A transformation has occurred along China’s Russian and Central Asian border (see Figure 1). From Vladivostok to Dushanbe, the focus of Chinese policy has shifted from maintaining military readiness and deterrence to expanding trade and cooperation. Beijing and Moscow have dramatically reduced political and military tension between their two countries. Despite initial misgivings, China also enjoys friendly relations with the newly independent states of Central Asia. Improved relations between China and countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) on its border extend beyond simply addressing long-standing border disputes. Trade links have expanded steadily over the past decade; Russia and countries of Central Asia are poised to become major suppliers of energy resources for China’s growing economy. Also, Russia has provided China with a wide array of advanced weapons systems through a series of arms sales, and Moscow and Beijing have recently trumpeted a new “strategic partnership” aimed at hastening the emergence of a truly multipolar world system.

This report examines the foundation of China’s policies toward Russia and the five republics of Central Asia, identifies what combination of issues and environmental conditions is likely to shape their evolution, and assesses the policies’ potential impact on regional or global U.S. interests.

Chapter Two addresses the question of why China has improved its relations with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It describes the evolution of Sino-Russian and Sino-Central Asian relations since the fall of the Soviet
Chinese Policy Toward Russia and the Central Asian Republics

Figure 1—Asia

Union and the goals of Chinese policies toward these countries. The purpose is to highlight the wide range of issues and interests that drive Chinese policy toward these countries.

Chapters Three and Four examine the prospects for Sino-Russian and Sino-Central Asian relations, respectively. A number of factors, many of which are beyond Beijing’s control, will affect how China’s relationships with these countries will evolve. These chapters identify some of the primary issues that will determine whether Sino-Russian strategic relations will grow closer and the extent to which China’s influence in Central Asia is likely to expand.

Lastly, Chapter Five discusses how the development of Sino-Russian and Sino-Central Asian relations might affect U.S. interests. To what extent does the Sino-Russian strategic partnership threaten U.S. in-
terests? Does China's expanding role in Central Asia work against American policy goals in the region? This chapter examines the nature and limits of the threat these developments pose to U.S. interests.