enhanced status” rather than creating an “alternative global order” (Stent 2016, 17).

### **Strategic Partnership Argument #2: Too Many Differences**

Another argument posed by the no alliance group is the theme that both China and Russia continue to feel threatened by each other, particularly Russia given their weaker economic, political, and diplomatic clout in the international system. Peter Rutland mentioned in his article, “Russia and China: Through a Glass Darkly”, that “because of deep differences in cultural background, economic interests, and security concerns, the Russia-China relationship is unlikely to develop into a deep and dynamic alliance. Nevertheless, for the time being it looks as if the partnership is making each side more confident, and more willing to challenge the U.S. in Europe, Asia and the Middle East” (Rutland 2017). He also mentions that Russia has other national interests in Asia such as longstanding ties with Vietnam, North Korea, India, and strong interests in improving relations with Japan and Indonesia. Rutland emphasized that these interests would not fall in line with Beijing given their policies and histories with each of those countries (Rutland 2017).

### **Strategic Partnership Argument #3: Impaired Bilateral Relationship**

Zhao Huasheng of the China Institute of International Studies, a think tank sponsored by the China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote an article titled, “Does China’s Rise Pose a Threat to Russia” in April 2013. This was a think piece based on looking at the biggest challenges impairing the development efforts for the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship. In it he mentions the increasing concern by the Russian elite and regular Russians on the growing power status that China has accumulated while theirs have declined (Huasheng 2013).

He also discusses additional concerns the Russians have such as: mass immigration of legal and illegal immigrants to Russia’s Far East leading it to outnumber the few amounts of Russian citizens living in these areas; China’s economic expansion in Russia’s Far East and Siberia creating a new form of “Chinese colonialism” that could undermine Russian control of the region; Threaten their territorial integrity based on perception that the Chinese won’t respect existing territorial treaties that favored Russia more; Threat of a Chinese military expansion into Siberia and the Far East; The concern that Russia becomes a “raw material appendage of China and its political appendage”; Threaten Russian national security since Chinese military spending and upgrading is significantly higher; Threaten Russian sphere of influence through their mass expansions in the world (Huasheng 2013). Over all this paper tries to disprove the Russian concerns mentioned but still recognizes them as areas impairing their bilateral relationship with Russia. Either way it can also be used for developing a Chinese strategy for improving and strengthening their relations with Russia as well.

### **Alliance Argument #1: A Growing Inter-dependent Relationship**

Alexander Gabuev mentioned in his War on the Rocks article, “Russia’s ‘China Dreams’ Are Less of a Fantasy Than You Might Think”, that it is easy for the Western media and

policymakers to not take the idea of a China-Russia alliance seriously as it would appear not to be in the Chinese interests. But Russia has greatly cut its Western interests and growing more inter-dependent with China as a result of it. This gives China greater access to Russian technology and resources.

Gabuev also mentions that the two have taken great lengths to continue economic and military deals that would not have been considered streamlined otherwise. The sales of Russia's "highly advanced S-400 surface-to-air missile system and Su-35 fighter jets" were something that would not have been considered as a result of Russia's concern for Chinese expansionism into the Russian Far East (Gabuev 2016). He adds that this is the type of purchase that would significantly alter the strategic balance regarding Taiwan, East China Sea, and South China Sea, as it would give them territorial dominance. In addition the significant impact in energy and financial deals that have taken place between the two has led Russia and China to "develop a parallel financial infrastructure that will bypass the United States and thus be immune to international sanctions" (Gabuev 2016).

### **Alliance Argument #2: Greater Inter-government Coordination**

Bob Savic of the Global Policy Institute writes in his article that China and Russia have taken great lengths to streamline inter-government coordination since the sanctions began. He mentions that it has spilled into several areas of government and institutional policymaking, particularly "both countries' governments, as well as regional and municipal governments, in addition to the increasing role played by state and private companies and various sectors of civil society" (Savic 2016). He adds that these changes have been made possible due to the Asian pivot and are intentional rather than being evolutionary since the Russian government took an activist approach to getting the public on board.

Savic also brings up the 2014 Strategic Partnership agreement between Russia and China that helped seal the deal in upgrading their bilateral relationship. It included a very large economic, energy and infrastructure package that consisted of a 40-year old gas deal between Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), building a gas pipeline in Siberia, a deal between Rosneft and CNPC worth up to \$500 billion making Russia the top supplier of China's oil (Savic 2016). In addition Savic mentions the 2014 agreement also created a currency swap agreement between these states that was worth "150 billion yuan and 815 billion rubles (\$24 billion at the time)" which was meant for them to facilitate and boost bilateral trade and settle in their national currencies rather than in dollars (Savic 2016).

The agreement also initiated the integration of high-level political and economic interests such as the coordination of foreign policy issues and partnerships such as integrating Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with China's Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This would work towards merging both countries free trade zones together as well as working on developing China's Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connecting Asia and Europe via trade and transportation routes (Savic 2016). From a military and security perspective, Savic also mentions that both countries have increased their military and security cooperation together, whether it is in response to exercises or partnered responses that counter American defense interests.

### **Alliance Argument #3: Similar Political and Ideological Alignment**

John S. Van Oudenaren with the National Defense University wrote an article in The Diplomat on February 23, 2017, called "Why Trump Can't Break Russia Away From China: Why the conditions just aren't right for Kissinger-style triangular diplomacy". He argues that China and Russia are now more fully unified than in previous eras and there is little incentive for

them to not be aligned in their efforts to compete with the U.S. and rest of the West. Like the others he feels Crimea was a turning point in the China and Russian partnership and emphasizes that for the first time both countries political systems and ideologies are strongly united. After all, both countries political systems are authoritarian and dictatorial in nature as well as “harboring intense authoritarian nationalist opposition to western and globalist ideologies” such as democracy and human rights (Van Oudenaren 2017).

Van Oudenaren also adds that neither side is no longer divided from their previous Marxist-Leninist political differences that played a key part in dividing them during the Cold War. “In contrast to the days of the Sino-Soviet split, ideology is now a unifying factor in relations” (Van Oudenaren 2017). In addition he adds that the current Chinese and Russian ideologies and fears about Western influence has enhanced their cooperation with each other in numerous areas like trade, energy, agriculture, and military collaboration and investments.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

Researching for a qualitative analysis that determines the potential for a Russia and China alliance requires it to utilize international relations theories that are based on realism and rationalism. This author chose to use the rational choice theory and realist theory in international relations. These theories were crucial in researching and analyzing the topic in order to reach a conclusion that the hypotheses' make a solid argument. In addition the findings and theories involved can be used for suggested research areas that may deal with the evolution of this research topic.

Application of the realist and rational choice theories in this paper were beneficial in understanding the theme of great power politics that is constantly addressed in this thesis. This was crucial as it looks at the behaviors and mindsets of nations and their leaders when considering certain policies that affect their interests and those of others. In addition these international relations theories have been used in numerous studies, research, and publications that pertain to the study of better understanding U.S., China, and Russia relations since the beginning of the Cold War.

Meanwhile, incorporating content analysis and case study formats was a useful method that enabled this author the ability to review both current and historical research aimed at further understanding the ongoing relationship pertaining to the U.S.-China-Russia triangle. In this chapter the reader will learn about: the methodology used for researching this topic; the research framework pertaining to the theories used; the collection of data and types of sources used; and a brief summary at the end tying in each of these research methods together.

## **Methodology**

The author chose to utilize qualitative analytical methods since this topic is considered being open-ended and evolving in real time. After all each of these three countries at some point find themselves in positions where they must take into consideration the implications of their foreign policies in various regions of the world. Moreover they will also have to determine how these implications impact the dynamics of the trilateral relationship between the United States, China, and Russia. Reviewing the evolving and closer ties between the Chinese and Russian governments will be crucial particularly with their continual uses of hybrid warfare in their respective regions.

Developing research for this type of analysis required a combination of content analysis and case study approaches to examine the previous, current, and future trends in this trilateral relationship. In addition this paper looked at a historical case study that helped explain the behaviors and rationale of countries that decide to enter into an alliance and conditions that led to it. The historical case study portion of this thesis reviewed the Ottoman Empire's decision to joining the Triple Alliance in 1914 that consisted of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria in the First World War. Rather than joining the Triple Entente which consisted of Great Britain, France, and Russia, the Ottoman Empire which was on the verge of collapse decided to align with Germany out of perceived self-interest and national survival. This case study was used to compare the current situation of Russia and their closer ties to China after sanctions were placed on them as a result of the Crimean annexation.

## **Research Framework**

Researching for a qualitative analysis that determines the extent of the China and Russian relationship requires it to utilize two theories pertaining to international relations. Realist theory and Rational Choice Theory are very relevant to this topic and considered to being highly

applicable in reviewing several other aspects of U.S., China, and Russian relations. Ultimately these theories reviewed the function of great power politics between these nations and looked at areas such as geopolitical and national interests, state survival and sovereignty to name a few. In addition these theories helped explain and answer the following research questions, hypotheses', and variables for this thesis:

**Research Question #1:** Is there an actual Sino-Russian alliance in the making or is it just a partnership based on singular mutual self-interests?

**Research Question #2:** How will bilateral relations between China and Russia after the Crimean annexation challenge the replenishment and expansion of U.S. soft power capabilities?

**Research Question #3:** What is the impact that a Sino-Russian alliance would have on U.S. interests via hybrid warfare and is it realistic in either the short or long run?

**Hypothesis #1:** A China-Russia alliance has been made more realistic since the Russian annexation of Crimea, which poses a serious threat to American soft power replenishment and projection in the world.

- **Independent Variable:** The sanctions that were placed on Russia for annexing the Crimean region of Ukraine.
- **Dependent Variable:** The impact that sanctions had on China and Russian relations as well as their threat to American soft power projection and management throughout the world.

**Hypothesis #2:** A China-Russia alliance would rely more on joint and individual hybrid warfare tactics in the short term while strengthening their conventional warfare capabilities.

- **Independent Variable:** A possible China-Russia alliance.

- ***Dependent Variable:*** A possible China-Russia alliance that is reliant on joint and individual hybrid warfare tactics since each of their conventional military capabilities is currently not considered equal to U.S. conventional force capabilities.

***Miscellaneous Variables:*** Policy, power, geopolitical interests, national interest, and relationship dynamics between these three countries.

***Rational Choice Theory:***

The two theories utilized in this paper are realist-based in the field of international relations as they deal with nations focusing on pursuing their interests while preserving and expanding their power and influence in the world. The rational choice theory originated as an economic principle that focuses on microeconomic analysis based on individual decision-making. It assumes that the individual is shrewd, well informed, and capable of making logical decisions that benefit their primary self interests (Levin and Milgrom 2004). Levin and Milgrom mention that it also depends on the individual's preferences, which could determine if the behavior is based on short term or long-term interests.

The criticisms pertaining to rational choice theory mainly are centered on real world choices being based on either the situation or being dependent on the context. Levin and Milgrom mention, "The way in which a choice is posed, the social context of the decision, the emotional state of the decision-maker, the addition of seemingly extraneous items to the choice set, and a host of other environmental factors appear to influence choice behavior" (Levin and Milgrom 2004, 22). The criticism brings up the issue of preferences not always being stable, however, Levin and Milgrom also mention that the strength of rational choice theory is the stability of the individual's preferences too. In addition they add that this enables the person

studying the behavior to “observe choices in one situation and then draw inferences about choices in related situations” (Levin and Milgrom 2004, 22).

Charles L. Glaser of the realist school of thought in international relations wrote on how rational choice theory pertains to international politics in his book called, “Rational Theory of International Politics: Logic of Competition and Cooperation”. In it he pinpoints three variables that influences state strategy which are, “the state’s motives, specifically whether it is motivated by security concerns or ‘greed’; material variables, which determine its military capabilities; and information variables, most importantly what the state knows about its adversary’s motives” (Glaser 2010). Glaser also emphasizes on the importance that motives and information variables have on foreign policymakers choices of competitive or cooperative strategies regarding other states (Glaser 2010). The rational choice theory in international relations is suitable for this thesis topic since the U.S., China, and Russian relationship is constantly dealing with cooperative and competitive strategies. Glaser mentioned how motives can impact this decision by states and this will be crucial in understanding how they can affect the balance of power and leverage that is seen in this triangle relationship.

### **Realism Theory in International Relations:**

The realist theory in international relations, also known as realism looks at the system being archaic and believes in the state sovereignty concept. Like the rational choice theory, realism assumes that states are rational actors looking to promote their self-interests. In addition, realism looks at state power being the key to survival as opposed to being governed by multilateral institutions (Waltz 1979). Realism looks at power from several angles such as “militarily, economically, diplomatically—but ultimately emphasizes the distribution of coercive material capacity as the determinant of international politics” (Slaughter 2010).

Theorist, John Mearsheimer in his 1994 essay, “The False Promise of International Institutions” emphasized on the pessimistic nature of realism and mentioned that the international system is in a state of constant security competition despite the fact that states frequently find ways to cooperate. His essay looks at four assumptions that entail this pessimism (Mearsheimer 1994, 10-11). The first one he mentions is that international system is in a constant state of anarchy in the sense that there are only independent political states with no central authority ruling them. The second assumption is that states will always possess some form of offensive military capability. The third assumption is that states should not fully trust each other since it is impossible to fully determine if one state will not use their offensive military capabilities upon another state. The fourth assumption is that survival of the state is their basic motive in order to protect its sovereignty (Mearsheimer 1994, 10-11). Finally, Mearsheimer’s essay brings up the issue of the international system being dominated by great power politics as the states with heavy political, economic, and military clout tend to decide the fate of the world. This is a key reason why the realist theory ties in nicely with the great power concept that makes up the U.S., China, and Russia triangle as the manner of competition and cooperation by these states can have great implications in the international system.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data collected for this thesis will be conducted via open-source material from the Internet, public sources, private subscriptions to specialized information hubs like STRATFOR, Foreign Affairs, KGS KnightWatch, Johnson’s Russia, and War on the Rocks to name a few. Other open-sources will come from geopolitical organizations, academic publications. Also research will be conducted by reviewing academic and analytical books, e-books, magazines, government and institutional documents that have been prepared for the general public.

### **Research Limitations**

Over all, this is an endless topic that deals with great power relations between these three countries. Previously it was mentioned that there are opposing viewpoints on whether there is a formalized China-Russian alliance in the making. There are indications happening in real time that helps support each side's case, although this author thinks the case regarding the probability of there being a formalized alliance is a lot stronger than the no alliance group. The sanctions placed on Russia and the declining price of oil in global markets harmed their already fragile economy and forced an Asian pivot with China and other nations in the region. This is still an ongoing issue that requires continued research and monitoring after this thesis. Both sides have streamlined economic, military, and political agreements while China continues to look at options that make them less reliant on the Western economic system. Whatever ends up transpiring will impact the U.S. ability to project its soft power capabilities in the international system as a whole. Meanwhile continued monitoring of these concerns will be necessary after this thesis is completed as well as the escalated and continued use of non-conventional methods like hybrid warfare.

The endless and evolving nature of this topic signifies that there will be a continuation and abundance of new material, articles and academic analysis, which explains this relationship and other related topics. At the moment there are currently not a lot of writings that deal specifically with the entire topic of this thesis. Instead there is literature that discusses different aspects and issues that are related. Given that this paper focuses primarily on the evolving relationship since the Russian annexation of Crimea, the author concludes that it is a trend still in the making. However in this current international climate, any one of these three countries could find a way to drastically alter the great power status and relations between the three in either a positive or negative impact.

## Summary

The qualitative method of analysis was very appropriate when conducting research for this thesis. It provided the author the opportunity to properly view the endless nature of this topic with a new and fresh perspective. This method also enabled the author to examine the topic by utilizing a combination of content analysis and case study formats to help bring insight when comparing the previous, current, and future trends of the China, Russian, and U.S. trilateral relationship. It also created the opportunity to utilize a creative lens by comparing the situations of modern Russia to the former Ottoman Empire in 1914 and decisions that have been made by both governments in response to their circumstances and international relations.

The research framework section discussed the need for rational choice theory and realism theory in international relations which both represent the great power theme of this thesis rather well. These two realist-oriented theories have commonly been used to understand the Russian and Chinese relationship with the United States for several years since the Cold War inception. The data for this framework consisted of various forms of open-source material from reputable Internet sites, publications, journals, professional news and analytical geopolitical organizations, and other sources that provided extensive thought and analysis pertaining to the U.S., China, and Russia relationship. However this is still an ongoing issue that could use more focused reporting and analytical work since it is still evolving. It will require continued monitoring as its been three years since the Crimean annexation and the streamlining of Chinese and Russian relations. This indicates that the full impact of these agreements have yet to be felt by either side, including the international system as a whole.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### Overview

This section covers a wide range of issues pertaining to the topic. It begins with a case study comparison that attempts to shed light on the perspectives and mentalities of decision makers who make realist-oriented policies for their countries best interests and survival. The coverage of previous agreements and treaties will also help give a perspective that shows China and Russia have been gradually building a strategically aligned partnership despite one having more influence than the other. Hybrid warfare as a policy tool that enables plausibility and great rewards for China and Russia will also be covered, including a quick look at areas the two countries interests align.

### Circumstances Leading to Alliances: 1914 Ottoman Empire vs. 2014 Russia

To begin this section, the author thought a unique comparison between pre-First World War Ottoman Empire and modern day Russia, post-Crimea, would make for an interesting perspective. A comparative cases studies approach on this can be quite helpful to recognize differences and similarities between the two states and the likeliness of forming official alliances. Moreover both of their circumstances are blatant examples that represent the uses of realism in international relations. The actions that will be discussed on both countries will illustrate their focus on state power and survival in an international system that is anarchic. For time constraints this section will do a brief summary of decisions and events that resulted into the Ottoman entry of World War One and their secret defensive alliance with Germany. Afterwards there will be a primary focus on comparison with modern Russia and their decision to pivot their strategic interests to Asia after the annexation of Crimea.

### *Ottoman Empire: 1908-1914*

A general consensus in this author's research shows that the Ottoman Empire began a state of decline throughout the nineteenth century when they broke isolation and attempted to modernize and westernize its armed forces, political, social, and economic systems. However a series of failed wars, huge losses in territory, and political instability in the government created problems that sparked ultranationalist sentiments and recognition by European powers that they had become weak and vulnerable (Rogan 2015). In other words the Ottomans were ripe for the picking as their economic, military, social, and political structures had been in a constant state of decay throughout the century. The period between 1908-1914 proved critical in shaping the mindsets of the Ottoman officials whose actions led to their involvement into World War One.

The decline of the empire had become so apparent by its citizens that it resulted into a growing consensus by them to form a revolt based on the intention of restoring Turkey's constitutional monarchy and weakening the role of the Sultan (Rogan 2015). This became known as the Young Turk's Revolution, which consisted of secret societies in the upper military and young intelligentsia, and it caused major revolts and counterrevolutions, during 1908 and 1909, throughout the Balkans that could have resulted into a major civil war (Rogan 2015, 27-28). The new constitution was passed but it created a new political system where the leftist and traditional parties ended up differing greatly on how to handle the decaying nature and vulnerability of the empire.

Shortly afterwards in 1911, the Kingdom of Italy decided to attack the Ottoman Empire's Libyan territories of Tripoli and Benghazi which sparked a new war in North Africa (Rogan 2015). However, the Ottomans had limited capability to properly defend its North African territories and it spread their Balkan defenses thin, which developed into a new imminent threat posed by neighbors, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece who, "each had territorial

ambitions in the remaining Ottoman territory in the Balkans—in Albania, Macedonia, and Thrace” (Rogan 2015, 36-39). At this point the Ottoman Empire chose to concede Tripoli and Benghazi to Italy in order to focus on saving their last European territories that had high economic and social importance. This would eventually lead to the Balkan Wars that occurred in 1912 and 1913.

Rogan mentions that the concession of the North African provinces illustrated the ideological divide and tensions between the two leading political parties in the Ottoman Empire. The Liberals who were in power preferred peace to avoid further losses in territory and protect Istanbul from risks while the CUP party, also known as the Committee of Union Progress, preferred a renewal of war to regain lost territories (Rogan 2015, 41). This divide was very prevalent during the first and second Balkan Wars. In fact the failure and loss of these important European territories of the empire led to a more solid and unified government in the Second Balkan War when retaking eastern Thrace. Shortly afterwards the Ottoman government focused on holding an iron fist on their existing territories while clamping down on dissent (Rogan 2015, 42-46).

Despite the success from the Second Balkan War and resulting government clampdown on its citizens, the Ottoman Empire was still concerned with domestic and foreign forces taking advantage of their weaknesses, particularly the Russian Empire who had been considered their greatest threat (Pasha 1922). By this time Turkey and Russia had fought numerous wars against each other and Turkey had lost significant territory as a result of it. In addition the Ottoman government could not rely on France and Britain as they were allied with the Russian Empire. This alliance was called the Triple Entente and Rogan mentions that the only way Russia’s great

power ambitions could be contained was by the Ottomans forming a defensive alliance with a strong and friendly power, which turns out to have been the German Empire (Rogan 2015, 50).

The Ottoman Empire and Germany had already established cordial relations and exchanges between their two empires, which made it easier for them to align. During an 1898 state visit, German Kaiser Wilhelm II had pledged Germany's friendship with the Ottoman Empire when he said, "May the Sultan and his 300 million Muslim subjects scattered across the earth, who venerate him as their Caliph, be assured that the German Kaiser will be their friend for all time" (Blaser 1926, 208). Wilhelm II considered Turkey a vital geostrategic position as a friendship could make the Muslim world more sympathetic towards Germany in its rivalry with France and Britain as well as gaining them access to Central Asia (Rogan 2015, 56).

In addition France and Germany failed to exercise support for the Ottoman Empire in the days following the June 28, 1914 assassination of Austro-Hungarian Prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia (Pasha 1922, 114-117). The Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia and led to a quick declaration of war by Russia since they had an alliance with them (Rogan 2015). This brought in Germany on Austria and Hungary's side as well as France and Great Britain siding with the Russian Empire, which led to the Great War. The Ottoman Empire had not yet chosen sides given that they were a war weary country from the conflicts of the previous five years. They were also still recovering politically, economically, socially, and militarily from this volatile period.

However they still feared the Russian Empires ambitions to annex Turkey and a war in the Balkans provided ample opportunity for an invasion. The Ottomans feared for the survival of their empire and placed their reliance on Germany by signing a "Secret Treaty of Alliance" on August 2, 1914, which stated that Germany would come to their aid if they were in conflict with

the Russian Empire (German-Turkish Treaty 1914). Pasha mentions that Germany suspected that war was coming in the near future and wanted to “strengthen their position in every possible way” despite the heavy burden of the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire (Pasha 1922, 114). He also argued that the Turkish government made the right decision to enter into an alliance as they betted on Germany who was very powerful at that time and could have been a very profitable venture for Turkey had they won the war.

The knowledge of this secret alliance was known to only a handful of people in the Turkish government. However it still enabled them to consider the option of proposing another secret alliance with the Russian Empire in exchange for preservation of territory and regaining lost territories in the Balkans and Mediterranean (Rogan 2015, 70). This happened shortly after the Turkish-German Treaty was signed. It ultimately failed as the Russian Empire didn’t take their offer seriously and other members of the Turkish government worried the Russians would still attempt at Ottoman dismemberment after the war ended (Rogan 2015). This resulted in the Ottomans decision to stick with the German Treaty and they eventually entered the war when their Navy, led by German officers, attacked Russia’s Black Sea fleet on October 29, 1914 (Rogan 2015, 73).

### **Comparing the Ottoman Empire in 1914 to Modern Russia in 2014**

The circumstances between the Ottoman Empire in 1914 to modern Russia in 2014 are different and yet the actions incorporated by both governments are the same. The Ottomans lived in a highly volatile and anarchic world with constant threats looking to pick at them piece by piece. Many in the Ottoman government had hoped to align with Britain and France to curb Russia’s territorial ambitions of Anatolia. However it fell through when they were betrayed by the British before the War began when they failed to deliver two large battleships that Turkey

had originally purchased from them (Rogan 2015). A well-developed friendly relationship status with Germany left them with the option of strengthening their ties by establishing the secret alliance to prepare for the War that was to follow.

Although the Ottoman Empire in 1914 had not really initiated the conflicts of the last five years themselves, they were still obliged to fight them in the name of state survival. This realist perspective can also be seen in modern Russia both before and after the Crimean annexation. Unlike the Ottomans, modern Russia initiated two controversial militarized conflicts in Georgia (2008) and in Ukraine (2014), which violated the previous United Nations agreements that stated they would not use force against them (Budapest Memorandum 1994). The rationale of the Putin government for both invasions pertaining to Georgia and Ukraine was their willingness to expand their security relations with the United States and its NATO allies. In response to this, Russian President Vladimir Putin was quoted in saying that “Russia viewed the appearance of a powerful military bloc on its borders as a direct threat to its security. The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice” (Friedman and Logan 2009, 37).

This quote is implying the fear of the Russian government in thinking that NATO had gotten too close to what they consider being their realm of influence. It also implied the insecurities they may have as a result of losing the great power status they possessed throughout the Cold War which is why they desired to regain it. These sentiments date back to when the Cold War era ended and the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the decline of their great power status. This is imperative as modern Russia under President, Vladimir Putin still sees themselves as being an essential power in the international system and is constantly trying to regain that status (Wesslau and Wilson 2016). However, like the Ottoman Empire, modern Russia is limited in soft power projection and instead relies more on their hard power capabilities

to control surrounding states that make up the former Soviet Union (Wesslaugh and Wilson 2016, 6). The conflicts in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 are prime examples of this.

Moreover the Ottoman Empire and Modern Russia both shared similar problems pertaining to economic growth that severely limited their power projection in the international system. The Ottoman Empire did not have the sophisticated infrastructure that the great powers like Great Britain, France, and Germany had developed (Rogan 2015). However, modern Russia under Putin is different than the Ottoman example since they do have access to sophisticated technology and expertise. But their economy, industry sectors, and infrastructures are not well diversified, developed, and upgraded to the point needed for annual economic growth that can foster in new direct investment opportunities (Wilson 2015). In fact the Russian economy is highly dependent on the exportation of its vast deposits of raw materials, especially oil and gas (64% in 2014) that are highly volatile and dependent on world market prices (Djankov 2015).

Russia's reliance on oil and gas to fuel their economy and government budgets would prove detrimental when sanctions were placed on them as result of the annexation of Crimea in Ukraine. This led to the United States and the European Union imposing strict sanctions on them in March 2014. This prevented Russian businesses (defense, banking, finance, and energy) to raise money from European institutions on economic development projects as well as barring any importing and exporting of goods and services with Russia (State Department-Ukraine-Russia 2017). However there were exemptions made in the sanctions, particularly the sale of gas to EU members since they depended heavily on Russian oil supplies, especially Germany and Italy (European Parliament 2015).

The problem that the sanctions and the lack of a well-developed diversified economy needed to weather out the situation properly was the fact that global oil prices had crashed right

after sanctions were imposed on Russia. The global price of oil per barrel that had averaged \$100 in 2014 went down drastically and has remained in the low to high \$40 range ever since (Nasdaq-Crude Oil 2017). Other than the sanctions prohibiting trade, the low oil prices also hurt the Russian economy with increased inflation from 7.8% to 15.8% in October 2015, causing a collapse in the Russian ruble currency from 62 to 29 rubles per dollar (Wilson 2015). This severely limits Russia's purchasing power of goods and services abroad given the added weakness to their currency and revenue stream.

The Ottoman Empire in 1914 was in an economic-credit crunch much like Russia has been in since 2014 and they both experienced perceived foreign threats at their borders. After reviewing all options, Germany had become the answer for the Ottomans and China has become the answer for Russia after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. China and Russia relations thawed after the end of the Cold War and have gradually become more cordial and cooperative ever since they initiated a strategic cooperative partnership that began in the mid 1990s (Meick 2017). This relationship has been evolving and growing into a strategic friendship between the two states. Russia's circumstances in 2014 allowed them to take it further with the Chinese given that both sides are looking at strategic and long-term interests. In addition both Russia and China hold similar views in opposing NATO and U.S. policies in each of their spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia (Putz 2016).

Comparing the circumstances of the Ottoman Empire in 1914 and Russia in 2014 should shed light on the realities and volatility these two nations in different time periods had to deal with. They each deal with signs of rational behavior as well as the emphasis of state survival in volatile times for them. Although it was mentioned earlier in this paper that Russia's pivot to Asia makes Russia more of a junior partner with China in their economic, diplomatic, military,

and social dealings. Given their former superpower status from the Cold War, this is typically a sentiment that the Russian government and its citizens may not prefer, however circumstances are forcing them into this situation. This ties in well with Ariel Cohen's 2001 article, "The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: A Strategic Shift in Eurasia?" where he mentioned, "As one expert pointed, 'Russia is likely to discover that it can no longer manage an equal partnership with China'; Russia will 'likely face a choice between the increasingly close embrace of a more dynamic China and attempting to find regional and global partners to help balance Chinese influence'" (Cohen 2001). It seems apparent that Russia has chosen the former, given that they have better relations and similar interests with China than they do with the United States and European Union.

### **Major Sino-Russian Agreements**

This section will look at the major agreements that have been made by China and Russia since the early 1990s when they signed a non-aggression pact. Since then there have been new agreements that have been building up the bilateral relationship and neither show signs of fear of having a shooting war with each other like they did during the Cold War (Weitz 2008, 3). Reviewing these important and long term-oriented agreements can provide an idea of the rationale between the Chinese and Russian governments as mentioned in the previous section.

#### **1996: Strategic Partnership Coordination Agreement**

The Strategic Partnership Coordination Agreement began as a new step for China and Russian relations to evolve into a closer partnership that would benefit both countries in the long term. Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese leader Jiang Zemin established it during a 1996 summit in Beijing as a bilateral agreement. The agreement dealt with their intentions of "developing a strategic partnership of equality, mutual confidence, and mutual coordination for

the twenty-first century” (UNGA doc 1996). The main agreements consist of the following: Maintain regular dialogue at various levels; Respect each others boundaries and continue resolving existing boundary issues at the time; Facilitate cooperation and exchanges between citizens as well as sharing information on their economic and social development; China considers Chechnya a domestic affair while Russia considers Taiwan a domestic affair as well; Gradual increases in bilateral trade economic and infrastructure development cooperation, especially in areas of science and technological development; Agreeing to nuclear non-aggression; and Reduction in border forces to foster good neighborliness and foster good relations between the militaries of each nation. (UNGA 1996).

After reading the points in this agreement it is interesting to notice that it takes a very realistic view of their perceptions of the world. Given that this was agreed in the mid 1990s, Chinese and Russian governments indicated the changes the world was experiencing as a result of the Cold War being over. They also indicated the growing trend towards multipolarism and the complications tied to them. The agreement particularly reveals their attitudes when it said, “The world is far from being tranquil. Hegemonism, power politics, and the repeated imposition of pressure on other countries have continued to occur. Block politics has assumed new guises. World peace and development face serious challenges” (UNGA doc 1996). This agreement is very forward thinking as the Chinese and Russian governments anticipated the future world order being more competitive and multipolar as well as referencing ongoing friction with the United States and the West.

#### **1996: Formation of the Shanghai-5**

Another revealing element that came from the new China-Russia bilateral agreement on “Strategic Partnership Coordination” is that Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin met several days later

in Shanghai, China to sign a multilateral agreement with leaders from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan that dealt with “confidence building in the military field of border areas” (Shtraks 2015). Gregory Shtrak mentions that this was the formation of what became known as the Shanghai-5, a precursor to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). But he mentions the time period and circumstances of this era illustrated an already growing concern by the Chinese and Russians on American preponderance in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe (Shtrak 2015). In essence the Strategic Partnership Coordination and Shanghai-5 agreements of 1996 were the first steps for developing a reversal of the U.S., China, and Russia triangle balance of power as they further developed their bilateral and multilateral relationships.

### **2001 Treaty for Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation**

On July 16, 2001, the Treaty for Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation was formed between China and Russia. It is both a reaffirmation and bilateral upgrade of the 1996 Strategic Partnership Coordination Agreement. It deals with five areas of cooperation: Countering U.S. preponderance; Continue resolving the long held border disputes; Increase in arms sales and technology transfers; Increase trade deals in Energy and raw materials; and Working together to deal with militant Islam in Central Asia (Cohen 2001). However, reading the actual agreement one can notice a few articles in the agreement that stand out and pertain to the formation of a formalized alliance between China and Russia. Articles 8 and 9 particularly discuss this in more detail:

#### ***Article 8***

The contracting parties shall not enter into any alliance or be a party to any bloc nor shall they embark on any such action, including the conclusion of such treaty with a third country which compromises the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other contracting party. Neither side of the contracting parties shall allow its territory to be used by a third country to jeopardize the national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other contracting party.

Neither side of the contracting parties shall allow the setting up of organizations or gangs on its own soil which shall impair the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other contrasting party and their activities should be prohibited.

***Article 9***

When a situation arises in which one of the contracting parties deems that peace is being threatened and undermined or its security interests are involved or when it is confronted with the threat of aggression, the contracting parties shall immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats (China-Russia Agreement 2001).

Reading these two articles, one would think it could lead to a collectively binding agreement where China and Russia must agree in ensuring that neither state would put the other's sovereignty in jeopardy. Although it doesn't necessarily indicate the forming of an alliance, article 9 indicates that the two would consult on the best way to eliminate a threat that undermines their interests and sovereignty, whether its via diplomatic or military means.

***2001 Formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)***

Like the Shanghai-5, the SCO was formed immediately after the Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and cooperation was formed. Like the latter, it too serves as an upgrade to the Shanghai-5 agreement where it continues efforts to demilitarize borders between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as increased military, counterterrorism, and intelligence cooperation and sharing between these member countries (Albert 2015). The SCO with China and Russia leading it is now focusing more on economic, energy, and infrastructure projects that will strengthen their positions in Central Asia.

Russia's pivot to Asia has made this possible, as previously they had misgivings in supporting the expansion project that deals with integrating China's Silk Road Economic Belt initiative with their Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). This was due to a concern for a growing Chinese presence in Central Asia. However integrating these two initiatives could establish the necessary infrastructure needed for creating massive free trade zones in the region (Albert 2015).

From a geopolitical perspective the economic, energy, and infrastructure deals that the SCO is promoting can have a huge impact on the balance of power in Asia as a whole since it could potentially serve as a major competitor to the U.S. and NATO.

#### **2014 Currency Swap Agreement for \$24.5 billion**

This was an agreement meant for boosting bilateral trade between China and Russia that was signed right before the annexation of Crimea and the decline in oil prices. It was geared towards improving the trading relationship as well as making the Chinese Renminbi (RMB) currency more internationalized (Spivak 2017). However the agreement has not lived up to its goals as very few swap agreements between Russian and Chinese firms took place. The economic decline and inflation that occurred made it harder for Russian firms to utilize the swap agreement and only 32 deals were made in the last three years (Spivak 2017). In addition Chinese and Russian bilateral trade is considered being highly disproportionate since the Chinese are mainly interested in Russian oil and natural gas supply rather than goods and assets made in Russia (Spivak 2017). This would be addressed in the numerous bilateral agreements that would be signed by China and Russia in 2015, indicating a more potent and friendly relationship.

#### **May 8, 2015 32 Bilateral Agreements**

On this day numerous agreements pertaining to economic, trade, energy, natural resources, and security were made. They represented a further warming of relations as well as dealing with Russia's struggle to weathering out the sanctions, credit crunch, and low global price of oil per barrel. The agreements streamlined their energy partnership as it makes Russia a major supplier of oil and gas to China as well as China financing new energy pipelines and infrastructures to help meet agreed supply and demand needs (Wang 2016). Also China and

Russia agreed to invest \$20 billion in new railway infrastructure that better connects Russian and Chinese railroads (Reuters 2015).

Russia and China also signed another bilateral trade agreement where the Chinese government would lend \$25 billion to Russian firms that were struggling from the credit crisis that are a result of the U.S. sanctions (Reuters 2015). This can be seen as an alternative to the swap agreement from the previous year that was not getting utilized by Russian firms.

The agricultural agreement provided for China to invest \$2 billion into Russia's agricultural sector (Russia Direct Investment Fund 2015). This could be very lucrative down the road as China receives a majority of their corn and soy products from the U.S. A stronger agricultural partnership could make China less reliant on imports from the U.S. and get their produce from across the border instead (Buckley 2017).

Another outcome that came through these agreements was a cyber non-aggression pact between the two countries. In it both countries pledge to refrain from "computer attacking" each other as well as cooperate more on cyber initiatives, information exchanges, scientific and academic cooperation (Korzak 2015). Although experts say that most of the language from this agreement originated from an SCO cyber agreement, it adds that the additional portion refers to both sides promising to not "computer attack" each other (Korzak 2015).

Although these agreements are not set in stone like formalized alliances, they still represent a new era in Chinese and Russian relations each time they upgrade the existing agreements. Although the circumstances may have played a big role in streamlining these agreements as well as both countries acting out their national interests and state survival, it is becoming more apparent that both sides have been leaning towards an agreement like this for quite some time.

## **China and Russia: Hybrid Warfare Strategies**

According to Frank Hoffman, hybrid threats are “any adversary that simultaneously employs a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battle space to obtain a political objective” (Hoffman 2014). Hybrid warfare used by each of these countries has increased since the Cold War ended and experts agree that it will continue to grow, as U.S. relations with China and Russia remain questionable. Both China and Russia do not currently have conventional military capabilities and capacities of the United States. So a full fledged conventional war would not be in their favor (Clarke and Knake 2010). However hybrid warfare that mixes conventional and unconventional warfare has been a very effective policy tool for China and Russia and it requires further understanding. This section will look at the difference in uses of hybrid warfare by China and Russia and examples how they were implemented to meet policy objectives in each of their realms of influence.

### **Russian Hybrid Warfare**

The Russians have been known to incorporate various forms of hybrid warfare such as disinformation campaigns, cyber offensives, political subversion and destabilization, and Special Forces operations. They particularly are well-known for using information warfare as a bread and butter policy tool since their military is limited and currently undergoing modernization that started in 2008 (Giles 2016). Information warfare has its roots from the old KGB Soviet era of disinformation and subversion where they used elements of propaganda and disinformation campaigns to their targeted areas (Giles 2016, 19). However they updated this concept by investing in modern communication tools such as mass media like the RT Channel, social media

and online forums to promote the Russian narratives to the masses, and engaging target audiences in their own languages (Giles 2016, 27-28).

The Georgian and Ukrainian offensives are major examples of how Russia limited their military involvement via hybrid warfare tactics. Utilizing proxies, cyber hacking, disinformation campaigns, and military intimidation enabled them to succeed in their objectives (Kofman 2016). While they still used conventional forces in each of these campaigns the Russians executed the ability to adapt using different hybrid tools based on the changing environment during the wars. They also illustrated that in some cases hybrid warfare wasn't the answer, which led them to consider the hard power option when it was feasible (Kofman 2016). Russian use of hybrid warfare is still a major concern for the U.S. and NATO as Giles referred it to being about one side outsmarting the other and a majority of Western policymakers have moved on from the Cold War mindset that dealt with that mentality on a regular basis (Giles 2016).

### ***China's Three Warfares Program***

According to Stefan Halper in an Office of Net Assessment report for the U.S. Department of Defense, the Chinese military uses an unconventional form of political warfare that incorporates a three-dimensional approach that deals with psychological warfare, media warfare, and legal warfare. He defines each of them:

1. ***Psychological Warfare:*** Seeks to undermine an enemy's ability to conduct combat operations through operations aimed at deterring, shocking, and demoralizing enemy military personnel and supporting civilian populations;
2. ***Media Warfare:*** Is aimed at influencing domestic and international public opinion to build support for China's military actions and dissuade an adversary from pursuing actions contrary to China's interests;
3. ***Legal Warfare:*** Uses international and domestic law to claim the legal high ground or assert Chinese interests. It can be used to thwart an opponent's operational freedom and shape the operational space. It is also used to build international support and manage possible political repercussions of China's military (Halper 2013, 28).

Experts consider this strategy as being a war of other means since it stresses more on unconventional methods rather than conventional forces. However they have been known to incorporate both in their assertive behavior in the South China Sea by using legal warfare and the Chinese navy to enforce Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ) throughout contested water territories that are owned by other Asian nations (Rinehart and Elias 2015). Moreover the creation of manmade islands in contested areas to serve as air and naval bases are another example of this strategy since they are incorporating assertion while claiming the maritime routes, as being historically Chinese owned. As a threat to American power projection, Halper mentions that China's three warfares program is used in countering U.S. naval presence in the region, surveillance operations in the region, and targeting U.S. allies in the region by using non-naval vessels that target their fisheries and other maritime infrastructures (Halper 2013, 104-112). He adds that media warfare could be used in the last scenario, as it would present the U.S. as being in a state of decline, which could strengthen sentiments for China's role in the region.

#### **China and Russian Cyber Warfare Programs:**

The cyber warfare programs that China and Russia have are considered to be a vital element in each of their hybrid warfare strategies. Chinese and Russian cyber warfare programs are considered among the best in the world and better funded than the U.S. cyber capabilities (Clarke and Knake 2010). After all, their conventional capabilities do not match that of the United States and cyber provides the element of plausibility. In addition the U.S. Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive mentions in a report that cyber warfare is and will continue to be a primary tactic used by the Chinese and Russian governments, in order to collect sensitive U.S. economic information and technologies via the Internet (ONCIX Report 2011). The report also mentions that they will continue to be aggressive and utilize various methods in

acquiring the information as part of their policies of “catching up fast and surpassing”. Moreover, the plausibility nature of this approach makes it harder to catch the perpetrators, especially if they choose to use hackers outside of their official programs, known as cyber militias (Eidman and Scott 2014, 34).

### **Areas of Shared Interests Aimed at Countering U.S. Smart Power Leverage**

As mentioned earlier, Russia and China have not always had a friendly relationship and the past twenty-five years has been focused on rectifying it through upgrading their treaties and collaborations. However there are elements from both sides, especially on the Russian side, that are still wary about closer relations between the countries. But the strategic partnership that they have developed throughout the years and the Russian pivot to Asia illustrates strong interests in collaboration on areas of mutual interests, particularly in countering U.S. smart power leveraging. The use of the term, smart power leveraging in this section is very appropriate since it entails the tactical use of hard and soft power in American policy towards the U.S.-China-Russia triangle. Areas that the Chinese and Russians would like to counter in U.S. smart power capabilities include: economic trade and energy Independence, global financial currency, and power projection in the world.

### **Economic Trade and Energy Independence**

Although China has benefitted greatly from the post-Cold war economic financial system, they have indicated that they prefer not to be dependent on one that is U.S.-dominated (Gabuev 2016). The U.S.-led globalization era that occurred after the Cold War has fuel their economic growth these past two decades and made them the largest manufacturing producer in the world. However the Chinese are looking to create the next round of globalization to be particularly in their favor rather than the U.S. Their “One Belt One Road Project (OBOR) also

known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road projects are aimed at revitalizing the ancient trading routes that link Europe and Asia (Cholpon 2016). This project is intended to create economic trade and transport incentives as well as giving nations with limited access to markets with more exposure and opportunities than they would otherwise not have.

The OBOR initiative is a huge and risky undertaking by the Chinese as it is supposed to cover 60 countries and cost \$890 billion on over 900 projects, including \$40 billion alone on infrastructure for transportation routes that span through western China, Central Asia, Russia, Middle East, and Europe (Cholpon 2016). China is facilitating this through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) but they have been trying to get Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which was set up in 2015 involved, as it would serve as an entry to Russia and Europe, along with a series of free trade zones (Cholpon 2016). This is a deal that is still in the works but is getting more streamlined. China and Russia would benefit greatly from this undertaking as it could make Asia and Eurasia a rising economic powerhouse that could limit U.S. and European hegemony in that region as well. In addition it could totally revamp China's reliance on maritime trade (gas, oil, agricultural goods) by further developing the East (Hsu 2016).

### **Global Financial Currency**

China and Russia have shown their concern over the predominance of the U.S. dollar that has helped fuel the U.S. and world economy as a whole. Other than the stabilization in price, the dollar is the agreed top currency used in business transactions throughout the world. It is especially used in the buying and selling of oil and gas, which are also known as "petrodollars". The Russians have a big problem with this since oil prices tanked shortly after sanctions were placed on them. It's also one of the reasons why the swaps deal did not pan out well for them.

However, China and Russia have been trying to rectify this by doing more deals in the Chinese Renmibi rather than the dollar. In fact China in recent years has been establishing more offshore financial clearing centers in places like New York City, Toronto, Hong Kong, and Moscow in order to popularize the internationalization of their currency (Wong 2016).

### ***Power Projection in the World***

Both Russia and China have shown interests in limiting American influences in places such as Europe, Asia, Middle East and Africa. Russia has done this militarily in both Eastern Europe and the Middle East via operations in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. In addition Russia recently violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in February 2017 which “bans ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 4,400 kilometers” (Kheel 2017). This treaty has been in place since the late 1980s and it represents the Russians ongoing concern of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe as well. (Wolfsthal 2017).

Arms sales have been another area where the Russians and Chinese have tried to effect U.S. power projection. The sale of highly advanced weapons systems to China that otherwise would not have been sold such as the Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) defense system. These can help enforce their Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ) and have tactical leverage over Taiwan and U.S. forces in the Pacific region (Meick 2017).

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In conclusion this author believes there is a high probability that a formal alliance between China and Russia is very likely. The purpose of this paper was to assess if Russia and China's strategic partnership is leading to a formal alliance or if it will just remain a partnership of mutual and singular self interests. After all, the Chinese and Russian relationship has not always worked out well and yet, their relationship has continued to improve tremendously throughout the years. Moreover, agreements and deals that had either been in the works or stalled for several years got streamlined after Russia pivoted to Asia in an attempt to persevere against the harm that Western sanctions and low oil prices had on their economy. However, the Western sanctions were placed on them as a result of the 2014 invasion of Ukraine that led to the annexation of Crimea. Previously in 2008, Russia under Vladimir Putin had orchestrated a similar-styled invasion in Georgia, which illustrates a pattern of testing Western hegemony in the region.

Vladimir Putin has been quoted in saying that his actions were in response to the growing U.S. hegemony in the region. Former Soviet states like Georgia, Estonia, and Ukraine have previously expressed pro-NATO sentiments that have been leaning towards improving security relations with them. Again, Vladimir Putin sees this as a threat to Russian influence in the region, since NATO forces are stationed near the borders. Putin's actions indicates his willingness to defy the west, whether it is exerting hard power, hybrid warfare, or violating agreements such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. His actions are complicated as his country was once a superpower and is now diminished as a result of poorly integrating into the global financial and economic system. Had Russia taken more initiative on this aspect, their economy would have been in better shape to either weather out the sanctions

with less volatility or may not have been in the position in the first place. As a result you have China who is better diversified and economically developed while “Russia remains for the most part a heavily armed petro-state” (Lane 2015).

However Russia and the U.S. have a long history with each other and the lack of trust is abundant between the two. Both sides continue to feel threatened by each other and Russia has centered their foreign policy on it. This paper chose to utilize both the realist theory in international relations and the rational choice theory. Both of them have been helpful in looking at this topic and in viewing it with a realist and rationalist lens. In short this author thinks that Russia is in a similar position that the Ottoman Empire had been in 1914. The Ottomans in the five years prior to entering into the First World War had experienced a highly volatile and damaging period for them. It had shaped and impacted the decisions made by their government and politically they were divided in how to handle the fragile and decaying nature their empire had become. One side wanted to make concessions and preserve what was left of the empire while the other side wanted to focus on regaining lost territories from recent and previous wars.

Russia since the end of the Cold War has had to deal with a similar circumstance and continue to perceive the U.S. as a threat. Their diminished superpower status and lack of soft power projection is not helping them either. Either way Russia in its current circumstances turned to the People’s Republic of China whom they have spent two decades establishing a friendly relationship since they have similar strategic interests, political and authoritarian structures, and sentiments about limiting U.S. soft power projection. China for Russia is in a sense, what the Germans had become for the Ottoman Empire. The relationship is a two-way street as both sides have to make it worth their while. This is why we are seeing numerous deals being streamlined that provide funding, financing, or better access to economic trade,

technology, advanced weapons, and energy deals. Overall China is Russia's best powerful ally for protection and legitimacy abroad and it shows it in their long-term agreements.

Once again this ties into to Ariel Cohen's quote in his 2001 article for the Heritage Foundation, where he wrote, "As one expert pointed, 'Russia is likely to discover that it can no longer manage an equal partnership with China'; Russia will 'likely face a choice between the increasingly close embrace of a more dynamic China and attempting to find regional and global partners to help balance Chinese influence'" (Cohen 2001). At this point it is clear that Russia has chosen China, however, they were not given much choice and it was the logical move for them to play it out. Considering the impact of sanctions and low oil prices on their economy, including the perceived threat of having their sovereignty undermined, it was exactly what the Ottoman government would have done.

A formal alliance between China and Russia is highly probable but whether its profitable for Russia in the long term is still in question. The deals that have been streamlined in the last three years are pertaining to areas that can have a major long term impact on both countries economic growth and power projection as well impact on balance of power in the international system. Increased bilateral trade, energy, and weapons deals will help the Russians in the short term but if they don't develop and diversify their economy, they could become more marginalized if China's Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road projects are a bust.

However, they could still become marginalized if the Silk Road Projects are a success, particularly if the region that consists of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) relies less on Russian leadership and more on China's growing presence via the free trade zones that would be set up in conjunction with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In the mean time the EEU is important to China and they consider it a lot easier to have the Russians control the

region rather than spread Chinese forces out in that part of the region. This ties in very closely to their treaties of friendship that has evolved since the Treaty of Strategic Partnership Coordination in 1996 where they initiated the process of demilitarizing their borders as well as opening them up.

Despite the possibilities of failure in profitability mentioned above, Russia should still be able to benefit greatly from an alliance with China. Their policies correlate in several areas, especially in countering American smart power projection in the region. With that said, Russia will most likely continue strengthening its partnership with China. By doing this they should be able to continue working on new projects and initiatives that help build and diversify their domestic economy as well as enhancing and retaining their great power status. China will continue being the senior partner, which gives them leverage over Russia. However it is the best option the Russians have in an emerging international system that is becoming increasingly competitive and multipolar. That alone is reason enough for a formalized Sino-Russian alliance.

Both countries utilize hybrid warfare strategies but in different regions and they each have different objectives. Their interests do correlate well with each other, which indicates a high potential for collaboration and coordination between the two governments. Also there is great potential of this happening if both sides continue to abide by the treaty agreements mentioned above which deals with the sharing of information, culture, and methods with each other. Perhaps the best way to tell is the level of increases in military collaborations and exercises that may occur down the road. In the mean time it is still a high potential given Moscow's willingness to streamline their partnership with Beijing even if half the reason is for state survival. In addition Beijing's interests to being less dependent on the Western economic system

will lead them more towards Russia and building up their economic and security interests in Asia and Eurasia while still benefitting from economic relations with the West.

### **Future Research**

The U.S.-China-Russia triangle is still evolving and will not end anytime in the near future which is why continued study and monitoring is required. This section will provide the reader, author, and researchers an idea on future areas that may become critical in understanding the changing relationship and power dynamics between these three countries. Also this section aims at providing future research topics that better understand how the Chinese and Russian relationship evolves in the long term as well as their collaborations in various joint ventures both currently and in the future.

### **Economics and Trade**

The Silk Road projects will be crucial to follow, as they will determine the future economic and political strength of the two countries. A lot of money is being poured into the projects and many countries with poor credit ratings are receiving loans by the Chinese government. Moreover the Silk Road projects could have a major impact on U.S. trade, economy and power projection in Asia and Eurasia. This will also be vital for researchers and policy makers when deciding and implementing policies that either respond to China and Russia's collaboration in the Silk Road projects or to counter them with policies that can strengthen the global position of the U.S. and other economically aligned nations.

### **Currency and Finance**

It was mentioned earlier that China and Russia are looking to internationalize the Chinese Renmibi and make the U.S. dollar less predominant. This is seen in the foreign currency and oil markets since the popular currency done to conduct international transactions are in dollars. The

Chinese government has been attempting to popularize their currency by setting up Chinese clearing agents throughout the world as well as loaning money in it rather than using the dollar. These are definitely areas to look at down the road as well as efforts made between the Chinese and Russians in stabilizing the Ruble-Yuan currency. Looking at previous U.S. experiences with having used the gold standard or pegging another country's currency to the U.S. dollar, it will be interesting to see how the Chinese and Russians deal with that in the long term, particularly if complete independence from Western economic structures is the primary goal.

### **Arms Deals**

Continued monitoring of arms deals between the two nations will be vital as determining the level of advanced technology Russia is willing to sell and to whom will be a key indicator. This could lead to an answer that helps determine the extent of the China and Russian relationship as well as looking at the overall impact on strategic repositioning in balance of power via friendly arms deals.

### **Leadership**

Both countries have authoritarian systems, however a change in leadership could go two ways. First it could be a leader who continues the same policy and playbook as the previous leader. Or the new leadership is different and decides to implement new agendas that may counter existing ones. Continued research on the impact of new leadership in each of these countries will be critical.

### **Political and Diplomatic Initiatives**

In regards to the Russian situation with the West, it will be important to monitor political and diplomatic initiatives given by either one of these countries. If talks revolving around ending sanctions occurs it will be interesting to see how the Chinese respond to it as well as other

neighboring states. This also applies to current U.S. and Russian efforts in the Middle East, as better or worse relations will also determine the future position that could either lead to a more formalized alliance or vice versa.

### **Future Collaboration and Coordinated Operations**

Continued observation on how China and Russia collaborates and conducts coordinated operations will be crucial as it could be a sign as to how well-integrated their structures are with each other. Also how they use the collaboration and coordinated operations could be indicators for future policy indicators, especially if they encounter a state like the U.S. on a particular issue like their policies in Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, or the Middle East. In addition looking at these trends to determine efficiency, quickness, and consistency could also be important indicators to study as their relationship progresses.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Sam Kessler earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies and a Minor in Economics at Bradley University in 2003. His senior thesis at the time was on “Russia’s Liberalization Reforms of the 1990s and its Impact in the Next 10-20 Years”. Shortly after graduating from Bradley he moved to New York City and worked with various NGOs accredited with ECOSOC at the United Nations (UN). At the UN he worked on various project initiatives dealing with UN NGO representation, liaising, and project coordination pertaining to various UN conferences and summits in the social, economic, and security fields. A few years later he moved into the private sector and worked as a Legal Compliance Analyst for Millennium Partners, L.P. (now known as Millennium Management, LLC), a global investment management firm. His varied functions at Millennium dealt with anti-money laundering (AML), Know Your Customer (KYC), and financial due diligence as well as risk analysis of new and existing business relationships, and opening and managing new and existing execution brokerage accounts. After a few years working at Millennium he went the entrepreneurial route by starting a freelance business consisting of a combination of business writing, editing, researching, and due diligence services for clients. During this time he moved back to his hometown of Dayton, Ohio to begin the process of enhancing his professional skills and educational background. Since Dayton is a defense hub for the military with Wright Patterson Air Force Base, he enrolled into the 10-week Intelligence Analyst Boot Camp Program at the Advanced Technical Intelligence Center for Human Capital Development (ATIC) in Beavercreek, Ohio, where he received a Certificate in Intelligence Analysis. Instead of going straight to the workforce after the program, one of the ATIC instructors encouraged him to pursue higher education and recommended American Military University (AMU). Since Spring 2015, Sam has been pursuing his masters degree at AMU. Currently Sam is doing a virtual telecommuting internship with the Hudson Institute Center for Political-Military Analysis, a Washington, D.C. think tank, as a Research Intern while finishing grad school. His projects at Hudson deal with researching and analyzing critical and ongoing regional and global security issues pertaining to Eastern Europe, Asia, Middle East, and their impact on U.S. foreign policy, military, and national security. In August 2017, Sam will graduate from American Military University (AMU) with a Master of Arts in National Security Studies with a Concentration in Security and Intelligence Analysis.