



**China-Russia Relations:
H-Bomb Plus THAAD Equals Sino-Russian Alliance?**

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The first months of 2016 witnessed a significant escalation of tension in Northeast Asia following North Korea's fourth nuclear test on Jan. 6. The test, coupled with renewed US-ROK interest in deploying the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, presented China and Russia with a “double-layered predicament”: nuclear proliferation on the heavily militarized Korean Peninsula and a direct threat to their nuclear deterrence posture. Meanwhile, talk of a Sino-Russia alliance was back on track in China. In reality, however policies of the two powers seemed to go in different directions. Russia continued to surprise the world, including China, over its involvement in Syria. For China, the “One Belt, One Road” initiative took Xi Jinping to three major Muslim nations (Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt) in January. China also dispatched its own Syrian special envoy and initiated a mini-security alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan to the displeasure of Moscow. By the end of April, the two countries announced they would conduct their first-ever joint anti-missile drills in Russia. Welcome to the brave and grave new world of nukes, missiles and alliances, real or reluctant.

Responding to Pyongyang's hydrogen bomb test

On Jan. 6, North Korean announced that it had [successfully tested a hydrogen bomb](#), its fourth nuclear test since 2006. China and Russia reacted immediately and strongly. Russia slammed the test as a “flagrant violation” of international law, and condemned it as a “threat to national security.” The Kremlin spokesman said Russia “is extremely worried about” the test and President Vladimir Putin gave [instructions](#) to “thoroughly study data of all monitoring stations, including seismic, and analyze the situation in case the information about the test is confirmed.” The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Beijing “firmly” opposed the test, saying that “China is steadfast in its position that the Korean Peninsula should be denuclearized and nuclear proliferation should be prevented to maintain peace and stability in Northeast Asia.” The spokesperson also expressed China's discontent over North Korea's failure to provide China with advance notice.

However, it was not until early February that China and Russia started to coordinate policies in response to the nuclear test. By contrast, the US and its allies responded within weeks of the test by reinforcing military forces in Northeast Asia with an aircraft carrier, a B-52 bomber, and a

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nuclear-powered submarine. In addition, the US and Seoul agreed to investigate the feasibility and desirability of deploying the THAAD missile defense system on the Peninsula.

On Feb. 5, Chinese Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Affairs Wu Dawei traveled to Moscow and met Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov. A “deep exchange of views took place regarding the current situation on the Korean Peninsula in light of North Korea’s nuclear test and plans to launch a carrier rocket,” and “both sides expressed deep concerns regarding North Korea’s demonstrative defiance of universally recognized norms of international law and requirements of corresponding UN Security Council resolutions,” said a press release from the Russian Foreign Ministry.

On the same day, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi initiated a telephone conversation with Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. According to *Xinhua*, they “unanimously maintained that ... all parties should refrain from taking any new actions that will intensify tensions. Instead, they should bring the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula back on the track of a negotiated settlement through the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and the efforts made by all parties.”

On March 2, Wang and Lavrov talked again by phone about a new UN Security Council resolution (2270) regarding North Korea’s nuclear test. Two days later, China’s Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyo traveled to Moscow and held the second China-Russia Northeast Asia Security Consultation with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov focusing on three areas: 1) the deepening of the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula; 2) THAAD deployment in South Korea; and 3) the need to enhance communication and coordination between the two sides.

In his press briefing during the annual Chinese legislative session on March 8, Foreign Minister Wang promoted a [dual-track approach](#) to resolving the Korean nuclear issue: to pursue the denuclearization of the Peninsula while also working to replace the armistice agreement with a peace treaty. Wang defined denuclearization as the goal of the international community, while replacing the current truce with a peace treaty as DPRK’s reasonable concern (合理关切). The two talks can be held in parallel and at the same time for a comprehensive resolution of the issue (□筹解决). For this goal, China is flexible and open to any format, including talks between three, four, or five parties, as long as the relevant parties return to the negotiations.

These diplomatic interactions culminated on March 11, when Foreign Minister Wang visited Moscow and met Foreign Minister Lavrov. By this time, Russia and China hardened their positions on both the North Korean nuclear test and the possibility of the deployment of THAAD in Korea. “Russia and China favor the adoption of such measures that will, on one hand, prevent further development of the North Korean nuclear programs and, on the other hand, will not increase the tensions in the region, will not eliminate the possibility of political and diplomatic settlement and will not be used as a pretext for the dangerous destabilizing pumping of weapons into the region, including the plans to create a missile defense system here,” Lavrov said in a press conference after the talks. “At least it should be clear in Pyongyang that no one is going to defend North Korea for such escapades.” Lavrov insisted that “the scale of the plans of the

United States and South Korea (for deploying THAAD) surpass all thinkable threats that may come from North Korea, even bearing in mind the current actions of Pyongyang.”

In the joint press conference after their talks, Lavrov said that, “Our countries display an example of a balanced and pragmatic approach towards tackling multiple problems, and they secure solutions to them on the basis of international law, primarily the UN Charter.” Wang emphasized that China had “full confidence” in the Russian economy, their strategic partnership, and their pragmatic cooperation and integration between China’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) and Russia’s Eurasian Union projects.

President Putin described the Lavrov-Wang talks as “substantive negotiations” when he received the Chinese top diplomat after the talks. Wang replied that 2016 marks the 15th anniversary of the China-Russia Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, and that China was ready to take this opportunity to further promote its partnership with Russia. The two foreign ministers also discussed Putin’s visit to China in late summer and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s visit to Russia at the year end.

Wang Yi’s visit to Moscow marked the beginning of a new, and certainly more serious, round of sanctions against North Korea. On April 14, Beijing announced its list of banned imports from North Korea, which included gold and rare earths. Banned exports to the country included jet fuel and other oil products used to make rocket fuel, a move in line with UNSC sanctions on North Korea. The sanctions list produced by the Chinese Commerce Ministry, however, exempts items for “the people’s well-being” and not connected to nuclear or missile program. For example, export bans on jet and rocket fuel included exemptions for “basic humanitarian needs” in conjunction with inspections, and for civilian passenger jets flying outside of North Korea. It remains to be seen how the sanctions will affect both Pyongyang’s nuclear policy as well as relations with China.

THAAD and its fallout

For China and Russia, the Korean nuclear issue has never been an isolated case about North Korea, but about other ramifications for the region. Aside from its geographic proximity to China’s Northeast region and Russia’s Far East region, the Korean Peninsula has been the site of clashes of major powers in modern times. The deployment of the US Army’s THAAD missile defense system to Korea is not seen as a matter just between the US and its allies. THAAD’s powerful X-Band radar would be able to monitor any missile test and firing thousands of kilometers inside China and Russia.

Prior to the North Korean fourth nuclear test, South Korea had been hesitant in introducing THAAD. Shortly after Pyongyang’s test, however, ROK Defense Minister Han Min-koo and US counterpart Ashton Carter discussed deployment of the system over the phone. The US affirmed its defense commitment to Seoul including “all kinds of extended deterrence assets,” including the US nuclear umbrella, missile defense systems, and redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea.

Both China and Russia were alarmed by the reopening of the debate about THAAD deployment in South Korea, as well as the speedy and “excessive” reaction by the US and its allies to

Pyongyang's nuclear test. "The North Korean threat is a wonderful pretext for strengthening the U.S. military and political presence on the Korean Peninsula, in Japan and in the whole region. And it is undoubtedly projected on China," said Fyodor Lukyanov, presidium chairman of the Foreign and Defense Policy Council. Alexander Zhebin, head of the Center for Korean Studies at the Russian Institute of the Far East, believed the real goal of the US was to strengthen its own posture in the Far East. He said, "Washington has long been in talks with Seoul over missile defense, and, eventually managed to persuade its South Korean allies, who previously had not been very eager to see such systems deployed in their territory.... Washington needs missile defense infrastructure on the Korean peninsula. And, had there been no rocket from North Korea, the Americans would have seized upon Beijing's 'expansion' into the South China Sea."

In March, Foreign Minister Lavrov said he was convinced that the US plans to deploy missile defense systems in South Korea are excessive to the threat coming from Pyongyang. He emphasized that Moscow and Beijing saw eye-to-eye on this matter and therefore Russia and China would defend it on the international scene. "We will show that such plans, which jeopardize global parity and strategic stability, are absolutely unjustified and we will call on our U.S. partners to have an honest and informative conversation," Lavrov said.

From China's perspective, South Korea reacted unusually strongly to DPRK's latest nuclear test. The second day after the test, South Korean President Park Geun-hye spoke about it by phone with US counterpart Barack Obama. Park and Defense Minister Han Min-Koo both said that Seoul was considering deploying THAAD system. Beijing's *Global Times* pointed out that the US had called for the deployment in South Korea time and again since the late 1990s, but the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations had been lukewarm about the idea. On Feb. 11, China issued a strong rebuke to Seoul over the decision to restart talks with the US over deploying THAAD. The Chinese Foreign Ministry voiced grave concern about the revived talks. Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin summoned Seoul's Ambassador to China Kim Jang-soo, insisting that THAAD would "do more harm than good." In his address to CSIS in Washington DC on Feb. 26, Foreign Minister Wang Yi requested "a convincing explanation" be provided to China" and "legitimate national interests must be upheld in the process" as the US looked set to deploy THAAD in South Korea. China's reaction to Seoul appeared as strong as its rebuke to Pyongyang. Later, in his press conference during the annual Chinese legislative sessions on March 8, Wang categorically stated that China "will not sit idle while the situation in the Korean Peninsula is fundamentally ruined. Nor will China do nothing when her security interests are unjustifiably undermined" ([中国不会坐□半□局□遭到根本破坏，不会坐□中方的安全利益受到无端□害](#)). North Korea's nuclear test and US-ROK THAAD deployment, therefore, constituted a twin threats to China.

Retired colonel Yue Gang said one of Beijing's top concerns was that THAAD would gradually lead to an alliance between South Korea, the US, and Japan. "After THAAD is in place in South Korea, the next step is to link up with the missile defense system in Japan. This will see South Korea gradually forming a military alliance with US and Japan, much like a mini-NATO. China is desperately trying to avoid this because the military threat then would be much more than just a ballistic missile defense system," Yue said. "During a conflict, China and Russia would be forced to destroy THAAD with ballistic missiles or even nuclear weapons. South Korea would then have to pay the price for hosting a lethal security threat in its own homeland," warned Yue.

For both China and Russia, THAAD is but the “first shoe” to drop. The real nightmare is the possibility of nuclear proliferation in northeast Asia. North Korea’s reckless tests of its nuclear capability and missiles are bad enough. The worst, however, may yet be to come.

Russia: “speaking-softly” without a big stick

The sharply deteriorating security environment in Northeast Asia in early 2016 paralleled a new round of discussion on the necessity, nature, efficacy, and purpose of a possible Sino-Russian alliance relationship. Twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War, major powers relations seem to be turning steadily away from the post-Cold-War “[unipolar moment](#)“ and the post-post-Cold-War [non-polarity](#) . The direction and momentum of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership are crucial for the transformation of the international system. The most important factors that drive the two large powers toward closer policy coordination are external stimuli. In early 2016, there were plenty of them.

Six days before North Korea’s hydrogen bomb test (Dec. 31, 2015) President Putin signed a new [Russian Federation’s National Security Strategy](#). The document, which was revised from its 2009 version, defines the goal of Russia’s strategy as one of “consolidating Russia’s status of a leading world power.” The 2009 strategy was approved by then President Dmitry Medvedev, and was intended to last until 2020. By revising it this far in advance, the Kremlin made it clear that Russia’s security situation has changed, that new threats have emerged, and therefore the approach to security needs to be changed.

A large portion (17 pages) of the 40-page strategy document is devoted to strengthening defense capabilities and state security, 12 to the economy, seven to culture, five each to increasing Russian citizens’ living standards and healthcare, and four each to the environment, science, and education. More than 20 sections cover strategic stability and Russia’s relations with the outside world. The new strategy attaches great importance to multilateral institutions such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), RIC (Russia, India, and China), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the G20. Gone is any reference to the G8. Within this context, the new strategy refers to China first when talking about relations with particular countries. Russia views the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination as key for global and regional stability.

The new strategy identifies a host of threats, both traditional and new, such as the expansion of NATO, military build-up and deployment in neighboring countries, a new arms race with the US, and attempts to undermine the Moscow regime and incite a “color revolution” in the country. Interestingly, Russia’s strategy does not refer to any particular states as enemies or threats (except mentioning NATO and US missile defense systems, plus “[T]he network of US military-biological laboratories on the territory of states adjacent to Russia”). “Unlike the USA, we do not use Cold War terminology, we do not categorize countries as good and bad, and we do not declare individual states or regions to be enemies or threats to national security,” said Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Yevgeniy Lukyano.

Xi's 'goldilocks': partners but not allies

While Russia's new security strategy may soft-peddle its ties with the West, the Korean nuclear crisis convinced many in China to seek alliances in the world, particularly with Russia. In mid-March, an [op-ed piece](#) in *Global Times* argued that "Northeast Asia is a complicated region full of hotspots and conundrums. China and Russia, for the interest of the whole region, should enhance cooperation, communication, coordination, information-sharing and military trust to lower the risks of war on the peninsula." Obviously, the author, and perhaps the editorial board of the paper, did not think the existing level and channel of communication/coordination with Russia were adequate in coping with the rapidly deteriorating situation. "At a critical moment when the peninsula situation is spiraling out of control," the author urged that "Beijing and Moscow must demonstrate to Pyongyang, Washington and Seoul their resolution to safeguard the national interests and stability of the region by getting rid of the double-layered predicament through the method of dual track."

Beyond the Korean issue, "hawks" in China have challenged Beijing's long-held non-alliance, or independent, foreign policy posture. In an interview with the *New York Times* on Feb. 9, [Yan Xuetong](#), the director of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University in Beijing, argued that China needs to develop more alliance relationships with other countries and that China should set up military bases with its allies. The current independent foreign policy of China was formed in 1982 when China was a very weak power. Despite the fact that China is the second largest economy in the world, China has limited itself because of its years of propaganda criticizing alliances as part of a Cold War mentality. "The more allies China has, the more balanced and stable the world will be. The more China shies away from alliances, the greater the chance that Washington will contain China, therefore resulting in an unstable relationship," argued Yan. Although Yan's view is provocative, if not radical, for existing Chinese foreign policy, part of his argument seems to have found its way into Chinese discourse. In the first four months of 2016, Beijing's foreign policy was clearly more proactive. Both the media and experts actively promoted [Xi Jinping's "partner-but-not-alliance relationship,"](#) first articulated at the Chinese Communist Party's foreign affairs conference in November 2014. Xi's vision of a global network of partners is a more explicit pursuit of cooperative relations with other countries with economic, political, societal, and strategic components.

Accordingly, more channels have been opened to engage Russia. China and Russia started the [first-ever](#) regular meeting between the Kremlin Administration (Russia's presidential staff) and the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China when Li Zhanshu, director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee, visited Moscow in March 2015 for the first meeting. On March 24-25, the second meeting was held in Beijing when Kremlin Administration Head Sergei Ivanov visited China.

China has also reached out to its strategic partners in the face of growing pressure from the US and its allies in the South China Sea (SCS). Following the routine Foreign Ministerial Meeting between Russia, India, and China (RIC) in Moscow on April 19, the group issued an explicit endorsement of China's position for a negotiated resolution between the parties concerned their joint communiqué:

Russia, India and China are committed to maintaining a legal order for the seas and oceans based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UN Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS). All related disputes should be addressed through negotiations and agreements between the parties concerned. In this regard the Ministers called for full respect of all provisions of UNCLOS, as well as the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and the Guidelines for the implementation of the DOC.

Several days before the meeting, Foreign Minister Lavrov made [more explicit remarks](#) to Japanese, Mongolian, and Chinese journalists in Moscow saying that, “[A]ny disputes in the South China Sea should be resolved through dialogue and attempts to internationalize the issue must be stopped. I am convinced that they are completely counterproductive. Only negotiations, which China and the ASEAN are pursuing, can bring the desired result, namely, mutually acceptable agreements.” He added that his country actively supports a political solution to the South China Sea issue between China and nations in Southeast Asia.

Foreign Minister Lavrov’s commitment came shortly after the annual G7 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Japan issued an implicit criticism of China for allegedly indulging in “intimidating, coercive or provocative unilateral actions that could alter the status quo and increase tensions” over the South China Sea. Following the trio’s footsteps, China visibly stepped up its effort in soliciting support for its SCS policies from friendly countries. By the end of April, 14 countries have publicly supported China’s position on the SCS issue (Russia, India Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Gambia, Poland, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Fiji and Sudan).

China pivots to the west; at Russia’s expense?

While Russian and Indian support for China on the South China Sea issue came as a surprise, those calling for a Sino-Russian alliance were disappointed by some other trends in Sino-Russian relations in the early months of 2016. The growing challenge to China from the east and southeast seemed to prompt Beijing to “pivot” further to the west, or the heartland of Eurasia, for both economic and security interests. Since Xi Jinping kicked off his OBOR strategy in September 2013, China has set aside and invested billions of dollars for infrastructure development along the traditional Silk Road stretching from Central Asia to Europe. In early 2016, the settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue and the deteriorating security situation in the region led to Xi’s high-profile tour in January of the greater Middle East with stops in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, where he sought out economic opportunities and strategic partnerships. Meanwhile, Xi also tried to mediate rivalries and crises between the three countries.

As a follow-up to Xi’s three-country tour, China dispatched its first special envoy to Syria. This happened shortly after Secretary of State John Kerry’s Moscow visit when Russia and the US reached agreement on the Syrian conflict. As Russia’s strategic partner, China has closely coordinated policies with Russia, particularly at the UN Security Council. Moscow, however, did not inform or consult with China prior to its agreement with Washington on the Syrian issue in late March. Similarly, Russia failed to inform China following its military intervention in and subsequent withdrawal from Syria. China’s decision to appoint a Syrian envoy, therefore, was seen as a means of indicating to the world that China should be involved in vital decisions in the region and in determining Syria’s future.

Meanwhile, Beijing also initiated a mini-security alliance to deal with Afghanistan. In early March, PLA Chief of the General Staff Gen. Fang Fenghui said on a visit to Kabul that China was proposing an anti-terror regional alliance consisting of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani supported China's proposal as did an anonymous US State Department official who said, "... We'd welcome any effort by the international community and members of the international community that would lead to a strong, prosperous, stable Afghanistan in the future."

It was reported that Tajikistan's Internal Affairs Ministry and China's Defense Ministry would create an antiterrorism center in Dushanbe. In the case of Pakistan, a decision was said to have been made that the PLA would be permanently deployed in Pakistan to protect the Chinese-Pakistani economic corridor, which stretches from the port of Gwadar [Pakistan] to Xinjiang. In both Tajikistan and Pakistan, China intends to work more closely with the host countries to provide security for its huge infrastructure investments. Since stability in Afghanistan is the key link to achieving those goals, China will also increase its military assistance to Afghanistan.

Russian officials have not publicly commented on China's mini-alliance in Central Asia. Russian commentators, however, were alarmed: "There is a danger in this new alliance, along with Pakistan and Afghanistan, China is including Tajikistan, which Russia has until recently considered part of its zone of influence," said Andrey Serenko of the Russian Center for the Study of Contemporary Afghanistan in Moscow in an interview with *Izvestiya*. He further warned that Russia would be marginalized by "this 'Central Asian NATO' under the Chinese umbrella." Separately, Central Asia analyst Alexander Knyazev wrote in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that, "[T]he attempt to create this sort of military alliance, were it to be realized, would de facto reject the anti-terror component of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.... The existence of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in this case is completely being ignored."

Xiao Bin, an associate research fellow at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, responded in the *Global Times*, saying that "In order to promote the reconciliation process in Afghanistan, since 2016 China has been playing a positive role in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) that involves the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan. China proposed a four-nation alliance against terrorism based on its own commitment. All this shows that China eyes a bigger role in maintaining security in Central Asia." He further indicated that China is not satisfied with the slow pace of the Afghanistan related operations: "China hopes to accelerate Afghanistan's reconciliation process. In recent years, the international community has made strong efforts in this regard. In March, countries such as China, the US, Japan, Russia, India, Iran and organizations such as the EU, the Red Cross, and the Asian Development Bank lent a helping hand by offering assistance and loans and reducing debts. The four-nation alliance can provide security shelters for the above measures and prevent international assistance materials from being attacked by terrorist groups." Xiao dismissed the "Central Asian NATO" analogy saying that, "Some Russian scholars have defined the alliance proposal as a Central Asian NATO. Given concerns that China might challenge their regional or even global interests, some established powers do not want to see China play a bigger role in Central Asian security. To cope with potential negative impact from these countries, China needs to make certain laws to

standardize its cooperation with other countries and show its stance to the international community.”

For this “highly curious Chinese military and diplomatic activity,” Russia’s immediate response was to conduct [unusually large-scale joint Russia-Tajikistan antiterrorism drills](#) in Tajikistan’s Khatlon region. From March 15-20, 2,000 Russian troops and 50,000 Tajik troops drilled to repel “external terrorist threats” and practiced “coordination and interaction in combat missions in mountains.” It was also the first time “in the history of military cooperation between Tajikistan and Russia” that joint drills had included soldiers from Russia’s Central Military District, not just troops from Russia’s 201st Motorized Rifle Division stationed in Tajikistan. To highlight the true intention of the drills, Russia’s *Tu-22M* strategic bombers were dispatched to join the drills. “It should not be ruled out that the army drills underway in Tajikistan, aside from their basic purpose, are also demonstrative and cautionary in nature – only this time directed by Russia at Tajikistan and China,” said *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online* in Russian on March 15, 2016.

More actions are yet to be carried out. In a largely unrelated area in relations with China, Russia announced on April 8 that Russia’s Roskosmos State Corporation was “not ready to begin delivering rocket engines to China for now,” reported Moscow *Izvestiya*. “We take into account that in contrast to Russia, China is not a party to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) at the present time, so a reliable regulatory legal base must be established for organizing cooperation in the rocket engineering area,” said the newspaper.

Russia’s turnaround came as a surprise because until recently, China’s MTCR status had “never been an issue for this “win-win” deal, in which exporting Russia’s highly capable rocket engines to Beijing would allow Russia to have access to Chinese electronic components to be used in Russia’s spacecraft construction. The China deal would be a big win for Russia’s ailing space sector because, until now, this type of Russian rocket engine, which is the best in the world, has the US as the only foreign customer. A supply deal with China could give Russia additional leverage over the US space industry. In the longer run, the engine deal would be the first step toward a joint venture specializing in the production of microchips and receivers for Russia’s Glonass satellite navigation system and its Chinese analogue BeiDou. Both are marketed as alternatives to the US-operated Global Positioning System (GPS).

Tales of alliances: between the past and future

The Russian rocket engine flip-flop reveals the complex, and perhaps inherently unsettled, nature of the current Sino-Russian relationship. The two large Eurasian powers cooperate, coordinate, compete, and may even conflict over a wide range of issues, given the heavy burden of the past and the highly volatile world. In the best scenario, such as in the Korean and SCS cases, their propensity for creating an alliance may be issue-based rather than a full-fledged commitment. This includes the scheduled anti-missile drills to be conducted in May in Russia. It will be a significant development in terms of both military interoperability and strategic trust. It is, however, more like a measured response to deter, if it is still possible, the THAAD deployment than a long-term and comprehensive alliance commitment.

The limited nature of the Sino-Russian strategic interaction does not necessarily mean that everything should be based on a rather cynical “axis of convenience.” Nor would Yan Xuetong’s rush to an alliance with Russia guarantee things would work out perfectly. For large powers like Russia and China, their capabilities, interests, history, strategic culture, and complex interactions with others produce multi-dimensional outcomes in an increasingly complex world.

Chronology of China-Russia Relations January – April 2016

Jan. 6, 2016: North Korea conducts its fourth nuclear test.

Jan. 15, 2016: Russian media reports that Russia will start supplying *Su-35* fighter jets to China in the fourth quarter of 2016 as part of a contract to deliver 24 jets in three years.

Feb. 5, 2016: Foreign Minister Wang Yi has a telephone conversation with Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov to discuss the North Korean nuclear test and Syria. They describe the bilateral relationship as one of strategic communication, strategic cooperation, and common strategic interests.

March 2, 2016: Foreign Ministers Wang and Lavrov discuss over the phone strategic bilateral coordination on the passing of a new UN Security Council resolution regarding North Korea.

March 2, 2016: Gen. Fang Fenghui, a member of China’s Central Military Commission (CMC) and chief of Joint Staff Department of the CMC, proposes during his trip to Afghanistan a four-nation anti-terror alliance consisting of China, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

March 4, 2016: Second China-Russia Northeast Asia Security Consultation is held in Moscow. Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou and Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov of Russia co-chaired the consultation.

March 11, 2016: Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits Russia and meets Foreign Minister Lavrov to discuss the Korean nuclear issue. Wang also meets President Vladimir Putin

March 24-25, 2016: Kremlin Administration Head Sergei Ivanov visits China at the invitation of Li Zhanshu, director of the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Ivanov also meets President Xi Jinping and participates in a forum for Russian and Chinese media.

April 8, 2016: Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) holds its 18th session in Tashkent.

April 13, 2016: Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Chinese State Council member and Minister of Public Security Guo Shengkun meet prior to the 11th meeting of the SCO Security Council secretaries in Tashkent.

April 13-14, 2016: The 11th meeting of SCO Security Council secretaries is held in Tashkent. Uzbek President Islam Karimov delivers a speech.

April 18, 2016: The 14th meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, India and China is held in Moscow. For the first time since its inception, Russian and Indian foreign ministers support China's position on resolving the South China Sea disputes.

April 24, 2016: A forum is held to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Agreement on Confidence-Building in the Military Field in Border Areas by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

April 27-28, 2016: Fifth International Conference on International Security is held in Moscow. Russian Defense Minister Gen. Sergei Shoigu delivers a speech at the conference.

April 27-28, 2016: Foreign Minister Lavrov travels to Beijing to attend the fifth Foreign Ministers Meetings of CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia). Lavrov meets President Xi Jinping after the CICA meeting on April 28.