



**China-Russia Relations:
Tales of Two Parades, Two Drills, and Two Summits***

Yu Bin
Wittenberg University

In contrast to the inactivity in Sino-Russian relations in the first four months of the year, strategic interactions went into high gear in mid-year. It started on May 8 with the largest military parade in post-Soviet Russia for the 70th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War and ended on Sept. 3 when China staged its first-ever Victory Day parade for the 70th anniversary of its war of resistance against Japan's invasion of China. In between, the Russian and Chinese navies held two exercises: *Joint-Sea 2015 (I)* in May in the Mediterranean and *Joint Sea-2015 (II)* in the Sea of Japan in August. In between the two exercises, the Russian city of Ufa hosted the annual summits of the SCO and BRICS, two multilateral forums sponsored and managed by Beijing and Moscow outside Western institutions. For all of these activities, Chinese media described Sino-Russian relations as "[For Amity, Not Alliance.](#)"

Moscow's Victory Day parade

President Xi Jinping's Moscow visit from May 8-10 was part of his three-country tour of Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus. The focal point of the Moscow stop was to join in the victory commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War, Russia's name for World War II, and to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin. In the absence of Western leaders and military units (in 2010, US, UK, France, Ukraine, and Poland all sent military representatives to join the parade), who were boycotting the event to protest Russia's takeover of Crimea, Xi was the most prominent among foreign dignitaries. In the words of Moscow's *Lenta.ru*, Xi was "the most influential foreign leader to come to Moscow for the Victory Parade." This was Xi's fourth trip to Russia and his 11th meeting with Putin since their first meeting in early 2013 when Xi became China's head of state.

After their talks on May 8, the two leaders signed a "Joint Statement on the Development of Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Interaction and Mutually Profitable Cooperation," which pledged to remember history, strengthen practical cooperation, and closely coordinate in foreign policy areas. The bulk of the statement (about 70 percent) was about foreign policy and international issues, including Korea, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, anti-terror efforts, missile defense systems, outer-space, the environment, cyber security, SCO, BRICS, G20, UN, APEC, and trilateral forums such as Russia-China-India and Russia-China-Mongolia. The document was by far the most foreign policy-focused document by top leaders of the two countries. This did not mean they ignored other issues. It was, however, indicative of a growing

* This article is extracted from [Comparative Connections](#): A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sept. 2015. Preferred citation: Yu Bin, "Russia-China Relations: Tales of Two Parades, Two Drills, and Two Summits," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sept. 2015, pp. 147-162.

sense of urgency for coordination in foreign and security policy areas as both Moscow and Beijing were facing pressure from Washington (in Ukraine and the South China Sea).

Xi's visit was well featured in Russia's public space. In a documentary entitled "Russia and China: The Heart of Eurasia" shown on the *Rossiya 1* television station, President Putin described relations between Russia and China as "trustful" saying, "Relations between our countries have reached a very high level, which we often call unprecedented. First and foremost, this has become possible because we have managed to secure a very high level of trust in our relations.... The interests of our states coincide in most areas and form the core of our relationship today," and that included the UN, SCO and BRICS. He went to say that "We are not building any alliances directed against anyone else. This is our principle. We are not establishing any inaccessible blocs. It is just the joint work of states with common interests."

Xi's attendance at Russia's Victory Day military parade followed former Chinese presidents, including Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who joined similar events in Moscow. Russia has held a parade to celebrate the event every five years since 1995 (Russia canceled the event after the Soviet collapse but resumed following public requests). This year was the first time a PLA honor guard participated. It was also the largest parade since the end of the Soviet era with about 16,000 Russian troops, 194 military vehicles, and 143 aircraft taking part, including some cutting-edge weapons such as the next-generation *Armata T-14* tank. The 112-member PLA honor guard unit was the largest foreign contingent, which included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, India, Serbia, Armenia, and Belarus.

Curiously, Russia's military parade was not broadcast live by Chinese TV. It was unclear if China tried to avoid being "too intimate with Russia" at the expense of its relations with the West, as claimed by Shi Yinhong, an authoritative foreign policy specialist in Beijing. China, however, has never provided full coverage of a foreign military parade in the past. Moreover, China would do its own victory day parade in September. Regardless, both Russia and China attached great importance to their respective 70th anniversary commemoration ceremonies. Xi's participation in the Moscow parade on May 9 would be reciprocated by Putin on Sept. 3, which is China's Victory Day for World War II designated by the then Nationalist government in 1945, a day after Japan signed its unconditional surrender to the allied forces, including China, aboard the *USS Missouri* on Sept. 2, 1945.

The importance of WWII in China and Russia's collective memory is not only for ceremonial purposes in the 21st century as both countries have carried a heavy burden of the past. "In this war, our countries suffered the greatest losses," Putin said at a joint news conference with Xi immediately after their talks on May 8. Between 1941 and 1945, 26.6 million Russians died, including 11 million military deaths. 12.7 percent of the Russian population perished during the war, which was surpassed only by Ukraine (16.3 percent) and Belarus (25 percent). In contrast, the UK lost 450,000 people, which was less than 1 percent of its population, France lost 550,000 of its citizens, or 1.35 percent of its population, and the US suffered 420,000 dead, or .32 percent of its population. "That's why we consistently oppose any attempts to rehabilitate Nazism and militarism, and why we oppose the falsification of history," Putin added in his Victory Day speech. An estimated 300,000 people walked through Red Square holding portraits of relatives who fought in the war. Putin joined them with a photo of his father, a navy veteran.

In its 14-year war with Japan, China suffered 35 million casualties, including 20 million deaths; most of them civilians because of large-scale atrocities committed by Japanese troops. Japan's war in China also caused \$500 billion in direct property loss, which effectively ended China's second effort to modernize itself after the Opium War of the 1840s.

The Soviet air squadrons – more than 2,000 Russian pilots and 1,000 aircraft – joined the war in China in 1937, four years before the US “Flying Tigers” launched their first air battles in China in December 1941. More than 200 Russian pilots died in China. After the Soviet Union declared war against Japan in August 1945, 1.7 million Red Army members entered China's northeast and wiped out nearly 700,000 Japanese Kwantung Army forces in three weeks; nearly 10,000 Soviets died in the last few weeks of WWII.

In China's war against Japan's aggression, “the Soviet Union provided valuable political and humanitarian support to China as well as large quantities of supplies and equipment for the Chinese people,” Xi noted in a signed article carried by the state-run newspaper *Russian Gazette* a day before he arrived in Russia. “If we lost the memory of our past, our mind and soul would be lost in the darkness,” Xi quoted Russian historian Vasily Klyuchevsky. In his speech at the Victory Day parade, President Putin said, “I extend my gratitude to the representatives of the countries that fought Nazism and Japanese militarism.” It was quite unusual for Putin to mention Nazism and Japanese militarism in the same sentence, which was a clear sign of Russia's support for Beijing's view of WWII history. Normally, top Russian officials only mention “fascism” in the context of WWII commemorations as Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev did after the 11th round of Russian-Chinese consultations on strategic security with Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi on May 25 in Moscow. Including Japan was also an apparent snub of Japan for joining US-led economic sanctions against Russia over the conflict in Ukraine.

In Moscow, Xi also met 18 Russian veterans who fought on the battlefields of Northeast China and in Russia's Great Patriotic War, as well as several Russian experts who contributed to the early development of the People's Republic of China.

Integrating Silk Road and EEU? Not too fast

Following their talks, Putin and Xi presided over a signing ceremony of 32 accords worth \$25 billion, including agreements on a \$6 billion loan for the 770-km Moscow-Kazan high-speed rail, to deliver to China of 30 billion cm of gas per year for 30 years via the so-called Western route pipeline, a \$3 billion leasing operation to sell 100 Russian medium-haul, Sukhoi-made *SuperJet-100* passenger planes over three years in China and Southeast Asia, a \$2 billion fund to invest in agricultural projects in the two countries, the integration of Russian Glonass and Chinese Bei Dou satellite navigation systems, gold mining, and R&D for the next generation of heavy helicopters.

The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road initiative – commonly known as China's “Belt and Road Initiative” – was high on Xi's agenda throughout his trip. Indeed, Xi's trip to Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus was almost a blueprint of China's design for integrating the Eurasian economies through large transportation and infrastructural projects.

Nearly 90 deals were signed during Xi's visit to these three "Silk Road" nations in areas including trade, energy, space, finance, investment, and infrastructure. Since the inception of the Silk Road initiative in September 2013, China has earmarked \$40 billion to support infrastructure projects along both the land and sea routes. Trade between China and nations along the Belt and Road has already reached \$1.12 trillion in 2014, and China hopes it will surpass \$2.5 trillion in a decade.

Until recently, Russian officials have treated China's Belt and Road project with skepticism and even hostility lest it undermine Russia's traditional control in Central Asia. Many current and potential members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) trade bloc are located along the old Silk Road between China and Europe. The signing of the "Joint Declaration of the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China and the Eurasian Economic Commission Regarding Launching an Economic Partnership Agreement between China and the Eurasian Economic Union" appeared to be a major departure from Russia's guarded posture. Because of Western sanctions, Russia's financial-economic policy bloc has begun realizing that China's Silk Road program is "entirely compatible with Russia's interests," reported Moscow *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in mid-May. The two sides agreed to create a dialogue mechanism for integrating China's Road & Belt with Russia's EEU. The goal is to start exploring the possibility, and perhaps the limits, of closer "cooperation" between the two mechanisms.

The issue seemed to assume some urgency during Xi's stay in Moscow. Immediately after the Putin-Xi talks, Chinese Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng and Russia's Eurasian Economic Commission Trade Minister Andrey Slepnev met and discussed issues relating to the possible cooperation between China's Silk Road and Russia's EEU. Citing a "broad consensus on jointly building the 'Silk Road' Economic Belt and cooperating on Eurasian economic integration" between Putin and Xi, Gao was quoted as saying that "China is a major trading partner for each EEU member state," and "the two sides must establish a systemic arrangement for trade facilitation through this agreement, and eventually establish a free trade zone." Slepnev appeared less enthusiastic about the idea of establishing a free trade zone. Instead, he emphasized creating "a solid foundation" for the establishment of a free trade zone with China "in the future." Slepnev did not spell out how much time was needed to create such a foundation and how "solid" it should be. The signed joint statement pledged eight measures to facilitate and expand cooperation in the areas of economics, investment, transportation, and finance. Some in Russia, however, anticipated a 10-15 year process for a possible free trade zone between the EEU and Silk Road, if it is desirable by both sides.

Military relations

President Xi was accompanied on his visit to Moscow by Gen. Fan Changlong, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which was the first time a CMC vice chairman had accompanied a Chinese president on a foreign trip during the reform decades. In 1957, Mao Zedong brought Defense Minister and Vice Premier Peng Dehuai to Moscow. Prior to attending a military parade, Mao reportedly told Peng to carefully observe Soviet equipment and then identify any equipment that China should purchase. The Russia-China military relationship today is far broader and deeper than the early days of the People's Republic. Some recent, and more sophisticated, Russian military technologies, however, still attract the PLA.

After Xi departed Russia on May 10, Fan stayed on for a bilateral meeting with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. Afterward, Fan and his party were invited to visit Russia's new National Defense Management Center that became operational at the end of 2014; they were given "a detailed description of the center's function's and goals."

One of Fan's missions in Moscow was to follow up with issues of "military-technical cooperation," which was an area of "special attention" in the Putin-Xi talks on May 8. Fan's party included Gen. Yi Xiaoguang, deputy chief of general staff of the PLA, and Wang Li, vice director of the PLA General Armaments Department. "We intend to expand it [military-technical cooperation] consistently. This area of collaboration has an important place in the complex of Russian-Chinese relations," Defense Minister Shoigu was quoted as saying. Prior to Xi's visit, Russia and China had been negotiating several large arms transfers including the purchase of 24 *Sukhoi-35* multirole fighter jets, six *S-400* anti-aircraft missile systems, and some fifth-generation *Kalina*-class conventional submarines. The first two items had been finalized making China the first foreign buyer of Russia's most sophisticated air defense system. Chinese sources indicated that the *Su-35s* were scheduled to be delivered to China in 2017.

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoliy Antonov told the media that cooperation with China aimed to "increase joint potential to counter new challenges and threats," adding that the two countries "shared" positions on "challenges and threats." He noted the "need to restructure the current world order, move away from double standards and strengthen equal and mutually advantageous relations in the world."

Two naval drills: from Mediterranean to the Sea of Japan

A week after Xi's visit to Russia in early May, Chinese and Russian warships conducted the first of two joint exercises in 2015 code-named *Joint-Sea 2015 (I)* in the Mediterranean Sea. A second exercise was held in the Sea of Japan in late August. In the past few years, China and Russia have normally held one naval exercise per year. The Mediterranean exercise was described as the first stage of the same exercise. The vast distance between their locations and the three-month interval, however, do not seem to support such a characterization.

In the Mediterranean phase, three PLAN ships drilled with six Russian ships. These ships were about 10,000 km from their home ports in China and the exercise area was the farthest removed joint exercise of the PLAN. The Chinese ships did not sail directly from their home ports but from the Gulf of Aden after their UN-authorized anti-piracy missions there. The three Chinese vessels (guided missile frigates *Linyi* and *Weifang*, and supply ship *Weishanhu*) first entered the Black Sea and called at Novorossiysk, where they took part in the local Victory Day celebrations on May 9. After that went to the Mediterranean where they joined six Russian naval ships (guided-missile cruiser *Moskva*, frigate *Ladny*, landing ships *Alexander Shabalin* and *Alexander Otrakovsky*, hoverborne guided missile corvette *Samum* and tugboat *MB-31*) to practice navigation safety, at-sea replenishment, escort missions, night-time maneuvering, anti-frogmen, anti-submarine, air defense, and anti-ship missile simulation exercises.

The exercise was jointly led by Russian Navy Vice Adm. Aleksandr Fedotenkov and Deputy Commander of the PLAN Vice Adm. Du Jingchen. A key feature of the exercise was joint command, control and communication. Since the warships were divided into mixed tactic combat groups during the exercises, both the “blue” and “red” teams had vessels from both countries. Liaison officers were assigned to each other’s ships to facilitate communication and operation during the exercise. The anti-submarine and air defense simulations required both navies to share their radar and sonar data, which displayed “a high level of trust between the two countries,” said Zhang Junshe, a research fellow at the Chinese Naval Research Institute.

Three months after the Mediterranean exercise, the navies staged the second phase of their *Joint Sea-2015* on Aug. 19-28 in the Peter the Great Gulf and areas off the coast of the Clerk Cape, as well as in the airspace above and waters of the Sea of Japan. A total of 23 surface vessels, two submarines, 15 fixed-wing aircraft, two unmanned aerial vehicles, eight ship-borne helicopters, 30 pieces of amphibious equipment and 200 marines participated in the drill. The Russian Navy sent 16 surface ships, two submarines, nine units of amphibious equipment, and 200 marines for the drills. The Chinese forces included seven surface vessels and six shipborne helicopters from the Navy, five fixed-wing aircraft from the Air Force, 200 marines, and 21 amphibious units.

The theme of the second phase of the exercise was “joint assurance of sea traffic and joint landing activities.” The drills focused on improving anti-submarine combat, joint air defense, joint anti-ship, and other relevant missions. A joint beach landing of troops was also part of the exercise, which was the first time for the two militaries. The two navies again integrated their forces including for the amphibious landing.

*

The two *Joint Sea* exercises in 2015 were not the largest joint naval drill between the Chinese and Russian navies. The 2012 *Joint-Sea* exercise in waters near Qingdao, which started the series, involved 25 warships, 13 planes and nine helicopters. This was followed by *Joint-Sea 2013* on July 5-12, 2013 near Peter the Great Gulf. A total of 19 vessels, eight airplanes, and two Special Forces teams participated. The maneuvers focused on joint air defense, escorts, and maritime search and rescue operations. *Joint-Sea 2014* was held on May 20-26, 2014 in the northern part of the East China Sea with 14 warships, two submarines, nine airplanes, and six helicopters. Prior to the *Joint-Sea* series, the two navies drilled together in the *Peace Mission 2005* exercises within the SCO framework on Aug. 18-25, 2005. Some 10,000 ground troops, ships and warplanes participated. It started in Vladivostok and moved to the Shandong Peninsula and nearby waters.

The two *Joint-Sea* drills in 2015 were certainly the longest of all naval drills since 2012 – 10 days for phase I and nine days for phase II. The longer duration of both exercises means more items were practiced. Closer interoperability was also prioritized. For the PLAN, the *Joint-Sea* series is perhaps the only opportunity to learn from a major navy. PLA sources indicated that the PLAN has quickly narrowed gaps in equipment and human quality with Russia. In some areas, particularly in gunnery precision, Chinese sailors outperformed their foreign counterparts.

In retrospect, the degree of interoperability of the Chinese and Russian navies reached a new height during the *Joint-Sea 2015(I)*, as the ships were mixed in the “blue” and “red” teams. In the anti-submarine drills, the blue team was given no prior warning and notification. These

features were still far behind the scope and degree of interoperability of the US-led drills. In comparison to separate formations and operations with limited communication and intelligence sharing in previous drills, however, *Joint-Sea 2015* was a considerable improvement.

Joint-Sea 2015(I) was not the first PLAN presence in the Mediterranean and its surrounding waters. The PLAN began expanding its reach toward the Mediterranean in 2008, when it first sent ships to join the UN-authorized anti-piracy patrols. In 2011, China evacuated 35,000 citizens from Libya during its civil war. This was followed by another effort in 2013 when it joined Russia in sending warships to Syria to escort ships carrying Syrian chemical weapons through waterways close to the Mediterranean Sea. In April 2015, China dispatched three ships from its anti-piracy patrols to evacuate Chinese citizens and other foreign nationals from fighting in Yemen. China's growing "space of interest" is often cited as justification for the PLAN's drill in the Mediterranean. PLAN analyst Li Jie (李杰), for example, described the Mediterranean as "an important linkage for China's "maritime Silk Road" route through the Strait of Malacca, Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean to Europe." The Mediterranean exercise would allow the PLAN to better understand the conditions in those waters for future tasks of anti-terror, anti-piracy, and emergency evacuation of Chinese nationals from these places.

The choices of the exercise areas – the Mediterranean and the Sea of Japan – were widely perceived as sensitive to the West and Japan, hence the wide speculation about alliance-building propensity of Moscow and Beijing. China claimed the choice of the Mediterranean was made by Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which chose the exercise area. China's Defense Ministry stated that the aim of the drill was to deepen "friendly and practical cooperation" and increase the two navies' abilities to jointly deal with maritime security threats. Both China and Russia denied, as they usually do, that their naval drills were targeted at any third party. "We have to stress that these exercises are not aimed at any third party and have nothing to do with the regional situation," China's Defense Ministry spokesman said at a monthly news briefing. China's naval presence in the backyard of NATO nations at the height of West's sanctions against Russia, however, was, in effect, support for Russia admitted Gao Chen, a senior scholar in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Russian media were more forthcoming in this regard. "A Beijing-Moscow strategic line is coming into being before our very eyes," claimed Moscow *Rossiya 1* Television. "The USA creates problems for Russia in the west, so we go east. The USA restricts China's advancement in Southeast Asia and sets China against Japan, so China goes west, and here we meet," the report said. "China and Russia have their own strategic interests in the Mediterranean Sea. Russia's intended military presence in Europe has been restricted by NATO. Its expanding reach into the Mediterranean will in return create pressure for the US and NATO and will help Russia keep its hold of Crimea," said Su Hao, director of the Asia-Pacific Research Center of the China Foreign Affairs University.

No one in either China or Russia has offered a convincing explanation for conducting two *Joint Sea* drills in 2015. The timing of the two drills, however, suggests that the two phases were close to the Victory Day parades in Russia and China. Phase I drills in the Mediterranean were kicked off only two days after Russia's Red Square military parade, and phase II in the Sea of Japan was just a few days before China's military parade in Beijing in late August. Perhaps China and Russia were hoping to use the joint drills as part of the efforts to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, but no one said it.

SCO and BRICS Summits, and more...

Between the two naval drills, the Russian city of Ufa hosted the summits of the BRICS and SCO on July 9-10, two major multilateral organizations created and dominated by Russia and China. Despite considerable overlap in membership, it was the first time since their inceptions that the two annual gatherings of heads of state (SCO's 15th and BRICS' 7th) were held together. Since 2015 was Russia's turn to host these summits, perhaps it made sense to combine the two meetings for the sake of efficiency. What differentiated the Ufa Summit from previous ones, however, was an informal SCO-BRICS-EEU (the Eurasian Economic Union) gathering on July 9 of all participating heads of state at the two formal summits. Of the 20 heads of state present in Ufa, Putin was the only one who was at the heart of all three regional and multilateral groupings of the SCO, BRICS, and EEU.

Overlapping Membership: SCO, BRICS & EEU

Countries	SCO	BRICS	EEU
Afghanistan	<i>O</i>		
Armenia	<i>Dp</i>		*
Azerbaijan	<i>Dp</i>		
Belarus	<i>O</i>		*
Brazil		*	
Cambodia	<i>Dp</i>		
China	*	*	
India	^	*	
Iran	<i>O</i>		
Kazakhstan	*		*
Kyrgyzstan	*		*
Mongolia	<i>O</i>		
Nepal	<i>Dp</i>		
Pakistan	^		
Russia	*	*	*
South Africa		*	
Sri Lanka	<i>Dp</i>		
Tajikistan	*		
Turkey	<i>Dp</i>		
Uzbekistan	*		

^ SCO Acceding States

O SCO Observer States

dp SCO Dialogue Partners

In light of the Western sanctions following Russia's Crimea seizure and its Ukraine policy, this summitry was a timely reminder of Russia's diplomatic clout in the world, particularly outside the West. The choice of Ufa as the site of the two summits also highlighted Russia's national identity as a Eurasian power between, and encompassing, the East and West. For the combined summits in Ufa, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was quoted as saying that the arrangement

was “what happened but not accidental (是偶遇, 但不偶然).” Exactly what Wang meant is anybody’s guess. Russia was certainly maximizing this diplomatic opportunity to bolster its image at a time of tension with the West.

“Different historical, cultural and religious traditions and socioeconomic systems typical for us do not separate us but, on the contrary, help us build a fair and comprehensive partnership model capable of ensuring stable global governance in the 21st century,” Putin said in his opening statement of the informal trilateral meeting. His talk about global governance was perhaps not purely rhetorical. The SCO occupies 60 percent of the Eurasian landmass and a quarter of the world’s population. BRICS nations have 42 percent of the world’s population, 26 percent of the land, and 27 percent of the world’s GDP. Despite some overlapping membership, the combined power and space of the three groups in the global power matrix deserve the attention of others.

Regardless of what Putin did to amplify the Ufa gathering, the substance of the combined summits was more important. The two largest multilateral groups administered by Moscow and Beijing made significant strides in institution building in Ufa. The two summits started with the BRICS, which elevated the cooperation of the five non-Western economies onto a new level in two specific areas. One was the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) with \$100 billion as initial capital and a \$100 billion Contingent Reserves Arrangement (CRA); the two financial instruments operate outside the existing international institutions of the IMF, World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which are dominated by the West and Japan. Prior to the Ufa summit, the Board of Governors of the NDB held its inaugural meeting and K.V. Kamath (Indian), former Chairman of ICICI Bank and Infosys Ltd., was chosen as NDB’s president for a five-year term. With its new office, which started operations in May in Lujiazui, the financial district of Shanghai, the NDB is set to process and approve its inaugural investment projects in late 2015 or early 2016.

While launching its new financial infrastructure, BRICS nations were also exploring new areas of cooperation in non-economic areas. Under the Russian chair prior to the Ufa Summit in 2015, BRICS held numerous mid-ranking official and expert-level workshops, conferences, and consultations in the areas of drug trafficking (Moscow, April 20 & 22), the environment (Moscow, April 21-22), foreign policy dialogue (Moscow, May 15), outer space (Moscow, May 20), think tanks council (Moscow, May 21), the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa (Moscow, May 22), national security advisors (Moscow, May 26), health ministers (Geneva, May 26), parliamentary forum (Moscow, June 8), cultural ministers (Moscow, June 16-17), cyber and information security (June 16-18), disease control (Moscow, June 23-24), civil BRICS (Moscow, June 28-July 1), youth affairs (Kazan, July 4), youth summit (Kazan July 4-7). After the Ufa Summit, a total of 26 functional meetings will be held, including telecommunications, disaster management, national statistics, social and labor issues, the BRICS website, anti-corruption, young diplomats, young scientists, young entrepreneurs, BRICS universities, etc. If these were not enough, Russia initiated an international forum of “Young Journalists, Bloggers and Photo Reporters, including those representing the BRICS countries.” Meanwhile, BRICS members will explore dialogue on peacekeeping, the creation of BRICS regional councils, and cooperation and exchange among BRICS media professionals.

The 13,000-word, 77-clause Ufa Declaration was the longest, most comprehensive, and most ambitious document ever released by any multilateral institution managed either by Moscow or Beijing, or by both. In comparison, the Fortaleza Declaration for the sixth BRICS Summit had 72 clauses and the Durban Declaration for the fifth Summit has 43 clauses. Aside from addressing intra-BRICS issues, the Ufa Declaration covered numerous global governance issues, ranging from the UN (4, 6, 7, 22), WWII commemoration (5), noninterference of internal affairs (8), human rights (10), G-20 (18), IMF reform (19), WTO (21), terrorism (27), drugs (28), corruption (29), transborder crimes (30), piracy (31), outer space (32), cyber transparency, regulation and security (33, 34), disaster relief (35), Syria (36), ISIS (37, 38), Israeli-Palestine conflict (39), Iran nuclear programs (41), Afghanistan (42), Ukraine (43), Libya (44), South Sudan (45), Somalia (46), Mali (47), Congo (48), Burundi (49), Central Africa Republic (50), African stability (51), immigration (59), health care and disease control (60, 61), cultural exchange (64), development (65, 66), climate change (67), and energy (69). In fact, 41 of 77 issues covered by the BRICS Ufa Declaration were global issues. To what extent the BRICS nations will be able to affect the outcomes of these issues remains to be seen, particularly at times when BRICS economies are experiencing slowdown and volatility. The numerous global issues covered by the declaration indicate a rapidly expanding horizon of this non-Western economic forum. Prior to the Ufa Summit, Russia urged BRICS nations to increase military technology cooperation. In the fifth meeting of high-ranking security representatives of the BRICS nations in Moscow on May 26, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev told BRICS nations that “it is necessary to increase cooperation between our countries in such fields as military-technical collaboration, the joint fight against terrorism, extremism, separatism, cross-border crime, and to withstand other new challenges and threats.” Patrushev also warned that the West had exercised political and financial pressure on the BRICS countries in an attempt to undermine the bloc’s economic might. The West, he added, was also using an increasing amount of informational warfare to “artificially highlight” national, religious, and cultural discord among the five BRICS countries. “An area of vulnerability of the BRICS had been capital outflows from the BRICS economies, which amounted to at least \$3.5 trillion in the past 10 years and was accelerating in the past three years,” estimated Patrushev.

Both Russia and China denied that BRICS was moving toward a political association or military alliance. Nor would an anti-West BRICS be in the interests of BRICS members, as almost all of them are deeply integrated with the international economic system dominated by the West. Beyond that, however, BRICS nations have been concerned about many global governance issues such as IMF reform (or lack of it), instability and wars in many parts of the non-West directly or indirectly caused by Western intervention, growing refugee issues, etc. For many in the BRICS nations, the return of West-West conflict after an almost a quarter of a century “intermission” since the end of the Cold War – which is the Ukraine crisis – is perhaps more disturbing as Europe again is being destabilized by the rise of more extreme forces of both sides, including neo-Nazism. Many in the non-West, including the BRICS nations, do not want to choose sides between the two “Wests” (US/EU vs Russia), or two Western principles of sovereignty (for Ukraine) and self-determination (in Crimea). Beyond their collective neutrality, expressing concerns for Ukraine and many other post-intervention crises (Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and many African states) is perhaps normal. That said, there is perhaps little that the BRICS could do.

While BRICS is broadening its scope to include non-economic issues, the SCO seems to be heading in the opposite direction – moving from a largely security-focused forum to an economic platform. For the first time, the SCO post-summit declaration expressed support for the China’s Silk Road Economic Belt initiative. Since China announced the initiative in September 2013, Russia had not expressed support, fearing its own economic integration project (the EEU) was in conflict with China’s effort to revive the old Silk Road dream. In the past two years, at least three developments seem to have turned Russia around. One is the Western sanctions against Russia for its Ukraine policy and takeover of Crimea. As a result, the Russian economy has been struggling. China’s ambitious economic thrusts through Eurasia and beyond (AIIB, NDB, CRA, etc.) are real alternatives for the Russian economy. Additionally, China has separately set up a \$5 billion China-Europe Fund for Economic Cooperation and a \$5 billion fund for SCO member states. Both were in operation before the AIIB, NDB, and CRA.

The second factor was the launch of the AIIB in early 2015. All SCO member states, including Russia, joined, which effectively bypassed Russia’s effort to prevent the SCO from becoming a China-dominated economic forum. The rush of major European countries (UK, Germany and France) to sign up with the AIIB may have convinced Russia to get on board at the last minute.

Third, the search for effective approaches by both sides to reconcile and integrate China’s Belt & Road and Russia’s EEU initiatives started to yield positive results. In the past few years, Chinese and European transportation companies have launched several China-Europe rail shipping routes largely through Central Asia, which is faster and safer than sea routes and far less expensive than air shipping. More recently, some Chinese shipping firms started to try Russia’s trans-Siberia rail with its cheaper rate than Central Asia routes.

Meanwhile, the emerging “Mongolian” factor – in the form of the “Russia-Mongolian-China economic corridor” first conceptualized by China – as a key economic linkage between China and Russia in the past two years seemed to offer new potential for all three sides. Since 2014, a mini-trilateral summit has been institutionalized on the sidelines of the SCO annual gathering. The “third party” factor, therefore, seems to be an effective way to reconcile and connect Russia and China. In Ufa, President Xi went so far as to call for a new “community of common destiny” for China, Russia and Mongolia. Such a project would dovetail with China’s Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, Russia’s transcontinental rail plan, and Mongolia’s “Prairie Road” program in the form of a trilateral economic corridor. In Ufa, the heads of state of the three countries signed several agreements including the “Medium-term Plan for Sino-Russian-Mongolian Trilateral Cooperation,” the “Framework for Constructing Sino-Russian-Mongolian Economic Corridor,” the “Framework for Facilitating Sino-Russian-Mongolian Trade,” and the “Framework for Sino-Russian-Mongolian Cooperation on Custom Service.”

The impact of the SCO’s embracing China’s Belt & Road initiative remains to be seen. One still wonders why the SCO’s Ufa Declaration does not mention the Russia-led EEU, despite top Russian officials publicly supporting China’s Belt & Road for the SCO nations. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, for example, described the SCO acts as the “ideal platform” for aligning China’s Silk Road initiative with the Moscow-led EEU strategy. Regardless, the SCO’s Ufa Summit made its most significant move to expand the scope of the security group since its founding in 2001 as it officially initiated the procedures for granting India and Pakistan full

membership. It also elevated Belarus to the status of observer from dialogue partner, and took in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, and Nepal as new dialogue partners. Meanwhile, the SCO leaders approved the “SCO Development Strategy until 2025,” which set targets and tasks for the organization’s development in the upcoming 10 years. The strategy maps out goals for the SCO member states to conduct cooperation in the areas including politics, security, trade and economy, and people-to-people exchanges in the next decade.

Both Xi and Putin spoke highly of India’s and Pakistan’s accession to full SCO membership. However, this was only after almost 10 years of deliberation as Pakistan applied for a full membership in 2006 (India officially applied for SCO membership in 2014). Despite India’s late application, Russia was more interested in bringing in India, which may help check China’s growing clout within the SCO. Meanwhile, Pakistan is perhaps the only real ally of China in the world. Many in the SCO worried about the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan, which may undermine SCO internal cohesion and even cripple the regional group. At a minimum, the expansion will complicate the SCO’s decision making.

Over time, supporters of expansion prevailed. SCO members gradually overcame their fears and realized that the potential advantages of having India and Pakistan inside the SCO would outweigh the disadvantage in at least five areas. Their inclusion would elevate SCO prestige and international profile, enable the SCO to reach out to South Asia, facilitate economic cooperation between SCO members and South Asia, help India and Pakistan reconcile their disputes, and help resolve the Afghan issue.

The prolonged deliberation for SCO expansion means considerable adjustment and coordination between current SCO members and the newcomers, which may be more challenging than the long deliberation. Even if Moscow publicly embraces China’s Belt & Road plan, each step and project of the SCO as an integrating platform may still mean hard bargaining between parties involved. The “growing pains” for the regional group have just started.

China’s Victory Day parade: back to the past for the future?

China’s military parade was the last in a series of commemorative activities for the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII. In Beijing, 12,000 officers and troops marched through the center of the city. More than 500 items of weaponry and 183 aircraft were on display at the parade: 84 percent of them were first shown since China’s last military parade in 2009. President Xi Jinping also took the opportunity to announce a 300,000-troop cut.

While leaders from major Western countries chose not to come to China’s Victory Day parade – the first one held in the 70 years since the end of the war – President Putin and South Korean President Park Geun-hye were the most prominent foreign dignitaries. Putin’s participation was long-expected as China and Russia had anticipated and prepared for this event for several years. Park made up her mind only days before the event, given the delicate position of South Korea between China, Japan, and the United States, or as the “shrimp (Korea) between whales (big countries)” according to a popular saying in Korea.

The presence of Park and Putin at the parade – a US ally (South Korea) and an outcast of the West (Russia) – may appear strange for the West. In modern history, however, all three nations were perhaps most affected by the rise of imperial Japan. What they experienced 70 years ago was the final arrest of nearly 100 years of Japanese military ascendancy. Exactly 120 years ago, Japan's war with China was the beginning of a series of aggressive wars, leading to Japan's colonization of Korea and Taiwan for the next half a century. Ten years after that, Japan turned to Russia, whose defeat in the 1904-05 war – which was actually fought in China's Liaodong Peninsula – discredited the Tsarist regime, opening Russia's political sphere to radical forces, and eventually the Bolsheviks. Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 was the first war act in WWII, which occurred eight years before the outbreak of the war in Europe and 10 years before Japan's attack of Pearl Harbor. On the eve of its unconditional surrender in August 1945, Japan was simultaneously fighting the three continental powers of China, Soviet Russia, and the United States. In August of 1945, the US atomic bombs served as “final touches” in Japan's reluctant conversion from a militarist state to a “pacifist” one. In retrospect, the willingness and capacity of imperial Japan to fight others impressed China and Soviet Union so much that Japan, not the United States, was the sole country identified by the subsequent Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance as its designated target. Fast forward to the 21st century and it is the shared history, not ideology that brought China, Russia, and Korea together in Beijing to commemorate the ending of the last phase of the bloodiest years in human history.

Chronology of China-Russia Relations **May – August 2015**

May 8-10, 2015: President Xi Jinping visits Moscow for the 70th anniversary of Russia's Victory Day military parade on May 9. He and President Vladimir Putin meet prior to the parade. Xi meets Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev after the parade.

May 10, 2015: Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu meets Fan Changlong, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission, during Fang's visit to Moscow. Fan and his party visit the newly established National Defense Management Center of the Russian Armed Forces.

May 11-21, 2015: China and Russia hold *Joint Sea-2015 (I)* exercise in the Mediterranean Sea.

May 14-15, 2015: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) transport ministers hold their seventh meeting in Ufa, Russia. They approve a protocol on the formation of an integrated transportation system in the SCO and discuss the potential of the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur railroads. Prime Minister Medvedev attends the meeting and gives a speech.

May 21, 2015: President Putin's special representative on the Middle East and African countries and Deputy Foreign Minister M.L. Bogdanov, and Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Ming hold consultations on Middle Eastern and African issues in Moscow. According to Russian sources, the principled positions of Moscow and Beijing “matched or were close.”

May 25, 2015: Russia and China hold 11th round of China-Russia strategic security consultation in Moscow co-chaired by Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi.

May 27, 2015: SCO's Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) signs a statement of intent in Kabul with the Afghan Foreign Ministry for cooperation against international terrorist organizations in the Middle East and Central Asia, collaboration between law enforcement authorities of Afghanistan and the SCO RATS, and the parameters and of their relations.

May 28, 2015: India, Russia, and China hold the second round of consultations on the Afghan issue in New Delhi. India's Deputy National Security Advisor Arvind Gupta, Assistant Chinese Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao, and Deputy Secretary of Russia's Security Council Yevgeny Lukyanov join the meeting.

May 30, 2015: Deputy Defense Minister of the Russian Federation Anatoliy Antonov meets Adm. Sun Jianguo, deputy chief of the PLA General Staff, on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

June 3, 2015: SCO holds its annual Foreign Ministerial Meeting in Moscow to set agenda for upcoming session of the SCO Heads of State Council. President Putin meets SCO foreign ministers prior to the annual meeting. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi meet on the sideline of the ministerial meeting.

June 4, 2015: SCO foreign ministers and high representatives from SCO member states, observer states, and dialogue partners attend "High-Level Conference on Security and Stability in the SCO Region."

June 8, 2015: SCO Interior Ministerial Meeting is held in Moscow to coordinate activities in fighting transnational crimes. China's Public Security Minister Guo Shengkun, SCO Secretary General Dmitry Mezentsev, and the interior ministers of the other SCO member countries attend.

June 8, 2015: BRICS countries hold their first parliamentary forum in Moscow. A plenary meeting of the forum consists of two sessions co-chaired by State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin and Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Matviyenko.

June 9, 2015: Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC), travels to Moscow to participate in the first BRICS parliamentary forum and the first session of the cooperation committee of the two countries' legislative bodies.

June 17-20, 2015: Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli visits St. Petersburg to attend the 19th Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF). He and First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov co-chair the second meeting of the China-Russia Investment Cooperation Committee. President Putin meets Zhang on the sidelines of the forum.

June 24, 2015: Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev meets Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party Meng Jianzhu for consultations over cooperation in the field of information security and law and order.

June 23, 2015: A Russian military procuratorial delegation led by the first deputy chief military prosecutor of the Russian Federation arrives in Beijing for its official visit to China. Du Jincui, PLA's deputy director of the General Political Department (GPD), meets the Russian group.

June 25, 2015: A forum for Chinese and Russian media opens in St. Petersburg, aiming to promote bilateral and international communication.

June 29, 2015: Representatives of 57 countries sign in Beijing the agreement that outlines the framework and management structure for the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The US and Japan decide not to join the AIIB.

June 30, 2015: SCO holds its annual Defense Ministerial Meeting in St. Petersburg. Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan participates and meets Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu on the sidelines.

July 6, 2015: Foreign Minister Lavrov meets Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of talks on Iran's nuclear program.

July 8-10, 2015: The 15th SCO Summit and seventh BRICS Summit are held in Ufa, Russia. Two trilateral meetings are held on July 9 on the sidelines: an informal meeting of the SCO, BRICS and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the second trilateral meeting between the heads of state of China, Russia and Mongolia. Putin and Xi also meet ahead of the summits.

July 8-11, 2015: Vice Premier Wang Yang participates in the sixth International Industrial Trade Fair held in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Wang is received by Prime Minister Medvedev.

Aug. 5, 2015: Foreign Minister Lavrov and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi meet in Kuala Lumpur on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Aug. 7, 2015: State Councilor Yang Jiechi meets Mikhail Babich, plenipotentiary envoy of the Russian president, in Chengdu and co-chairs the fourth Local Leader Symposium of the Upper and Middle Reaches of the Yangtze River in China and the Federal District Along the Volga River Bank in Russia.

Aug. 13, 2015: President Putin sends condolences to Xi Jinping over the deadly explosions at an industrial complex in the city of Tianjin.

Aug. 20-28, 2015: Chinese and Russian navies carry out *Joint Sea-2015 (II)* exercise in the Peter the Great Gulf, waters off the Clerk Cape, and the Sea of Japan. The two navies practice, for the first time in history, an amphibious landing with a total of 400 marines.