

China-Russia Relations:

## A “Nice” Treaty in a Precarious World

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The third quarter began with the signing of a historic friendship treaty between Russia and China that was inspired, at least partially, because of their difficult relations with Washington in the post-Cold War years. By the quarter’s end, however, both Moscow and Beijing found their foreign policy priorities significantly altered by the tragic terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11. Russia and China are now faced with the possibility of a strategic plunge by the world’s sole superpower into their highly volatile and sensitive “backyard.” Indeed, the Sino-Russian friendship treaty and the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) – the two pillars of Moscow and Beijing’s regional foreign and security policies – are subject to severe test by a fast changing security environment at both the global and regional levels.

### **The “Everything-and-Nothing” Treaty**

Twenty years after the expiration of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty and 10 years after the Soviet collapse, the Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation was officially signed in Moscow by Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 16, 2001. The 25-article treaty, which covers almost every aspect of bilateral relations in the past 10 years, can be reduced to four main areas of joint concern: basic principles, border issues, security base-lines, and cooperative areas.

The text of the treaty begins with some basic principles, including political equality, economic mutual benefit, mutual trust for security, consultation for world affairs (Articles 1 to 5), and not aiming at any third party or forming a bloc (Articles 7 and 22). Among these general principles are two crucial statements: not targeting nuclear weapons against the other (Article 2) and adhering to the “one China” stance (Article 5).

The second area provides assurance for the 4,300 km border that has long been a burden for both countries. While Article 6 fixes the current border line as permanent (98 percent of the border settled except two islands along the Heilongjiang/Amur River) and should be respected in the context of international law, Article 7 calls for more action in the areas of confidence building and force reduction in the border areas.

Perhaps the most important part of the friendship treaty is the third area, which draws parameters for future bilateral relations. That is, each country should refrain from developing and conducting any foreign and defense policy that would jeopardize the interests of the other. Specifically, Russia and China will not join any alliance or take any action if such a move threatens to undermine the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of the other signatory (Article 8). If one of the parties faces a threat of aggression, the two countries should immediately consult each other “with the aim of removing the threat” (Article 9).

In order to achieve these goals, the treaty specifies areas for cooperation that include strengthening dialogue mechanisms at all levels (Article 10); observing international laws for peace and stability (Article 11); jointly safeguarding “global strategic balance and stability” (opposing U.S. missile defense) and arms control (Article 12); cooperating in multilateral fora (Article 13); furthering regional stability (Article 14); promoting cooperation and exchanges in the areas of economics, science, military technology, humanity, intellectual property rights, human rights, and environmental protection; and combating terrorism, separatism, extremism, and cross-border crimes in both bilateral and multilateral spheres (Articles 15 to 21).

Both sides hailed the treaty as “historic” and “a milestone” for “a new type of inter-state relations” and for “Russian-Chinese friendship from generation to generation.” Moscow and Beijing, however, were also busy publicizing an “everything-and-nothing” theme: maximum cooperation by the two sides on every conceivable area and minimal impact on any third party. Officials of the two countries stressed time and again that their treaty was not based on “anti-Americanism,” and neither did it have a hidden agenda. In his speech at the Moscow State University after signing the treaty, Jiang Zemin vowed to continue to pursue an “independent, peace-oriented” foreign policy. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov went as far as to say “a strategic partnership with China is not a union, neither a civilian, nor a military one. It is absolutely wrong to say that the partnership between Russia and China is aimed against anyone in the West. The West must understand there is a certain line neither we nor the Chinese are willing to cross.”

### **Looks Good and Tastes Good**

In December 1949, Mao Zedong traveled to Moscow for Stalin’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Once Mao was in Moscow, however, he surprised his Russian host by asking to sign a “political document” that both “tastes and looks good.” The Russians were sincerely puzzled because they thought that their 1945 treaty with the Nationalist government was still binding and applicable in their relations with the Chinese communists. In the next two months, a team of Chinese officials and diplomats – who traveled the trans-Siberia railways all the way from China – worked day and night. The 30-year Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was signed on Feb. 14, 1950, and targeted specifically Japan and its protector, the U.S.

In the next three decades, however, this “tastes-and-looks-good” document led to the “best” and “worst” times of bilateral relations: from the “honeymoon” of the 1950s to the open military conflict of the 1960s and 1970s. Stability and normal relations between the two countries were lacking.

In 1996, President Jiang Zemin, like Mao, again took the initiative and proposed a treaty that would govern bilateral relations for the new millennium. This time, the guiding philosophy seemed to be “political correctness,” meaning not to offend anybody. In other words, it first and foremost “looks good.”

Media and official reactions outside the two countries tended to offer diverse assessments of the treaty. On one hand, they highlighted the limitations of the treaty since it was not an alliance, the traditional animosity, the disappointing bilateral trade volume, and the countries’ need for Western resources for their economic development. On the other hand, some in the West argued that the current treaty does have real, though hidden, teeth. Fixing, in legal terms, of Russia’s opposition to Taiwan’s independence (Article 5) is a specific constraining factor aimed at both Taiwan and its main supporters (the U.S. and Japan).

The truth, however, may lie somewhere between the two opposing views. The dual character of the treaty – minimalism and maximism – reflects the complexities of their bilateral relations and relations with the outside world. On one hand, the goal of an open-ended treaty based on comprehensive and maximum cooperation is pursued as a result of the bitter learning experience. A return to the past is simply unacceptable. Both are keenly aware of the need to maintain normal relations, though such a job can be routine and even boring in contrast to previous extremes that ranged from “honeymoon” to hostility.

On the other hand, the desire of Moscow and Beijing not to offend any third party is derived from a strategic imperative on both sides to work with the U.S.-led international system, no matter how difficult it may be. This is largely the result of their painful and costly pursuit, in the past, of two alternatives: being part of a separate and inefficient communist trading bloc controlled by Moscow and/or a self-imposed “splendid isolation.” For both, economic development will have to be achieved within the Pax Americana, even if such a system is not considered to be perfect.

The current treaty, though stressing “political correctness,” is also made to “taste good” with certain binding features. Articles 8 and 9 are rather explicit in limiting each other’s freedom of action insofar as neither government should pursue any policy that would harm the interests of the other. It also stipulates prompt consultation in crises that affect their security and interests. These are a minimum for any policy coordination and joint action. Although the treaty twice stipulates that it is not against any third party, its bottom-line and open-ended approach to cooperation and coordination will certainly be able to accommodate future contingencies.

In sum, the wording of the current treaty provides both sides with assurance at a time when each needs support from the other in some areas (domestic stability, anti-terrorism and separatism, and a multipolar world order) and when both need to obtain resources and benefit from the West-dominated world system. In the final analysis, a stable, peaceful, and predictable bilateral relationship is perhaps the best that Moscow and Beijing can count on in a highly fluid and even “hot” post-Cold War world, one in which the world’s sole superpower enjoys a freedom of action exceeding that of any time in its history.

Yet, before the end of the third quarter, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, which has been anchored with a new treaty and a growing SCO, would face a real test.

### **“9-11” for Moscow and Beijing**

Several hours before the fateful terrorist bombing of New York City and Washington, D.C. on Sept. 11, Russian President Putin was congratulating Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji in the Kremlin for the economic accords signed during Zhu’s five-day visit. Putin was unusually upbeat as he praised the “extremely positive development of cooperation” between Russia and China in trade, economic, and military-technical matters. The two major breakthroughs in bilateral economic ties –China’s long-delayed purchase of Russian commercial jets after more than a decade of buying from Boeing and Airbus, and major progress in constructing a vital oil pipeline from Russia to China – occurred against a backdrop of a widely expected hike in trade volume for 2001 (estimated at \$20 billion, including border trade and military transactions). Beyond economics, Putin and Zhu also reaffirmed their adherence to defense of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty as a cornerstone of global strategic stability and security, a reference to perceived growing U.S. unilateralism.

Zhu left Moscow early on the morning of Sept. 12 when the magnitude of the terrorist attack just started to unfold in New York and Washington, D.C. His next stop was Kazakhstan where the SCO members – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – would hold their first prime ministers’ meeting after a major expansion of the regional security pact in June.

Although Russian intelligence was said to have passed to its U.S. counterpart information regarding a possible terrorist attack on the U.S., Moscow and Beijing had no idea about the magnitude of the attack. Not only did the attack instantly overwhelm the United States, it also radically altered the regional security environment and will have an impact and consequences beyond that which can be handled by the SCO.

The SCO annual meeting of prime ministers, which was supposed to shift the organization’s emphasis from regional security to economic development, was forced to face the reality of a major escalation of terrorist activities with deep roots in Central Asia. At Russia’s initiation, the SCO prime ministers quickly issued a statement denouncing the terrorist attacks in the U.S.

Despite the declaration of intent, the SCO members did not appear to be ready for any joint response to the unfolding crisis that would be coordinated by the SCO's own institutional mechanism, in particular through the SCO's anti-terrorist center created last year in the Kyrgyzstan capital, Bishkek. Instead, most of the follow-up activities by the SCO's member states seemed to have occurred outside the SCO.

Immediately after the attack, almost all Central Asian SCO states looked to Moscow for either guidance or approval on how to cooperate with Washington in its military operations against terrorism. Meanwhile, supporters of the Afghan Northern Alliance (Russia, Iran, India, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) acted immediately and convened a closed-door meeting in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe – as the SCO heads of state were meeting in Almaty of Kazakhstan – to decide how to assist this anti-Taliban group. These developments may reflect institutional limitations of the SCO, whose anti-terrorist jurisdiction is largely between and within, but not beyond, the territories of the member states.

Meanwhile, Moscow and Beijing both quickly condemned the terrorist attacks and, despite their treaty, seemed to have been more interested in echoing Washington than coordinating their bilateral actions. In contrast to their quick calls through their hotlines to President Bush (Jiang on Sept. 12 and Putin on Sept. 13 in their local times), Putin and Jiang did not talk to each other through the Moscow-Beijing hotline until Sept. 18. And this phone call, which was initiated by the Chinese side, appeared to be part of China's "hotline" campaign of reaching out to British and French leaders as well. The next day, Chinese and Russian diplomats met to form joint plans against terrorism. By this time, both Moscow and Beijing had already pledged to support the U.S. in joint action against terrorism, though their specific inputs remained to be identified.

Ten days into the crisis, Moscow and Beijing finally aligned their policies by emphasizing caution, a long-term multilateral effort, and U.S. reciprocity for curbing terrorist and separatist activities inside Russia and China. These policy nuances reflect a concern beyond the current crisis: a U.S. return to the strategically sensitive region of Central Asia will produce sea-changes in regional security. To be sure, U.S. anti-terrorist actions will in the short-term help curtail terrorist activities in both Russia and China. The unprecedented, staggering casualties from the attacks in the U.S., however, may lead to less restrained U.S. retaliation against targets, many of which are located in Central Asia.

In the long term, the U.S. move to Central Asia may undermine or even displace the security mechanism (the SCO) that Moscow and Beijing have worked hard to develop in the past six years. Until the Sept. 11 attack, the SCO was the only major regional security organization without direct U.S. participation. Washington had not only been a bystander to that multilateral effort to curb terrorism in the most volatile part of the world, but it also treated destabilizing activities in Chechnya and China's Xinjiang Province as either fighting for freedom or a human rights issue (the U.S. State Department even received the Chechen "foreign minister" a few months ago).

For both Moscow and Beijing, cooperating with Washington to fight terrorism in the short run may come at a price in terms of long-term security. That is, successful operations against terrorism by the U.S. in Central Asia may produce a more confident and unilateralist U.S. A less successful, or failed, anti-terrorist move by the U.S. could cause more instability and a surge of extremism and terrorism in the region.

### **Religious Extremism: A Bitter Harvest for Moscow, Beijing, and Washington**

Ironically, the roots of the current rise of Islamic extremism can be traced back some 20 years when China and the U.S. worked closely with both Pakistan and the *mujahadeen* in Afghanistan to combat Soviet military intrusion. In the ashes of the Soviet defeat, these fighters for *jihād* took on new struggles. While the triumphant Americans packed up and went home in the wake of the Soviet collapse, leaving a devastated land with seasoned Islamic warriors, Beijing and Moscow have had to live with a growing fundamentalist movement across their long borders with Central Asia states.

The initial salvo of the military operation against terrorism, if any, appears likely to be unleashed against Afghanistan, a Central Asian state that has already been devastated by 22 years of war, perhaps no target there is worth the price of an American missile. However, Afghanistan, together with other central Asian states, is a geo-strategic meeting place of the world's major civilizations: Christianity, Islam, Hindu, and Confucianism, all of which, unfortunately, were nuclearized at the end of last century. Understanding and managing these issues would be hard enough for Washington, Moscow, and Beijing during times of relative tranquility. It is unclear how the massive American strategic initiative will affect the delicate and dangerous chemistry of this region. The current war against terrorism, with all of its good intentions and noble goals, allows very little margin for error in the age of weapons of mass destruction.

## **Chronology of China-Russia Relations July - September 2001**

**July 2, 2001:** Russia and China sign an agreement in Beijing on cooperation in electronics, communications, and digital television.

**July 7-10, 2001:** Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov visits Beijing for consultations on Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Moscow.

**July 8, 2001:** Russia refuses to issue a visa to Wei Jingsheng, a leading Chinese dissident based in the U.S.

**July 10-14, 2001:** Li Lanqing, deputy prime minister of the Chinese State Council, leads a Chinese delegation at the 112<sup>th</sup> session of the International Olympic Committee in Moscow; Li meets his Russian counterpart Valentina Matviyenko to discuss exchanges in the fields of sports, culture, education, and public health.

**July 11, 2001:** Moscow police stop a group of Tibetans from holding an unauthorized rally in Moscow to protest Beijing's bid to host the 2008 Olympic games.

**July 13, 2001:** Riot police in Moscow break up a rally conducted by a Russian radical party called Organizations for Supporting Tibet opposing Beijing's bid to host the 2008 Olympics.

**July 15-18, 2001:** President Jiang pays an official visit to Russia. On July 16, Jiang and Putin sign Friendship Treaty.

**July 19, 2001:** A \$2-billion agreement is reported signed by which China purchases 38 Russian Su-30MKK ground attack jets. Russian sources suggested that China would account for 30 percent to 50 percent of Russia's arms sales in the next 10 to 15 years.

**July 20, 2001:** Russia and China sign accord for cooperation in designing a nuclear energy plant for spacecraft and the manufacture of MOX fuel, a mixture of plutonium and uranium.

**July 26, 2001:** On the phone, President Putin briefs President Jiang about the results of the G-8 summit and his meeting with U.S. President Bush regarding strategic stability.

**July 27, 2001:** Russia Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov briefs Chinese counterpart Tang Jiaxuan in Hanoi about Russia-U.S. talks on the ABM Treaty.

**Aug. 11, 2001:** The Chinese Embassy in Moscow sends request to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs to prohibit representatives of Falun Gong religious sect from holding a news conference in Moscow on Aug. 13.

**Aug. 18, 2001:** Russia and China reach agreement to create a joint sub-commission on communications and information technologies to cooperate in cell phone, satellite, and TV services.

**Aug. 20-21, 2001:** The second round of "expert meetings" of members of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization is held in Almaty; the meeting focuses on trade and economic cooperation.

**Aug. 21, 2001:** Russia delivers 10 of 18 Su-30 MKK jets to the Chinese Air Force; the final delivery (18 jets) will be made before the end of 2001.

**Sept. 3, 2001:** Russia reportedly refuses to issue a transit visa to the Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama for his planned visit to Mongolia between Sept. 3 and 17; the Russian Foreign Ministry denies receiving an application.

**Sept. 7-12, 2001:** Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visits Russia for the regular annual prime minister talks with Russian counterpart Mikhail Kasyanov. The six commercial agreements signed include a \$160-million deal to purchase five Tu-204, 200-seat passenger jets and an intention to buy 10 more; an agreement under which China recognizes Russian aircraft as suitable for operation in Chinese territory; an agreement on drafting a feasibility report on building an oil pipeline from Russia to China; and on setting up a sub-commission for telecommunications. Zhu also meets President Putin, Russian Federation Council (upper house of the Parliament) Chairman Yegor Stroyev, leading representatives from Russian business and industry circles, and visited the Gagarin Cosmonauts' Training Center in the Star City.

**Sept. 14, 2001:** In the first prime ministerial meeting of the SCO in Almaty, Kazakhstan, leaders of the six member states issue a joint declaration condemning the terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11. They pledge to speed the development of their joint cooperative anti-terrorist mechanism.

**Sept. 18, 2001:** President Putin and President Jiang confer by phone on possible international mechanisms to combat terrorism. For this purpose, Russia and China would continue close cooperation within the framework of the UN and on a bilateral level.

**Sept. 21, 2001:** The construction of an oil pipeline between Russia and China starts in the Russian city of Angarsk. Four tanks with a total capacity of 30,000 tons and a transit trestlework are under construction. The pipeline will cross Russia's Trans-Baykal area from Angarsk to China's city of Daqing in northeastern China. China will receive 20 million tons of oil annually at the initial stage (2005-2009) and the volume of deliveries will rise to 30 million by 2010.