



U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC AND SECURITY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Hearing on “An Emerging China-Russia Axis? Implications for the United States in an Era of Strategic Competition”

**Opening Statement of Commissioner Roy Kamphausen
March 21, 2019
Washington, DC**

Good morning, and welcome to the third hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission’s 2019 Annual Report cycle. Thank you all for joining us. Today, our hearing will examine the growing alignment between China and Russia and the implications of their closer relationship for the United States and our allies and partners.

Beijing and Moscow share a complicated history as neighboring rivals. Since World War II, bilateral ties have swung dramatically from alliance in the early Cold War period to open conflict two decades later, settling now to a more stable relationship.

In order to understand the state of Sino-Russian ties today, it is thus useful to first briefly recount the history of the relationship.

In the first decade after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Beijing and Moscow maintained an alliance based on common ideology and a shared perceived threat from the United States and her democratic allies. During this time, the two provided massive assistance to revolutionary regimes across Asia, ultimately resulting in violent confrontation with the United States during the Korean War.

Between 1956 and 1962, however, the Sino-Soviet alliance deteriorated due to political and ideological differences, including over leadership of the worldwide Communist movement and over how to interact with the United States and the West. Known as the Sino-Soviet split, this was arguably the most crucial strategic development of the Cold War period, even if not well-appreciated in the West at the time. The downturn in bilateral relations culminated in a series of armed border skirmishes in 1969 that resulted in hundreds of deaths, and nearly led to nuclear war between the erstwhile allies. The collapse of the Sino-Soviet relationship created the strategic opportunity that President Nixon seized in 1972 to pursue normalization of bilateral relations between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China.

The severely strained Sino-Soviet relationship never recovered. It was not until after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 that the new and ostensibly democratic Russian Federation and a China weakened by the post-Tiananmen Square Massacre fallout took constructive steps to restore normal bilateral relations. In 2001, Beijing and Moscow signed a 20-year friendship treaty that helped the two sides shelve differences and expand cooperation. Notably, the two countries also finally settled their lingering border dispute, resolving a longstanding strain in the relationship.

Since then, three key developments have accelerated the growing alignment between China and Russia:

First, the 2008 global financial crisis created a strategic opportunity for Beijing and Moscow, in light of their common perception of U.S. decline and the dangers of overreliance on the West, to deepen cooperation. As European banks were unable to bail out major Russian energy firms in financial trouble, Chinese lenders stepped in to provide these companies long-term loans, fostering growing energy ties.

Second, the rise to power of Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2012–13 and return to office of Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2012 invigorated China and Russia’s growing alignment. The authoritarian tendencies and shared world views of the two leaders have helped improve bilateral coordination while managing differences.

Finally, Western sanctions on Russia after its 2014 annexation of Crimea led Moscow, which became increasingly isolated from the United States and the West, to significantly strengthen its engagement with Beijing.

It is clear that China and Russia have overcome a difficult past to build the mutually beneficial relationship they have today. Their growing cooperation has important implications for the United States, and this is what we want to come to grips with during our hearing.

To our witnesses, thank you for being here to share your insights on the China-Russia relationship. I look forward to hearing from each of you. I would also like to thank the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for securing this room for our use today. I will now turn the floor over to my colleague and co-chair for this hearing, Chairman Bartholomew.