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CHINA- RUSSIA RELATIONS

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

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The end of 2020 may well be an “[end-of-history](#)” moment for a world riddled with disease, death, despair, and de-linkage. Despite huge differences in how Russia and China coped with these challenges, bilateral cooperation in a variety of areas (SCO, COVID-19, response to the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy, etc.) were sustained and even enhanced in the last months of 2020. A salient factor was Washington’s dual-adversary undertaking, which pushed Moscow and Beijing toward deeper and broader strategic coordination. The post-election instability also cast a long shadow over US domestic and foreign policies. As 2020 drew to a close, Beijing and Moscow stepped up their strategic coordination for a possible resetting of relations with the Biden administration, or perhaps even a Biden moment, thanks to Trump’s legacy.

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SCO in Moscow

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese and Russian leaders managed to maintain “virtual” high-level contacts in the last few months of 2020. This included the annual Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, the 12th BRICS summit, the annual (and 19th) SCO prime ministerial meeting, and the annual (and 25th) China-Russia prime ministerial meeting. Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin talked over the phone on Dec. 28, their fifth call in 2020.

Senior officials of the two countries were also busy with virtual and real contacts, including a dozen SCO and BRICS ministerial meetings. In early September, Moscow hosted the in-person SCO annual defense and foreign ministerial meetings. Russia overloaded these meetings with numerous “extras.” The [SCO defense ministerial meeting](#) on Sept. 4, for example, was augmented by an enlarged gathering with the Commonwealth of Independent States) CIS and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) defense chiefs.



Figure 1 SCO/CIS/CSTO defense chiefs' meeting in Kubinka, Moscow Region. Photo: [Russian Defense Ministry](#)

It was “the first meeting in the history of our international contacts at this level,” said Russian Defense Minister Sergey [Shoygu](#) in his opening remarks. Although the three security groups are defined as part of an “equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial partnership,” there was no question that Russia, not China, was the main driver of the trio because of the simple fact that China is not a member of CIS and CSTO. Russia’s effort was understandable given the growing turbulence in

many parts of the post-Soviet space (the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in July, the constitutional crises in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan in August, and escalating border disputes between India and China in late August).

Another topic of the defense chiefs’ meeting was the pandemic and biological threats, as well as possible measures and capabilities in dealing with them (the specifics of the bio-threat discussion are not available publicly). Throughout the summer and in early fall, however, top Russian officials (Vice Chairman of the Russian Security Council [Dmitry Medvedev](#) and Foreign Minister [Sergey Lavrov](#)) repeatedly voiced concern about US biological labs located around the world.

A week after the SCO/CIS/CSTO defense chiefs’ meeting, Moscow hosted the annual SCO foreign ministerial conference. Putin met with the foreign ministers via video a day before. Aside from the routine global and regional issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking, arms control, regional issues, etc., [COVID-19 and bio-threats were an important focus](#) of the meeting. “The coronavirus infection has triggered complex political and economic processes around the world and has had a heavy impact on the entire system of international relations, testing the resilience of country-to-country ties and multilateral institutions,” [remarked](#) Lavrov. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was more forthright, defining the US as the biggest destroyer of the international system. The SCO, therefore, should prevent the world from falling into “a jungle” in which the strong prey on the weak, added Wang.

SCO foreign ministers paid particular attention to cybersecurity. “The internet should not be used to disseminate the ideas of terrorism and extremism. Nor should it be used to intervene in the domestic affairs of sovereign states,” said the [news release](#) by the SCO foreign ministers. They also supported the need for UN cybersecurity regulations. For this, they drafted two relevant documents on international information security.



Figure 2 SCO's 17th annual foreign ministerial meeting in Moscow. Photo: [SCO website](#)

Moscow's 'Indian Moment'

Russia had good reasons for over-sized in-person SCO meetings in Moscow: to broker a deal between Russia's two largest partners (India and China), whose border disputes continued into late summer and early fall. On the sidelines of both SCO defense and foreign ministers' meetings, an India-China meeting was held for the purpose of alleviating tension between the two large powers. Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and his Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh, despite their disagreements, [concurred](#) that the current border conflict could be resolved through diplomatic means alone.

A week later, Wang Yi and S. Jaishankar held a "candid and constructive discussion" on bilateral relations, which included the border issue. They issued [a joint news release](#) with a five-point consensus for deescalation, dialogue, and disengagement. The two sides also agreed to speed up the creation of new confidence-building measures to improve stability in the border regions.

In addition to the two smaller meetings between India and China, Russia chaired the annual RIC (Russia, India, and China) foreign ministerial [lunch meeting](#). Satisfied with the outcome of his meeting with the Indian side and the RIC meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi summarized "[seven broad and deep common interests and ideals](#)" between the three sides, which included mutual support for multipolarity, multilateralism, UN-related international law, non-interference of domestic affairs, globalization, development, and global governance. [A press release](#) noted that the three

foreign ministers agreed that "common development and cooperation of the three countries is conducive to promoting global growth, peace, and stability."

By late September, [commanders](#) of the Indian and Chinese militaries in the border region agreed to stop reinforcing border areas and unilaterally altering current postures. The border dispute is far from over, yet the Moscow meetings managed to reduce India-China tension.

For a long time, the SCO has been regarded as a [talking club](#) for its slow institutional development and lack of implementation capability. India's full membership in 2017 is widely regarded as another sign of the SCO's dysfunction because Delhi's border disputes have become an internal issue for the organization. This time, Russia's mediating role within the SCO demonstrated the potential for the organization to provide a platform for conflict management and resolution among member states, observed [Pan Guang](#), director of the SCO Center in Shanghai. The SCO started as a platform (the Shanghai Five) to solve border issues in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, recalled Pan. Its success in settling border issues should be a model for others, he added.

For [Wan Qingsong](#), associate research professor in the prominent Russian Studies Center of Shanghai's East China Normal University, Russia's role in the India-China border conflict can be considered one of "benevolent neutrality" (善意中立), meaning that Russia is independent in the US-China and India-China conflict. This posture has an internal dimension, said Wan, in that it would prevent China-US confrontation from being internalized in Russia's domestic discourse.

Russia's independence also means flexibility. That prevents Moscow from becoming entangled in China's conflicts with the US and with India, while cooperation with Beijing does not necessarily mean allying with China against the US and India. Largely because of this, Wan contends, Russia was able to continue and even accelerate deliveries of the [S-400 SAM system](#) upon India's request (as pausing arms delivery might have been seen as a sign of Russia siding with China), all the while providing diplomatic support to China.

In the last months of 2020, Russia's China and India policies seemed to follow this script, particularly regarding the US-led Quad formation (US, Japan, Australia, and India) within its Indo-Pacific framework. A day after the RIC foreign minister meeting in Moscow, Lavrov and Wang met formally. The two diplomats coordinated efforts for the next round of high-level exchanges between the two countries. While Wang pointed to "[certain extreme forces](#) in the US" in their "defaming China and Russia," Lavrov described the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy as "[destructive actions](#)" taken by the US in the Asia-Pacific. "They are fueling tensions in various parts of the world, including along the Russian and Chinese borders," said Lavrov in his joint press conference with Wang. "In this context, we stated that the so-called 'Indo-Pacific strategy' ... only leads to the separation of the region's states, and is therefore fraught with serious consequences for peace, security, and stability in the Asia-Pacific Region," he stressed.

By year's end, Russia's top diplomat further clarified Russia's principled opposition to the Indo-Pacific strategy. In a speech to Russia's International Affairs Council on Dec. 8, [Lavrov](#) accused the West of attempting to engage India in "anti-China games" to reinstate the unipolar world order that would exclude Moscow and Beijing. Lavrov particularly noted that the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy was trying to undermine Russia's "privileged relationship" with New Delhi.

Lavrov's rejection of the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy came after [significant internal discourse](#) and [heavy lobbying from India](#) to get Russia on board. However, being squeezed between India as its "[special privileged strategic partner](#)" (2018) and China as a "[strategic partner of comprehensive coordination in the new era](#)" (2019), Russia sought to preserve its balance between the two nations in order to enhance its independence in the unfolding game of great powers. India was not to be abandoned but brought back to its nonaligned tradition. As a token of Russia's continued friendship with India, three Russian warships, including the guided-missile cruiser *Varyag*, the flagship of the Russian Pacific Fleet, conducted [a joint exercise](#) with two Indian naval vessels in the Bay of Bengal a few days before

Lavrov's "second shoe" regarding the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Valdai and Beyond

In retrospect, the COVID-19 pandemic frustrated almost all high-level bilateral interactions between Russia and China in 2020, including a military parade in Moscow's Red Square to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. Other important bilateral events disrupted because of the pandemic include the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, SCO, and BRICS summits, etc. The quality and frequency of high-level communication and policy coordination between the two countries, however, was not negatively affected, according to [Guan Guihai](#), a prominent Russologist in Peking University.

In their last telephone conversation on Dec. 28, President Xi and Russian President Putin [praised](#) bilateral ties, stating that they had reached "the highest level in history." 2020 was an extraordinary year for China and Russia, and the world because of the pandemic and its devastating effect on the world economy, said Xi. The crisis, however, indicated the prominence and value of the bilateral relationship. According to *Xinhua*, [Xi reportedly told Putin](#) that the relationship between China and Russia is in "a league of its own" (独立价值) and "is driven by strong bilateral forces" (具有强大内生动力); that Sino-Russian relations cannot be broken by any third nation and will weather all kinds of international crises; and that "strengthening strategic cooperation between China and Russia can effectively resist any attempt to suppress and divide the two countries."

These remarks may well be delayed reciprocity to Putin's exceptionally candid references to China as a "superpower" in the annual [Valdai Discussion Club](#) in late October. "China is moving quickly towards superpower status" because of its economic weight and political influence, said Putin at the forum. And as a result, the US "can hardly claim exceptionality any longer."

In a response to a question from Professor Yan Xuetong of Qinghua University in Beijing on the possibility of a military alliance with China, Putin's answer was both "yes" and "no." "It is

possible to imagine anything,” replied Putin, adding that “it is certainly imaginable, in theory.” A formal alliance, however, may not be necessary, suggested Putin, in that “[W]e have always believed that our relations have reached such a level of cooperation and trust that it is not necessary.” After a considerable discussion of Russia’s mil-mil relationship with China, including in the area of some “very sensitive issues,” Putin came around by saying that “in principle, we are not going to rule it (alliance) out, either. So we will see.”

For years, the annual Valdai forum has been a convenient venue for Putin to engage foreign audiences. Last year, he revealed in Valdai that Russia was helping China develop an [early warning system](#) for strategic missile defense.

Beijing remained cautious about Putin’s depiction of China as a rising “superpower.” A brief news release from [Xinhua](#) did not even mention the phrase. As a common Chinese saying goes, “High elevation means colder temperature” (高处不胜寒), which is precisely what Beijing tries to avoid in the age of heightened US sensitivity toward China. Putin seemed to fully understand China’s wariness regarding its “superpower” status, as he also used the term to describe Germany.

By toying with the alliance issue in Valdai, Putin left adequate space for strategic brainstorming and realpolitik. Both Russia and China would be able to enjoy freedom of action as large powers, while leaving the door open to future necessity. A veteran Chinese [commentator](#) described Putin’s ambiguity regarding the alliance issue as one of strategic deterrence while leaving room for [unlimited cooperation](#) between the two countries.

For many in China, Putin did a huge service in Valdai by deflecting US criticism of China’s nuclear arms control position. The Trump administration [went out of its way](#) to bring China into US-Russian strategic arms control talks. Because of its far smaller nuclear arsenal (about 300 vs. 5,800 for the US), Beijing has [repeatedly argued](#) that the US call is unfair and unnecessary. Responding to a question in Valdai, [Putin questioned](#) why only China should be involved in this process with the US and Russia. “Where are the other nuclear powers? Where is France that, as the press reports, has just tested another submarine-launched cruise

missile? Great Britain is also a nuclear power,” argued Putin. An influential Chinese [commentator](#) claimed that “only Putin is able to articulate in such a manner.”

Winds of War in the Age of Uncertainty

Putin’s Valdai remarks came at a time of rising tension between the US and China, particularly regarding Taiwan. On Sept. 4, President Trump’s National Security Adviser [Robert O’Brien](#) publicly urged Taiwan to “fortify itself” against a mainland attack. On Sept. 16, Under Secretary of State [Keith Krach](#) visited Taiwan. As the highest-level official from the State Department to visit the island in decades, Krach’s trip was preceded by a high-profile trip in August by US Health Secretary Alex Azar, the highest-level US Cabinet official to visit Taiwan since the US switched formal relations from Taiwan to China in 1979. Throughout the fourth quarter of 2020, Washington also stepped up arms sales to the island (totaling \$5.1 billion). New Year’s Eve witnessed [a rare double-warship passing through the Taiwan Strait](#) (*USS John S. McCain* and *USS Curtis Wilbur*), marking the 13th passage of US naval vessels through the strait in 2020.

Beijing was furious. Its official media used the phrase “[radical deterioration](#)” (陡变) of cross-strait relations toward military confrontation. On Oct. 15, a [People’s Daily](#) editorial urged Taiwan intelligence personnel to defect to the mainland in times of war. Its title was the familiar “Don’t Say it is Unpredictable” (勿谓言之不预), equivalent to ultimatums issued before all the border wars the PRC has fought since its founding. This warning was accompanied by several largescale [exercises](#) including amphibious landings in September and October. Xi himself was seen inspecting [PLA Marines](#) on Oct. 13. A few days later, China reportedly deployed its super-sonic [DF-17](#) ballistic missiles to coastal regions. In his speech on the 70th anniversary of China’s entry into the Korean War, [Xi](#) warned that “China will never allow its national sovereignty, security, and development interests to be undermined. China will never allow any forces to violate or separate its sacred territory.” Xi’s speech was delivered at the same time as the final US presidential debate in Nashville, where Trump and Biden competed in declarations of who would best stand up to China. On Dec. 26, China’s legislature passed the heavily amended [national](#)

[defense law](#) with explicit references to combating separatism.

For much of 2020, steadily worsening cross-strait relations occurred against the backdrop of Trump's highly ideological and militarized China policy. Rapidly degenerating relations with China may be the reason for the [US-China defense ministers' talks](#) on Oct. 28-29. In mid-November, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who was instrumental in the normalizing of relations between the US and China in the 1970s, [urged](#) the incoming Biden administration to move quickly to restore lines of communication with China "for some cooperative action" or "the world will slide into a catastrophe comparable to World War I."

Kissinger's warning was echoed by Chairman of the [Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley](#) in early December, when he offered a "useful corrective" to those who believed that the US would prevail in violent confrontations with China and/or Russia. The limited "flare-ups" could not be controlled and deescalated easily and quickly, said Milley. Given the huge destruction of great power wars in the past, war with China and Russia is "not an acceptable outcome." In the age of great power competition, which is now the norm, the measure of success is not military victory but deterrence and, if war does happen, rapid de-escalation and conflict termination, added Milley.

Russia, too, was [alarmed](#) by rising China-US tension. Washington demonstrated "a little bit more restraint" for Russia only because of fear of Russia's nuclear potential, [wrote](#) Dmitry Yefremenko, deputy director of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow benefited little from [the rising tension between Washington and Beijing](#) as US-led [sanctions continued unabated to the end of the year](#). By late December, the US was ready [to close its last two consulates](#) in Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg, leaving only its embassy in Moscow to serve the entirety of Russia. To many Russian elites, the Biden administration's declared goal of rebuilding relations with US allies suggests [a difficult time](#) ahead for Russia.

By late December, the bitterly contested US presidential election led to more uncertainties for China and Russia in their relations with the US. Trump continued to publicly defend Russia

by [contradicting](#) other senior officials on Dec. 19, stating that China, not Russia, was behind the extensive cyber-attack on US federal agencies. [Biden](#) opted for a different matrix for the two principal US rivals by describing Russia as an "opponent" and China as "a serious competitor." As such, the Russia and China factors were [fully internalized](#) as a zero-sum game in US domestic politics, for better or worse.

To many in [Russia](#) and [China](#), post-election US is a deeply divided society, reinforced by the fact that [both Biden and Trump broke Obama's record](#) for the most votes cast for a presidential candidate in US history (more than 81.2 million for Biden vs more than 74.2 million for Trump). Still, a mere change of the guard in the White House may mean so much, yet so little for both US domestic politics and its relationship with Russia and China.

Given these uncertainties, Moscow and Beijing chose to steady their partnership. On Dec. 15, Russian Defense Minister Shoigu and his Chinese counterpart Wei [signed a protocol](#) to extend the agreement on mutual notification for launching ballistic missiles. Just a week before, Russia [testfired](#) land, air, and sea-based offensive strategic missiles. On Dec. 22, two Russian *Tu-95s* and four Chinese *H-6K* bombers conducted a [second joint patrol](#) in the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. Shoigu [briefed](#) Putin about the joint patrol. The next day, Beijing's [Global Times](#) published an editor's note, titling "More US bullying means stronger Sino-Russian strategic coordination."

Looking Ahead

While their militaries were coordinating for uncertain times ahead, China and Russia were looking to the post-Trump future. Frustrated by both natural (COVID-19) and artificial (trade war) barriers, the market also searched for different paths and potentials for growth. On Nov. 17, China established the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ([RCEP](#)) with 14 other nations to form the single largest free-trade zone in history, accounting for 2.2 billion people (30% of the world's total) and 28% of global trade (based on 2019 data), with a combined GDP of \$26 trillion.

A few days later, Xi announced that China would actively consider joining the Comprehensive

and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a successor to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) promoted by the Obama administration. The TPP, which excluded China, never entered into force due to Trump's withdrawal shortly after his election. For Beijing, China's bid to join CPTPP is an opportunity to ease tensions with Washington, although this means China's commitment to higher-level market access and more binding intellectual property protection requirements.

Finally, China and the EU announced on Dec. 30 that they had agreed in principle to the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), after 35 rounds of negotiations over the course of seven years. The [EU](#) considers it "the most ambitious agreement that China has ever concluded with a third country" because it will give European companies greater access to Chinese markets.

China's three economic "strikes" attempted to both transcend and engage with post-Trump Washington. For Russia, however, the China market is both real and remote. For years, trade with China was the weakest link between the partners, despite the huge growth potential. On the positive side, bilateral trade in 2020 dipped only slightly to around [\\$100 billion](#), quite remarkable for the COVID era. Russia gained a significant market share in China for its farm products, minerals, LNG, etc. To further tap the potential in China, [Putin offered](#), on the eve of the China-EU agreement, to be the first foreign head of state to visit China in 2021.

None of this diplomatic, economic, and military posturing by Moscow and Beijing sought to neglect Washington. Both intend to regain a certain normality in relations with the US. "China-US relations have come to a new crossroads, and a new window of hope is opening," [said](#) Wang Yi in late December. "We hope the upcoming US administration can adopt a rational attitude toward Russia and China," echoed Russian ambassador to Beijing [Andrey Denisov](#) at the year-end.

Life continues despite the devastation caused by COVID-19. The new year means hope, but not without shadows of the past. For those who recall the Hobsbawmian "[short 20th century](#)" (1914-1991), 2021 is the 30th anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Russia has made a remarkable

comeback from what Putin branded the "[greatest geopolitical catastrophe](#)" of the 20th century—meaning the 1991 Soviet collapse—albeit by paying a huge price, [argued Feng Shaolei](#), a leading Russologist in China. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama's excessive optimism, history never ends but seems to be "going around in circles every 30 years" (三十年河东, 三十年河西), according to a Chinese saying. With the new year, a newly available vaccine, and a new administration in Washington, the rest of the world—including America's friends and foes, real or imagined—is waiting to see how Biden's America will engage with the outside world.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2020

Sept. 2, 2020: Russian Ambassador to China Andrey Denisov [joins](#) a ceremony in Beijing to commemorate Soviet pilots in China during World War II. Chinese and Russian ambassadors to the US [Cui Tiankai and Anatoly Antonov](#) jointly pen an op-ed piece on *Defense One* titled “Honor World War II with a Better, Shared Future.”

Sept. 3, 2020: Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin [exchange](#) congratulatory [messages](#) on the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Sept. 4–5, 2020: Defense ministers of the SCO, CIS, and CSTO countries [hold](#) a joint meeting in Kubinka, Moscow Region, chaired by Russia. Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe held separate meetings with his Indian and Russian counterparts on the sidelines of the group meetings.

Sept. 10, 2020: SCO [holds](#) its 17th annual foreign ministerial meeting in Moscow. Putin met with the SCO foreign ministers via video a day before.

Sept. 10, 2020: Trilateral lunch meeting [is held](#) in Moscow between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, External Affairs Minister of India Jaishankar, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. A joint [press release](#) was issued afterward. Earlier in the day, Wang and Jaishankar held a bilateral meeting on the border issue.

Sept. 10, 2020: SCO holds its 17th Cultural Ministerial meeting via videoconference, chaired by the Russian minister of culture.

Sept. 11–16, 2020: In conjunction with the SCO annual foreign ministerial meeting, Wang and Lavrov [take part](#) in formal talks, attend a joint press conference, and issue a [joint statement](#).

Sept. 15, 2020: Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev [chairs](#) the SCO’s 15th Meeting of Security Council Secretaries via videoconference.

Sept. 17, 2020: BRICS nations [hold](#) the 10th conference (via video) for national security senior representatives.

Sept. 21–26, 2020: Russia [conducts](#) its “Caucasus 2020” strategic military drills with five foreign states (Armenia, Belarus, China, Myanmar, and Pakistan). It involved some 12,900 troops, 250 tanks, and around 450 infantry combat vehicles. China sent more than 200 personnel and light infantry vehicles. [India pulled out](#) of the exercises in late August, citing COVID-19 as the reason.

Oct. 1, 2020: Putin [sends](#) congratulatory telegraph to Xi for the 71st anniversary of the founding of the PRC.

Oct. 20, 2020: SEO [holds](#) 18th Meeting of Prosecutors General via videoconference, under Uzbekistan's chairmanship. The next meeting will be in India in 2021.

Oct. 21, 2020: Russia [chairs](#) the fifth SCO ministers of agriculture meeting via videoconference.

Oct. 21, 2020: Vice Chairman of Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev [voices](#) concern over US bio-labs in many parts of the world, particularly in Commonwealth of Independent States regions. The next day, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian [urged](#) the US to offer a comprehensive clarification on its overseas biological activities.

Oct. 22, 2020: In his annual press conference at the Valdai Discussion Club, Putin [says](#), for the first time, that China “is moving quickly towards superpower status,” also saying Russia and China enjoy such a good relationship that there is no need to move to a formal alliance.

Oct. 22–23, 2020: Moscow [hosts](#) the SCO’s first inter-party forum via teleconference.

Oct. 28, 2020: SCO [holds](#) eighth Transport Ministers' meeting chaired by Russian Minister of Transport Yury Tsvetkov's via videoconference.

Oct. 30, 2020: Sixteenth meeting of SCO Interbank Consortium Board is [chaired](#) by Russia via videoconference, featuring board members and board chairs of leading banks in the SCO member states.

Nov. 3, 2020: Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergei Naryshkin [says](#) the SVR exchanges information with its Chinese counterpart, adding that the CIA was Russia's "main opponent." According to Chinese media, Naryshkin refers to cooperation with China as at "[a very high level](#)."

Nov. 3, 2020: Deputy Foreign Minister Le Yucheng [invites](#) Russian Ambassador Denisov to China to a Chinese exhibition of the 70th anniversary of China's Korean War entrance in Beijing.

Nov. 10, 2020: Putin [chairs](#) the SCO [annual summit](#) via videoconference. The [Moscow Declaration](#) and [a news release](#) are issued after the summit.

Nov. 12, 2020: Russian FM Lavrov [says](#) Russia would not pressure China to join arms control talks with the US.

Nov. 17, 2020: Putin and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang join 15th East Asia Summit via video, chaired by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc.

Nov. 17, 2020: BRICS holds its 12th summit by video, chaired by Putin.

Nov. 18, 2020: Wang and Lavrov [discuss](#) bilateral, international, and regional issues over the phone.

Nov. 23, 2020: India [hosts](#) teleconference for the SCO's annual Business Council for more than 200 participants.

Nov. 27, 2020: SCO holds its "Regional Cooperation and Exchange Conference" in the Chinese city of Xuzhou. In addition to Chinese business, local and provincial officials, diplomats and trade representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cambodia, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, and Uzbekistan, as well as international organizations join the meeting.

Nov. 30, 2020: SCO [holds](#) the 19th annual prime ministerial meeting by videoconference, issuing a [joint statement](#).

Dec. 2, 2020: Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and his Russian counterpart [hold](#) the 25th regular meeting between prime ministers via teleconference, with cooperation in Russia's Far Eastern region a key issue, and together issue a [joint communique](#).

Dec. 4–5, 2020: Three Russian warships of the Pacific Fleet [conduct](#) a joint exercise with two Indian naval vessels in the Bay of Bengal.

Dec. 9, 2020: Russia [testfires](#) its offensive strategic forces of land-based missiles, strategic bombers, and submarine-based launchers.

Dec. 15, 2020: Chinese DM Wei Fenghe and Russian counterpart Sergey Shoygu [sign](#) a protocol to extend an agreement on mutual notification for launches of ballistic missiles and carrier rockets, upon approval from the heads of the two states. The original document, inked on Oct. 13, 2009, was set to expire on Dec. 16, 2020.

Dec. 22, 2020: Two Russian *Tu-95s* and four Chinese *H-6K* bombers [conduct](#) a second joint patrol in the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. Russian DM Shoygu [briefed](#) Putin on the joint patrol. On July 23, 2019, long-range bombers of the two militaries conducted their first joint patrols.

Dec. 22, 2020: Wang and Lavrov [discuss](#) bilateral cooperation in foreign affairs and anti-pandemic measures.

Dec. 28, 2020: Xi and Putin [talk](#) over the phone, during which they recall major developments in bilateral relations over 2020 and look forward to the new year for more cooperation in global, regional, and bilateral affairs.

Dec. 29, 2020: Russian Ambassador to China Denisov [says](#) in a press briefing in Beijing that Putin would like to be the first foreign head of state to visit China when the pandemic is contained in 2021.

Dec. 31, 2020: Chinese and Russian presidents and prime ministers [send](#) each other New Year greeting messages.