

BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: THEIR LEGAL EVOLUTION FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION

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The relationship between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China goes back more than seventy years and has undergone considerable changes over the decades. This article attempts to shed light on the evolution of the two countries' bilateral relations over the decades, analyze the background and future of certain phenomena in those relations, such as the economic connections that exist in the Sino-Russian relations, and examine the strengthening of Moscow's and Beijing's ties in light of the Special Military Operation. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the treaties and agreements concluded between the two countries, with a particular focus on the documents of the post-Soviet period, while making extensive references to Russian judicial practice in the implementation of these treaties and agreements. By doing so, the article hopes to contribute to the understanding of two of the world's most important countries' relationship which has steadily been gaining importance on the international stage and is poised to bear strong influence on global politics in the 21st century.

Keywords: Russia; China; USSR; PRC; economy; trade; Special Military Operation; alliance; cooperation; Sino-Russian relations.

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Introduction

At their meeting on 22 January 1950, in Moscow, Joseph Stalin turned to Mao Zhedong and said, "Let us discuss the credit agreement. We need to officially formalize that which has already been agreed to earlier."¹ A few weeks later, on 14 February the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was signed, and the Soviet Union agreed to loan \$300 million (\$3.8 billion USD in 2023) to the nascent, war-torn People's Republic of China in \$60 million installments over the next five years.² Nearly six decades later, in February 2009, Russian state-owned oil and pipeline companies Rosneft and Transneft signed a deal with the China Development Bank to supply oil to the PRC for the next 20 years in exchange for \$25 billion (\$34.6 billion USD in 2023).

In a little more than 70 years, the world has changed immensely: while the Russian Federation was struggling to find its footing and regain its confidence in a drastically changed world following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) up until the 2000s, the world witnessed China's meteoric rise. In 2011, the People's Republic of China (PRC) overtook Japan as the world's second largest economy and it has since, undoubtedly, emerged as a new superpower in the making, not only bolstering a massive economy but also rapidly developing its military capabilities, both of which are quintessential in the formation of international prestige.³ Given the importance that China now holds globally and the strong ties the country maintains with Russia, it is of interest to explore how the relationship between two of the world's largest countries has developed over the past few decades and where it stands as of 2023. In what follows, a detailed list will be given

¹ Record of Talks between I.V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China Mao Zedong, 22 January 1950, Wilson Center Digital Archive; Alexander V. Pantsov & Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (2012).

² See, e.g., the economic development of China after the Second World War: Cheng Chu-yuan, *The Economy of Communist China, 1949–1969* (1971); Gregory C. Chow & Kui-Wai Li, *China's Economic Growth: 1952–2010*, 5(1) Econ. Dev. Cult. Change 247 (2002).

³ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (1981).

regarding the various areas of cooperation and agreements signed between the two countries, followed by an attempt to shed light on some of the less obvious aspects of their relationship.

1. Bilateral Cooperation and Agreements Between Russia and China

The Sino-Russian relations only began to blossom again after 1991.⁴ It can be considered symbolic that in the year of the USSR's dissolution, an agreement was signed between the two governments about state credit for supplying goods from the PRC to the USSR. This time the loan was provided by Beijing, and it amounted to 1 billion Swiss francs at 4% per annum for the supply of goods. In 1991, as a result of the above-mentioned credit, the following list of goods were supplied from the PRC to the USSR: corn, fresh-frozen meat, canned meat, peanuts, tea, raw silk, tobacco, cigarettes, fabrics, sewing, knitwear, down, fur and leather products, and winter leather shoes.

In the same year, the USSR and the PRC took an important step towards resolving their long-standing border issues and territorial disagreements stemming from the Treaties of Aigun and Beijing signed in 1858 and 1860 respectively, in which Russia gained over one million square kilometers of territory. Following the 1991 agreement, further agreements were signed in 1994 and 2004, granting China control over a number of islands. Moscow designated the Verkhnekonstantinovsky Island and the adjacent water area on the Amur River (Heilongjiang) as a joint economic use area and allowed the border population of China to engage in economic activities (such as fishing) in the area. On the other hand, China has designated four regions of the Menkeilizhouzhu group of islands and the waters of the Argun (Ergunakhe) River adjacent to them, along with Island No. 1 of the Longzhangdao Islands group and the adjacent waters of the Amur River as a joint economic area (Heilongjiang) under the sovereignty of the PRC, and allowed the border population of the Russian Federation to engage in economic activities in the above areas.

Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1992, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China declared that they were pursuing a "good-neighborly and mutually beneficial" and "constructive partnership" which evolved into a treaty of "strategic partnership" as well as "friendship and cooperation."⁵ Shortly after this treaty was enacted, on 16 January 1992, in order to develop economic ties between the two countries and to ensure the transportation of foreign trade goods between

⁴ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* i–vi (2008).

⁵ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *A New Sino-Russian Alliance?*, Project Syndicate (2015) (May 15, 2023), available at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/russia-china-alliance-by-joseph-s-nye-2015-01?barrier=accesspaylog>.

Russia and China by river transport on the Amur and Songhua Rivers, the Ministry of Communications of the People's Republic of China opened the Chinese ports of Heihe, Qike, Tongjiang, Fujing, and Jiamusi to Russian ships, while the Ministry of Transport of the newly formed Russian Federation opened up the ports of Harbin, Blagoveshchensk, Poyarkovo, Nizhneleninskoye, Khabarovsk, Komsomolsk, and Mago for the entry of Chinese ships. On 5 March 1992, an Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on trade and economic relations was concluded in Beijing. The Parties declared the goals of strengthening friendship, cooperation, and the development of trade and economic relations between the two countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit. In particular, Moscow and Beijing agreed to grant each other the "most favored nation" treatment in matters relating to customs duties and various other taxes and fees imposed on the import and export of goods and related services, as well as in relation to the rules of customs administration and customs formalities. It should be noted that Russian courts invariably take these agreements into account when resolving economic disputes arising with Chinese entities, with the exception of Hong Kong (Xianggang), as it is an independent customs territory, and thus, the "most favored nation treatment" clause does not apply to it.⁶

Nor did the equally pressing question of civil and criminal cases get resolved although it was not long before the issue was addressed. On 9 June 1992, the two countries signed a treaty firmly rooted in reciprocity and respect for sovereignty, which states that citizens of one Contracting Party enjoy the same legal protection in the territory of the other Contracting Party with respect to their personal and property rights as citizens of the other Contracting Party. Furthermore, citizens have the right to apply to the courts and other institutions whose competence includes civil and criminal cases, and they may file petitions and carry out other proceedings under the same conditions as citizens of the other Contracting Party.

In 2013, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation used this Treaty to formulate an important legal position: if a citizen, as a private person, does not have the opportunity to independently obtain the official information necessary to resolve the dispute on the territory of another state, the court must, at the stage of preparing the case for trial, provide assistance in collecting and demanding the necessary evidence. This position was formulated as a result of a regional court that despite a reasoned request to assist the plaintiff in collecting evidence in the case while preparing the case for trial, returned her application, including using the grounds of her failure to provide information about a marriage registered by the defendant in the territory of the People's Republic of China, and thereby unreasonably refused to provide the necessary assistance, which included sending a corresponding request to the

⁶ See Rulings of the Arbitration Court of the North Caucasus District dated 13 October 2014 in Case No. A32-42308/2013 and Case No. A32-42447/2013; and dated 19 June 2015 in Case No. F08-2560/2015.

Ministry of Justice of Russia. The Contracting Parties also undertook to recognize and, if required by the nature of the decision, to execute on their territory the following decisions made in the territory of the other Contracting Party after the Treaty came into force:

- court decisions in civil cases;
- court decisions on compensation for damages in criminal cases;
- decisions of the arbitration court.

Furthermore, Russia and China undertook to execute, upon request, orders in criminal cases to interrogate witnesses and victims as well as pay attention to experts and defendants; to search, examine, inspect, and undertake other procedural actions related to the collection of evidence; to transfer physical evidence and documents or valuables obtained as a result of a crime, as well as upon the delivery of documents related to the proceedings in a criminal case; and to inform each other about the results of criminal proceedings.

On 19 August 1992, the Government of the Russian Federation agreed to receive, and the Government of the People's Republic of China agreed to send its citizens to work at enterprises, associations, and organizations in Russia. The direction and admission of Chinese citizens to work at Russian enterprises are carried out in accordance with the procedures established in the PRC for sending labor abroad and the procedures established in the Russian Federation for attracting foreign labor, on the basis of contracts (economic contracts) concluded between Russian enterprises and companies that are approved by the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Foreign Trade of the People's Republic of China.

In addition, a significant number of agreements between the governments of the two countries were signed on 18 December 1992 including the following:

- Agreement on cooperation in the social and labor spheres.
- Agreement on Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes.
- Agreement on cultural cooperation.
- Agreement on cooperation in the construction on the territory of the People's Republic of China of a gas centrifuge plant for uranium enrichment for nuclear power.
- Agreement on scientific and technical cooperation.
- Agreement on cooperation for the construction of a nuclear power plant on the territory of the PRC and the provision of a state loan by Russia to the PRC.

In the area of criminal policy, the 1996 "Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illicit Traffic and Abuse of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances" is of great importance. The Parties agreed to cooperate in the suppression of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and, if necessary, to carry out the following actions:

- exchange of relevant information on attempts to smuggle narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances into the territory of one of the Parties;

- exchange of information on the methods used to conceal consignments of illegal narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances when crossing the border, as well as on methods for their detection;
- exchange of information on persons identified as carrying out illegal transportation of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as on the routes of transportation of such drugs and substances;
- exchange of specialists in the field of technology for detecting illegal consignments of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

A few years later, 1997 saw a legal impetus for the development of interregional cooperation. Russia and China agreed to create favorable conditions to promote the development of bilateral cooperation between the administrations (governments) of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and the local governments of the People's Republic of China. The exception were questions related to the fields of foreign policy, defense, state borders, air traffic, and other issues that are under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China and affect their state sovereignty and territory.

Since 2001, the legal "evolution" of Russian-Chinese relations has begun to acquire signs of a full-fledged "revolution." On 16 July 2001, the "Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China" was signed in Moscow. Russia and China agreed to comprehensively develop their relationship while also focusing on a number of principles, such as long-term commitment, good neighborliness, friendship, cooperation, equal partnership, and strategic interaction. Moreover, Moscow and Beijing agreed that in their relations with each other, neither side would use force or the threat of using force, nor would they use economic or any other forms of pressure against each other. The juridical base for this agreement was provided by two main sources: provisions of the U.N. Charter and principles and norms of international law, including but not limited to mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

The Contracting Parties reaffirmed their commitment not to use nuclear weapons against each other as well as not to aim nuclear missiles at each other's territory.

The Russian side reaffirmed and acknowledged the existence of only one China, with the Government of the People's Republic of China being the only legitimate government representing all of China and Taiwan being an inalienable part of China. Furthermore, the Russian side declared its opposition to the independence of Taiwan in any form whatsoever. Both countries indicated their determination to turn their shared border into a border of "eternal peace and friendship passed down from generation to generation."

On 27 September 2010 in Beijing, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China agreed to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

In particular, the signatories agreed to share information on the following points:

1. Organizations established to commit acts covered by the agreement and their members, if possible, including the names, structure, and main activities of organizations, as well as names, information about citizenship, place of residence or location, characteristic features of appearance, photographs, fingerprints, and any other information about the members of such organizations that is deemed useful in establishing and identifying these members.

2. The plans of such organizations to commit acts covered by the agreement on the territory of the other Party, as well as information about the training of their members and the location of their training.

3. The acts covered by the agreement, which are being planned, carried out and committed, including on the territory of a third country, and that are directed against the other party.

4. The illegal manufacture, storage, circulation, use or threat to use poisonous, explosive, radioactive substances, radiation sources and nuclear materials, firearms, explosive devices, ammunition, weapons of mass destruction, as well as the materials and equipment that can be used to create them by organizations established to commit acts covered by the agreement.

5. The implementation or threat of terrorist activities by organizations created to commit acts covered by the agreement or their members, directed against heads of state and other state leaders, diplomatic missions, consular offices, employees of international organizations, important and high-ranking delegations, the security of public events, and objects of importance to any of the signing Parties.

6. The illegal production and distribution of propaganda materials (printed, audio, and video materials, as well as any other materials regardless of their format) about terrorist ideology, separatism, and extremism by organizations founded to commit acts covered by the agreement.

7. The sources and channels of financing of organizations created to commit acts covered by the agreement, as well as of their members.

8. The characteristic features, patterns, and methods of organizations created to commit acts covered by the agreement.

9. Identification data, categories, and numbers of identity documents; place of residence or location; photographs; and other relevant information about any persons in possession of citizenship of one Party, located in the territory of the other Party and suspected of committing acts covered by the agreement.

10. Organizations or persons providing equipment, weapons, financial and material resources or carrying out training in order to commit acts covered by the agreement.

11. Any relevant experience in detecting, preventing, and suppressing acts covered by the agreement.

In essence, this bilateral document became the continuation of the 2001 “Shanghai Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism”,

which, along with Russia and China, was signed by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The Convention is referred to not only by the decisions of courts of general jurisdiction, but it also serves as the international legal basis for the positions of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.⁷

Since 2013, cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China has been gradually expanded to cover the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Meanwhile, the two countries have strengthened and expanded their cooperation in a field of utmost importance: the energy sector. The hallmarks of this cooperation have been expanding supplies of natural gas from Russia to China via the 'eastern' route; joint investments in the exploration and development of the South-Tambeyskoye gas field; the construction and operation of an integrated complex for the production, treatment, liquification, and storage of natural gas; the construction and operation of port infrastructure in the area of Sabetta port in northern Siberia, which is set to become the world's largest Arctic port; and the sale of liquified natural gas and gas condensate to the People's Republic of China.

In 2015, Russia and China agreed to cooperate in the field of international information security in the following areas:

1. Determination, coordination, and implementation of the necessary cooperation in the field in order to ensure international information security.
2. Development of communication channels and contacts in order to jointly respond to threats in the field of international information security.
3. Cooperation in the formation and promotion of international law in order to ensure national and international information security.
4. Joint response to threats.
5. Exchange of information and cooperation in the field of law enforcement with the aim of investigating cases related to the use of information and communication technologies for terrorist and criminal purposes.
6. Development and implementation of joint building measures.
7. Cooperation between the relevant Russian and Chinese authorities in critical information infrastructure security, exchange of technologies, and cooperation between these authorities in response to computer incidents.
8. Exchange of information on legislation between the Parties on issues concerning information security.
9. Assistance in improving the bilateral regulatory framework and practical mechanisms for cooperation between the Parties in ensuring international information security.

⁷ See Определение Конституционного Суда Российской Федерации от 2 июля 2013 г. № 1053-О // Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Determination of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation of 2 July 2013 No. 1053-O, Official Internet Portal of Legal Information] (May 15, 2023), available at <http://www.pravo.gov.ru>.

10. Creation of ideal conditions for interaction between the competent authorities of the Parties in order to implement the agreement.

11. Deepening cooperation and coordination of activities between the Parties to ensure international information security within the framework of international organizations and forums, including the United Nations, the International Telecommunication Union, the International Organization for Standardization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS association, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum, among others.

12. Promotion of research in the field of international information security, as well as fostering joint research.

13. Joint training of specialists, as well as the exchange of undergraduate and graduate students and researchers from various higher educational institutions.

14. Holding workshops, conferences, seminars, and other forums for the representatives and experts of the Parties in the field of international information security.

15. Establishing cooperation between the relevant bodies of the Parties with the aim of exchanging and sharing information about existing and potential risks, threats, and vulnerabilities in the field of information security, as well as their identification, assessment, analysis, intelligence sharing, and prevention. It was stated that the Parties or their relevant authorities may in the future determine, by mutual agreement, other areas of cooperation as well.

On 25 November 2022, the two governments agreed to create an organizational and legal framework for cooperation in specific areas related to the creation of the International Scientific Lunar Station.

2. Analysis of the Sino-Russian Relations

While the signing of ever newer and more encompassing treaties over time can easily strike the casual observer as organic development, such an approach ignores the fact that initially the Sino-Russian relations were burdened with plenty of historical baggage, and it required much wisdom and foresight to overcome it. Indeed, looking back over a period of more than seven decades, while the relationship between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic started on rosy terms in 1949, following Stalin's death in 1953, it slowly turned sour. A 180-degree turn in relations did not happen until after the dissolution of the USSR. Post-1991, Sino-Russian relations have indeed been blossoming with great intensity, with tremendous effort being put in from both sides into developing them; however, Western media portraying the relationship between the two countries as unbreakable since time immemorial is misleading.⁸

⁸ Guy Taylor, *China Declares its 'Unbreakable' Friendship with Russia Ahead of Biden-Putin Summit*, Washington Times, 15 June 2021 (May 15, 2023), available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jun/15/china-united-russia-mountain-ahead-biden-putin-sum>.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union thus coincided with the rise of China. The International Monetary Fund estimated that the People's Republic of China's GDP would reach almost \$20 trillion by 2022.⁹ In 2022, China's population reached 1.41 billion.¹⁰ China and Russia share a border that stretches 4,200 kilometer, and each nation has a seat on the UN Security Council, where they almost always cooperate. Russia's Far East, a vast territory that is the source of a wealth of resources, has been welcoming Chinese investment since the late 1990s.

Contrary to what Western observers have anticipated, the Special Military Operation did not lead to a deterioration in the relations between Russia and China. Since February 2022, the position of the PRC on this issue has been based on five main considerations:

First, Beijing emphasizes that Washington and other Western capitals are primarily to blame, as they have, for decades, ignored Moscow's security concerns.

Second, instead of unipolar security arrangements exclusively favoring the United States and its allies, which should take the interests of other countries into consideration, security concepts should be developed and applied in Ukraine as well as globally.

Third, the conflict persists primarily because of Washington's involvement; the lion's share of military material (75%) for Ukraine comes from the United States.

Fourth, Beijing stresses that NATO should recognize the "indivisible security principle," which should become the foundation of the new international security order. The core tenet of this principle is that the security of any given country should not be realized to the detriment of other countries' security. This also means that there is a strong need for the world to embrace a multi-polar, more inclusive international system which would not exclusively be led by Western countries.

Fifth, sanctions against Russia are, in no small measure, part of a thinly veiled plan to expand American economic influence, and thus China cannot support them.

In a document titled "Position Paper" that was published on 24 February 2023, Beijing put forward twelve points towards achieving lasting peace in Ukraine.¹¹ Pointing to the decades-long expansion of NATO towards Russia dating back to the late 1990s, China emphasizes the need to "abandon cold war mentality" stating that, "The security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs", and highlights the supreme importance of "reducing strategic risks."

⁹ The People's Republic of China, International Monetary Fund (May 15, 2023), available at <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/CHN>.

¹⁰ Statistical communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2022 national economic and social development, National Bureau of Statistics of China (May 15, 2023), available at http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/202302/t20230227_1918979.html.

¹¹ China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2023) (May 15, 2023), available at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202302/t20230224_11030713.html.2023.

Further, by pointing to the need for “stopping unilateral sanctions” which are not authorized by the U.N. Security Council, the “Position Paper” underscores the counter-productiveness of the West’s sanctions regime against Russia. Additionally, China stresses that it “stands ready to provide assistance and play a constructive role in this endeavor,” fully agreeing with Moscow’s repeatedly emphasized goal of post-conflict reconstruction, which has already begun in certain areas, such as in Donetsk, for example.¹²

It is also noteworthy that since the advent of 2023, Beijing has been increasingly vocal about its frustration over Washington’s growing pressure to fall in line and support Western efforts to isolate Russia.¹³

As these points suggest, Beijing does not try to conceal its sympathy for Russia. In the months that followed the start of the Special Military Operation, the People’s Republic began deepening economic ties with Russia. Despite the fact that Beijing has avoided directly challenging Western sanctions, much like Russian businesses have done, the Chinese government has also quickly begun filling the gaps Western companies have left in critical fields such as the manufacturing of semiconductors. Contrary to widespread predictions early in 2022, which expected the Russian economy to promptly collapse under the weight of the Western sanctions barrage, it quickly became clear that the country’s economy is far more resilient than it was previously credited for, and no meltdown whatsoever can be expected.

Conclusion

In the coming years, the People’s Republic is expected to expand its economic foothold in Russia through long-planned investments in Russia’s Far East and Siberia for example, and plans are in place for China to begin paying for oil and gas in yuan, a non-convertible currency. This, taken together with Russia’s economic decoupling from Europe and strategically planned orientation towards Asia, will undoubtedly lead to China’s growing importance for Russia. Highlighting the questions of trade, as President Putin remarked before meeting President Xi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s 22nd summit in Samarkand in mid-September 2022, “Our Chinese friends are tough bargainers,” and during his meeting with President Xi, President Putin stated, “We appreciate our Chinese friends’ balanced position in connection with the Ukraine crisis. We understand your questions and your concerns in this

¹² Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on 21 February 2023 (May 15, 2023), available at http://belfast.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/wjbfyrth_3/202302/t20230221_11028860.htm.

¹³ Ilya Tsukanov, *Wang Yi Touts Rock-Solid Ties With Russia as Moscow Lauds ‘More Just’ Order Two Nations are Building*, Sputnik News, 21 February 2023 (May 15, 2023), available at <https://sputniknews.com/20230221/wang-yi-touts-rock-solid-ties-with-russia-as-moscow-lauds-more-just-order-two-nations-are-building-1107673664.html>.

regard.”¹⁴ In his reply, Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China, remarked that “since the beginning of this year, China and Russia have maintained effective strategic communication,” and underscored that “China will work with Russia to extend strong mutual support on issues concerning each other’s core interests, and deepen practical cooperation in trade, agriculture, connectivity and other areas.”¹⁵ For Beijing and President Xi, it is of considerable importance that Moscow stands victorious, as the Special Military Operation not only promises triumph in its Ukrainian objectives, but achieving those will present a clear defeat for the West as well, which has been steadily supporting Ukraine, which, in turn, is a victory for China as well.

Remarks by President Xi on the Sino-Russian Relations

In March 2023, on the eve of a state visit to Moscow, President Xi noted that, *China and Russia are each other’s biggest neighbor and comprehensive strategic partner of coordination. We are both major countries in the world and permanent members of the UN Security Council. Both countries uphold an independent foreign policy and see our relationship as a high priority in our diplomacy.*¹⁶

There is a clear historical logic and strong internal driving force for the growth of China-Russia relations. Over the past ten years, we have come a long way in our wide-ranging cooperation and made significant strides into the new era.

– High-level interactions have played a key strategic role in leading China-Russia relations. *We have established a whole set of mechanisms for high-level interactions and multi-faceted cooperation which provide important systemic and institutional safeguards for the growth of the bilateral ties. Over the years, I have maintained a close working relationship with President Putin. We have met 40 times on bilateral and international occasions. Together we have drawn the blueprint for the bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields, and have had timely communication on major international and regional issues of mutual interest, providing firm stewardship for the sustained, sound and stable growth of China-Russia relations.*

– Our two sides have cemented political mutual trust and fostered a new model of major-country relations. *Guided by a vision of lasting friendship and win-*

¹⁴ Meeting with PRC President Xi Jinping: Vladimir Putin and President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping held bilateral talks on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Samarkand, President of Russia, 15 September 2022 (May 15, 2023), available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69356>.

¹⁵ President Xi Jinping Meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Press Release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2022) (May 15, 2023), available at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202209/t20220915_10766678.html.

¹⁶ Forging Ahead to Open a New Chapter of China-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Common Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2023) (May 15, 2023), available at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202303/t20230320_11044359.html.

win cooperation, China and Russia are committed to no-alliance, no-confrontation and not targeting any third party in developing our ties. We firmly support each other in following a development path suited to our respective national realities and support each other's development and rejuvenation. The bilateral relationship has grown more mature and resilient. It is brimming with new dynamism and vitality, setting a fine example for developing a new model of major-country relations featuring mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

– **Our two sides have put in place an all-round and multi-tiered cooperation framework.** Thanks to the joint efforts of both sides, China-Russia trade exceeded US\$190 billion last year, up by 116 percent from ten years ago. China has been Russia's largest trading partner for 13 years running. We have seen steady increase in our two-way investment. Our cooperation on major projects in such fields as energy, aviation, space and connectivity is moving forward steadily. Our collaboration in scientific and technological innovation, cross-border e-commerce and other emerging areas is showing a strong momentum. Our cooperation at the sub-national level is also booming. All this has brought tangible benefits to both the Chinese and the Russian peoples and provided unceasing driving force for our respective development and rejuvenation.

– **Our two sides have acted on the vision of lasting friendship and steadily strengthened our traditional friendship.** On the occasion of commemorating the 20th anniversary of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, President Putin and I announced the extension of the Treaty and added new dimensions to it. Our two sides have held eight "theme years" at the national level and continued to write new chapters for China-Russia friendship and cooperation. Our two peoples have stood by and rooted for each other in the fight against COVID, which once again proves that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'.

– **Our two sides have had close coordination on the international stage and fulfilled our responsibilities as major countries.** China and Russia are firmly committed to safeguarding the UN-centered international system, the international order underpinned by international law, and the basic norms of international relations based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. We have stayed in close communication and coordination in the UN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, the G20 and other multilateral mechanisms, and worked together for a multi-polar world and greater democracy in international relations. We have been active in practicing true multilateralism, promoting the common values of humanity, and championing the building of a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind.

Looking back on the extraordinary journey of China-Russia relations over the past 70 years and more, we feel strongly that our relationship has not reached easily where it is today, and that our friendship is growing steadily and must be cherished by us all. China and Russia have found a right path of state-to-state interactions. This is essential for the relationship to stand the test of changing international circumstances, a lesson borne out by both history and reality.

My upcoming visit to Russia will be a journey of friendship, cooperation and peace. I look forward to working with President Putin to jointly adopt a new vision, a new blueprint and new measures for the growth of China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination in the years to come.

To this end, our two sides need to enhance coordination and planning. As we focus on our respective cause of development and rejuvenation, we should get creative in our thinking, create new opportunities and inject new impetus. It is important that we increase mutual trust and bring out the potential of bilateral cooperation to keep China-Russia relations at a high level.

Our two sides need to raise both the quality and quantity of investment and economic cooperation and step up policy coordination to create favorable conditions for the high-quality development of our investment cooperation. We need to boost two-way trade, foster more convergence of interests and areas of cooperation, and promote the complementary and synchronized development of traditional trade and emerging areas of cooperation. We need to make sustained efforts to synergize the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union, so as to provide more institutional support for bilateral and regional cooperation.

Our two sides need to step up people-to-people and cultural exchanges and ensure the success of China-Russia Years of Sports Exchange. We should make good use of the sub-national cooperation mechanisms to facilitate more interactions between sister provinces/states and cities. We should encourage personnel exchanges and push for the resumption of tourism cooperation. We should make available better summer camps, jointly-run schools and other programs to steadily enhance the mutual understanding and friendship between our peoples, especially between the youth.

The world today is going through profound changes unseen in a century. The historical trend of peace, development and win-win cooperation is unstoppable. The prevailing trends of world multi-polarity, economic globalization and greater democracy in international relations are irreversible. On the other hand, our world is confronted with complex and intertwined traditional and non-traditional security challenges, damaging acts of hegemony, domination and bullying, and long and tortuous global economic recovery. Countries around the world are deeply concerned and eager to find a cooperative way out of the crisis.

In March 2013, when speaking at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, I observed that countries are linked with and dependent on one another at a level never seen before, and that mankind, living in the same global village, have increasingly emerged as a community with a shared future in which everyone's interests are closely entwined. Since then, I have proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative on different occasions. All these have enriched our vision for a community with a shared future for mankind and provided practical pathways toward it. They are part of China's response to the changes of the world, of our times, and of the historic trajectory.

Through these ten years, the common values of humanity – peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom – have taken deeper roots in the heart of the people. An open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world with lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity has become the shared aspiration of more and more countries. The international community has recognized that no country is superior to others, no model of governance is universal, and no single country should dictate the international order. The common interest of all humankind is in a world that is united and peaceful, rather than divided and volatile.

Since last year, there has been an all-round escalation of the Ukraine crisis. China has all along upheld an objective and impartial position based on the merits of the issue, and actively promoted peace talks. I have put forth several proposals, i.e., observing the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, respect of the legitimate security concerns of all countries, supporting all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of the crisis, and ensuring the stability of global industrial and supply chains. They have become China's fundamental principles for addressing the Ukraine crisis.

Not long ago, we released China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis, which takes into account the legitimate concerns of all parties and reflects the broadest common understanding of the international community on the crisis. It has been constructive in mitigating the spillovers of the crisis and facilitating its political settlement. There is no simple solution to a complex issue. We believe that as long as all parties embrace the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and pursue equal-footed, rational and results-oriented dialogue and consultation, they will find a reasonable way to resolve the crisis as well as a broad path toward a world of lasting peace and common security.

To run the world's affairs well, one must first and foremost run its own affairs well. The Chinese people, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, are striving in unity to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through the Chinese path to modernization. Chinese modernization is characterized by the following features: it is the modernization of a huge population, the modernization of common prosperity for all, the modernization of material and cultural-ethical advancement, the modernization of harmony between humanity and nature, and the modernization of peaceful development. These distinctive Chinese features are the crystallization of our practices and explorations over the years, and reflect our profound understanding of international experience. Going forward, we will steadfastly advance the cause of Chinese modernization, strive to realize high-quality development, and expand high-standard opening up. I believe that this will bring new development opportunities to Russia and all countries in the world.

Just as every new year starts with spring, every success starts with actions. We have every reason to expect that China and Russia, as fellow travelers on the journey of development and rejuvenation, will make new and greater contributions to human advancement.¹⁷

¹⁷ Xi Jinping, *Forging Ahead to Open a New Chapter of China-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Common Development*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2023) (May 15, 2023), available at https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202303/t20230320_11044359.html.

Epilogue

Regardless of certain differences which inevitably arise from time to time, Moscow and Beijing are working towards shared goals and can continue to rely on each other in the face of increasing Western pressure; without a doubt, Russia and China serve as a model of cooperation between leading countries.

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