

# Moscow, Beijing and Washington: A Complicated Triangle

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*The historical importance of relations between the United States, China and Russia has long been analyzed from the beginning of the Cold War. Often the tone of interactions has determined the global situation. Important information can undoubtedly be gleaned concerning current and future strategies by observing the direction in which the dynamic relations between Moscow, Beijing and Washington are headed.*

For a good part of the Cold War the United States enjoyed a privileged situation that relied on a tempestuous relationship between Moscow and Beijing, especially from the end of the 1960's until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ideological differences, regional conflicts and territorial disputes spanning for decades allowed Washington to occupy the apex of this complicated triangular relationship. It was in this climate that Nixon's memorable visit to China developed in 1972, preceded by months of diplomatic work done by Henry Kissinger. The primary objective of the visit, beyond the dispute over Taiwan and the beginning of a fruitful economic cooperation, was to negotiate an agreement and align strategies against the Soviet Union. To date, there is no unique reason that can explain the collapse of the Soviet Union. But certainly the unenviable position of Moscow, subjected to the combined external pressures of Beijing and Washington, did little to help.



Since 1991, Russia and the PRC have embarked on a long path of reconciliation and reconstruction of bilateral relations based on trust and common interests. During the first post-Soviet decade, the triangular relationship between the powers saw strong cooperation and few episodes of conflict. It was during this period that the Chinese began to power up their economic engine, reaching what it is now. In particular, trade between Washington and Beijing skyrocketed, going from a few billion dollars in 1990 to a hundred billion dollars per annum in the early 2000's. At the same time, Russia and the United States were experiencing their most agreeable period in history, thanks to Gorbachev and Yeltsin selling out Russia, bowing to western wishes to exploit the Russian Federation. It was during this embryonic phase that the trilateral relationship between the three powers began to crack. The level of poverty, decline, misery and humiliation suffered in the former Soviet Union, especially in Russia, compelled the Kremlin to appoint a young Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister, and then President, of the Russian Federation.

## The apex of the triangle

Events on September 11, 2001 were the main driver for the adoption of a US global interventionist policy. Under the pretext of the infamous war on terror, every corner of the globe became open to attack, any perceived threat assuming a strategic priority to be

addressed. As can be imagined, with such stated objectives, the next 15 years led to a progressive loss of stability and sense of security for both China and Russia. In particular, NATO expansion towards Russia's borders, flaring up in the 2008 war with Georgia, marked the beginning of a direct action to attack the Eurasian superpower. Simultaneously in Southeast Asia, diplomatic action, increasingly expressed in military terms, led Beijing to demonstrate a more determined posture on matters concerning the definition and defense of its maritime boundaries.

In spite of the rising tensions, it was only in the recent 24-36 months that the situation took a dramatic turn. The events in Ukraine radically damaged relations between Moscow and Washington, and the affair concerning Crimea permanently changed the delicate balance in the triangular relationship between China, Russia and the United States. Specifically, it is important to observe the development of events from the coup in Ukraine, namely, international sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States on Russia forced Moscow to make a long-awaited strategic turn to the east.

Immediately, vital trade agreements that had been lingering for 20 years awaiting approval were agreed to in a matter of weeks, thanks to the sudden motivation of Moscow and Beijing. Even military technology exchanges have overcome the historical mistrust between Moscow and Beijing, delivering a huge blow to American hegemonic aspirations. The last 15 years have seen a gradual but inexorable strategic rapprochement between China and Russia, the inadvertent result of Washington's perpetual bullying. The paradoxical result of this continuous bullying has been Moscow's turning to the east, resulting in Sino-Russian cooperation that effectively serves to place the United States in a weaker position with respect to both.

The privileged position held for decades by the United States has gradually evaporated, vanishing completely.

## Beijing is the new vertex

In spite of all this, the People's Republic and the United States continued to increase their trade, reaching a staggering five hundred billion dollars per annum in 2015. The insistence with which Washington has tried in every way – initially with the Asian crisis of 1997, then with strong pressure on regional allies (Japan and India in particular) to contain the economic growth of China – has ended up putting Washington in a disadvantageous position. A similar situation was seen with the same attitude pursued by NATO and the European Union of advancing towards Russia's borders. The reunification of Crimea and the militarization of the 'Spratly Islands' are just two emblematic examples of what consequences American policies can lead to and how unproductive they can end up being for Washington.

The aspirations to global dominance of the American deep state have resulted in pushing China and Russia to adopt a comprehensive shared strategy in which they place at the center of their relations common interests rather than differences. Historical mistrust is a thing of the past, with the absence of ideological difference no longer providing a hindrance to mutual cooperation that pervades all areas. The weaknesses of the two nations was transformed into a strength through mutual all-around support.

A good example can be seen in the need for Russia to attract fresh capital, following the application of illegal international sanctions, and the equally important need for China to

have rich agricultural lands to cultivate. Recent studies show that Siberia has probably the most fertile lands in the world. Both Moscow and Beijing needed to correct respective strategic deficits: food independence in the case of China, and foreign investment in the case of Russia. The combination of these needs fostered a fruitful collaboration that allowed them to quickly solve their issues: Chinese companies received long Siberian land concessions in exchange for huge capital. Further developments of this agricultural strategy will be interesting to follow in the near future.

Equally obvious is the aspiration of China and Russia to become international brokers, organizing and bringing together different countries within frameworks such as BRICS, SCO and AIIB. Although differing in purpose, membership and methods of action, it is the principle that unites all these organizations led by Moscow and Beijing. Stability, economic prosperity, cooperation and security are the four pillars on which these new global alliances are being built.



The Carnegie Endowment explains the strategic balance (especially nuclear) among the three powers, with an asymmetrical relationship between China and the US, a symmetrical one between Russia and the United States, and latent one between China and Russia.

### The tragedy for the United States seems interminable

Although the global economic system is dominated by the dollar, benefiting only Washington, recent pushes towards the internationalization of the yuan (the IMF Basket and ASEAN), and trade exchanges between China and Russia that increasingly tend not to be conducted in dollars, explain the future trend of global currencies. The supremacy of the dollar depends mainly on its use in the oil trade, forcing countries to accumulate American money as a reserve currency in order to operate in the international markets. With the United States leading and imposing its international economic architecture, it is easy to understand the reasons behind the visits of Putin and Xi to Iran, and the even more significant visit of the Chinese leader to Saudi Arabia in recent months.

The maneuvers towards de-dollarization are already being conducted. This for Washington is an existential threat that can hardly be ignored. Equally improbable is the possibility of America halting this drift. The American policy over the past fifteen years has forged unexpected agreements between the Russian Federation and the Republic of China that will end up in benefiting global stability. The failure of the global hegemonic aspirations of Washington, and of the strategies adopted against China and Russia, have ended up isolating the United States rather than Moscow and Beijing. The tragedy for the United States seems interminable

The hysteria that has plunged the American oligarchy has produced devastating results in America. Donald Trump and his strategy to accelerate the withdrawal of the US from the world stage in favor of a domestic recovery has had an unexpected success and could be the last chance to save the American empire from a future collapse. We could even almost overdo it and go further by stating that a Clinton presidency would transform the understanding between Moscow and Beijing, raising it to hitherto unseen levels, permanently isolating Washington.

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