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**“One Island, Two Countries”:
A Sino–Russian Bordering Disputed Space**

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A large delta between the Ussuri and Amur rivers is world famous for the seabed that was the source of serious challenges in Sino–Russian relations for centuries. The delta, almost 350 square

kilometers and near Khabarovsk, a capital city of the Russian Far East, is called Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii in Russian and Heixiazi in Chinese. The delta that had been occupied by Russia since 1929 hindered Sino–Soviet negotiations on border delimitation during the 1960s by China's strong claim on the delta. It finally triggered the Zhenbao/ Damanskii military clash in 1969.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, negotiations on border delimitation were resumed under Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev. Talks continued in a constructive way to overcome the past deadlock, but again the delta issue disturbed it. China and Russia agreed to disagree in the process and excluded the delta from the 1991 Sino–Soviet eastern boundary agreement and shelved it for future negotiations.

The deal on the delta in November 2004 between Hu Jintao and Vladimir Putin shook the world, however. Few expected a sudden solution to the most difficult challenges in the history of the Sino–Russian borderlands. The method for the solution sounded more provocative than the solution per se — dividing the disputed islands in half. This aroused many questions: How would they divide the space? Would they manage “one island” separately or jointly?

As for the future of the divided islands, it remains uncertain. Historical lessons on the Sino–Russian trans-border cooperation generally do not suggest a bright outlook for the divided spaces. For Russia and China, the border has not been a “tool” for cooperation between neighbors, rather, a kind of “fort” against a potential aggressor. Securing the border directly relates to security while economic benefit is often a secondary concern.

China and Russia officially “promote” the delta's outlook of “One Island, Two Countries,” but the details have yet to be apparent. Will the project really go beyond the limitation of the current Sino–Russian cooperation? Could they manage a space divided after the border solution? The paper investigates the realities on the ground using local resources and the latest field research.