

## China-Russia Relations: Treaties Scrapped, Treaties Signed

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A specter is haunting the world – the specter of breaking and making treaties. From Washington to Brussels and from Moscow to Beijing, treaties are being scrapped (Kyoto Protocol and Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty) and signed (Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Russian-Chinese friendship treaty) in such a way that the post-Cold War order is rapidly being shaped into a brave and perhaps not-so-certain new world with consequences that may not be anticipated or liked by anyone.

During the second quarter of 2001, there were at least three major treaty-making activities in bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing, partially or largely in reaction to the threatened U.S. departure from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and other arms control treaties. First, the final wording of a historical friendship treaty was hammered out and is ready to be signed at the onset of the third quarter (the July Moscow summit). Second, the joint effort to stabilize central Asian states led to the debut of an enlarged and reshaped Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), formerly known as the Shanghai Five. Third, Chinese and Russian heads of state (Jiang Zemin and Vladimir Putin) met in Shanghai for the first of three summit meetings in the year 2001.

### **Living with the Not-So-Humble Superpower**

Washington's perceived "unilateralism" was the main concern for the two continental powers (Russia and China). By maximizing the missile threat from so-called "rogue states" and minimizing the danger of global warming, the Bush administration is viewed as departing from a series of international treaties that constitute the bedrock of global strategic stability and harmony, causing considerable uncertainty in both Moscow and Beijing with regard to bilateral relations with Washington.

In bilateral relations, the Bush administration also played hardball with Moscow and Beijing. Top U.S. officials called Russia an "active proliferator" and "a possible threat." The U.S. put on hold (in the name of a comprehensive review) all U.S. aid for dismantling of Russian nuclear, biological, and chemical complexes. Fifty-one Russian diplomats were expelled from the U.S. (a favor returned by Moscow) while investigations began on former FBI agent Robert Hanssen, accused of espionage. Finally, Russia was not pleased when the Chechen "minister of foreign affairs" was allowed to visit the U.S.

State Department. It was as if everything the previous administration did with Moscow was wrong and needed to be reversed.

This new “rhetorical” Cold War with Russia, in the words of both U.S. Russianologists and Russia’s Americanologists, was deflected, ironically, on April Fool’s Day (April 1), when a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane collided with a Chinese Air Force jet in airspace close to China’s Hainan Island. As a result, Beijing replaced Moscow as Washington’s primary national security concern for the second quarter.

Following the collision, the Bush administration authorized a \$5 billion sale of arms to Taiwan, the largest in history. Shortly after this, both President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney stated publicly and forcefully that the United States would defend Taiwan, a significant departure from the policy of ambiguity and “one China” pursued by the previous six U.S. presidents.

Even before the midair collision, Washington began to shift its focus to Beijing. Shortly after Bush’s inauguration in late January 2001, the U.S. Air Force conducted its first space-war exercise in Colorado with China as the target and the Taiwan Strait as the anticipated theater of operations. Meanwhile, the new administration quickly affirmed its new definition of China as a “strategic competitor.” In late March, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld officially submitted to the president a review of the U.S. military in the post-Cold War era, reportedly suggesting that the U.S. shift the focus of its military power from Europe to the Asia Pacific. The EP-3 accident further confirmed Beijing’s worst fear: the U.S. is making China a target.

For Moscow and Beijing, the “humble” superpower, as promised by Bush the presidential candidate a few months before, was anything but humble. On a host of issues ranging from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, global warming, the ABM Treaty, and the 30-year “one China” policy, Beijing and Moscow were sufficiently alarmed by Bush’s pursuit, with religious devotion, of policies hatched in conservative think tanks in the previous eight years. Meanwhile, Moscow and Beijing were also puzzled by the sudden enthusiasm of Bush’s foreign and defense policy team for trashing parts of the Cold War architecture as “relics of the past” (such as the ABM Treaty and “one China” policy). At the same time, Washington is seen as having tightly held on to and even expanded other Cold War “relics” such as NATO and the U.S.-Japan security alliance at the expense of Moscow and Beijing’s security interests. *[Editors’ note: Despite Bush’s comments about defending Taiwan, the administration maintains that the U.S. “one China” policy has not changed.]*

Bush’s actual and attempted exit from international treaties and commitments as well as Washington’s seemingly unrestrained policies toward Moscow and Beijing drove the two powers to speed up efforts to produce a major treaty of friendship and cooperation. Ironically this happens at a time when neither expects such a treaty to come into complete effect at the expense of their respective relations with Washington.

### **A Treaty “Just to be Nice”**

The Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighborly and Friendly Cooperation to be signed by Putin and Jiang in July means a lot for the two continental giants. Fifty years ago, the Sino-Soviet treaty of alliance signed by Stalin and Mao carried the two countries to the best and perhaps the worst of their bilateral relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the two sides were determined to avoid that experience, it was the not-so-friendly peace (“cold peace” for Yeltsin and “hot peace” for Chinese Americanologist Wang Jisi) in the post-Cold War world that prompts Moscow and Beijing to sign another treaty. By the end of April, Moscow and Beijing essentially completed all the preliminary work and the treaty is ready to be signed by the two heads of state during their July summit in Moscow.

The exact content of the treaty has been closely guarded by both sides. Several main features, however, were publicly stated by both sides in the past few months. First, perhaps the biggest surprise of the treaty is that it has “no sharp or unexpected points” and “no hard-line formulations.” Instead, it will be “a well-considered, balanced document” based on the positive aspects of bilateral relations in the past decade. In Putin’s words, the document is to “define principles of interaction between China and Russia as friendly countries” in areas including: borders, economics and trade, foreign and security policies, social and cultural issues, and military cooperation.

It is intended for “the long-term” and avoids “a momentary character.” It will determine “the basic principles that will govern the relations between the two countries in the 21st century.” Finally, the treaty is said to be based on a partnership of equality, mutual confidence, and respect, rather than on the hierarchical relationship exemplified by the previous, Moscow-centered alliance treaty.

### **Soft-Peddling a Strategic Partnership**

The nonbinding features of the treaty represent a culmination of *two* significant characteristics in Beijing-Moscow relations in the past decade. One is close coordination on a range of major issues, particularly in foreign and defense areas, in order to safeguard sovereignty at a minimum and to promote a multipolar world at maximum. This includes collective opposition to the U.S. missile defense plan, coordination at the United Nations and other multilateral diplomacy, regional security, border stability, and anti-terrorism/separatism (Taiwan and Chechnya).

Throughout the second quarter, the two sides interacted at almost all levels in the areas of foreign policy, defense policy, culture, and education. While China continued to support Russia’s effort to maintain “strategic stability,” Putin reminded the U.S., right after his meeting with President Bush in Slovenia, that China should not be overlooked or kept in the dark during the U.S. pursuit of missile defense. This was the first such warning by a Russian president. According to Putin, Russia had taken an interest in ensuring that China’s strategic concerns are addressed in the debate. “The transparency of our action is very important, lest none of the nuclear powers would feel abandoned or that two countries are making agreements behind their backs,” insisted Putin.

The second and perhaps more important characteristic of their strategic partnership is the desire and effort by both sides to maintain maximum flexibility and freedom of action in their relations with other countries. Upon initialing the draft treaty in Moscow on April 29, both Chinese and Russian foreign ministers reiterated that the treaty did not target any third country, which has been a long-standing and declared guideline for their strategic partnership since the mid-1990s.

This is particularly true with regard to relations with the United States. Aside from issues such as sovereignty and missile defense, Moscow and Beijing seem to have reached a point where they will not overreact to the other's relations with Washington, at least not publicly. In the aftermath of the EP-3 collision with the Chinese Air Force jet in the South China Sea, Russia expressed "regret" over the accident and maintained a rather neutral position. The Russian foreign minister depicted the incident as "an accident which brought to the verge of crisis the bilateral relations of the two big countries in Asia Pacific." Russia, however, was quick to bid on and win the right to transport the damaged U.S. spy plane out of China. After the massive U.S. arms sale package to Taiwan in late April, the Russian Foreign Ministry referred to the sale as a "question of bilateral relations."

Curiously and ironically, worsening relations with Washington during the first few months of the Bush administration actually led to joint efforts by Beijing and Moscow to improve relations with Washington. During the mid-June "Shanghai Five" annual summit, President Jiang asked President Putin to convey a verbal message to President Bush to the effect that China "is willing to pursue a constructive, predictable, and positive policy vis-à-vis all its partners, including the United States." Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov later stated that "[T]he Chinese side attaches great importance to its relations with the United States for international stability," and "the Chinese leadership intends to pursue a constructive policy in its relations with Washington." In their June 18 telephone conversation during which Putin briefed Jiang on his summit meeting with President Bush in Slovenia, President Jiang went as far as to state that "I believe that Russian-U.S. dialogue and cooperation are conducive to maintaining world peace, security, and stability." Toward the end of June, the Russian foreign minister stressed that Russia will do "everything to prevent confrontation between the U.S. and China, because it will not lead to anything good." No problems in the world can be solved without Russia, the U.S., China, and Europe working together, said Ivanov.

If anything, Moscow and Beijing seem to work closely to help softly land the "800-pound gorilla" and at the same time, to smooth their respective rocky relations with Washington, though for their own interests. Some influential Chinese analysts go so far as to describe relations between the U.S., China, and Russia as a "strategic triangle," a far cry from a typical, normal but rigid alliance treaty. Managing relations with the sole superpower is in the ultimate interests of both countries' political transformation and economic modernization. For that purpose, Moscow and Beijing's long-articulated non-zero-sum and no-enemy-and-no-alliance approach to their strategic partnership should not be interpreted as mere lip service.

Perhaps one of China's key motivations in drafting the treaty was institutionalizing relations with Russia's young president. This was particularly needed in the first few months of the post-Yeltsin era when Russia's new head of state did not appear eager to develop relations with Beijing. For Moscow, Russia's historically weak position requires a safety net to deal with a rising China.

Over time, however, Putin seems to have convinced his Chinese counterpart that he can be trusted and is as capable as his predecessor in developing bilateral relations with Beijing. In the past year or so, Chinese leaders seem to have developed more confidence and trust in Putin. With the exception of a few issues such as Russian arms sales to India, the Chinese media has had largely positive, even glowing, reports about Putin's Russia. China, at both official and popular levels, seems to be fascinated by the charisma of the Russian president. After meeting Putin in the Kremlin in late April, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan went as far as to say that he had been amazed at the "objectiveness, composure, and sensibility" of Putin. Putin, in return, described bilateral relations as "practically no problems" and "are developing intensively and in a positive way . . . and with very good dynamics."

The seemingly contradictory characteristics of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and the upcoming friendship treaty – close coordination and maximum flexibility – can be possible only if officials in both countries develop high levels of confidence and trust in each other. Their interactions, therefore, will focus on bigger and strategic pictures; they will not be hampered by minor issues and irritants such as the occasional spying cases. Indeed, after a decade of carefully cultivating bilateral relations, Russian and Chinese leaders seem to be able to conduct real, informal but substantive "strategic dialogues" whenever they meet. Some Chinese analysts compare the current Russian-Chinese summit meetings with Mao and Zhou Enlai's meetings with Nixon and Kissinger in the early days of Sino-U.S. strategic partnership, when top leaders of the two countries roamed over philosophic and strategic issues, while leaving secondary problems for their assistants or to the future. In contrast, recent high-level contacts between Chinese and Russians with their U.S. counterparts always take the format of long "to-do" lists from the U.S. side which are followed by hard and bitter bargaining.

### **A Face-lift for the "Shanghai Five"**

While finalizing their basic treaty, Moscow and Beijing in the second quarter also sped up treaty-making efforts promoting the "Shanghai Five," a regional forum established in 1996, to a new height. Several "firsts" were made in the sixth annual session of the Shanghai Five: It was given a new name, the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," a new member (Uzbekistan) was added, and efforts were initiated to make Central Asia a nuclear-free zone. The heads of state signed "The Shanghai Convention on Fighting Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism," which consists of 21 articles. The defense ministers of the six countries also signed a communiqué on arms control with a clear goal to defend the ABM Treaty. Meanwhile, members agreed to speed up institutionalization of their cooperative mechanism in the areas of border security,

confidence building, anti-terrorist-separatist-extremist activities, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural exchanges.

The transition of the forum to the SCO was played up with a media fanfare and heightened security measures that brought Shanghai, China's financial center, to a halt. The summit was also attended by defense ministers of all six member states to discuss security cooperation, joint exercises, weapon's research and development, etc. Leaders of the member states, however, tried to downplay the military/security aspects of their forum. President Putin called stronger economic ties a key aim of SCO. "Cooperation in economics, trade, and culture is far more important than military cooperation," said Putin. The Chinese side proposed adding a regular meeting between trade and economic ministers and the drafting of a 10-year economic cooperative plan (2001–2010) in the areas of tariff reduction, custom streamlining, standardization of commodity certification and exchange, coordinating infrastructure for trade and investment environment, etc. During the summit, Jiang Zemin also suggested that an annual meeting of cultural ministers be added to the growing list of sub-commissions. Energy development, transportation, and environmental issues were also at the top of the agenda for the SCO summit. The next annual SCO summit would be held in St. Petersburg, Russia, as suggested by Jiang in Shanghai. By then, SCO's charter will be approved and signed by member states.

"Shanghai Five" is a name invented by Western journalists for their own convenience and was accepted by all parties concerned. Later, the Chinese side justified the location for such a regional forum in Shanghai and not in Beijing as a decision that reflects the spirit of equality among member states. It started out as a multilateral summit in Shanghai in 1996 with the purpose of military force reduction, confidence building, and transparency in the 7,400-kilometer (4,598 miles) border areas of the original five member states. Gradually, the organization developed sub-commissions for annual talks between foreign ministers, defense ministers, and policy chiefs. More recently, emphasis was put on economic cooperation, border trade, and energy development. In 2000, the Shanghai Five agreed to create an anti-terrorist center in the Kyrgyzstan capital, Bishkek. With the new upgrade, SCO now boasts three-fifths of the huge Eurasian landscape (nearly 30 million sq.-kilometers) and a quarter of the world's population (1.5 billion people). More important, SCO laid the institutional foundation for future enlargement. Mongolia could be the next new recruit. Also, Russia's foreign minister proposed institutional linkage of SCO's antiterrorist mechanism with the CIS Collective Security Treaty.

The organization underscores Beijing and Moscow's concern over the growing pull of Islamic fundamentalism in the region and the potentially destabilizing role played by the Taliban government in Afghanistan. It is also part of a reaction to the growing influence of NATO and the United States in Central Asia. Already, there are more than 60 cooperative arrangements and regimes between the West and Central Asian states, and many of them are concerned with military and security issues. With unremitting pressure from NATO in the west and the U.S.-Japan alliance in the east, Moscow and Beijing have been working hard to keep their influence in this important and volatile "backyard." At a

minimum, the two countries expect SCO to provide the needed security for their own domestic stability and to be free from infiltration by rising Islamic fundamentalism. At maximum, a cooperative and friendly Central Asia constitutes a vital part of efforts by Moscow and Beijing to create a multipolar world.

Like the pending Sino-Russian friendship treaty, SCO is said to not be directed against any third country. The evolution of the forum, however, clearly shows an outward-looking posture. Six years ago, its debut aimed at issues either within or between these states. Over time, the SCO members began to coordinate policies on issues of regional and global importance. These include promoting a multipolar world, opposition to U.S. missile defense, supporting the “one China” policy, etc. As the first international organization named after China’s largest city, SCO is one of the few international organizations without any direct U.S. participation. And it is unlikely that Washington would even have any indirect or unofficial role in the SCO in the near future due to SCO’s rather strict rules.

### **The Outlook**

At the beginning of the third quarter, President Jiang will find himself in Moscow for the signing of the historic friendship treaty with President Putin. In response to reporters’ questions regarding the possibility of forming an alliance with Russia in late April after initialing the draft treaty, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan stated, “China and Russia did not plan to form an alliance now . . . the time has not come for that.” The current paradoxical nature of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and the pending friendship treaty – close coordination and maximum flexibility – will be subjected to severe tests should the U.S. decide to actively bypass or depart from the ABM Treaty and other international arrangements vital to the security and interests of Moscow and Beijing.

## **Chronology of China-Russia Relations**

### **April – June 2001**

**Apr. 3, 2001:** The “Shanghai Five” (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, and Tajikistan) conclude a week-long, expert-level session on military confidence building measures.

**Apr. 4, 2001:** China’s Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Deguang and his Russian counterpart G. Mamedov holds talks in Beijing and reach a broad consensus on issues related to strategic stability, including missile defense, disarmament, and arms control. Both sides reaffirm their opposition to the deployment of the NMD system and development of the TMD system of a military bloc nature for the Asia Pacific region.

**Apr. 19, 2001:** Representatives of the General Staffs of the Shanghai Five countries meet in Bishkek to discuss cooperation in antiterrorism and religious extremism.

**Apr. 24, 2001:** Russian space engineer Valentin Danilov is arrested in Krasnoyarsk on suspicion of passing to China technology for new-generation radiation shielding for satellite constellations, according to the regional Federal Security Service department.

**Apr. 24-27, 2001:** The 10<sup>th</sup> Northeast Asia Economic Forum opens in Changchun, China's Jilin Province, with representatives from China, Russia, North and South Korea, Japan, and the U.S.

**Apr. 27-May 2, 2001:** Chinese FM Tang Jiaxuan visits the Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Russia. In Russia, Tang joins the Shanghai Five foreign minister meeting and holds talks on the upcoming visit to Russia by President Jiang Zemin and finalizing the text of the Russo-Chinese friendship treaty.

**Apr. 28, 2001:** Foreign ministers of the Shanghai Five meet in Moscow for annual ministerial talks.

**Apr. 29, 2001:** FM Tang meets with President Putin in Moscow.

**May 10, 2001:** A PLA delegation leaves Beijing on a friendly visit to Russia and Croatia. The delegation is headed by Gen. Tao Bojun, commander of PLA Guangzhou Military Area Command.

**May 13, 2001:** China and Russia sign a protocol document on cooperation between the two countries' prosecutors in border regions, cities, and districts in order to boost efforts against crime.

**May 17, 2001:** Russian Education Minister Vladimir Filippov and his Chinese counterpart Chen Zhili meet in Beijing.

**May 21, 2001:** A Chinese delegation visits Moscow to discuss the missile defense issue; the two sides confirmed opposition to U.S. plans to deploy a global missile defense system and did not consider the reasons and arguments for these plans to be convincing.

**May 28-June 9, 2001:** Former Russian President Boris Yeltsin takes a "comprehensive trip" to China, meets with President Jiang Zemin.

**June 1, 2001:** Chinese Embassy in Moscow holds a party for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the peaceful liberation of Tibet.

**June 9, 2001:** Polet, a Russia company, wins the international tender for transporting the U.S. spy plane from Hainan Island to Okinawa, Japan.

**June 12, 2001:** Taiwanese business delegation led by Taipei-based Taiwan Institute of Economic Research (TIER) President Wu Rong-i begins visit to Russia. Taiwan



delegation sets date for the first Taiwan-Russia forum concerning bilateral economic affairs to be held in Taipei in October.

**June 13-14, 2001:** A delegation of the Chinese-Russian Committee of Friendship, Peace, and Development, led by the chairman Huang Yichen, visits Vladivostok and holds talks with officials of the Maritime Territory and the command of the Pacific regional agency of Russia's Federal Border Service. The group also visits Irkutsk, Moscow, and Bryansk.

**June 13-15, 2001:** A group of Chinese Tibetologists visits Russia and meets with Russian counterparts.

**June 14-15, 2001:** Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Shanghai for the sixth summit meeting of the Shanghai Five, meets with Jiang.

**June 17, 2001:** Russia and China sign a \$5 million deal to equip China's F-8 fighter jets with radars from Russia's Fazotron-NIIR research institute. Another contract of \$25 million will be signed soon for a total of 100 systems including finished products and segments for assembly in China, according to *Itar-Tass* at the 44th international aerospace show in France.

**June 18, 2001:** President Putin telephones President Jiang and briefs him on his summit meeting with President Bush on June 16 in Slovenia.

**June 26, 2001:** Russian *Itar-Tass* news agency reports that Tibetan spiritual leader in exile Dalai Lama will visit the Russian republic of Kalmykia in late August.

**June 27, 2001:** The second meeting of Sino-Russian central bankers is held in Moscow.

**June 27, 2001:** Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko denies British and Hong Kong press reports that Russia is helping organize the production of Kilo-class submarines in Taiwan.

**June 29, 2001:** Chinese official media reports that Russian Defense Ministry officials are quoted as saying that Russia did not rule out possible revision of ABM Treaty.

**June 30, 2001:** China resumes beef and pork exports to Russia.