

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

CHINA- RUSSIA RELATIONS

THE STORY OF TWO PIVOTS

YU BIN, WITTENBURG UNIVERSITY

After a slow start, there was a burst of diplomatic activity affecting the Russia-China relationship in late-April with Russia focusing on the east for a Russia-DPRK summit in Vladivostok and China focusing on the west with its second Belt and Road Forum. The militaries expanded the scope and substance of their relationship in April with consultations for a third joint missile defense computer simulation to be conducted later this year, several Russian ships joined a naval parade to honor the 70th anniversary of China's Navy, the start of the *Joint Sea 2019* naval exercise, and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe's visit to Moscow.

This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal of Bilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific*, Vol. 21, No. 1, May 2019. Preferred citation: Yu Bin, "China-Russia Relations: The Story of Two Pivots," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp 115-124.

Introduction

The first four months of 2019 were mostly quiet between Russia and China except for some low-level interactions. The end of April, however, witnessed a burst of activity: Russia's "pivot" to the east (Putin-Kim summit) and China's own "pivot" to the west and beyond (the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing). Regardless of the differences in direction and the nature and degree of these foreign policy thrusts, the two largest Eurasian powers cooperated, coordinated and even competed for their respective national interests with implications for the rest of the world.

The Chinese and Russian militaries also tried to significantly expand the scope and substance of their mil-mil relationship during the last two weeks of April: on April 15-19, they held the first round of consultations in Beijing for a third joint missile defense computer simulation to be conducted in Russia later this year; several Russian ships joined a naval parade on April 22-25 for the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Navy; the two navies conducted a joint naval exercise (*Joint Sea 2019*) off the Chinese coast on April 29-May 4; and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe visited Moscow to meet Russian counterpart Sergey Shoygu on April 24-25.

These events occurred when both Beijing and Moscow experienced difficult relations with Washington. Issues creating concern included the announcement in early February that the [US would withdraw](#) from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), uncertainties in the wake of the failed second US-DPRK summit in late February, increasing tension over US pressure on Venezuela, and the looming US showdown with Iran.

Looking forward, 2019 is a year full of political symbolism: 100 years after the Treaty of Versailles, which led to the rise of Chinese nationalism and eventually communism, 70 years of China-Soviet/Russia diplomatic relations, 60 years after the China-Soviet split and 30 years after the normalization of ties between Beijing and Moscow. Beyond asymmetrical Moscow-Beijing-Washington triangular maneuvering, forces are gaining momentum to reshape the triangular construct with implications for world order.

Putin-Kim Vladivostok summit

The first-ever Vladimir Putin-Kim Jong Un summit was held on the campus of Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) on April 25. During the [two-hour talks](#) (originally planned for no more than [one hour](#)), the main topic was denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. "Chairman Kim Jong Un is quite an open person and speaks freely. We had a very detailed conversation on all items on our agenda and discussed them in various aspects," remarked Russian President Vladimir Putin in his post-summit [press briefing](#). He continued, "My colleagues and I are all satisfied with the outcomes of the talks," added that "I got the impression that Kim Jong Un is interested in denuclearization, all North Korea needs is guarantees of its security and sovereignty."

Without spelling out specifics, Putin said that "the only means for such guarantees is to ensure that international law triumphs over 'rule of force.'" This would be "the first and critical step toward resolving the challenging situation." Ultimately, Putin believed that it was up to North Korea to decide the sources and shape of that guarantee. Russia, however, may have a role in the "international guarantee" if necessary.

The Putin-Kim summit was held in the aftermath of the second, and failed, Trump-Kim summit in Vietnam at the end of February. Apparently positioning himself as an "honest broker" between North Korea and the US, the Russian president reportedly welcomed Kim's effort to normalize ties with the US, saying that Russia and the US were both against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and that he was open to relaying the content of his talks to President Trump. "We are going to discuss the situation with the U.S. Russia is always open on this – there are no conspiracies. More than that Kim Jong Un personally asked us to inform Washington of his position and the issues he wants to ask about," reiterated Putin in his press conference.

The Putin-Kim one-to-one meeting was followed by enlarged meetings with officials from both sides. Economic issues were apparently the major topic during the enlarged meeting as Russian transportation, rail and development [officials](#) joined the discussion.

Putin left Vladivostok shortly after his dinner with Kim to fly to China for the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, leaving his Korean guest for some sightseeing in Vladivostok for the next few days. Kim Jong Un, however, “[suddenly](#)” ended his stay in Vladivostok on April 26.

Russian media described the Putin–Kim summit as “[historic](#).” Prior to this, the Moscow–Pyongyang relationship seemed to be hibernating after the early years of Putin’s presidency when Putin visited [Pyongyang](#) July 19–20, 2000 and Kim Jong Il visited [Vladivostok](#) on Aug. 23, 2002. In-between those visits and the current flurry of summit diplomacy regarding the Korean nuclear issue, President Dmitry [Medvedev](#) and Kim Jong Il met only once in 2011 in Ulan-Ude (Улан-Удэ), the capital of Buryatia (Бурятия) 3,000 miles east of Moscow.

Russia’s “eclipse” in the Korea issue paralleled President Obama’s “strategic patience” strategy toward North Korea. The Putin–Kim Vladivostok meeting, however, may be the beginning of Russia’s reentry into Korean nuclear diplomacy. It is timely given that Kim Jong-un has visited China four times, met South Korean President Moon Jae-in three times, and President Trump twice in the past 13 months. Several times during this period, the Russian side extended invitations to Kim for an official visit, including the one delivered by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov when he visited Pyongyang on May 31, 2018. It seems that Kim finally turned to Russia when both were encountering an impasse in their relations with Washington, according to [Zheng Jiyong](#) (郑继永), a veteran Korea observer in Fudan University in Shanghai. Both sides were looking for a [new mechanism](#) beyond the current framework.

The past, however, is relevant for Russian and Korean leaders. At the dinner on April 25, Putin told Kim about [his encounters](#) with Kim Jong Il in 2000 and 2002. They also talked about the long-envisioned oil, gas, and rail lines through the Korean Peninsula and Russia’s far eastern territories. Putin attributed the lack of progress on infrastructure projects to South Korea’s “shortage of sovereignty,” meaning US objections to intra-Korea and Korean-Russian connectivity. “We will work on this steadily, intensively and patiently. I hope that we will be able to accomplish this someday. The sooner we do this, the better,” promised Putin.

Russia’s late entry into, or final return to, the current Korean nuclear dialogue seemed to be driven by a combination of [factors](#):

- Russia’s limited ability to influence various parties involved;
- the relatively high stakes for Russia’s interests; and
- its pessimistic assessment of the prospect for Korean denuclearization, meaning a fundamental mismatch of North Korea’s interest in nuclear weapons as the only guarantee of its regime’s survival and the US interest in regime change.

After the collapse of the second Trump–Kim summit in Vietnam in late February, Putin seized the moment with the goal of putting Russia back into the role of a relatively independent and indispensable player.

China’s immediate reaction to Kim’s visit was made public shortly before Kim arrived in Vladivostok. “China favors high-level exchange between the DPRK and Russia, which will enhance their cooperation. China believes that this helps Korean-Russian bilateral relations and peace and stability of the peninsula and the region,” said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang (耿爽). The Vladivostok summit was a “good card game played by two extremely skillful players from their respective position of weakness” (两个善于打烂牌高手之间的合作) commented [Dong Jian](#) (董健), a veteran observer of Northeast Asian affairs.

Xi’s dream (BRI) and Putin’s pride (EEU)

Immediately after his dinner with Kim in Vladivostok, Putin flew to Beijing to attend the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) in Beijing on April 25–27, which also doubled as a “[working visit](#)” for talks with counterpart Xi Jinping.

The [second BRF](#) in Beijing hosted 5,000 participants from more than 150 countries and 90 international organizations, including 40 heads of state/government and international organizations. After the three-day conferencing (a leaders’ roundtable, a [high-level meeting](#), a CEO meeting, etc.), agreements valued at more than \$64 billion were signed, [283 deliverables](#) (or “practical outcomes”) were reached, and a joint communique was issued. Despite the size

of the BRF crowd, Putin was prominently featured and treated with respect.



Figure 1 Chinese President Xi Jinping (left) and Russian President Vladimir Putin arrive for the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing. Photo: AFP



Figure 2 Chinese President Xi Jinping takes a group photo with foreign leaders and heads of international organizations. Photo: Xinhua

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – initiated by President Xi Jinping in 2013 – borrows the historical symbol embodied in the ancient Silk Road and incorporates new connotations of the times for the construction of an international platform for promoting trade, connectivity, and social exchanges. According to China's statistics, as of April 20, 2019, China has inked 174 cooperative documents with 126 countries and 29 international organizations. From 2013 to 2018, the total trade volume of goods between China and the countries along the BRI routes has exceeded \$6 trillion. Of the 1,400 BRI investment items above \$1 million in the past five years, only 100 are somewhat "problematic," according to a [Boston University survey](#).

"This is of fundamental importance both for Russia and, I am sure, for many of our colleagues who have gathered here in Beijing today," said the Russian [president](#) at the

opening ceremony of the second BRF. Putin's public endorsement was in contrast to consistent [opposition](#) from the US ("[predatory economics](#)" according to former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson). Indeed, Putin has consistently voiced his support for the BRI since 2015 when he and Xi signed a joint communique to [connect \(对接\)](#) BRI and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

Despite Putin's endorsement, Russia's policy and research community seems to have undergone considerable [mood changes](#) about BRI between 2013–2018: from initial "uncertainty and a high degree of suspicion" (2013–14), to an engaging and supportive posture (2015), and now disappointment and skepticism (2016 onward) for lack of quick results.

Part of the reason for such a shift may be Russia's excessive expectations in the aftermath of the Ukraine/Crimea crises and mounting Western sanctions against Russia. A deeper reason for the lack of progress in China's economic activities with and in Russia is perhaps the overall weakness of Russia-China economic ties, which are considerably smaller and less developed than China's economic ties with many other countries. As of January 2018, China and Russia had invested only [\\$4.5 and \\$0.25 billion](#), respectively, in each other's economy. This state of affairs cannot improve in just a few years. The emerging environmentalist movement in Russia, coupled with widespread corruption and [anti-China sentiment](#), particularly in Russia's Far East (the [Lake Baikal](#) water bottle case, etc.), continue to discourage Chinese [investors](#). Finally, Russia's geostrategic concerns for its [traditional influence](#) not just in Central Asia, but also in East Europe and even in Ukraine, remains a constant neutralizer in Russia's thinking about the BRI. Ultimately, there is an asymmetry between the BRI and EEU in that the former is an open-ended project while the latter is a traditional trading bloc for member states.

As a result of these constant and complicated settings and thoughts, Xi and Putin struck quite different tones at Beijing's BRI extravaganza. In his keynote speech, Xi reiterated his "six-words" principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits (共商共建共享) and open, green, and sustainable approaches. One of the key [takeaways](#) from Xi's

speech is the nearly ubiquitous emphasis on “joint,” “shared,” “common” and “co-development,” indicating that China intends to be one of many players rather than dominate the BRI.

Xi also promised more market access, more intellectual property protection, more import of both commodities and service without intentionally seeking trade surpluses, no devaluation of the yuan, and more effective implementation of bilateral and multilateral economic and trade agreements it has signed with other parties. Xi never mentioned the US, though some significant parts of his speech seemed to respond to US criticism of China’s trade practices (market access, intellectual rights, trade surplus, etc.). In other words, BRI sets its goals in terms of global operations, not just Russia.

Xi addressed Russian concerns in talks with Putin on the sidelines of BRF. Stressing that Russia is an important partner in the joint development of BRI, Xi said the alignment of the BRI with Russia’s EEU is a model for regional economic cooperation. Meanwhile, the two sides should continue to promote cooperation in economy and trade, energy, science and technology, aerospace, connectivity, as well as cooperation at subnational level and people-to-people and cultural exchanges, Xi said. While much of this was boilerplate, Xi carefully framed the interaction between the BRI and EEU as one of “alignment” but not “integration,” which embodies a sense of equality and dignity between the two large Eurasian groupings.

Putin’s speech at the BRI opening session offered a sharp critique of the “[negative trends](#) that feed terrorism, extremism and illegal migration flows, causing old regional conflicts to resurface and new ones to emerge.” It was therefore “important that we come up with effective ways of responding to the risks of a fragmented global political, economic and technological landscape and growing protectionism, with illegitimate unilateral restrictions imposed bypassing the UN Security Council or, even worse, trade wars as its most dangerous expressions,” urged the Russian president in the opening ceremony of the BRF.

A significant part of Putin’s speech was devoted to a vision of establishing “a Greater Eurasian Partnership” (GEP), a superstructure to “integrate integration frameworks” including

the BRI and the EEU. The GEP represents Russia’s conceptual answer to the BRI with deliberately “vague and elusive” wording, according to Alexander [Gabuev](#) of the Carnegie Moscow Center. Meanwhile, Russia continues to build the EEU with its partners (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) on the principles of the “unshakable principles of respect for the sovereignty, rights and legitimate interests of each state,” said Putin. The implication was that the same principles of respect of sovereignty should also be applied to BRI.

Russia’s defensive, if not evasive, actions regarding BRI are understandable within the overall framework of its economic [strategy](#) of constructing a productive relationship with China while avoiding over-dependence on it. For Russia, [pride](#) in being an independent and sovereign power is perhaps as important as obtaining friendly prices for materialist gains. For China, however, the challenge is to steer the BRI through a narrow space between the “too-much” perception of the US and the “too little” BRI input into Russia.

Joint Sea 2019: new “wine” in old bottle?

While the chemistry, or lack of it, between BRI and EEU/GEP remains a challenge for both Beijing and Moscow, there was a surge of interactions between Russian and Chinese militaries in April. The overlapping military activities may have been a matter of convenience. The annual *Joint Sea* naval exercises were right after China’s naval parade for the PLAN’s 70th anniversary, in which Russian naval vessels joined the multinational gathering in Qingdao. The defense ministerial meeting in Moscow was on the sidelines of the Moscow International Security Conference. For *Joint Sea 2019*, the number of naval vessels, aircraft, and marines involved was modest (13 surface ships, two submarines, 11 fixed-wing aircraft, and 80 marines). The drills, however, were said to have achieved “[historical breakthroughs](#)” (历史性突破) in both the degree and scope of interoperability between the two navies.

The Russian Pacific Fleet dispatched a *Steregushchiy*-class frigate, a *Slava*-class guided-missile cruiser, a *Ropucha*-class large landing ship, an *Igor Belousov*-class maritime search-and-rescue support vessel, and a *Kilo*-class diesel-electric attack submarine. The

PLAN sent two guided-missile destroyers, three guided-missile frigates, a submarine rescue ship, and presumably one of the eight Russian-made *Kilos*. The ships [formed](#) two mixed “red teams” and one “blue team” and conducted a series of [first-ever](#) joint air defense, joint anti-submarine, and joint submarine rescue operations, etc.

Joint Sea 2019 started with land/beach drills by the [marines](#) of the two navies on April 30. On May 2, sea drills began with the two navies practicing submarine rescue missions of each other’s “damaged” subs. This was a significant elevation of interoperability of the two navies. In *Joint Sea 2017*, the Chinese deep-sea rescue underwater vehicle only “coupled” with a Russian submarine. This time, crew members were rescued and transported by each other’s [rescue teams](#). “This is a major step toward step beyond the 2017 operation,” remarked Du Changyu, commander of the Chinese deep-sea rescue operation. “It requires very high mutual trust between the two militaries for such a high-risk operation requiring high degree of coordination,” he added. This meant the Chinese and Russian submarine crews would put their lives and combat potential in the hands of each other’s rescue team, commented [Global Times](#).



Figure 3 Two Russian submarine sailors are coming out of China’s deep-sea rescue underwater vehicle to be transferred to the Chinese deep-sea rescue ship *Ocean Island* (海洋岛号援潜救生船). Photo: *Global Times*

Joint anti-submarine exercises were conducted on May 3 when two Russian *Tu-143MZ* anti-submarine planes joined a Chinese *Yun-8* anti-submarine plane spotted and locked two “blue team” subs: a Russian *Kilo*-class sub and a compatible PLAN [Type 039A](#) diesel-electric attack sub (*Yuan*-class by NATO’s identification). They were then attacked and destroyed by anti-submarine helicopters and

surface ships of the “red team.” The joint anti-submarine operation requires very high-level of tactical coordination,” said Zhao Yao (赵曜), deputy director of the “red team.” “All of the anti-sub techniques were used in the drills in which the Chinese and Russian surface ships searching each other’s submarines. The shipborne helicopters ([2 Russian Ka-27 and 3 Chinese ones](#)) flew through the same air space. All of this requires a very high degree of coordination,” noted Zhao.

Joint air defense was the last item of the exercises. On May 4, the PLAN *Harbin* (guided missile destroyer) and the Russian *Admiral Vinogradov* (anti-submarine warfare ship) each fired a short-range ship-to-air missiles and destroyed incoming “enemy” missiles (simulated by drones). This “first-ever” joint air defense was said not only to require close coordination of the two navies, but also the sharing of weapons’ technical and tactical data (性能参数).



Figure 4 *Harbin* fired its ship-to-air short-range missile. Photo: Pu Haiyang, *Global Times*

All these “first-ever” drill items were interfaced with an integrated command and data-sharing, (CDS) system developed by the PLAN. The CDS system allows real-time data sharing, postural display, operational coordination and command dissemination with simultaneous Chinese and Russian languages. Meanwhile, traditional communication and command methods were used as secondary means.

During *Joint Sea 2019*, the center of the CDS was located on the PLAN guided-missile destroyer *Harbin*, and was linked with other ship and aircraft (photo below) for communication and coordination down to the [tactical level](#) (战术协同), a significant upgrade from coordination at the

command level during previous Joint Sea exercises.



Figure 5 Source: CCTV

“Every Joint Sea exercise since 2012 has had its own ‘first,’” commented [Global Times](#) shortly after the naval drill. For this writer, however, progress in previous Joint Sea operations was more incremental. The 2019 drill represents real breakthroughs in terms of both interoperability, coordination, and mutual trust down to the tactical levels. “Unprecedented” (前所未有) was the word used to describe the level of interoperability for Joint Sea 2019 by Vice Adm. Qiu Yanpeng (邱延鹏), co-director of the drill and PLAN deputy commander.

Joint Sea Exercises, 2012–2019

Year/Month	Exercise Area
2012/4	Yellow Sea
2013/7	Sea of Japan
2014/5	East China Sea
2015/5	Black Sea/Mediterranean
2015/8	Sea of Japan
2016/9	South China Sea
2017/7	Baltic Sea
2017/9	Sea of Japan/Sea of Okhotsk
2019/4–5	Yellow Sea

Panda diplomacy and myth of “30-year” cycle of fate

BRI and Joint Sea seemed to be a perfect balance between “cold” economics and “warm” military-to-military ties. China and Russia, however, had many other shared interests. In their April 26 [talks](#) on the sidelines of the

second BRF, Xi and Putin covered a broad range of bilateral and international issues: Korea, Venezuela, trade, Xi’s upcoming visit to Russia for the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations, etc. Surprisingly, they did not discuss pending US sanctions on [Iranian oil exports](#).

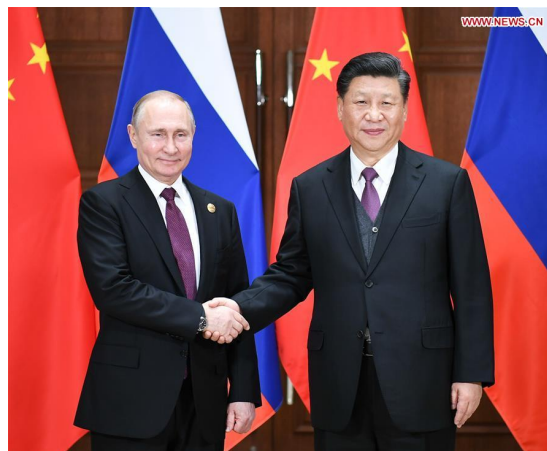


Figure 6 Source: CCTV

Xi defined the bilateral relationship between China and Russia as one of the “highest degree of mutual trust, the highest level of coordination and the highest strategic value” since 1949 when the two countries established diplomatic ties. “We should always regard each other as important development opportunities, support each other and draw on each other’s strength to achieve revitalization together,” Xi reportedly said to Putin.

To make Putin’s visit special, Xi chose BRI as the occasion to announce that China would send a pair of giant pandas to the Moscow Zoo for “joint research.” The last time China sent pandas to Moscow was in 1957 when Beijing and Moscow were still in the “honeymoon” phase of the Soviet-Chinese alliance. Three years later the alliance split (1960), leading to the US-China-Soviet strategic triangle in which Washington courted Beijing at Moscow’s expense.

In Chinese folk mythology, things always go in the opposite direction every 30 years (三十年河东，三十年河西). It has been 30 years since Beijing and Moscow normalized relations after Gorbachev’s historic visit to Beijing in 1989. Prior to this, the two largest Eurasian powers went through a 30-year enmity (1960–1989).

The past 30 years was a historic period in which the US gradually lost its pivotal posture within

the Washington-Moscow-Beijing strategic triangle by assuming a confrontational posture with both Russia and China. Regardless of the accuracy of this Chinese mythological forecasting for China-Soviet/Russia relations, President Trump has relentlessly pursued a “Russia-soft-and-China-hard” strategy to regain the pivotal position within the triangle. This was obvious throughout the 2016 presidential campaign.

In the first four months of 2019, the Trump administration seemed to be redoubling its efforts to lure Russia away from China, which is seen as the more “dangerous” strategic rival for the US. Trump pushed the [INF](#) button to alert Russia of the “China” factor, [escalated the trade war](#) with China, tightened the “screws” on Venezuela and Iran from which China imports significant amounts of oil, and had a “[long](#)” telephone call with Putin to clear both his name and that of Putin from the “Russian hoax” in the US. On the last day of April, a State Department policy planning official (Kiron [Skinner](#)) went so far as to reveal the draft of a George Kennan “Letter X”-type document depicting China as America’s “civilizational” foe. In contrast, the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union was “a fight within the Western family.”

It remains to be seen how far the new round of triangular maneuvering will unfold in the months leading to the 2020 presidential campaign. Trump may have a chance to influence Russia’s policy discourse, not necessarily because of the 30-year cycle in the China-Russia strategic partnership. Rather, the Russian foreign policy community is undergoing a round of soul-searching regarding Russia’s global posture as well as the style and substance of Russia’s grand strategy. The discourse is mostly between two seemingly polarized schools of thought: those who champion “Putin’s Lasting State” ([Долгое государство Путина](#)) or “Putin’s large political machine” ([Большая политическая машина Путина](#)) by Vladislav Surkov (Владислав Сурков) and those who call for a major policy deliberation and reorientation with broader societal input ([Dmitri Trenin](#)). Although both schools value Russia as an independent player on the world stage, the latter explicitly calls for a Russia that is independent of China.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

JANUARY – APRIL 2019

Jan. 1, 2019: Russia-China trade in 2018 passes [\\$107 billion](#) for the first time, a 27% increase over 2017. Meanwhile, China's trade with the US, Japan, and South Korea registered \$634 billion, \$318 billion, and \$313 billion, respectively.

Jan. 1, 2019: Chinese President Xi Jinping sends a [message of condolences](#) to Russian President Vladimir Putin for the gas explosion in a residential building in Magnitogorsk, Russia. On the same day, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also sent condolences to Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, conveying deep sorrow for the victims and sincere condolences to their families. 39 people died and dozens wounded in [a huge gas explosion](#) on Dec. 31, 2018.

Jan. 7, 2019: PM Medvedev visits Chinese Embassy in Moscow for Chinese New Year celebration and meets Ambassador Li Hui. Medvedev's visit is said to be the [first ever](#) time a Russian prime minister visited a foreign embassy in Moscow.

Jan. 25, 2019: Zhang Hanhui (张汉晖), assistant to the Chinese foreign minister, and Russian Ambassador to Beijing Andrey Denisov participate in a [New Year Spring Reception](#) jointly hosted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Russian Embassy in Beijing.

Feb. 16, 2019: Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Russian foreign minister meet in Munich on the sidelines of the 55th Munich Security Conference (Feb. 15-17).

Feb. 22, 2019: Deputy Chinese Foreign Minister Zhang Hanhui joins [reception](#) for the "Defender of the Fatherland Day," formerly known as the Soviet Army and Navy Day, hosted by the Russian embassy to Beijing.

Feb. 26, 2019: Chinese Foreign Minister [Wang Yi](#) meets Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Wuzhen, China. They discuss the Indian-Pakistani conflict in Kashmir and a range of bilateral and international issues including Korea, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Iran, etc. They also sign a document for the 2019 plan for the consultations by the two foreign ministries in 2019.

Feb. 27, 2019: FM Lavrov, Minister of External Affairs of India Sushma Swaraj and FM Wang Yi hold 16th meeting of the Russia India Trilateral Conference in Wuzhen. A joint communique is issued after the meeting.

March 21-22, 2019: Special representatives of Russia, China, and the US meet in Washington DC for [consultations](#) on Afghanistan. They agree to continue efforts to promote Afghan peace process on the basis of Afghan "sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity."

April 10, 2019: Joint working group [meeting](#) is held in Beijing by the Commission for Economic and Humanity Cooperation between China's Yangzi River region and Russia's Volga River region. China's Deputy FM Zhang and Deputy Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Volga Federal District Oleg Mashkovtsev ([Олег Мапшковцев](#)) co-chair.

April 15-19, 2019: Russian and Chinese militaries hold [first round of consultations](#) in Beijing for the third joint missile defense computer simulation to be held in Russia sometimes this year.

April 17-18, 2019: Shanghai Cooperation Organization hold [14th Forum](#) in Beijing with more than 100 experts and diplomats of the SCO and other countries participating. Afghanistan is the main topic of discussion.

April 23-25, 2019: Chinese Defense Minister [Wei Fenghe](#) (魏凤和) travels to Moscow to attend the Eighth Conference on International Security. In a speech, he talks about China's "new security concept" (新安全观) of "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security" and praises the China-Russia military-military relationship.

April 22-25, 2019: People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) conducts a large-scale naval parade off the coast of Qingdao marking 70 years since the founding of China's Navy. It featured 32 Chinese naval vessels and 39 aircraft, as well as warships from 13 foreign countries including Russia, India, Japan, Vietnam, and Australia.

April 24-25, 2019: North Korean Chairman Kim Jong Un visits Vladivostok for summit with President Putin.

April 25-27, 2019: President Putin travels to Beijing for a "[working visit](#)" and to attend the second Belt and Road Forum. Putin and Xi meet separately on April 26 focusing on Korea and Venezuela. Putin also receives an honorary degree from China's top engineering university [Qinghua](#), which is Xi's alma mater.

April 29, 2019: SCO defense ministers hold their [16th meeting](#) in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan.

April 29-May 4, 2019: Chinese and Russian navies conduct *Joint Sea 2019* naval exercise in the Yellow Sea.