



**China-Russia Relations:
Politics of Anniversaries and Beyond**

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Past, present, and prospect were played out in the second quarter of 2005 when Russian and Chinese leaders commemorated the 60th anniversary of Russia's victory (May 9, 1945) in World War II, mended fences in Central Asia in the wake of a surge of "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, and toyed with the idea of a multilateral world order with a Russia-China-Indian trio in Vladivostok. The quarter ended with President Hu Jintao's state visit to Russia, which aimed to elevate the strategic partnership to a new height. Meanwhile, Russian and Chinese generals were hammering out details of their first-ever joint exercises in eastern China to be held in the third quarter.

Summits times four

In less than two months, Chinese and Russian leaders met or will meet for Victory Day in Moscow (May 9), Hu's official visit to Russia (June 30-July 3), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Kazakstan (July 5-6), and the G8 summit in UK (July 7-8). The busy summit politicking began with a journey back to the last world war when nearly 50 million Russians and Chinese died. Hu met with Russian veterans in Moscow, paid tribute at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier outside the Kremlin Wall, joined 60 other foreign dignitaries in a 75-minute parade, and met Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin afterward.

In China, there were numerous commemorations: cemeteries for 11,000 Soviet deaths were tended; Chinese veterans who served in the Soviet military during the war were recognized and decorated; sales of Soviet war literature went up; and the Soviet novel/movie *Quiet Dawns* – which dramatizes the death of five young female Soviet soldiers during the war and was banned during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-76) – was reproduced, with Russian actors and Chinese directors, as a soap on Chinese state-run TV, etc. In his meeting with Hu after the Red Square victory parade, President Putin thanked the Chinese side for cooperating with the Soviet Army in defeating the Japanese in August 1945 and for China's efforts to commemorate the sacrifice of Russians during the war.

Russia and China, however, did not revisit the past only for the sake of the past. Moscow's Victory Day celebration – perhaps the last “grand” one with the few remaining survivors from Russia's “greatest generation” – served as a convenient vehicle for both nations to assess an increasingly unbalanced post-Sept. 11 world. China's presence at an event for the European theater was particularly comforting in contrast to Bush's revisionist and critical remarks about Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill (Bush linked Yalta to British Prime Minister Chamberlain's concessions to Hitler at Munich in 1938 and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939), Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's initial reluctance to come, and a general amnesia in the West that discounts the role of the Russians in defeating the Nazis.

Still, the world is irreversibly moving into the 21st century, and distinctions between victors and vanquished of the great war of the past century mean less and less. For Putin, one of Russia's own “boomers,” it was “the demise of the Soviet Union” that constituted “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” stated the former KGB officer in his annual State of the Nation speech from the Kremlin on April 25. If Russia's steep decline makes the world unbalanced and therefore less stable for Putin, China's steady rise, though peaceful so far, has yet to be fully accepted and welcomed by the status quo powers. Despite their divergent fortunes, the sources of their national anxiety relate to relations with the U.S. It was against this backdrop that the Chinese president began his four-day official visit to Russia on June 30.

Moscow summit: eye on world order

President Hu began his official visit to Russia with a private dinner and informal late-night talks at Putin's suburban residence in Novo-Ogaryovo. Despite its informal setting, “high-value” topics dominated the evening talks, along with “an in-depth exchange of views on a wide range of subjects,” according to Chinese media. “Military-technical cooperation and interaction in the military area are expanding. We have planned the joint military exercises this year for the first time in many years,” the Russian president remarked as he opened the evening meeting with his Chinese guests.

After a three-hour formal talk in the Kremlin the following day, the two sides signed the “Joint Declaration on the International Order in the 21st Century.” The two presidents also witnessed the signing of several cooperation documents in the areas of energy, power transmission, banking and credit, debt service, etc.

The 12-article joint statement recognizes the complicated and lengthy process of building a desirable international order (article 1). Such an order can be achieved through four broad approaches:

- adhere to international law and principles (article 2) and a major role of the UN (article 3);
- pay attention to the issue of development (articles 4, 5, 10);

- promote multilateralism, diversity, equal dialogue in human, cultural, and social development (articles 6,7,8,11,12); and,
- construct a new security framework (article 9).

Both sides spoke highly of the joint declaration. It was “a most important document reflecting the coincidence of fundamental views of Russia and China on key questions of the modern world order, our common vision of prospects for development of humanity,” remarked a Kremlin official. This was because it “will confirm the commitment of the sides to the formation of a new fair and rational world order based on primacy of international law, multilateral approaches, equality and mutual respect, and the enhancement of the role of the UN in world politics.”

It was almost impossible to escape the warm words from both sides for the summit in general and the world order document in particular. Any Sino-Russian summit, however, seems to be run like a Chinese banquet, with numerous courses coded with fancy names, regardless of their nutritional content. One needs to go beyond the fog of summit rhetoric to taste the substance, however. Hu’s Russia visit was no exception. Below and beyond the publicly articulated high principles for a desirable world order, Moscow and Beijing had genuine concerns about a world that may not move as they desire: the ever assertive foreign/defense policies of the Bush administration despite the bloody “peace” in Iraq; steadily growing Japanese military power with highly selective national memories of what that country did in the first half of the past century; the precarious Korean nuclear issue still without sight of any meaningful resolution; and, an almost unstoppable arms race across the Taiwan Strait.

Summer breeze for mil-mil

The Russian-Chinese anxiety of a more precarious world was somewhat reflected in seemingly smoother military-military relations between the two nations. This issue topped the agenda of the June summit in Moscow. Throughout the second quarter, Russian arms dealers and makers were busy filling orders from China: 8 *Kilo-class* diesel-electric submarines, 2 *Project 956-EM* destroyers, up to 500 *RD-93* aircraft engines, various types of missiles, etc. The Chinese expect delivery in the second half of 2005. Meanwhile, Moscow and Beijing were busy making final touches on the upcoming joint military exercise, coded *Sodruzhestvo-2005 (Commonwealth-2005)*, to be held in eastern China on Aug. 12-26. On June 6, the two militaries concluded the fifth round of negotiations in Vladivostok. On June 28, an agreement was signed in Moscow on the “status of forces,” which covers rights and liabilities of Russian and Chinese personnel to participate in the exercise, the time-frame of their deployment in Russia and China, transportation means, etc.

Since the agreement to hold the exercise was signed during Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov’s visit to China on Dec. 12-13, 2004, the nature and content of the exercise have been considerably reshaped. In the beginning, the drill was described as one of “counter-terrorism” within the SCO framework, with a token force of a few hundreds from the Russian side. By June 2005, the SCO “cover” still remained. So was the rhetoric

of not being directed against any third party/nation. “Antiterrorism,” however, had become a “component.” Meanwhile, the Russians and Chinese would use 8,000 men for the drill (3,000 Russians and 5,000 Chinese) for the first-ever exercise. It was unclear how many of the 3,000 Russian personnel would directly operate in China and how many would play supportive roles or remain in Russia or outside Chinese territory (on boats, for example). The type of weaponry (*Tu-95MS* and *Tu-22MZ* strategic bombers) and operations (Russian paratroopers from *Ilyushin-76* transport airplanes and simulated beach assault from large Russian landing craft) involved, however, amount to “over kill” for “antiterrorist” and “peacekeeping” purposes.

Russia and China, however, do differ in their perceptions of and preference for the exercise. China has been more eager to stage a larger and more comprehensive drill involving more personnel and equipment, particularly from the Russian side. On the other hand, Russia seems content with a smaller force, but with selective weaponry for demonstrative, presumably commercial, purposes.

This disparity between the declared goals of the drill and its actual content and execution, however, may be intentional. With both symbolic and real impacts, the first Russo-Chinese military exercise serves several goals for the two nations and the SCO. It will enhance the strategic partnership between two nations in both the geopolitical and regional contexts. Some PRC analysts defined this goal as based on “deep strategic considerations.” Another imperative is to harmonize the interaction between the two militaries beyond mere arms transfers and to test the capability and compatibility of their weapons systems under different operational military doctrines. Last if not least, the demonstration of Russia’s strategic gadgets may result in more weapons sales.

The commercial implications of the exercises should not be underestimated. For quite some time, the Russian side has engaged in a debate, both publicly and internally, about its ability to sell arms. Few were optimistic. The consensus has been rather gloomy: Russia’s global arms sales will inevitably decline in the next 5 to 10 years due to the end of volume orders from a few nations such as China and India. The inability of Russia’s arms industry to provide quality after-sales service and to innovate into high-tech areas, particularly in electronics, would also handicap Russia’s hardware manufacturers in competing with more sophisticated weapon designs in the West. As a result, many in Russia anticipate that India and China will either divert procurement away from Russia or opt for more joint R&D, rather than volume purchasing Russian systems.

Under these circumstances, a growing number of Russian defense analysts and officials call for upgrading the current level of arms sales to China to retain it as a major market for Russian arms. Russia’s strategic bombers are one category of weapons that Moscow has refrained from selling to China. Having provided the Chinese with tactical fighter-bombers such as the *Su-27s* and *Su-30s*, the *Tu-95MS* and *Tu-22MZ* strategic bombers are the natural candidates for the PLA Air Force, which so far only has limited power projection capabilities. More recently, China has shown some “keen interest” in the *Tu*-series bombers, according to Gen. Vladimir Mikhaylov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force. Meanwhile, China is also more interested in joint R&D with the

Russian side for more advanced weapons systems. During the second Sino-Russian Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) Conference in Beijing in May, Chinese weapons specialists offered Russia cooperation in developing front-line aircraft and supersonic UAVs.

SCO: not so quiet on China's western front

Closer military-military ties between Moscow and Beijing also have a geopolitical basis, notably the growing instability in Central Asia and among some SCO states. To be fair, the SCO faces divergent trends. One is the continuous broadening of its ranks and external contact with other international organizations. In the SCO's annual foreign ministerial meeting in early June in the Kazak capital of Astana, the decision was made to accept India, Pakistan, and Iran as new "observers," a status previously extended only to Mongolia. This was in conjunction with the fourth anniversary of SCO's founding with a series of activities mostly in Beijing. Meanwhile, the regional security mechanism officially established contact with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (April 12) and ASEAN (April 21).

Despite this progress, a deeper and more unsettling trend for regional organizations has been in the making, largely from the ripple effect of the so-called "color revolutions" in many, if not all, the former Soviet states. In the aftermath of the popular uprisings against the ruling elite in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (late 2004), and Kyrgyzstan (March 2005), Uzbekistan was apparently the focal point for the "color revolution" in the second quarter.

Both China and Russia came to support the embattled government led by President Islam Karimov. Less than two weeks after the Uzbek government cracked down on prison riots and anti-government uprisings in the Andijon region leaving hundreds dead or wounded, President Karimov found himself in Beijing for a state visit. China's treatment of the embattled Uzbek government was impressive. This included meeting with Chinese President Hu, signing a treaty of "partnership, friendship, and cooperation" and 14 other agreements for "comprehensively" deepening mutually beneficial cooperation "in all fields," and signing over 20 economic contracts worth about \$1.5 billion.

It was not until late June that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov announced that Russian forces would conduct joint military exercises with the Uzbeks this summer. Essentially, the main result of Karimov's visit to Moscow was that Uzbekistan would offer its territory for deployment of Russian troops – up to 10 airfields – if the situation in Central Asia destabilizes. Thus, "Uzbekistan has made a final decision to change its foreign-policy orientation and turn toward Russia," stated Karimov after his talks with Putin.

The different approaches by the Chinese and Russian government in their "rescue" effort for Uzbekistan may reflect the different forms of their national power: China is an economic giant while Russia is still a military power. The timing of their intervention in the Uzbek situation – one and half months apart – however, goes beyond the issue of

available national means and resources. China was certainly more alarmed than Russia by the domino effect of the “color revolution” following the toppling of Kyrgyzstan’s government in March. With the still unsettled “dust” from the Kyrgyzstan “revolution” in the air, SCO Secretary General Zhang Deguang visited the nation and tried to stabilize and salvage relations between the SCO and one of its founding members.

While Beijing moved relatively swiftly after the unrest in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, there was anxiety among some Chinese analysts who saw President Putin as “an indifferent spectator” to the deteriorating events in Central Asia. The reasons for Putin’s inaction were two-fold: Russia was a much weaker state and Putin wanted to shift this “hot potato” to China and to use China’s strength to challenge U.S. expansion in Central Asia (according to a pro-PRC newspaper in Hong Kong).

The apparently divergent Russian and Chinese approaches to the unrest in Central Asia seemed to be played out in early June when SCO security councils’ secretaries and foreign ministers met in the Kazak capital Astana to prepare for the SCO’s annual summit in early July. Chinese officials stressed the need to take immediate and effective actions in dealing with the SCO’s problems. “Security cooperation needs to be strengthened, and China is willing to join efforts with other SCO members to further expand consensus, *take real measures to carry out existing agreements* [emphasis added] and provide a safe environment for social and economic development of the region,” urged Chinese State Councilor Zhou Yongkang in his speech to the SCO security councils’ secretaries on June 2.

Two days later when SCO foreign ministers met in Astana, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing reiterated that “...[I]t is urgently necessary to continually consolidate solidarity and cooperation between its members, grasp implementation, *do practical things*, and *pursue practical results*. All parties must get a tight grasp of preparations and make thorough plans to ensure that the Astana SCO summit in July will be a grand meeting of solidarity, pragmatism, and progress. We should therefore pay attention to the following points: First, it is essential to strengthen security work *without the slightest slackening*; second, focus vision on the long term, increase input in economic cooperation, and *do more practical things...*” [emphasis added]

Russian officials, however, voiced different opinions about the SCO’s operation during the conferences. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, for example, insisted that equal dialogue, consultations, and talks are “the most effective means for resolving conflicts and safe-guarding peace.” “One must respect and protect models of civilization and models of development without resorting to force of the threat of it,” the Russian foreign minister stressed. “The affairs of each country must be resolved independently by its people,” and “These principles make up the fundament of the SCO, give it a life force and the ability to find consensus and rules out the division of states into leaders and the led.” If the words of the Russian foreign minister were still unclear in its reference, *Itar-Tass* offered a more revealing title: “Russian Foreign Minister Calls For Equality in SCO Decision-Making.”

While the rhetoric on the “equality in SCO decision-making” aimed at the perceived inequality among SCO members, Lavrov also pointedly reminded both his fellow SCO member states and perhaps the West that he did not agree that the SCO had become an “anti-orange bloc.” Two days later, Lavrov went public again to address his disagreement with certain opinions within the SCO that the regional organization “is not planning to create any kind of a military structure.” He said the SCO depends on “law enforcement bodies and special services” in fighting terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking, not rapid-reaction forces for countering possible external threats within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (comprised of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia).

Whatever the case, Moscow seemed to opt for a business-as-usual approach, at least before it offered its own “military option” in late June during Uzbek President Karimov’s visit to Moscow. Meanwhile, China preferred a more immediate and more effective approach in dealing with growing instability in the region. The real reason for Russia’s declared policy over SCO’s operation was perhaps not a less alarming view of the situation in Central Asia. Rather, it may well be the concerns over China’s growing influence in the region, a traditional Russian sphere of influence and part of the former Soviet empire. The SCO, no matter how it evolves, remains an interface for major powers, particularly China and Russia, to adjust their respective policies toward one another as well as with the outside world.

Anniversaries come and go. It remains to be seen how Hu’s two trips to Moscow in the second quarter – one for the past and the other the present – will play out in the enduring geopolitical games across and beyond the Eurasian continent.

Chronology of China-Russia Relations

April-June 2005

March 31-April 3, 2005: Former Russian Prime Minister Primakov and honorary chairman of the Russia-China Friendship Committee for Peace and Development visits China at the invitation of Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen.

April 3-6, 2005: Russian presidential aide Viktor Ivanov visits China with a delegation of the presidential administration at the invitation of China’s Ministry of Personnel. He meets with State Councilor Hua Jianmin, head of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee He Guoqiang and Vice Premier Huang Ju.

April 7, 2005: A delegation of the Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP), led by Maj. Gen. Xi Zhongchao, PAP’s deputy commander-in-chief, visits Russia at the invitation of the Russian Interior Ministry Forces (IMF). The group meets with Col. Gen. Nikolai Rogozhkin, IMF commander-in-chief, and visits IMF’s Central Museum, military units in IMF’s Moscow and Northwestern districts, and St. Petersburg.

April 11-14, 2005: CIS Executive Secretary Vladimir Rushaylo visits Beijing to deepen cooperation between CIS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in economic and security areas. Rushaylo meets with Chinese State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan, and a protocol on mutual understanding and cooperation was signed.

April 14-15, 2005: Chinese First Deputy FM Dai Bingguo visits Russia at the invitation of Russia's First Deputy FM Valery Loshchinin. The two discuss bilateral relations, SCO, CIS, Korea, and the UN. Dai also meets with FM Sergei Lavrov, the president's foreign policy aide Sergei Prikhodko, the president's special representative for human rights Vladimir Lukin, and First Deputy Secretary of the Security Council Yuri A. Zubakov.

April 25, 2005: Putin makes State of Nation speech.

May 4, 2005: Second Russian-Chinese seminar on unmanned aerial vehicles held in Beijing.

May 8-9, 2005: President Hu Jintao travels to Moscow to join more than 50 other state leaders for the May 9 celebration marking the 60th anniversary of Russian victory in the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany.

May 12-14, 2005: St. Petersburg Gov. Valentina Matviyenko visits China to sign agreement on the construction of a multifunctional complex Baltic Pearl (\$1.25 billion) in St. Petersburg. Five largest Shanghai companies controlled by the state will invest and construct the 180-hectare project. Matviyenko meets Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan.

May 18, 2005: President Hu Jintao meets with outgoing Russian Ambassador Igor Rogachev before the latter's final departure for home May 21. Rogachev had been ambassador to China since 1992.

May 22, 2005: Russian Motherland Party leader Dmitriy Rogozin visits Beijing and meets with Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee. The Russian group also meets with officials of China's State Council and the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

May 25-26, 2005: The Sixth Plenary Session of the Sino-Russian Committee on Friendship, Peace, and Development is held in Moscow. It adopts the committee's work program for 2005, which includes 55 activities.

June 1-2, 2005: Tripartite conference between foreign ministries of Russia, China, and India in Vladivostok, the fourth of this kind and first outside any multilateral context. Bilateral meetings also take place in Vladivostok. A joint communique is signed. On June 2, FM Lavrov and FM Li exchange ratifications of an additional agreement on the eastern part of Sino-Russian border signed during President Putin's visit to China in October 2004.

June 2, 2005: SCO holds second security councils' secretaries session in Astana, Kazakhstan.

June 3-4, 2005: SCO holds annual foreign ministerial meeting in Astana. The decision is made to admit Iran, India, and Pakistan as SCO observers. They prepare for the SCO summit in Astana July 5-6.

June 6, 2005: The fifth round of consultations on preparations for the first joint Russian-Chinese military exercise held in Vladivostok. They approve the concept and schedule of the drill and work on legal and international documents, as well as the status of forces agreement for Russian troops on Chinese territory.

June 7-12, 2005: Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan visits Irkutsk en route to St Petersburg to attend the second Russian-Chinese investment forum on June 9-10. He also visits Moscow and talks with Russian Vice Premier Alexander Zhukov. Seven projects (\$1.7 billion) are agreed to during the forum.

June 10, 2005: President Putin appoints deputy FM Sergei Razov as Russia's new ambassador to China.

June 14-16, 2005: Third forum on China-Russia regional cooperation and development takes place in Harbin. 300 government officials, experts, and businessmen from both countries attend.

June 16-19, 2005: The 16th Harbin Trade and Economic Fair concludes with contracts worth \$3.96 billion. Over 7,000 Russian businessmen took part. China's Vice Premier Wu Yi spoke.

June 16-18, 2005: Speaker of the State Duma Lower House of the Russian Parliament Boris Gryzlov visits China at the invitation of NPC Standing Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo. Gryzlov also meets with Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu. Gryzlov and Wu sign agreement to initiate a cooperation committee for annual regular exchange the NPC and the State Duma.

June 17-19, 2005: Russian and Chinese experts meet in Khabarovsk for the first round of negotiations on the demarcation of the eastern section of their border.

June 25-29, 2005: Russian Federal Space Agency chief Anatoly Perminov travels to Beijing for seventh meeting of intergovernmental commission for space cooperation.

June 27-28, 2005: Col. Gen. Vladimir Moltenskoi, Russian Land Forces first deputy commander-in-chief, and Maj. Gen. Qian Lihua, deputy chief of the Foreign Affairs Chancellery of the Chinese Defense Ministry, sign status of forces agreement for joint exercise "*Commonwealth-2005*" on Aug. 18-26.

June 30-July 3, 2005: President Hu pays official visit to Russia. In addition to talks with Russian leaders and signing various documents including the “Joint Declaration on the International Order in the 21st Century,” Hu visits Novosibirsk, Russia’s third largest city.