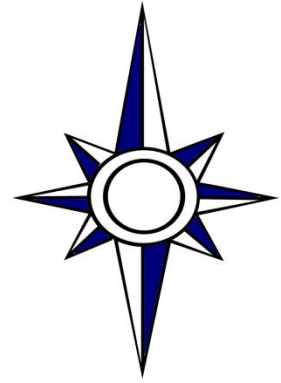


Comparative Connections

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China-Russia Relations: Succession, Syria ... and the Search for Putin's Soul

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By any standard, the first four months were a rough start to the year for both Russia and China. While succession politics gripped first Russia and then China, Moscow and Beijing coordinated closely over the crises beyond their borders (Syria, Iran, and North Korea). Toward the end of April, the Russian and Chinese navies held the largest joint bilateral exercise in seven years, codenamed *Maritime Cooperation-2012* (海上联合-2012; *Morskoye Vzaimodeystviye-2012*), in the Yellow Sea. Meanwhile, China's future premier Li Keqiang traveled to Moscow to meet Russia's future-and-past President Putin in Moscow.

Succession politics

There was little doubt about the outcome of the March 4 presidential elections in Russia, as Vladimir Putin and his United Russia Party dominated the electoral process and public space. The process of Putin getting the next six, or possibly 12, years in the Kremlin, however, did not bode well for the new-and-old president-elect. For three months between the legislative elections on Dec. 4, 2011 and the presidential election on March 4, 2012, protests and counter-protests (pro-government) of various sizes and duration swept through Russia. Some protested perceived electoral fraud, others vented their anger toward rampant corruption, others expressed frustration over the return of Putin for a third term as Russia's president. Although Putin received almost two-thirds (63.64 percent) of the votes on March 4, the persistence of the protests by large number of young professional and middle-class Russians – many of whom had benefitted from Putin's rule since 2000 – cast a long shadow over the next few years.

Meanwhile, the sudden fall of a top Chinese leader (Bo Xilai) in mid-March – which began with an unexpected one-day “visit” on Feb. 7 to the US Consulate in Chengdu by Wang Lijun, who was Bo's anti-corruption czar in Chongqing – shook the top Chinese leadership, which will undergo a major personnel change in the fall.

Despite these signs of weakening authority succession processes, bilateral relations did not seem to be affected, at least for the time being. Beijing moved quickly to engage President-elect Putin. The day after the Russian presidential election, President Hu Jintao sent a message to Putin, congratulating him. Hu noted that Russia under Putin has “scored tremendous achievements” in terms of stability and development. He promised China's cooperation in furthering the Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in the coming decade. A day after Hu's cable, he and Putin spoke by telephone regarding bilateral ties and major international and regional issues. Hu said that China “firmly support[s] Russia's choice of its own development

path according to its national conditions as well as the efforts to safeguard its national sovereignty and security and boost its economic development,” and that China “stands ready to work with Russia to boost practical cooperation and strategic coordination in a bid to continuously lift the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination to higher levels.” Putin, in turn, said China is a good neighbor and good friend to Russia and the bilateral ties have been built on the solid foundation of their fundamental interests. Regarding the international situation, Putin said that Chinese-Russian cooperation “is playing an important role in safeguarding world peace and stability.” Meanwhile, *People’s Daily* predicted continuity and stable bilateral relations after Putin’s election.

Putin’s eyes and minds

Putin’s third term as president, though widely predicted, was the most discussed topic by Russian and Chinese analysts, with a wide range of assessments. Russian experts tended to see continuity and pragmatism in Russia’s domestic and foreign policies with Putin as president. That is, to hold the West, bolster neighbors, and face the East. Indeed, as a pragmatic helmsman, Putin will be expected to steer the Russian ship of state and kept it a safe distance – not too close to or too far – from the American one.

Some Chinese analysts, however, predicted a more assertive Putin in the future. An anonymous commentary in the *Huangqiu Shibao (Global Times)* described Putin as an “outstanding statesman” with qualities of a “great leader” (世界伟人), such as decisiveness, wisdom, and ambition. “Give me 20 years and I will make Russia strong and powerful again,” the article recalls Putin’s promise in the early days of his previous eight-year presidency (2000-08). Now he returns to add 12 more years to that dream. A great leader should not only change Russia but also the world. In this regard, Putin’s election may be a nightmare for the US, whose strategy was described as wanting to dominate the world.

Yin Shuguang, councilor of the China Foundation for International Studies, argued that Putin has a strong sense of history; revival of the past glory and greatness of Russia has become the ideological cornerstone of his national development strategy. His foreign policy, therefore, would be tough over the issues of Syria and Iran. Putin sees Russia-US relations as unstable because the US has persistently been meddling in Russia’s backyard. Putin does not see the rise of China as a threat and believes China and Russia need each other to be prosperous and stable.

Putin’s return to the Kremlin occurred when the US is executing its strategic “pivot” to Asia, which is widely perceived in China as an effort to contain a rising China. In a policy conference “US Strategic Pivot to Asia and China’s Security” sponsored by China’s State Security Policy Committee, some analysts debated the need for China to form alliances with other countries, particularly with Russia. The consensus was to deepen the current strategic relationship to the point of forming a quasi alliance, or alliance in essence but not in appearance (非盟之盟), which is far more flexible and pragmatic than an open and declared alliance with Moscow. Despite the fact that no analyst pushed for an open alliance with Moscow, *Huangqiu Shibao (Global Times)* used a rather sensational title for the news story, “China alone cannot deal with the US; Sino-Russian military alliance inevitable.” In a separate piece, a Chinese historian argued that China should not avoid allying with Russia just because doing so with the Soviets cost China a lot.

In the midst of high expectations for Putin, a notable exception among Chinese analysts is Wu Dahui, director of the Eurasian Institute of Qinghua University in Beijing, who highlights six tensions in Putin's domestic and foreign policies:

- between Russia's potential as a regional power and its ambition to be a global power;
- between traditional rule of man and rule of law;
- between promoting economic growth based on the current resource-oriented economy and on a future and innovative new economic infrastructure;
- between social welfare and national defense;
- between a mutually needed and competitive relationship with the US; and
- between the existing and future political elites.

Given these constraints, Putin's Russia would have to change while maintaining stability. Russia today is not the Russia that existed when Putin first came to power. Nor is Putin the same. Some likely, as well as inevitable, changes include the transition from hard to soft authoritarianism and from an economy based on "raw" (unprocessed) to processed energy. Wu also predicts that Putin's Russia will be more assertive with the US. He saw this as an opportunity for more cooperative relations between Moscow and Beijing.

Only Putin himself, however, knows what is going on in his mind – aside from former President George W. Bush who claimed, shortly after his first meeting with Putin in Prague in May 2001, that he saw Putin's "soul" in his eyes. Perhaps Bush was not entirely wrong. As Yeltsin's hand-picked successor, Putin's immediate action in 2000 was to distance himself from Yeltsin's "overly pro-China" stance; his first few foreign visits were to Western European capitals. He went so far as to confide to the visiting US Secretary of State Madeline Albright of his "European essence" and superficiality in regard to Asian interests (practicing judo and eating Chinese food) (see, Yu Bin, "New Century, New Face, and China's 'Putin Puzzle'," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 15, 2000). After 9/11, Putin was the first foreign head of state to pledge support for Washington. This was followed by Russian advisors to Afghanistan, assistance to the Northern Alliance, sharing intelligence, opening up transit routes and allowing the US to use bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Putin's goal was to make Russia a full partner of the West. In October 2001, Putin went so far as to make a direct request to then NATO Secretary General Robertson in Brussels to join NATO. Robertson's evasive answer was equivalent to a "no." Only after this and NATO ongoing expansion, did Putin become more defensive and assertive in his policies toward the West. In his mind, and perhaps his heart, Putin is by no means anti-West. What he wants is to be equal with the West.

It remains to be seen if Obama's "open microphone" promises to Medvedev on March 26 – that he would have "more flexibility" in missile defense negotiations after the 2012 elections – will

materialize. Perhaps an alliance with China is only a tactic, while Putin's goal is to restore Russia's greatness.

Russia and China draw the line on Syria

During the first four months in 2012 Russia and China closely coordinated their Syria policies:

- On Feb. 4, after days of negotiations, Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution backing an Arab-West peace plan that called for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down. The other 13 UN Security Council members voted in favor of the resolution. This was the second time that Russia and China vetoed a resolution on Syria; in October 2011, they vetoed a sanctions resolution drafted by Europe condemning Syria.
- On Feb. 16, China and Russia voted against a draft UN General Assembly resolution condemning Syria that was adopted by a 137-12 margin with 17 abstentions.
- On March 1, Russia and China voted against a draft resolution of the UN Human Rights Council condemning crimes in Syria.
- In mid-March, both China and Russia supported Kofi Annan's mission in Syria.

Beyond the UN, Moscow and Beijing adopted a proactive approach to resolving the Syrian conflict. On Feb. 8, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Intelligence Service Director Mikhail Fradkov paid a "lightning visit" to Damascus. Although the visit was planned before the UN vote, the two brought al-Assad a message from President Medvedev. This was the first visit to Syria by high-ranking representatives of Russia during the more than 10 months of unrest. On March 7, China sent an envoy to Syria to discuss ways to end the crisis with a six-point peace plan presented to Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem and opposition figures. Meanwhile, China offered \$2 million in humanitarian aid. On April 19, China announced it was considering sending observers to monitor a Syrian ceasefire that came into force a week before.

These proactive policies by Moscow and Beijing were directly shaped by the Libya experience where Russia and China registered huge losses. At the beginning of the year, Moscow and Beijing became sufficiently alarmed by the West's regime-change policy toward Syria. "Russia will not be able to prevent foreign military intervention in Syria, but will never allow such intervention to be sanctioned by the UN Security Council," claimed Foreign Minister Lavrov in mid-January. Later, Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov warned that the proposed Western-Arab UN Security Council resolution on Syria would lead the country down a "path to civil war." Russia's policy is understandable, given that Syria is Russia's only ally in the region and Moscow has invested heavily (Russia sold around \$1.5 billion worth of arms to Syria in 2000-2010, making Damascus Moscow's seventh-largest client).

China's calculations, though overlapping with those of Russia to a certain extent, are more complicated. Unlike Russia, which is a seasoned player in Middle Eastern politics, Beijing had until recently been quite aloof from regional politics while focusing almost exclusively on economics. Nor does China have a substantial military and economic stake in Syria. The

prospect of the quick fall of the al-Assad regime, however, convinced Beijing that doing nothing was harmful to the long-term interests of China in the Middle East. An editorial in the *Huanqiu Shibao* (*Global Times*) argued that after the Syria domino, the next would be Iran, where China does have substantial economic and security interests. Moreover, if Iran was in trouble, China-Russian relations would be complicated in that China's dependence on Russian oil would increase. By engaging the West in Syria and Iran, China does not have to face the West in China's vicinity. It is still possible for China to do something to turn the Syrian "revolution" into an "evolution" because the Syrian opposition, the Arab League, and the West are not as united as they appear.

Yan Xuetong, an analyst in Qinghua University in Beijing, calculated the Russian factor somewhat differently. China's veto at the UN served to strengthen ties with Russia, whose strategic support to China is more substantial than that of 33 Arab countries. Russia's support could also be extended to East Asia while the Arab countries have no such an impact. Moreover, the longer the Syria issue continues, the further a war in Iran would be postponed, which means the longer the Chinese will not have to worry oil supply problems. Besides, the more difficulty the West finds in Syria, the less energy the West would divert toward China. In the final analysis, even if China supported the proposed Arab-West resolution, argues Yan, the Arab countries and the West won't appreciate it. Nor would it do anything to improve China's international image.

At the end of April, the Syrian crisis was far from over and the ceasefire remains fragile. The immediate collapse of the al-Assad regime, however, was averted. In March and April when the Iranian and Korean crises were deepening, Moscow and Beijing also worked closely to ensure a soft-landing for both cases.

Multilateralism: SCO and BRICS

By late March when the Syrian crisis had stalemated, Beijing and Moscow turned their attention to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As the rotating chair, China hosted a series of ministerial meetings in preparation for the annual summit that will be held in June in Beijing. These included Russian Deputy Foreign Minister I.V. Morgulov's consultations on March 29 with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping in Beijing, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister A.I. Denisov's meeting in Shanghai with China's First Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun on April 5, the seventh session of the SCO Security Council Secretaries Meeting in Beijing on April 11-12, and the SCO Defense Ministers Meeting in Beijing on April 24.

One of the key issues for the SCO is enlargement of the organization, particularly India and Pakistan's accession to full SCO membership and Afghanistan's request for observer status. By April, the prospect of these "upgrades" looked good as both Russia and China expressed support for their accession. According to Foreign Minister Lavrov, the SCO is "now finalizing the legal, organizational and financial aspects of admitting new members," and that all formalities would be completed "in a short time and we can take the decision to admit India and Pakistan."

Until recently, China had not been keen on SCO enlargement. After the annual summit of BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in India on March 29, and especially after the 11th Foreign Ministerial Meeting of Russia, India and China on April 13 in

Moscow, Beijing's concerns seemed alleviated as India, together with the rest of BRICS, moved significantly toward the position of Moscow and Beijing regarding Syria and Iran. As the host nation for the annual BRICS Summit, India's initiative to create a BRICS developmental bank was well received by other member states. Despite some tension, all the BRICS nations called for more responsible economic and financial policies by the West; for ending "excessive liquidity" through aggressive policy actions taken by Western central banks and fostering excessive volatility in capital flows and commodity prices; and for reforming international organizations with more representation of the emerging economies.

Beyond that, the propensity of the BRICS today – with India's active participation – may be indicative of what the SCO will be like with Indian participation as a full member state. Although China's weight within the SCO may be reduced proportionally, it does not mean the end of China's influence within the SCO. In an ironic, as well as pragmatic, sense, China's "excessive" influence in the SCO, particularly in the economic area, may not be in the long-term interests of Beijing as others get increasingly uncomfortable with China's expansive economic power. India's ascension to full membership of the SCO will provide some breathing space for smaller SCO members. Besides, a lack of SCO membership has not prevented India from developing ties with SCO members. In the final analysis, India's international clout and friendly relationship with the West may even strengthen the SCO's international posture.

In April, the accession of Afghanistan to SCO observer status also looked brighter as the SCO members were said to be "actively" discussing the Afghan request, which will be brought up at the June summit, according to SCO Secretary General Muratbek Imanaliyev in Beijing on April 20. The real challenge regarding Afghanistan, however, will come in 2014 when NATO forces will leave the war-torn county. The SCO would have to prepare for that eventuality. In his meeting on April 24 with SCO defense ministers, Vice President Xi Jinping said that China was ready to make solid efforts with other members to advance defense cooperation. Xi, who is poised to take over China from President Hu Jintao later this year, expressed China's readiness to work with other SCO members to develop a blueprint for defense and security cooperation in the future, particularly the SCO's capacity to fend off practical threats.

Naval exercises in the Yellow Sea

Close diplomatic coordination between Beijing and Moscow in the first four months paralleled their military-to-military interactions. At the height of the Syrian crisis, Russian Deputy Chief of the General Staff Serlyukov traveled to Beijing on Feb. 13-14 for talks with Chinese counterpart Ma Xiaotian. Serlyukov's visit was not part of the regular meetings between the Chinese and Russian militaries. In Beijing, Ma greeted Serlyukov with the statement that the visit "is in line with the fundamental interests of the two countries and two peoples for the two militaries to enhance strategic mutual trust and elevate the level of cooperation, which is also conducive to safeguarding *the peace and stability of the region and the world at large.*" [Emphasis added]. Serlyukov later was received by Chen Bingde, member of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and the PLA's chief of general staff. Chen told his Russian guest that "Under the current complex and volatile international and regional situations, the two militaries should strengthen cooperation with each other and promote the development of the China-Russia comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, which is of far-reaching significance in maintaining the

sovereignty, security and development interests of the two countries and promoting the world peace and stability.” In his reply, Gen. Serlyukov said that the Russian side is “willing to make joint efforts with the Chinese side to strengthen communication and coordination,” so as to consolidate friendship, deepen mutual trust, seek close cooperation and achieve mutual benefits.

The most significant military activity was the Russian-China joint naval exercise codenamed *Maritime Cooperation 2012*” (海上联合-2012; *Morskoye Vzaimodeystviye-2012*) in the Yellow Sea on April 22-27, which was the largest joint exercise between the two countries in seven years. The exercise was jointly initiated by the chiefs of general staff the two militaries during their meeting in August 2011 and was jointly approved by them on April 17, 2012 in a direct telephone conversation.

The exercise included 23 surface ships (seven from Russia and 16 from China), two submarines (from China), 13 fixed-wing aircraft, nine helicopters, and two special operations contingents. According to the Chinese, the exercise was the largest with any foreign navy. Two groups of Russian naval ships participated in the drill: the *Admiral Tributs* anti-submarine warfare ship, the *MB-37* tug boat and the *Pechenga* tanker sailed from the Gulf of Aden and joined the Pacific Fleet’s *Varyag* missile cruiser, the *Admiral Vinogradov* and *Marshal Shaposhnikov* anti-submarine warfare ships, and the *SB-522* tug boat.

The active phase of the exercise began on April 26 with three simultaneous components. The first was to detect a submarine. The second was for the *Marshal Shaposhnikov* to lead the rescue of hostages from a ship held by pirates. The third was for the *Varyag* and *Admiral Tributs* to engage surface and airborne targets, with Chinese drones serving as enemy aircraft.

During the exercise, Rear Adm. Sukhanov, deputy chief of staff of the Russian Navy traveled to the Chinese port city of Qingdao as general director of the exercise for the Russians. His counterpart was Vice Adm. Ding Yiping, deputy commander of the Chinese Navy. Wu Shengli, member of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and commander of the PLA Navy was also in Qingdao during the exercise.

The two sides maintained that the drill was “routine” and “not directed at any third party,” but for deepening “pragmatic cooperation” of the Chinese and Russian navies. The exercise claimed to have a high level of joint actions including a joint exercise direction group, a joint campaign command post, and a joint maritime formation command post. The two navies practiced tasks such as anchorage defense, maritime supply, joint anti-submarine operation, live fire against air, sea, and underwater targets, and search and rescue of a hijacked ship.

By any standard, *Maritime Cooperation 2012* was unprecedented. The assessment of the exercise, however, was also unusual. On one hand, official media from both countries extolled the level of coordination and expertise shared between the two navies. On the other hand, and perhaps for the first time, the Chinese media, particularly the internet chat room discussions, pointed to the outdated equipment and backwardness of the Russian Navy, particularly its surface combatants, even compared with those in the Chinese Navy, let alone those of the Western countries. Some Chinese media also noticed that Russian gunners even failed to knock out a slow moving target drone. Still others warned not to exaggerate the significance of the

exercise, which actually was part of military diplomacy and could by no means be compared with operational exercises conducted by the US and its allies. Even communication between the Russians and Chinese remained problematic. Although the official means of communication for the exercise was Russian, officers from both sides actually used English and hand signals to communicate in the joint headquarters, according to an official *Xinhua* story.

The real significance of the exercise lies in its strategic and even psychological implications. Duan Shaoxian, deputy chief of staff of the PLA Navy, believed that the biggest gain from the exercise was to strengthen strategic trust. Fleet Adm. Ivan Kapitanets remarked that the main aspect of the exercise was the “return to active cooperation” with the friendly Chinese Navy. “It is the first exercise of this scale in more than 10 years, and it is especially important that it is being held with the Chinese Navy. For us, this is a positive development, because the Russian Navy was left alone after the collapse of the USSR, while we had many friendly navies before,” Kapitanets said. For China, the exercise was badly needed given the heightened tension on the Korean Peninsula and growing maritime disputes with Japan and other countries.

Li Keqiang visits Russia

In early 2012 succession issues preoccupied both Moscow and Beijing. By the end of April, Putin was about to be inaugurated for his third term as Russia’s president and Beijing was able to control most of the damage from the fall of a political star (Bo Xilai). When Presidents Medvedev and Hu met in New Delhi on March 28, a day before the annual BRICS Summit, the two countries seemed to be doing business as usual. When Chinese Vice Premier Li Keqiang paid an official visit to Russia on April 26-30, the two countries were working for the next decade of bilateral relations.

Li, who is widely believed to be in line to succeed Premier Wen Jiabao in the fall, was the first Chinese leader to visit Russia after the presidential election. This was a good opportunity for the future leaders to size up each other. In Moscow, Li met President Medvedev, Prime Minister Putin, and Chairman of State Duma Sergei Naryshkin. Putin was described as looking into Li’s eyes and taking careful notes while listening to Li’s remarks, something that Putin never did before in his meetings with other dignitaries. The Li-Putin talks were stretched from one hour to almost two hours. Li reportedly quoted Confucius words, “Promises must be kept and actions must be executed (言必信，行必果).” For this, Li said that Sino-Russian cooperation should not only be pragmatic, but also reciprocate trust.

Li’s visit was not just symbolic. Chinese press reported that Li had an “in-depth exchange of views” with the Russians on preparations for the Beijing SCO Summit scheduled for June and on major international and regional issues of common concern. Li also presided over the signing of 27 commercial agreements worth \$15 billion. During the visit, Li also called for stepping up bilateral, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges, which was the theme of his Russian visit. In Moscow, Li met with a group of Russian veterans of World War II who participated in the battles in China’s northeast against the Japanese. As a sign of Li’s “human touch,” he gave each veteran a special package of Chinese liquor, Chinese tea, a computer, and a blood pressure monitor. Li’s speech to 1,600 students and faculty at the Moscow State University was also said to be well-received by the young Russians.

Li's four-day Russia visit was the beginning of the next decade of bilateral relations. During his visit, an editorial of the *Huanqiu Shibao* (*Global Times*) noted that international relations are at a crossroad and the West has defined China and Russia as part of the non-West. Globalization has expanded the political sphere of the West while restricting the choices for development by non-Western countries. The editorial, titled "Sino-Russian Hand Shake: More Unequivocal and More Elegant [中俄的握手更清晰, 也更有魅力]," stated that in the longer term, the biggest challenge for Sino-Russian cooperation is to protect the basic rights of non-Western countries in terms of their national independence and political diversity. This does not mean an open alliance against the West, but a linkage of the reasonable strategic interests of the two countries, which requires self-protection but not external aggression. Therefore, it is imperative for the two governments to make people aware of the importance of Sino-Russian relations. Mutual perceptions of the two peoples have been rather complex and outsiders are eager to sow discord. The two countries need to carefully manage "internal noises" toward each other, particularly when external pressure declines.

The editorial ends by claiming that both China and Russia are world powers and they should maintain a state of equilibrium in the world with their independent postures. They should not be self-deprecating, nor should they follow the footsteps of the West. It is a mistake for either China or Russia to make its relations with the West the main sources of its international influence. It is unclear how Russia received these words, which seem to target both Chinese and Russian audiences. China is embedded in its non-Western, non-Christian, and Confucian roots. Russia's identity, however, remains an undetermined variable.

Chronology of China-Russia Relations

January – April 2012

Jan. 5, 2012: The 2012 Sino-Russia Tourism Year kicks off in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. The initiative is the third of its kind between China and Russia, following Sino-Russia National Year and the Sino-Russia Year of Language held in 2006 and 2009, respectively.

Feb. 4, 2012: Russia and China veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for the Syrian president to step down.

Feb. 4, 2012: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov talks by telephone with Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi regarding a draft UN Security Council resolution on Syria put forward by a group of Western and Arab states.

Feb. 13-14, 2012: Russian Deputy Chief of the General Staff Serlyukov travels to Beijing and meets Chinese counterpart Ma Xiaotian. He is also received by Chen Bingde, member of the Central Military Commission and PLA's chief of general staff.

Feb. 23, 2012: Foreign Minister Lavrov talks by telephone with counterpart Yang Jiechi regarding the situation in Syria.

March 1, 2012: Russia and China vote against a draft resolution of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva condemning crimes in Syria.

March 5, 2012: President Hu Jintao sends a message to Putin to congratulate him on his election as the president of the Russian Federation.

March 6, 2012: President Hu Jintao talks via telephone with President-elect Putin on bilateral ties and major international and regional issues. They reiterate their commitment to strategic cooperation between the two countries.

March 4-8, 2012: The third round of consultations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization defense officials (except Uzbekistan) is held in Khujand, Tajikistan, to prepare the *Peace Mission 2012* anti-terrorist exercises.

March 23-25, 2012: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov visits China for the opening ceremony of the 2012 Sino-Russia Tourism Year in China. Vice Premier Wang Qishan meets Surkov and the two attend the opening ceremony of Sino-Russia Tourism Year and Sino-Russia Tourism Cooperation Forum in Beijing. Surkov also meets Vice President Xi Jinping.

March 28, 2012: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao meet in New Delhi before the opening of the annual BRICS Summit and discuss bilateral and international cooperation, particularly the Korean satellite crisis.

March 29, 2012: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister I.V. Morgulov meets Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping in Beijing to prepare for the annual SCO Summit.

April 5, 2012: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister A.I. Denisov and China's First Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun meet in Shanghai to discuss bilateral relations, SCO, the Middle East, Iran and Korea.

April 11-12, 2012: The seventh session of the SCO Security Council secretaries is held in Beijing and hosted by Chinese State Councilor Meng Jianzhu.

April 13, 2012: FM Lavrov, FM Yang, and Minister of External Affairs S. M. Krishna meet in Moscow for the 11th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of China, Russia and India. They call for a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue and oppose new sanctions on North Korea.

April 13, 2012: Military experts from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China visit Alabino, Moscow Region. The visit is part of the 26th session of the Joint Control Group consisting of military, technical specialists, and diplomats of the five Asian countries for the implementation of agreements on arms reduction.

April 22-27, 2012: Russia and China conduct the *Maritime Cooperation 2012* joint naval exercise in the Yellow Sea.

April 24, 2012: SCO Defense Ministerial Meeting is held in Beijing and chaired by Defense Minister Liang Guanglie. Vice President Xi Jinping meets SCO defense ministers.

April 24, 2012: The seventh session of the SCO Forum opens in Almaty as a prelude to the SCO annual summit. Participants include more than 80 delegates and experts from SCO bodies, members, observers, dialogue partners, Afghanistan, and the EurAsian Economic Community.

April 24, 2012: A meeting of the chief justices of SCO member states is held in Beijing.

April 26-27, 2012: Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin visits Beijing and meets Gen. Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission and State Councilor Dai Bingguo.

April 26-30, 2012: Vice Premier Li Keqiang visits Russia where he is received by President Medvedev, Prime Minister Putin and Chairman of State Duma Sergei Naryshkin. Li also travels to Kazan and meets local leaders of the Volga Federal District.