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THE DAWN OF A BRAVE TRUMP WORLD

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The end of 2016 was a period of extraordinary uncertainty in world affairs. Much of the world was engulfed by waves of [refugees](#), terror [attacks](#), and rising populism, culminating in the election of Donald Trump as president in the US. Against this backdrop, top Chinese and Russian leaders interfaced regularly. Military ties also gained momentum as the two armed forces conducted a joint exercise in the South China Sea and stepped up coordination in missile defense. Twenty years after their “strategic partnership of coordination,” the two countries still resist a formal alliance, but the perceived challenge to their national interests and strategic space by Western alliances seems to have led to more proactive and coordinated actions. Meanwhile, both Moscow and Beijing were anxiously awaiting the Trump presidency. Welcome to the brave new world of the reversed strategic triangle, Trump style.

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G20 in Hangzhou: between symbolism and substance

The 11th G20 Summit in Hangzhou was both routine (a long [communiqué](#) with 48 clauses and 37 additional documents) and extraordinary (the US and China [ratified](#) the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement). As its rotating host, China managed to focus on its planned “4-I” theme (Innovative, Invigorated, Interconnected and Inclusive world economy) without any “anti-Russia snubbing” as in the previous G20 summits in Brisbane, Australia and Ankara, Turkey.

There were some mishaps in Hangzhou, including some with political implications: [no red-carpet](#) and not even a staircase for Barack Obama, [no handshake](#) between Vladimir Putin and UK’s Theresa May, and Angela Merkel got the time of day [wrong](#) with Putin. The Chinese hosts, however, made sure that President Putin was treated with respect and dignity. Even before the summit, senior Chinese officials made clear that the Putin would [top China’s guest list](#) in the most beautiful city of China (Hangzhou is traditionally referred to as “paradise on earth”). The night show (“Hangzhou, A Living Poem”) on Sept. 4 – with Chinese artistic and musical pieces harmonized with Western ones (Debussy, Beethoven, etc.) – prominently featured [Swan Lake](#) with Chinese ballerinas dancing on the actual water of the West Lake. One wonders how Putin felt about this Chinese “distortion” of Tchaikovsky’s masterpiece.

The Hangzhou meeting was the third encounter between Xi Jinping and Putin in 2016. Both pledged greater “coordination” in international and regional affairs as the two countries deepened their ties amid growing tensions with the West. Fifteen years after the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation and 20 years after the China-Russia “strategic partnership of coordination,” Sino-Russian relations were indeed “operating at a [high level](#),” as Putin noted in talks with Xi on the sidelines of the summit.

Apparently satisfied with the Hangzhou G20, which was in sharp contrast to the humiliating and early exit at the Brisbane G20 two years before, the Russian president chose to hold his press conference after he met Xi to publicly support China’s SCS stance: “President Xi did not ask me to comment on the situation in the South China Sea,” disclosed Putin at the press conference. “In general we would not like to get involved in this dispute. However, this is our general position that interference of non-regional powers only hampers the

settlement of this kind of issue. Our position is not a political, but rather a legal one: we think that third-party arbitrations should be initiated by the parties involved and we think that the arbitration court should listen to the arguments of both parties,” said Putin. Later, Russian media described Putin’s remarks as those of an “[objective bystander](#).” For China, however, Russia’s hands-off stance was seen as both fair and timely, similar to China’s “sympathetic neutrality” regarding Ukraine and Crimea. “China values Russian President Vladimir Putin’s position on the South China Sea issue,” and it “represents the voices of justice from the international community,” said spokesperson [Hua Chunying](#) of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Ten days after the G20, Russian and Chinese navies conducted a first-ever joint naval drill in the South China Sea.

While enjoying China’s hospitality in Hangzhou, Putin seemed careful in touting Russia’s special relationship with China. After the early morning Xi-Putin meeting on Sept. 4, Chinese media quoted [Xi](#) as telling his Russian guest that China and Russia should firmly support each other’s efforts to safeguard sovereignty, security, and development interests; that China and Russia should strengthen coordination in international and regional affairs to safeguard justice and promote world peace. Specifically, China would like to see that bilateral military exchanges and security cooperation are strengthened. Given China’s heightened tension with the US in the SCS and on the Korean Peninsula, Xi seemed eager to seek Russian reciprocity.

[Putin’s responses](#) were more reserved, if not aloof. According to Chinese media, Putin said that Russia would like to join with China to share political trust and their people’s friendship to stimulate economic cooperation, adding that the two countries should enhance cooperation in trade, investment, finance, energy, science and technology, and to bring real benefits to peoples on both sides. The Kremlin web page went further by completely [dropping Xi’s remarks](#) calling for enhanced strategic coordination, while adding that “Our relations are developing just as well as we hoped,” a rather take-it-easy approach in comparison to Xi’s sense of urgency.

The Russian president, however, could also be surprisingly considerate, such as when he brought a box of Russian [ice cream](#) from Siberia as a gift to Xi. Only Putin knew if the ice cream aimed at warming up or cooling down Russia’s relationship with China. His soft-peddling of the strategic implication of his meeting with Xi in Hangzhou may not mean too much. For Putin, the Hangzhou visit served a broader Russian purpose: to

finally escape the shadow of Western sanctions and return to normalcy in relations with the West. This process started a year before when Putin was "[center-staged](#)" at the G20 Summit in Turkey in making his case for deeper international partnerships in fighting Islamic State after the Paris terror attacks. He followed this with the [20th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum](#) in June 2016 and the second [Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok](#) in early September where the Russian president portrayed [a gentler and more cooperative Russia](#) to Western and eastern investors. In Hangzhou, Putin took the opportunity to meet many leaders, including all the major Western participants.

Eighth BRICS Summit in India

During the G20 in Hangzhou, China and Russia started warming up for the Eighth BRICS Summit, which was held in Goa, India Oct. 15-16. [BRICS](#) member countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) account for 41.6 percent of global population, 29.31 percent of total world area and about 22 percent of the world's total Gross Domestic Product. Despite its relatively short life and multiple problems, BRICS is more institutionalized for real actions, particularly in the economic area, than any other multilateral groups involving China and Russia, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). BRICS has already set up its New Development Bank (\$100 billion) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (\$100 billion). More recently, BRICS also moved to coordinate and institutionalize policies in the areas of [foreign policy](#), [security](#), [environmental issues](#), cultural/humanities exchanges, and parliament exchanges. In Hangzhou, BRICS leaders met informally, which was "one of their most productive encounters ever," according to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov.

[Putin's speech](#) at the BRICS informal meeting was rather pessimistic about the world economic and security situation. He also briefed other leaders on the Syrian situation and Russia's strategy, while urging the BRICS financial institutions to become "fully operational," and "to adopt the bank's strategy, to provide loans in local currencies, and to begin financing specific projects." Putin concluded by hoping for the "linkage" of Russia's Eurasian Economic Union and China's Silk Road Economic Belt.

President Xi made a [four-point statement](#) for BRICS development: 1) search for new growth mode in trade, finance, infrastructure and cultural-humanities exchanges, 2) help improve global governance by

reforming existing international trade and monetary systems, 3) promote stability for a peaceful environment for development, and 4) promote sustainable development.

The joint Russian and Chinese efforts to optimize BRICS operation occurred at a time when the group faced serious internal problems and external challenges. Unlike the issue-oriented and loosely connected G20 (for economics), BRICS members deal with multiple issues on diverse goals and interests. Indeed, the organization faced "the risk of retrogressive, rather than progressive, cooperation," said [Chen Xiangyang](#), senior researcher at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing. This was partially because of the "new, intricate circumstances," and the 'competition and cooperation' games that developed and emerging economies play on the geopolitical, geo-economic and other fronts," added Chen.

Chen was not specific about these "competition-cooperation" games. Prior to the BRICS summit in Goa, India's relations with China and Pakistan visibly deteriorated over the issues of perceived Chinese "obstruction" for India's full membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and heightened Indo-Pakistani tensions in Kashmir after the terror attack in early September (19 Indian soldiers died). It also looked like India was determined to utilize its BRICS chair position for enhancing bilateral relations both within and outside BRICS. Meanwhile, [anti-BRICS sentiments](#) were gaining momentum in India prior to the Goa summit.

These [intra-BRICS tensions](#) bode ill for normal operations, let alone progress. In both Hangzhou and Goa, Russia and China worked hard to promote cohesion. In Hangzhou, [Xi urged the group](#) to "adhere to the open, inclusive, cooperative, and win-win spirit of the BRICS countries, do not be affected by winds and rains, troubled by noise, and impeded by difficulties, continuously strengthen the partnership." Prior to Xi's travel to India for the BRICS Summit, China's Vice Foreign Minister [Li Baodong](#) told reporters that "no country should have double standards on terrorism or use it for political gains." At a minimum, Russia and China believed that BRICS should not take sides in [bilateral disputes](#) at the expense of the BRICS cohesion. At a maximum, they wanted to see sustainable growth of the BRICS as a viable juxtaposition to, not an alternative to or replacement of, the existing West-led global governance infrastructure.

Xi and Putin were instrumental in molding the Goa Summit into a more constructive event. In his formal address, Xi made a [five-point proposal](#) for the BRICS nations to join hands in tough times, including building an open world, mapping out a shared development vision, coping with the most pressing global challenges, safeguarding fairness and justice in the international community, and deepening partnerships within the bloc.

Largely because of the joint effort by Russia and China, the eighth BRICS Summit ended with more cohesion, albeit compromised, for its future development. By no means does this mean the end of intra-BRICS competition and conflict. Nor should one wish away the decades-long Indo-Pakistan enmity. What the Goa Summit does mean, however, is a relatively successful conflict avoidance and management process with future implications for other multilateral forums with Russian and Chinese participation. In the long run, the case may serve as a benchmark for managing other multilateral groupings relating to China and Russia. Russian scholar Dmitri [Trenin](#) offered a penetrating assessment:

Sino-Russian relations are a good example of two major neighboring powers having de facto accepted a formula of “never being against each other, but not necessarily always with each other.” This formula squarely puts a premium on a solid partnership between Moscow and Beijing where their interests meet, eschews conflicts where they don’t, and allows a lot of flexibility where interests overlap only partially. Russia and China will probably never become full allies; the important thing is that they abhor mutual hostility, and have mastered their differences.

Trenin’s confidence in the ability of Beijing and Moscow to massage BRICS politics, however, should be taken with a grain of salt. It was the convergence of interests – to sustain BRICS functioning – that made China and Russia, the most powerful members of this “gang of five,” to coopt India this time. In the longer run, India’s role in the BRICS, and its willingness and capacity to deviate from the group, will also depend on India’s relative power to other member states, as well as its relations with Washington.

Meeting at APEC

By the time Xi and Putin met for the last time in 2016 at the annual APEC Economic Leaders Meeting in Lima, Peru on Nov. 19-20, the world seemed to be totally altered by three “Ts”: Trump, Trade, and TPP. Perhaps more than any other place outside the US, the Trump

“tremor” was most felt in the Lima APEC forum. For almost a quarter of a century, the loosely connected APEC had served as an advocate for trade liberalization and economic interdependence. Its [21 member economies](#) are home to around 2.8 billion people and represent about 59 percent of world GDP and 49 percent of world trade in 2015. No one, including Trump himself, may know what will happen to APEC and globalization. His America-firstism, however, suggests “sudden death” for both “free trade” (such as APEC) and “not-so-free trade” such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which had so far excluded China, the largest trading state in the world.

Partly because of this sudden sea change, the mood in Lima was subdued if not depressing. President Obama assured his audience that the US remained an “indispensable nation” for the world, implying that nobody, including China, would be able to fill the void (a world without US leadership). President Putin was busy meeting leaders, only to be told by the lame-duck US president to “[cut it out on hacking](#).” It turned out that Xi Jinping assumed the role of champion of free trade with a strong warning against [isolationism](#) and [protectionism](#). Xi also used his APEC trip to make state visits to Ecuador, Peru, and Chile to broaden and deepen China’s economic and political interactions with these countries.

Xi and Putin [met briefly](#) on the sidelines of APEC, mostly reaffirming official visits to each other’s countries in 2017. Putin took the opportunity to express his satisfaction with the “...improving dynamics in our trade and economic relations. It concerns both advanced goods and high-tech production areas. We are moving forward in those areas, regardless of any problems, and we are very happy about it. It speaks to the fact that we are not working idly, but are reaching the objectives we set before us.” Putin may have been referring to a series of high-tech arms sales with China in the last few months of the year, including the first of the 24 *Su-35* multi-role jets, the largest transaction in recent years.

Military and security coordination

The last four months of 2016 witnessed some high-profile activities and exchanges between Russia and China in the areas of security and defense. On Sept. 12-13, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev traveled to Beijing for two meetings: the 12th round of China-Russia Strategic Security Consultations and the third Russian-Chinese law-enforcement and security cooperation mechanism. In November, Russian

Navy Commander Adm. [Vladimir Korolyov](#) and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited China. Several military exercises also took place, including the annual *Joint Sea-2016* drills in the South China Sea. After many years of “delays,” Russia delivered to China the first four *Su-35* fighters.

Secretary Patrushev is a key figure in Russia’s foreign and security policies and is known for his close relations with President Putin. The [12th security consultation](#) co-chaired with China’s State Councilor Yang Jiechi was held three days after North Korea conducted its fifth nuclear test on Sept. 9. Chinese media reported that the two “conducted in-depth consultation and exchanges on the Korean Peninsula situation ... and on other issues, and reached extensive consensus.” Russian *Interfax* quoted Patrushev saying that “An unprecedentedly high level of interaction between Russia and China has been attained in every field.” [Yang stressed](#) the imperative for China and Russia to “stay in close communication ... strengthen communication, consultation and coordination in strategic security, give more support to each other and further deepen collaboration in international affairs.” After their Beijing meetings, Yang and Patrushev traveled to New Delhi, India for the sixth session of BRICS senior representatives on security issues in India on Sept. 15-16.

The two sides “unanimously believed that the North Korean nuclear test was not conducive to Peninsula’s peace and stability, that at present it is necessary to strive to prevent round after round of escalation or even loss of control of the Peninsula situation, and pull the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue back to the track of dialogue and consultation,” a press release said. Meanwhile, China and Russia were also firmly opposed to the US deployment of the THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea. A month later, Russia and China announced that their militaries would hold a joint anti-missile drill in 2017. The move was widely believed as a counterbalance with the pending deployment of the US THAAD system.

Secretary Patrushev also co-chaired the third law-enforcement session with his Chinese host Meng Jianzhu, state councilor and Public Security minister. They focused on anti-terror and “color revolutions.” Both Russia and China believed that they have been targeted by the West-backed “color revolutions” in recent years. Some of the high-profile ones included the 2011 rally at the Sakharov Avenue in Moscow, which was part of the so-called “[Snow Revolution](#)” from 2011-13 and Hong Kong’s “Occupy Central” movement in

2014. Moreover, Central Asia was seen as becoming increasingly vulnerable because of internal and external disturbances. On Aug. 30, a car driven by a suicide bomber exploded outside the Chinese embassy in Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, injuring three Kyrgyz nationals. They said that neither Russia nor China alone would be able to cope with future instabilities. Together, however, they would be able to manage the situation. Chinese President Xi met with Patrushev after the two security meetings.

There was also a significant increase in the last few months of the year in the number of exercises between Russia and China, or in the name of the SCO. In September, the SCO held two exercises. One was the regular *Peace Mission-2016* joint anti-terror command and staff military exercises in Kyrgyzstan on Sept. 15-21, involving 1,100 troops, 200 pieces of military hardware, and 40 military aircraft, including two *Tu-95MS* bombers. It was the first time that the SCO held its *Peace-Mission* exercise in Kyrgyzstan. The second exercise was the five-week SCO border guard drill, code-named *Unity-2016* from Sept. 25 to Nov. 1. Special services of the five SCO nations reportedly conducted enhanced operations for intelligence/information collection and exchange, coordinated reconnaissance, search, patrol, and combat activities. It was unclear how many border guards participated. Its five-week duration, however, was unprecedented.

In late November, China’s Armed Police hosted for the first time an [international forum on urban anti-terror strategy](#) in Beijing, named *Great Wall-2016*. More than 120 military and police representatives from 26 countries, including Russia, France, Chile, Pakistan and Egypt, participated in the events. During the conference, participants visited China’s special police institute, observed drills by the Armed Police, and attended discussion panels. It should be noted that China’s increasing interest in urban anti-terror operations was in the context of its more proactive posture in Afghan and Syrian affairs. The Beijing forum was followed by a week-long (Nov. 28-Dec. 4) joint training exercise in Korla, China. The exercise was aimed at improving combat ability, boosting military communication and improving troop’s ability to deal with security threats. The goal was to improve cooperation, coordination and actual combat abilities.

Chechen law enforcement officials [visited China](#) from Dec. 6-10 to share their skills in fighting international terrorism and extremism with Chinese counterparts. The visit was reportedly part of an agreement signed with China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The

Chechen delegation was led by the military aide to the head of the Chechen Republic, Daniil Martynov, and the head of the Directorate of the Federal Service of National Guard Troops for Chechnya, Sharip Delimkhanov. The [Chechen group](#) shared its experience with public security during events of mass public assemblies. They also demonstrated use of their equipment, weapons, kits, and outfit, and visited China's training facilities.

Joint Sea-2016 and its implications

The Chinese and Russian navies conducted a joint exercise in the South China Sea for the first time ever Sept. 12-19. Code-named *Joint Sea-2016*, the drill involved submarines, surface ships, fixed-wing aircraft, ship-borne helicopters, and amphibious armored equipment from both navies. The goal was to strengthen coordination of maritime operations between the two navies. The South Sea Fleet of China played a leading role, while Russia sent five warships led by the *Udaloy*-class anti-submarine destroyer.

The drills kicked off in the wake of increased US pressure demanding that China adhere to the ruling of the Hague international arbitral tribunal invalidating China's longstanding claim to the SCS. During the drill, the two navies increased levels of interoperability, particularly in the areas of communication, intelligence sharing, electronic/information warfare, anti-submarine and island-seizing operations. Chinese and Russian ships/units were assigned to mixed groupings to practice and increase interoperability. They were interfaced, for the first time, with a China-Russia joint command information system (JCIS), according to the spokesman for the Chinese Navy. In the previous *Joint Sea* exercises, the two sides depended primarily on conventional means such as naval maps, telephone, telegraph, and Chinese-Russian translation. The JCIS platform is capable of sending, receiving and sharing information between all command posts and combat units at all levels, a "gigantic leap" (跨进一大步) for more efficient interoperability.

Both China and Russia claimed that the naval drill in the SCS did not target any third party. Beijing's *Global Times*, an extension of the official *People's Daily* that usually displays more assertive views on foreign issues, was more candid: "The Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination is partly attributed to the US which keeps strategically squeezing the two countries. The joint drills by the two in the South China Sea do not differ much from the ones in the

other waters." Referring to the "extreme" sensitivity of the US and Japan regarding the naval drill in the SCS, the paper simply said "[Let them be.](#)"

Both hawks and doves in Beijing missed the point, deliberately or not. The Sino-Russian joint naval drill has been an annual event since 2012. *Joint Sea-2015* was conducted in the Mediterranean and the Sea of Japan, and both are sensitive areas for coastal nations with the ongoing Ukraine-Crimea and Korean nuclear crises. In fact, the SCS was the only place where the Chinese and Russian navies had not drilled together before 2016. The actual exercise area was just off the coast of Guangdong Province and far from disputed waters. A glimpse of all the *Joint Sea* series shows the size of the forces that participated in the SCS drills was actually the smallest in terms of main surface combatants.

China-Russia Joint-Sea Exercises, [2012-2016](#)

Code-Names	Time	Location	warships & subs *
Joint Sea-2012	April 22-27	Qingdao, China	25 (7)
Joint Sea-2013	July 5-12	Peter the Great Gulf, Russia	19 (12)
Joint Sea-2014	May 20-27	East China Sea	16 (6)
Joint Sea-2015 I	May 11-21	Mediterranean	9 (6)
Joint Sea-2015 II	Aug. 19-28	Sea of Japan	25 (18)
Joint Sea-2016	Sept. 12-19	South China Sea	15 (5)

* Number of Russian warships and subs in parentheses.

Beyond the technical aspects of the SCS drills, it was perhaps not in the interest of China to push hard on the SCS drills at a time when Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phu was [visiting China](#). Meanwhile, newly inaugurated Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was pivoting away from Washington and reaching out to Beijing. Russia, too, has been treading carefully in the SCS region, looking for a bigger footprint after its neglect of the region since the Soviet collapse. In May 2016, Putin hosted in Sochi the first-ever Russia-ASEAN summit, calling for the creation of a "Greater Eurasia" economic grouping consisting of the Eurasian Economic Union, the SCO and ASEAN.

Joint Sea-2016, therefore, was never a mere naval drill for Beijing and Moscow, but part of a broader political and diplomatic game. The best option was to speak softly while carrying a concealed, or semi-concealed, stick. Good, or normal, working relations with regional players may be more useful than a demonstration of force.

Shoigu's Beijing visit: end of an era? not so fast

Russian Defense Minister Shoigu visited China from Nov. 22-24 for an official visit and to co-chair the 21st session of the Intergovernmental Military-Technical Cooperation Commission with Vice Chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission Air Force Gen. Xu Qiliang. It was Shoigu's third time to visit China as Russia's defense minister. It was widely believed that his meetings with Chinese counterparts focused on the sales of Russian weapon systems, particularly the *Su-35* multirole fighters and *S400* surface-air batteries.

The session reportedly summed up the outcomes of the work over the past year and planned for the following year in the military-technical area. The Russian side also "offered to discuss" Syria, Iraq, and Libya with the Chinese hosts. A total of \$3 billion in annual contracts was implemented in 2016, according to the Russian side. And "...all of them are being implemented, to one degree or another, within the framework of mutually advantageous military-technical cooperation," Shoigu said. The Russian side declared that military-technical relations with China "has returned to the [best time in history](#)," meaning the peak transaction year of 2002 with a total amount of \$2.7 billion. Although the 2016 dollar figure of \$3 billion was actually lower than that of 2002 (\$3.6 billion at the current US dollar rate), military cooperation was much deeper, broader, and more diverse than the past. Instead of depending heavily on sales of complete platforms, current cooperation was more integrated in various technical aspects including parts (engine, radar) supply, joint R&D, etc.

Some in China, particularly those online chatterers with a keen eye on Russia, were not convinced. Shoigu's statement perhaps aimed to pacify lingering doubts that Russia had been [delaying the delivery](#) of *Su-35* and *S400* to China. Several times in November, Russia sent contradictory messages and some went as far as to claim, just four days before Shoigu's visit, that there was no date set for the *Su-35* delivery, contrary to the previous agreement setting delivery at the end of 2016.

"The leaders of Russia and China determine the depth, nature and direction of this interaction, which they keep

under their constant control. We are set to fully implement the agreements, which have been reached in this area," Shoigu remarked in Beijing. It was unclear if this was an excuse for the apparently delayed delivery of the *Su-35s*, which may be due to technical reasons. The display panel of the *Su-35s*, for example, remained in the Russian language, at least for the first four delivered *Su-35s*. The Russians tried to convert it to Chinese characters but they were unreadable due to problems in the software. Many in China were unconvinced. Some even believed that Russia finally let the *Su-35* go when Chinese Air Force's stealth [J20 made its public](#) appearance in the Zhuhai Air Show in early November, which would make the *Su-35* less appealing to the PLA.

Russia's real motive to delay the *Su-35* delivery, however, may not have concerned China's *J-20* stealth fighter, but rather to delay the R&D of the *J-11D*, China's own variant of the *Su-35*. As an equivalent to the US *F-22*, China may not be able, or willing, to mass produce the *J-20* due to its high price tag. A relatively inexpensive replacement of China's vast number of second-generation fighters, and eventually the current *J-10* and *J-11* series, requires a more advanced version of the *Su-27* series. The delay of the *Su-35* delivery to China was more likely done to slow down China's *J-11D*, if there was such a calculation on the Russian side.

On Dec. 25, the first four *Su-35s* were delivered to the Chinese Air Force. For this, a commentary in the Chinese Military Net ([中国军网](#)), which is the only designated net for the PLA by the Chinese Military Commission, declared that "despite its good quality, the *Su-35s* hopefully will be China's last imported fighters." The article indicated that its delivery was delayed for nearly two years. "Some may believe that the *Su-35* delivery was because of close relationship between China and Russia. Conventional wisdom, however, says that there is no enduring friendship but only permanent interests," [claimed the author](#).

While in Beijing, Shoigu also met Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Chang Wanquan, Vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission Xu Qiliang, and Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Yu Zhengsheng. Surprisingly, Shoigu was not received by President Xi, who had met other Russian dignitaries in China throughout 2016 (Foreign Minister Lavrov in April, Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Matviyenko and Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev in September). In his first visit to China as Russian defense

minister in 2014, Shoigu was received by Chinese Prime Minister [Li Keqiang](#).

The “never-again” claim regarding the *SU-35* purchase is indicative of the complex and sensitive nature of the bilateral relationship. The suspicions about Russia motives are contrasted by the reaction among Chinese to the tragic death of 64 artists/singers of the Red Army Choir in a plane crash in Sochi on Christmas Eve. The event was heartbreaking for tens of millions of their [fans](#), particularly those “boomers” now in leadership positions, including President [Xi Jinping](#). The extensive exposure to Russian/Soviet literature and culture of this generation is likely to exert considerable influence on their perception of Russia, no matter who is in power in Moscow.

Military sales is only part of the broader bilateral military-to-military ties ranging from confidence building, security consultations, military exercises, military education and training, joint R&D of military and civilian products. It is highly unlikely that the current institutionalized relationship will be seriously affected by one transaction. China’s expert community is more pragmatic about the current and future military relationship with Russia. A military columnist in Shanghai, for example, asked, “[What can China learn from Su-35s?](#)” In his long article intended for general readership, the writer provided a balanced assessment of the strong and weak points of the two military-industrial complexes, particularly in the aerospace and naval armament areas. His conclusion was that perhaps in the foreseeable future, China would continue to benefit from, or be influenced by, the design philosophy and technology of its Russian counterparts, even if China may take the lead in some areas of aerospace and naval R&D.

Central Asia: great game again?

Great power competition in Central Asia ebbs and flows in a timeless and tireless fashion. This “great game” – including the cooperative-competitive ones between Moscow and Beijing – continues, albeit to different degrees and in different areas, 25 years after the Soviet implosion, and 15 years after the formation of the SCO and the massive incursion by the US in the wake of 9/11. In addition to the traditional challenges defined by the SCO (“three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism), the region is faced with new complexities, including the prolonged instability of Afghanistan and a growing ISIS footprint. Meanwhile, Central Asia is more integrated today than any other time in the post-Soviet era thanks to two China-related

mechanisms: the SCO and the [huge energy infrastructure](#) (gas and oil pipelines) running from Turkmenistan to China through several Central Asian states.

More recently, the region has been gripped by the succession issue as Soviet-era leaders are fading away. On Sept. 2, Uzbek President Islam Abduganiyevich Karimov died. After 27 years in power, this left a huge void in Uzbekistan, a stable, independent, and secular state in a region of Islamism and instability. Uzbekistan is only the first to experience a succession crisis; Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are in the same boat. President Putin stopped in Tashkent right after the G20 Summit in China, and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev represented Russia at Karimov’s funeral.

Russia’s core interest is to make sure that there is a friendly leader and an ally in Tashkent, observed veteran Indian diplomat/scholar [M K Bhadrakumar](#). Moscow, nonetheless, will have to compete with both Beijing and Washington in this vital part of the region. Between the US military and political presence and China’s economic drive, the latter is less alarming for Russia. China’s desire for stability overlaps considerably with that of Russia.

More recently, “returned” ISIS fighters from the Middle East have made Central Asia both their “home” and transit area to other countries. Moscow and Beijing, therefore, share a more [pessimistic view](#) of the regional security outlook. The SCO security services (RATS), for example, identified [multiple sources](#) (Tajik, Chinese, and Russian) behind the August terror attack near the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, a sign of a more coordinated ISIS operation. SCO’s September [Peace Mission-2016](#) exercises in Kyrgyzstan ran a scenario of “regional crisis triggered by international terrorists” (国际恐怖主义引发的地区危机). Still, it was odd that Russia dispatched two Tupolev *Tu-95MS* strategic bombers. It was “overkill” for anti-terror operations, but perhaps “just right” to underscore Moscow’s role for both its friends and foes.

The 15th SCO Prime Minister’s Meeting was held in Bishkek on Nov. 2-3. Economic issues dominated the annual meeting, with China’s proposals to establish a [free trade zone](#) (FTZ) within the SCO as well as a SCO development bank to promote regional trade and investment topping the list. In his speech, Premier Li Keqiang expressed willingness to conduct relevant feasibility studies for the FTZ. Others, however, were

not so sure about the FTZ for the SCO. Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister [Rustam Azimov](#) favored an SCO bank, which is in progress. Prime Minister [Medvedev](#) cautioned about the complexities in operating “any preferential trade regimes” due to its conflict with internal rules. Instead, Russia favored working through the existing SCO Business Council and Interbank Associations. Medvedev also supported upgrading and utilizing existing rail and highway systems, presumably those vast and underused Russian transportation lines. The [Joint Communiqué](#) issued largely reflected Russia’s preference without any explicit reference to China’s FTZ proposal.

It is unclear how China’s Silk Road strategy, commonly known as the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, and Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) will interface with the SCO’s economic strategy. Both Russian and Chinese leaders now favor integration of the two, at least in their rhetoric. In actuality, however, Moscow seems more forthcoming when working with financial mechanisms outside the SCO framework, such as the more recently developed BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). As a result, bilateral projects have been the main format between China and individual Central Asian states. It looks like economics will continue to be the “weakest link” for the SCO in the foreseeable future.

In the security area, the region was increasingly torn by competing and mutually exclusive arrangements regarding Afghanistan. In early August, a high-level (defense ministers) [Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism](#) was set up by Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. The goal was to coordinate with and support each other in a range of issues, including situation assessment/evaluation, intelligence sharing, anti-terrorist capability building, and joint anti-terrorist training and personnel training. The four also committed to keep this coordination and cooperation “exclusive” to the four countries. China’s highly publicized engagement with Afghanistan was a sharp departure from its usually cautious approach. The word “exclusive,” however, begs the question: why were Russia and the US excluded?

Before anything tangible was accomplished by the quartet, an [“India-US-Afghanistan Trilateral Dialogue”](#) made its debut in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session. For a while, the Afghan government seemed to be engaging with everyone except Russia, to Moscow’s dismay. On Oct. 12, Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Alexander Mantytskiy said that the US and NATO had failed in their mission in

Afghanistan, that terrorists were still strong enough to launch attacks, and that Russia was concerned about insecurity in the north of Afghanistan. At the same time, Moscow hosted an international conference titled [“Instability in Afghanistan in the Fall of 2016”](#) with representatives from Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Germany, and Afghanistan, without the Chinese!

Regardless, [RT](#) reported on Oct. 10 that Beijing publicly backed Moscow’s Afghan and Syrian initiatives. Throughout October and November, reports and leaks claimed that Russia had established [contacts with the Taliban](#) for the purpose of fighting ISIS or “protecting the Russian embassy in Kabul.” Moscow dismissed the alleged “contacts” as “fairy tales,” maintaining that “the U.S., the British and the French contacted Taliban for years and had no troubling thoughts over this,” reported [Interfax](#) on Dec. 9. Meanwhile, [a new trilateral “axis”](#) was taking shape between Russia, China, and Pakistan. In late December, [the trio met](#) for the first time in Moscow to discuss the Afghan issue, without the Afghans! Afghan media warned that the growing Russo-American rivalry in Afghanistan may turn the country into [another Syria](#).

All of these “consultation mechanisms” regarding Afghanistan were against the backdrop of previously [failed initiatives](#) to seek a political solution to the Afghan conflict. In July 2015, Pakistan, which is seen as key to the future of Afghanistan and was part of both Beijing and Moscow’s initiatives, brokered the first-ever direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. However, the process was scuttled after the confirmation of the death of Taliban Supreme leader Mullah Omar. Six months later, another initiative was announced involving Pakistan, Afghanistan, the US, and China to make renewed efforts for direct talks between the Ghani administration and the Afghan Taliban. The group, which was formed in December 2015, is all but dead after the killing of Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansoor in a US drone strike in Balochistan near the Afghan border in July 2016.

It is unclear how this new round of tug-of-war focusing on Afghanistan between those global and regional powers will play out. On the eve of an unprecedented power transition in the US, Moscow and Beijing seemed to be working together, with Pakistan, to counter the US-India-Afghan trio. Meanwhile, Russia and China reacted sharply to President Obama’s Dec. 9 decision to lift the ban on providing lethal weapons to Syria and to send 200 US Special Forces to Syria. The battle of Aleppo” – driven by Moscow and with an [increasingly](#)

[proactive role of China](#), albeit on the periphery – may well be part of the end game at the dawn for the much anticipated (for Russia) and dreaded (for China) Trump era.

Awaiting the Trump Show 2.0, and the winner is...

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th US president, aside from its domestic shock, was perhaps the most, and least, anticipated event for Moscow and Beijing. Part of this “Trump complex” in Moscow and Beijing was derived from their mutual dislike of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Washington’s worsening relationship, almost simultaneously, with China and Russia had moved the two Eurasian powers closer, [albeit reluctantly](#), to the dismay of political realists such as [Henry Kissinger](#) and [Zbigniew Brzezinski](#). Meanwhile, many in China and Russia were surprised, puzzled and perhaps entertained by Trump’s overly pro-Russia stance, which appeared to be an extremely rare, and perhaps dangerous, game between Trump and the rest of the political elite in the US. As a result, both Moscow and Beijing were anxiously waiting for Trump to take full control on policies toward Russia and China.

Fluidity and uncertainty is inherent in any triangle relationship. Nevertheless, the Trump “tremor” meant very different things for Russia and China. For Moscow, the prospect was to get a quite different type of relationship with Washington. Given Trump’s overt and overly pro-Putin outlook, there were good reasons for Russia to expect that the worst with the US would be over, though the direction and degree of any change remained unclear. Indeed, chemistry was already in the making between Trump and Putin. On Dec. 15, Putin send a letter to Trump, hoping to “restore bilateral cooperation in different areas with a constructive and pragmatic way, and to elevate our cooperation at the international level to a new height.” Trump’s transition team quickly publicized the letter. Later, Putin went so far as to “refuse” to reciprocate Obama’s expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats, thus avoiding the normal retaliation cycle. In contrast to Washington’s growing Russia-bashing climate, Moscow appeared to be notably calm, either to hide its pleasant disbelief for the totally unexpected “gift,” or for its uncertainty about Trump’s ability to work with the Washington establishment.

Meanwhile, almost everything from Trump and his team for China pointed to a less sure, or even worse, prospect. The basic trust and foundation of bilateral relations (Taiwan and the one China policy) were shaken by Trump’s Dec. 2 phone call with Taiwan

President Tsai Ing-wen even before Trump’s inauguration. And he did not seem to care!

Trump’s Russia-soft-and-China-hard posture set off a deluge of commentaries and assessments in China. Some published assessments [questioned](#) if Trump would be able to undermine the current Sino-Russian strategic partnership, given the level of shared [mutual interests and deep and broad bilateral interactions](#) constructed and matured over the past quarter of a century. At best, Trump’s Russia policy may open [a door for improving relations with Moscow](#), but it may be more challenging for him to turn that into a real hedge against China. Regarding Trump’s China policy, an [analyst](#) in the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) in Beijing, which is attached to the Foreign Ministry, pointed to the limits of Trump’s “China-unfriendly” policy due to the complex and deep interactions between the US and China.

Still, Trump’s capacity to alter existing relations with China, particularly after his [telephone talk](#) with President Tsai on Dec. 2, sufficiently alarmed, and angered many in Beijing. A growing number of published assessments started to take seriously Trump’s willingness and ability to pursue a “revised” strategic triangle once in office. [Jia Qingguo](#) (贾庆国), dean of Peking University’s School of International Affairs, warned shortly after the Trump-Tsai phone call that the trust deficit and confrontation between major powers, particularly between Washington and Beijing, were increasingly leading to deteriorating security situations in both Europe and East Asia. This trend toward confrontation, though undesirable, may not be reversed in the foreseeable future.

This pessimistic assessment of Trump’s China policy was perhaps most obvious in the two pieces published by Liu Ying (刘莹), associate professor at CIIS in Beijing and currently visiting scholar at the Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. In her Oct. 31 article for Beijing’s *Global Times*, [Liu was cautiously optimistic](#) about the future of US-China relations, assuming that Hillary Clinton would win. In her [Nov. 22 op-ed](#) in the same paper, Liu urged that China should be ready to change its Russia and US policies “with the times.” Liu noticed that both Putin and Trump had expressed willingness to reset the difficult bilateral relationship. Although this may be difficult, US policy toward Russia will change for sure. China therefore must be ready to face changes in US-Russian relations, which can be “imperative, pragmatic and ‘unprecedented.’”

The uneasiness toward the impending Trump era and its perceived challenge to Sino-Russian relations by China's experts was also evident at the official level. An authoritative op-ed in the Dec.17 *People's Daily* with the pen-name of [Zhong Sheng](#) (钟声) stressed the invulnerability of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. With the title of "China-Russia strategic coordination acts as stabilizer of world peace," its targeted audience may also include Moscow. After listing almost all the major developments, shared interests, and current and future benefits of the bilateral relationship, Zhong Sheng ended with a clear preference for future relations with Russia: "Looking into the next year, the international situation may become even more complicated, thus posing greater challenges for the development of both China and Russia. With the joint efforts and cooperation, the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination will continue to serve as a ballast stone in order to further promote prosperity in both countries and enhance world peace and stability."

In her last press conference in 2016, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying expressed similar views. China would like to see a normal and less confrontational relationship between Moscow and Washington, remarked Hua, referring to Obama's decision to expel 35 Russian diplomats in late December. "China, the U.S. and Russia are large powers in the world with global influence.... Closer cooperation and more positive interactions between the three are in line with the fundamental interests of the countries and peoples of the world, as well as for promoting world peace, stability and development," said Hua.

Toward the year end, Chinese President Xi Jinping also weighed in. In a two-day Politburo meeting on Dec. 26-27, which focused on domestic politics, [Xi](#) said that his leadership would "never and under any circumstances tolerate anything jargonizing the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation."

These increasingly negative views in China about the coming Trump administration were mostly in the public and policy domains. The view of Feng Shaolei (冯绍雷), a top Russianologist in Shanghai, however, provided a unique perspective. For him, the current Trump-Putin tangle was by no means derived from personal preferences, but rather the outcome of several "convergences" between the two large powers at various levels of their perceptions and interactions:

First, both Putin and Trump are populists and conservative. And their anti-elitist views are also based on certain similar geostrategic and civilizational components. Partly because of these similar ideational elements, both respect realist thinker/practitioners such as Henry Kissinger who met with Trump both before and after his recent China trip.

Second, both Putin and Trump are able to feel and to lead the populist impulse in each other's country. Although they come from totally different cultural, social and political backgrounds, both have been successful in overcoming considerable odds in their respective career/experiences. Their mutual respect is, therefore, natural and logical.

Third, Trump's effort to reset the current asymmetrical triangular relationship between the US, Russia and China is understandable. A less confrontational side in a strategic triangle is more stable and therefore more desirable for Trump, as well as for Russia and China. The key is to avoid an all-round confrontation with any one of the trio.

Feng noticed that a considerable amount of US public opinion actually agreed with Trump's pro-Russia rhetoric. What surprised him in his recent encounters with the US side, however, was the deep, broad, and unprecedentedly strong anti-Russia sentiment across the US political establishment, including think tanks and the entire Hillary Clinton team. In such a climate, even some moderate Russia experts were unable and unwilling to speak their mind. He also found that Russian political elites understood the difficulties that Trump would have to overcome to be able to reset his Russia policy and were therefore not overly optimistic about that prospect.

As a frequent visitor to Russia, Feng noticed the "entire Russian elite including Putin himself were waiting for the possible readjustment" of the US Russia policy under the Trump administration. Meanwhile, Putin had on almost all the occasions when Feng was present in Russia, spoken highly of relations with China. Feng was particularly impressed when (presumably in one of the annual sessions of the Valdai International Discussion Club) Putin said that "Sino-Russian relations is higher than normal strategic partnership relations" (中俄势必一般战略伙伴关系更高级的关系).

At a time when the Sino-Russian-US triangle was to experience some adjustment, Feng said that Putin had been extraordinarily careful and cautious not to

undermine the bilateral relationship with China by expressing clearly and unambiguously the signal that “Sino-Russian relations should be cherished” (要珍惜中俄关系).

Meanwhile, Putin had been pragmatic about relations with the US. Even when he was very critical of the US, Putin always left the door open with conciliatory messages for future adjustment. Nor did Putin always blame Western sanctions and outside factors for Russia’s internal problems. Instead, he was quite honest and pragmatic about Russia’s own predicament. In the end, Feng seemed sure about the sustainability of the Sino-Russian side of the triangle, while anticipating some almost unavoidable adjustments in Russian-US relations under the Trump administration.

In the current foreign studies community in China, Russia specialists are well outnumbered by US scholars/experts and international relations generalists. Even within China’s Russia studies community itself, many are “Westernized,” though to different degrees, in terms of their methodology and Russian language proficiency. Genuine Russianologists are hard to find. Feng’s assessments of possible changes in Russian-US relations are therefore unique against the proliferation of “expert” opinions of various kinds.

It remains to be seen how Feng’s views will be interfaced with others in the policymaking process. On the eve of Trump’s inauguration, however, there seems to be a visible “disconnect” between China’s concerns about a more symmetrical triangle with some reduction in Russian-US tension, and a possible “free fall” in Sino-US relations regarding the SCS, Korea and Taiwan, etc. It is also unclear for many Chinese analysts how Trump’s White House will interface with the vast military-industrial-intelligence community. What worries many in China now is not necessarily Trump’s ability to pursue a pro-Russia policy, or the many high-level pro-Russia officials in his foreign policy team, but rather the sheer lack of any equivalent in the China policy making team in the White House. The only possible “China hand” in the White House (senior director for Asia on the NSC) is former Marine intelligence officer [Matthew Pottinger](#). The Chinese-speaking officer/scholar, however, may well be more China-unfriendly due to his years in post-Tiananmen China as a journalist for *Reuters* (1998-2001) and the *Wall Street Journal* (2001-2005). He has been, however, one of the most trusted subordinates of Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump’s designated national security advisor, who is known for his “pro-Russia” views and behavior. In the past few

decades, China has been able to turn some old-generation Russia scholars/policy makers (e.g., Kissinger and Brzezinski) more China-friendly. The China experts in Trump’s team, however, are recruited because they are tough on China.

In light of all the unfriendly signs and messages from team the incoming Trump team, a popular Chinese media outlet in Shanghai advised its readers to “[buckle up](#)” (系好安全带) for future relations with the US.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2016

Sept. 4, 2016: President Xi Jinping meets Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the 11th G20 meeting in Hangzhou, China. Xi tells Putin that the two countries must reinforce their mutual political support, including in “the protection of their sovereignty.”

Sept. 4, 2016: BRICS leaders met informally on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Hangzhou. They agree to boost their strategic partnership to address common economic challenges.

Sept. 8-10, 2016: Russian Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Matviyenko visits China. She is received by President Xi in Beijing.

Sept. 10, 2016: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov and Chinese Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Affairs Wu Dawei have a telephone conversation to discuss events in the Korean Peninsula. The sides expressed concerns about the DPRK’s new nuclear test, and call on countries to refrain from steps that could further escalate tensions.

Sept. 11-19, 2016: Chinese and Russian navies conduct *Joint Sea-2016* naval drill in the South China Sea. The last joint drills (2015) were held in the Sea of Japan and the Mediterranean.

Sept. 12, 2016: Russia and China hold the 20th meeting of the subcommittee on nuclear issues in Moscow in preparation for the Prime Ministers Meeting.

Sept. 12, 2016: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov exchange views by phone on North Korea’s nuclear test and ceasefire deal in Syria.

Sept. 12-14, 2016: Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev visits Beijing and jointly chairs 12th Round of China-Russia Strategic Security Consultation with China’s State Councilor Yang Jiechi. He also participates in the third Russian-Chinese law-enforcement and security cooperation mechanism and meets President Xi.

Sept. 15-16, 2016: Top security officials from the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) meet in New Delhi, India for the sixth session of BRICS senior representatives on security issues. Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi join the meeting.

Sept. 15-21, 2016: SCO member states (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, China, Russia and Tajikistan) hold *Peace Mission-2016* joint anti-terror command and staff military exercises in Kyrgyzstan.

Sept. 25-Nov. 1, 2016: SCO’s border guard and special services conduct joint operation code-named *Unity-2016*.

Sept. 26, 2016: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Meshkov meets China’s Assistant Foreign Minister (rank of Deputy Foreign Minister) Liu Haixing in Moscow. Talks focus on European situation including Brexit and Russian relations with NATO.

Oct. 10-12, 2016: China and Russia announce at the seventh Xiangshan Forum that the two militaries will hold a joint anti-missile drill in 2017.

Oct. 15-16, 2016: Eighth BRICS Summit held in Goa, India. President Xi and President Putin meet

on sidelines for “an in-depth exchange of views” on Korean, Syrian, and Central Asian affairs.

Oct. 27, 2016: Fifth round of the Russia-China Dialogue on Security in Northeast Asia is held in Beijing, co-chaired by Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou and Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov. They urge coordination to ensure strategic stability in Northeast Asia.

Nov. 2-3, 2016: Fifteenth annual SCO Prime Ministerial Meeting is held in Bishkek. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev meet on the sidelines.

Nov. 3-6, 2016: Adm. Vladimir Korolyov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy, visits China and PLA Navy Commander Adm. Wu Shengli. Korolov also visits PLA Navy’s North China Sea Fleet, the Submarine Academy and vessels including the aircraft carrier *Liaoning*.

Nov. 6-8, 2016: Premier Li Keqiang visits Moscow and co-chairs with Prime Minister Medvedev the 21st China-Russia Prime Ministers Meeting. Li is received by President Putin.

Nov. 19-20, 2016: APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting is held in Lima, Peru. Presidents Putin and Xi meet on the sideline and agree on reciprocal visits in 2017.

Nov. 22-24, 2016: Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visits China and co-chairs the 21st session of the intergovernmental military-technical cooperation commission together with Vice Chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission Air Force Gen. Xu Qiliang.

Nov. 21-24, 2016: China’s first international forum on urban anti-terror strategy, code-named *Great Wall-2016*, organized by China’s Armed Police is held in Beijing.

Nov. 28-Dec. 4, 2016: SCO Infantry forces conduct joint training exercise in Korla, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Nov. 30, 2016: The 14th SCO Attorney Generals Meeting and the 2016 BRICS Attorney Generals Meeting are held in Sanya, Hainan Province.

Dec. 6-10, 2016: Group of Chechen law enforcement officials visits China and share their skills in fighting international terrorism and extremism with Chinese partners.

Dec. 12, 2016: Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov visits Beijing and meets Assistant Foreign Minister Li Huilai. They exchange views on bilateral relations, the SCO and other topics.

Dec. 26, 2016: President Xi sends condolences to President Putin on behalf of the Chinese government and people for the airplane crash near Sochi that killed all 84 passengers on board, including 64 artists and singers of Russia’s world-renowned Red Army Choir.

Dec. 27, 2016: Russia, China, and Pakistan meet in Moscow to discuss Afghanistan.

Dec. 31, 2016: President Xi and President Putin exchange congratulatory messages on the coming New Year.