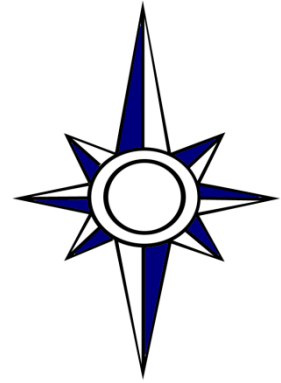


Comparative Connections

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China-Russia Relations: Pivot to Eurasia and Africa: Xi's Style

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President Xi Jinping kicked off his first round of foreign visits by traveling to Russia and Africa in late March, just five days after he was confirmed as China's paramount leader by the National People's Congress. In comparison, it took Hu Jintao two months and Jiang Zemin two years to set foot in Russia after assuming the Chinese presidency. Both sides hailed the Moscow summit as "historical" for the "special nature" of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. Xi also became the first foreign head of state to visit the Russian Defense Ministry. Three days after their summit, Xi and President Vladimir Putin met again in Durban, South Africa, where they navigated the annual BRICS Summit toward a more integrated economic grouping. Before and after those trips, however, both men had to deal with a host of difficult and dangerous foreign policy challenges in Korea, Afghanistan, and Syria.

To Russia, with dreams

President Xi's eight-day trip started in Moscow for a state visit on March 22-23, which was just five days after Xi officially assumed top leadership following the annual meeting of China's National People's Congress (NPC) on March 5-17. Moscow was still in its last leg of winter, with a temperature of -20 C. The atmosphere surrounding Xi's official visit, however, was heating up prior to his arrival at the Moscow Vnukovo International Airport. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, for example, described Xi's forthcoming visit to Russia as "the biggest event in the history of Russian-Chinese relations." Both Putin and Xi spoke about the "special nature" of the strategic partnership between Russia and China prior to their meeting in Moscow. Chinese media went as far as to predict that Xi's visit would "leave a historic imprint in setting a new paradigm by demonstrating that the world's two major nations can forge a bond purely based on good-neighborliness, equality and mutual trust, without resorting to old-school alliance or jointly targeting a third party."

However, Xi's choice of Moscow as the first foreign capital to visit actually followed diplomatic protocol in that it reciprocated Putin's visit to China as his first foreign trip after assuming the Russian presidency in May 2012. Xi's visit was packed with more than 20 meetings covering a wide range of topics. The Xi-Putin talks in the Kremlin on March 12 focused on two major issues: how to translate their high-level strategic trust into pragmatic cooperation in economic and socio-cultural areas, and how to broaden and deepen cooperation and coordination on regional and global issues. For the first issue, Putin and Xi agreed to proceed with the "(2013-2016) Guidelines for the Implementation of the Treaty of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation," which focuses on

economic issues. The goal is to “jointly enhance the two countries’ comprehensive national strength and international competitiveness” in the following areas:

- To realize \$100 billion in bilateral trade by 2015 and \$200 billion by 2020, and promote the diversification of their trade structures;
- To achieve a significant increase in mutual investment;
- To promote the use of yuan and ruble in bilateral trade, direct investment, and credit;
- To cooperate in the energy sectors (petroleum, natural gas, coal, electricity, nuclear and new energy) and jointly safeguard bilateral, regional and global energy security;
- To cooperate in the areas of forest resources, agriculture, regional development, environmental protection, high-tech, aerospace, transportation, etc.
- To strengthen and expand people-to-people interactions and cultural exchanges, such as the “China Tourism Year” in Russia and youth exchanges for the forthcoming “China and Russia years of friendly youth exchanges” during 2014-2015.

To be sure, these items were not additions to the priority list of Chinese-Russian summits, but the explicit wording that “translated” their high-level political relationship into more tangible benefits for both sides as “a strategic task” was quite striking. This reflects a reckoning, though belated, of the weakest link (economic relations) in their bilateral ties, as well as new impetus infused by the new leadership of both countries. Among the 32 agreements and memorandums signed shortly after the Putin-Xi talks were major energy and banking accords that would significantly increase the flow of energy resources from Russia to China. For example, Russian oil giant Rosneft would more than triple its oil deliveries to China from 300,000 to 1 million barrels per day, making Russia the top supplier in China’s oil market. Even Russia’s gas supply to China, which was one of the most difficult points of negotiation over the past six years, seemed to be approaching the end of the tunnel as Putin and Xi presided over the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) for the annual delivery of 38 billion cubic meters (cm) of natural gas to China over a period of 30 years starting from 2018, with the option of expanding to 60 billion cm per year.

Many of these agreements were not binding, meaning that the two sides still have room for further negotiations. The fact that many of the MoUs are being financed by Chinese banks is, by itself, a sign of major step toward their finalization. This means China would pay in advance for Russian oil and gas, as was the case in the past (in 2009, China paid \$25 billion for two Russian oil firms in exchange for 15 million tons of Russian oil per year for 20 years). In the words of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the two sides reached “breakthrough agreements,” or “agreements of the century.” Putin, in turn, remarked, “We can already say this is a historic visit with positive results.”

Another focus of the Moscow summit was global affairs. For both Xi and Putin, the current world order is marked by interdependence and instability. Indeed, the Moscow summit was against a backdrop of many alarming signs, particularly for China: the US pivot to Asia, crises in Korea, tensions in the East and South China Seas, uncertainties surrounding the situation in Afghanistan, and disagreement over the Iranian nuclear program, as well as the deepening civil war in Syria. Normalcy in relations with Russia is an island of stability in an increasingly chaotic

environment around China. Therefore, Moscow and Beijing are particularly fond of their “new type of great-power relationship,” which is defined as being based on “principles of equality, mutual trust, inclusiveness, mutual learning, and win-win cooperation; jointly promote peace and stability; pursue common development and prosperity; and build a just, democratic, and harmonious world order.” The two sides called on “all major powers to go beyond the mentality of zero-sum games and bloc-based politics.” Neither Putin nor Xi ever mentioned the United States by name in speeches or published documents during the summit. However, no one would miss the implication of the wording. In fact, the Moscow summit would be followed by several multilateral forums – the BRICS Summit in late March, the SCO Summit and G20 in June – where Moscow and Beijing coordinated policies to support their respective interests.

In their joint press conference following the formal talks, President Xi emphasized that the mature and stable bilateral relationship between the two countries has reached a new stage, from which Beijing and Moscow would provide each other with opportunities to develop and to treat each other as partners for cooperation. Both symbolism and substance, therefore, underscored the Moscow summit. Xi’s visit was indeed “a landmark event” in bilateral relations, as Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov remarked. Putin and Xi had met several times before the Moscow summit. This time, however, they fostered a personal relationship that would guarantee the continuity and stability of the bilateral relations for a decade, assuming that both Xi and Putin would serve two full terms (10 years for Xi till 2023 and 12 years for Putin till 2024). That is why Putin was said, according to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, to accompany Xi for eight consecutive hours in Moscow, which was unprecedented in Russian protocol.

Specifics of the Xi-Putin talks have yet to be fully disclosed, though the Chinese side has described them as “sincere, pragmatic and intimate (坦诚、务实、投契).” Russia’s *Kommersant* (*Businessman*) somehow reported that Xi remarked during the talk that he and Putin had similar characters. Exactly what Xi meant was subject to speculation. Putin is immensely popular in China, particularly among young Chinese women because of his masculine image, in sharp contrast to Putin’s negative image in the West. For Xi and many Chinese elite, however, Putin is admired for his ability to restore some sense of order from the ashes of the Soviet implosion in the 1990s. Despite their vastly different personal experience before getting into their respective national leadership positions, both men went through the worst of their nations’ times: Xi spent much of his teenage years (1969-75) in the poorest rural areas of China during the catastrophic Cultural Revolution (1966-76); as a young KGB officer, Putin witnessed “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20th century, the collapse of the Soviet Union. Neither was able to reverse the tide of history, and both men learned, from their own experience, the hard lesson, which was provocatively and brilliantly theorized by Harvard Political Science Samuel Huntington that, “Men may, of course, have order without liberty, but they cannot have liberty without order. Authority has to exist before it can be limited,...” (Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Harvard University Press, 1968, pp. 7-8).

Xi has yet to be fully tested on foreign policy, though his Russia visit is widely interpreted as part of his grand diplomatic strategy of “making relations with major powers as the key, neighbors as top priority, developing countries the basis, and multilateral forums important stages [大国是关键、周边是首要、发展中国家是基础、多边是重要舞台].” He nonetheless

managed to consolidate his authority on the home front with his resolute, nuanced, and effective skills to balance major power groups in China – Jiang Zeming’s Shanghai faction, Hu Jintao’s Youth League group, the ambitious “princelings,” the increasingly disenchanting intelligentsia, and the powerful military – in a few months after assuming his role as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secretary general at the end of 2012. Xi is yet to prevail in the anti-corruption campaign that is essential for restoring the seriously eroded trust between the state/party and the society. The unprecedented scale and speed of the anti-corruption move, however, separated Xi from both Jiang and Hu, who spent most of their time trying to preserve the status quo.

Indeed, Xi was so confident at the onset of his 10-year reign that he began vigorously promoting the “China Dream” concept, which is defined as the pursuit of national prosperity, national rejuvenation, and the happiness of the people. The concept has been scrutinized and rationalized in China, while being dismissed by many in the West. The definition of the “dream,” however, does not have any traces of communism and/or the communist party. By no means does Xi’s “China Dream” dump the CCP. The “China Dream” implies that the CCP is a vehicle for national rejuvenation. In this respect, Xi appears very similar to Putin, who has been seen as a staunch Russian patriot and nationalist, for better or worse.

In his speech to students and faculty members of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations on March 23, Xi not only brought up the notion of the “China Dream,” but took a step further by claiming that “We will achieve the China Dream, not only for the benefit of the Chinese people, but also for the people of all countries.” It remains to be seen how Xi’s “China Dream” would be shared with the Russians. The visiting Chinese president, however, infused a considerable dose of optimism-plus-realism in his audience by quoting Russian writer Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828–89), who is also very popular in China: “[T]he road of history is not the walkway on the Nevsky Prospect. It moves forward entirely out in the open. Sometimes it passes through dust. Sometimes it passes through mud. Sometimes it crosses swamps. Sometimes it passes through jungles.” Whatever the outcome, Xi told his audience that “[a] prosperous and strong Russia is in line with China’s interests and also benefits peace” and that the Sino-Russian relationship “is the most important bilateral relationship in the world and it is the best great power relationship.”

Xi’s portrait of the bilateral relationship was no exaggeration. Shortly after his speech, Xi became the first foreign head of state to visit the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Command Center of the Russian Armed Forces, including its Strategic Missile Forces and Special Forces. The visit was arranged at Putin’s suggestion, according to Xi, who was accompanied by newly appointed Defense Minister Gen. Chang Wanquan. Xi and his party were briefed, presumably through instant communication, by Russian naval commanders from the high seas, regional commanders, and CEOs of Russian military-industrial companies. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu remarked that Xi’s visit indicated the high level and special characteristics of the bilateral relations. Chinese media also reported that the two sides discussed and reached agreement on China’s purchase of a large quantity of Russian arms (24 *Su-35s* and four *Lada*-class submarines). Some Russian “insiders,” however, dismissed the authenticity of such reports, and claimed that the two sides were still working on the issue at a preliminary stage. Regardless, the two sides are working on the largest military sales in the past 10 years.

BRICS with momentum

Three days after their Moscow summit, the Chinese and Russian presidents met again in Durban, South Africa for the 5th annual summit of BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). This time, Beijing and Moscow were better prepared for their common position on BRICS development. In their joint communiqué issued in Moscow on March 22, Xi and Putin stated:

The two sides will strive to push the BRICS leaders' meeting in Durban to take cooperation among BRICS countries to a new level and support BRICS countries in gradually becoming a mechanism for *dialogue and cooperation on major world economic and political issues* (emphasis added). The two sides emphasized the vital importance of comprehensive and practical cooperation within the framework of BRICS countries, and that includes support for the Business Council's work, exploring a development bank and a foreign exchange reserves pool, and continuing cooperation in science and technology, agriculture, health, and other important livelihood areas.

The theme of the 5th BRICS Summit was "integration and industrialization." Perhaps the most important achievement was an agreement to set up a BRICS development bank, a \$100 billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), a business council, and a think tank council. The operating specifics of the bank and CRA are yet to be worked out by experts groups, which could take considerable time and energy, but the path toward the final goal is now open.

This was the first time that the BRICS held their summit in Africa and agenda was therefore heavily Africa-oriented, reflecting both the prospects and problems of this vast and largely underdeveloped continent. BRICS leaders also reached broad consensus on jointly dealing with major global and regional issues including reform of the international monetary and financial systems, promotion of global development, and management of global crises and conflicts. The policy preferences reflect the broad thinking on international affairs in Beijing and Moscow.

The exact shape and impact of BRICS on the world stage are widely debated. Already, this loose grouping of newly industrialized countries now account for 50 percent of the world's economic growth, 42 percent of the world's population, 30 percent of the world's territory, 20 percent of the world's GDP (\$14.9 trillion), 15 percent of global trade and \$4 trillion in combined foreign reserves as of 2013. If the current trajectory continues, even at a slower pace, BRICS' share of the global economic pie will continue to grow. BRICS has repeatedly claimed that the group is not a counterweight to existing institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Instead, it seeks a "complementary rather than rival role" in international economics. Regardless, the West's perception of the BRICS mechanism has largely been negative. Joseph Nye's "BRICS Without Mortar" (April 8, 2013) and Dani Rodrik's "What the World Really Needs from the BRICS" (April 15, 2013) highlighted the inherent difficulties within BRICS due to their huge differences. Both authors are from Harvard, and both pieces were published in the *Moscow Times*, a rather anti-Putin daily.

In comparative terms, the BRICS countries have taken, and will continue to take, more pragmatic and effective steps toward specific goals set by their top leaders at the annual summit.

Since its inception at the Yekaterinburg (Russia) summit in 2009, considerable traction has been developed in the institutionalization of the BRICS. In just one year between the 2012 New Delhi summit and the 2013 Durban summit, several ministerial meetings were held in the areas of foreign affairs, security, finance, trade, health, and central bank governors. Additionally, the BRICS fifth Academic Forum, fourth Business Forum and third Financial Forum were all carried out over the past year. Based on this line of thinking and BRICS own track record, the Durban summit decided to apply more “mortar” onto the BRICS’ structure. The “Action Plan” of the Durban summit declaration, for example, specified an even more ambitious list of functional meetings, totaling 18, in the following year prior to the Brazil summit in 2014.

One advantage of the BRICS is its economic focus, which allows its member states to avoid more sensitive “high politics” (security, etc.). Another feature of the BRICS is its wide geographic dispersion that prevents the group from developing any geostrategic dimension against any established groups, most of which are dominated by the West. Finally, the three non-Western democracies (Brazil, India, and South Africa) and one “less Western” democracy (Russia) within BRICS have been far more accommodating in dealing and working with the non-Western, non-democratic and secular China than their Western counterparts who insist the criterion of “sameness” in group/alliance configuration. These factors, among others, perhaps explain the relatively rapid institutionalization of the BRICS.

Since Beijing and Moscow have their own preferences regarding the construct, operation, and future trajectories of the BRICS. The Durban summit and its emphasis on African development are perceived by Beijing as a huge opportunity for more balanced and more convenient economic interactions between China and Africa. With China’s huge financial clout, BRICS would serve as a very useful vehicle for China’s long-term economic interests. BRICS is not intended to displace the existing economic infrastructures dominated by the West, into which China has immersed itself. Rather, it would open new spaces for China’s development beyond the West and where Beijing would have more say in rule creation and enforcement. Beijing’s financial power, however, may or may not be directly translated to China’s influence in BRICS operation. The huge and still growing disparity between China and other BRICS members – China’s GDP is larger than the combined GDP of the four other BRICS members – will require considerable fine-tuning of the use of China’s power in both symbolic and substantive issues of the BRICS. In his speech at the summit, Xi Jinping spelled out China’s goal as “peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcome” for both the BRICS and for Africa. Xi also paid official visits to Tanzania, South Africa and the Republic of Congo, during his trip to the BRICS summit.

While China’s goal for BRICS is largely economic, Russia seems to seek more opportunities to advance its strategic and political agendas. An internal assessment of Russia’s role in the BRICS, which was disclosed prior to the summit, envisioned Russia’s “strength” regarding BRICS in its “political and military might” vs. China’s strength in economics, Brazil’s ecological resources potential, India’s demographic and scientific potential, and South Africa as a gateway to Africa. Russia, accordingly, would find opportunities to exercise its “negotiating potential.” Within BRICS, Russia should use its power and authority to “stimulate” BRICS members “to overcome their disputes” in territory, natural resources, climate change, trade, etc. Russia’s ultimate goal is to prepare for the transition to a “polycentric world order” from the “US hegemony” that has been obsessed with “removal of undesirable regimes.”

Back to the “arch of instability”

Xi’s Eurasia-Africa “pivot,” along with Putin’s Africa “pivot,” barely hid a strategic fact of life: the peripheries of China and Russia have been in crisis. Instability in Afghanistan, which has become a permanent feature of the war-torn country, is expected to further deteriorate with the pending NATO/US pullout in 2013. The Korean Peninsula has been rocked by a series of crises between North Korea and the US-led allies. Last if not least, the civil war in Syria seems to have reached a point of no return with Western intelligence claims that the Assad regime “crossed the red line” by using chemical weapons against the rebels.

The final configuration of a post-NATO-US Afghanistan is still far from clear, which largely depends on the situation in that country as well as US domestic politics. It is precisely the uncertainty regarding the future of Afghanistan that affects its neighbors, especially member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Despite repeated efforts by the Obama administration to cast the pending withdrawal as a victory, retreat is considerably more difficult and trickier than getting into a conflict. Worse, the Taliban is apparently playing a waiting game and is not in a hurry to work with anyone for a post-NATO arrangement. The Russians, perhaps more than anybody else, understand the inherently unpredictable nature of getting out of Afghanistan. Going back to the mid-20th century, the disastrous outcome of the British decolonization of the sub-continent, which was brilliantly captured by Penderel Moon in *Divide & Quit* (1962), immediately led to wars between India and Pakistan.

Against this backdrop of heightened anxiety and uncertainty, a series of meetings was held in the first few months of 2013 among SCO members about the future of Afghanistan. In February, a trilateral meeting was held in Moscow between representatives of Russia, China, and India. Despite their different interests in Afghanistan, all three powers intend to see a stable and secure Afghanistan. Both China and India have huge investments there (\$3 billion and \$2 billion, respectively), while Russia wants to make sure that its traditional sphere of influence in Central Asia is not seriously affected by the spillover from the withdrawal and an almost inevitable power vacuum in its aftermath. During the Moscow trilateral meeting, India and China agreed to start their own bilateral talks on Afghanistan.

On April 3, diplomats from China, Russia, and Pakistan held the second round of consultations on the Afghanistan issue in Beijing. The dialogue was chaired by Director General of the Asian Affairs Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Luo Zhaohui and attended by a Russian delegation led by Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov and Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan Syed Ibne Abbas.

On April 11, India and China held the sixth counterterrorism talks in Beijing that yielded an “in-depth exchange of views and opinions on international and regional counterterrorism issues,” particularly regarding post-NATO Afghanistan. A week later, the two sides officially launched the India-China dialogue on Afghanistan in Beijing at which India’s Additional Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran) of the External Affairs Ministry Y. K. Sinha met Chinese counterpart Luo Zhaohui.

The Afghanistan-centered diplomatic maneuvering culminated in April 26 when the Istanbul Process held its third ministerial meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan. More than 50 high-level delegations, including many member states of NATO and groups of nations, joined the meeting to map out post-NATO Afghanistan. The third round of the Istanbul Process produced a great amount of publicity and support around the world, at least on paper. The substance of the meeting, however, is that the West is to wash its hands and other inputs are needed to manage the war-torn country. The impact of the withdrawal would be felt more immediately and strongly by Afghan neighbors, most of which are SCO members/observers. The fourth round of the Istanbul Process will be held in China in 2014.

While Afghanistan remains a “future” issue with many uncertainties, the Korean Peninsula and its neighbors were shaken by a series of crises beginning on Dec. 12, 2012 when North Korea launched a satellite into space. The resulting UN sanctions resolution passed on Jan. 22, 2013 and was reciprocated by North Korea’s more hostile rhetoric and actions including a nuclear weapon test on Feb. 12, withdrawing from the 1953 Armistice agreement on March 13, withdrawing workers from the Kaesong Industrial Complex on April 3, warning all foreign countries to evacuate their embassies and tourists on April 9, and demanding recognition as a nuclear state as prerequisite for dialogue on April 23. Throughout this period, the US and its allies carried out large-scale and almost non-stop military exercises, including *B-52* and *B-2* flyovers of South Korea. Former Japanese Defense Minister Ishiba Shigeru went as far as to state that Japan had the right to deliver a preemptive strike against North Korea. If this was not enough, a Japanese official in Osaka mistakenly e-mailed 87 Japanese airports that a North Korean missile had been launched, though the intended message was about a magnitude 6.3 earthquake that occurred in western Japan.

Both China and Russia strongly protested North Korea’s nuclear test immediately after it occurred. Two days later, Chinese and Russian foreign ministers talked over the phone. Beijing and Moscow supported March 7 UN resolutions condemning the test, calling for peaceful, diplomatic, and political settlement of the current situation and a resumption of the Six-Party Talks. They opposed further economic sanctions against North Korea, calling for a return to the negotiating process. On March 14, Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov and Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Wu Dawei held consultations in Moscow. They expressed their “joint opinion” that the tension must not be allowed to escalate and that it was necessary to settle nuclear and other issues of the Korean Peninsula using political and diplomatic approaches. The next day, SCO Secretary General Dmitriy Mezentsev issued a statement that “The SCO member-states are strongly in favor of the soonest possible resumption of the Six-Party Talks on the Korean Peninsula’s nuclear problem, unconditional fulfillment by the DPRK of the UN Security Council resolution requirements and it rejoining the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.”

Despite the strong opposition to North Korea’s moves, China and Russia were in a diplomatic and strategic dilemma. For many analysts in Russia and China, Obama’s “strategic impatience” toward North Korea contributes, at least partially, to the cycle of crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Pyongyang’s bellicose rhetoric, no matter how rational from North Korea’s perspective (drawing US attention), has made Northeast Asia the most dangerous place in the world. Worse, the

Korean crisis is being exploited by Japan to shake off the decades-long constitutional constraints imposed by the US. Most Russian analysts agreed that Russia has “surrendered, and perhaps should, the Korean issue to China. Nevertheless, “[I]n the current situation, nobody can influence North Korea, not even China,” remarked one Russian analyst in early April. For both Moscow and Beijing, there has been a growing “North Korea fatigue” syndrome lately. “Pyongyang has made a living of such blackmail for 20 years now, having successfully mastered the part of beggar with a stick,” remarked Georgiy Kunadze, who was Russian ambassador to South Korea in 1994-1997.

Blaming Pyongyang, however, would not defuse the current crisis. The real danger in the eyes of China and Russia may well be triggered by accidents as both sides are playing chicken with demonstrative uses of force, though nobody seems ready, or willing, to jump into a real war. Sixty years after the guns along the 38th Parallel fell silent, is the “sour little war” (the words of W. Averell Harriman), or “police action” (Harry Truman) that killed millions in three years really forgotten?! If Stalin and Mao indeed were in a position to switch on and off the Korean War 60 years ago, Xi and Putin appear to have little influence over Kim Il Sung’s grandson Kim Jong Un, whose seemingly reckless behavior has led to the ironic outcome of keeping the Americans in, Chinese and Russians out, South Koreans down and Japanese up (though unintentionally). Welcome to the brave new game of 21st century geopolitics, in which the “shrimp” teases the “whales.”

What comes next: between dreams and nightmares

It is a cliché to describe Beijing and Moscow as sharing the same bed but with separate dreams, but the analogy may still be relevant for Russian and Chinese postures within the SCO and BRICS. It misses, nonetheless, the fact that Russia and China are now far more different than at any time in their history: Russia is Western, Christian and, democratic (no matter how some in the West dismiss this) and China remains Asian, Confucian, and communist. I am not necessarily ignoring the similarities between the foreign policies of the two powers, which have set aside ideology in the pursuit of pragmatism. Both strive for a more balanced and nuanced, and less confrontational world in terms of both power and cultural/civilizational configurations. In this way, Moscow and Beijing do share “dreams” (policy preferences) in broad terms, but definitely from separate “beds” (their domestic attributions).

For the time being, however, both have a lot of nightmares about Korea, which makes the Iranian nuclear issue a far less stressful matter for Moscow and Beijing. The Syrian civil war, however, is getting to a dangerous point as the West claims the Assad government used chemical weapons (a “red line” for the Obama administration); the US decided to double aid to the opposition to \$250 million, including non-lethal supplies such as communications equipment, body armor, night vision goggles and vehicles; and Israelis carried out air strikes against Syria. This immensely complicated and confusing Syrian civil war is being fought between conservatives and radicals, Shiite and Sunni, royalists and republicans, Islamo-monarchists and Arab nationalists, pro-Western and anti-Western forces, Russia and the US, Al-Qaeda-Salafist fanatics and more secular mainstream oppositions, centralized modern Arab states and the forces of fragmentation along ethnic, religious, sectarian and tribal lines. Once these diverse forces are set in motion in Syria, the end game will probably be quicker, though nobody can know, let alone

control, the fallout (just look at Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and, to a lesser degree, Egypt). One thing, however, seems certain: most of the interstate conflicts in recent Arab history occurred in summer: the 1948 war, the June 1967 war, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, etc. For both Moscow and Beijing, the next few months will be crucial to see if the Syrian civil war assumes a regional dimension.

Chronology of China-Russia Relations January – April 2013

Jan. 8-9, 2013: Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo hold the eighth round of strategic security consultations in Beijing.

Jan. 10-11, 2013: Third meeting of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) senior representatives on security issues is held in New Delhi. China's State Councilor Dai Bingguo and Russian Security Council Nicolai Patrushev join the meeting.

Jan. 27-30, 2013: Wu Bangguo, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, attends 21st annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum in Vladivostok by invitation of Valentina Matviyenko, chairwoman of Russia's Federation Council.

Feb. 14, 2013: Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi talks by telephone with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov about the North Korean nuclear test and the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Feb. 20-22, 2013: Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visits Moscow and meets counterpart Sergei Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin to discuss the pending visit of Xi Jinping and other issues.

Feb. 22, 2013: President Xi Jinping meets Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) new General Secretary Dmitry Mezentsev and calls for better development of the organization.

March 14, 2013: President Putin congratulates Xi Jinping as China's new president. Putin and Xi also pledged to continue their personal contacts.

March 18, 2013: China's new Premier Li Keqiang and counterpart Dmitry Medvedev talk over the phone and agree to promote bilateral cooperation. Medvedev congratulates Li on his endorsement as premier. Li invites Medvedev to visit China in the second half of the year for the 18th prime ministerial talks.

March 22-24, 2013: President Xi Jinping visits Russia at the invitation of President Putin. They join a ceremony to open the Year of Chinese Tourism in Russia.

March 26-27, 2013: Fifth BRICS Summit is held in Durban, South Africa. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Putin participate in the annual meeting.

April 15-17, 2013: Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov visits China with a group of Russian businessmen and meets Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli in Beijing.

April 22, 2013: President Xi talks over the phone with President Putin about the strong earthquake in Sichuan's Lushan and offers to provide China with all the necessary assistance.

April 23, 2013: President Putin appoints former First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov as Russia's Ambassador to China. He was first deputy foreign minister since April 2006.

April 26, 2013: Turkey officially becomes the SCO's third dialogue partner after the signing of a memorandum granting the status in Almaty by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and SCO Secretary General Dmitry Mezentsev.

April 25-26, 2013: Chinese State Councilor Guo Shengkun visits Moscow and meets Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and other officials.

April 27, 2013: SCO Security Council secretaries hold their eighth meeting in Bishkek.