

An Evolving Partnership

China and Russia have become increasingly close, but stop short of a military alliance By Li Ziguo



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from alliance to confrontation, followed by normalization and a strategic partnership. At present, China-Russia relationship is among the most mature of those between major powers. The two countries actively support one another, meanwhile they are partners—not allies.

A steady pace

The basic trend of the China-Russia relationship is one of constant progression, which is clearly different from the “neither better nor worse” Sino-U.S. relations. What’s more,

EXPANDING COOPERATION: Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin sign a joint statement aimed at expanding cooperation in all fields and coordinating diplomatic efforts following their talks in Shanghai on May 20



there have been a series of documents and mechanisms that ensure the general direction of bilateral ties.



NEXT GENERATION: A Russian education official answers questions from Chinese students during an international education show in Beijing on November 2, 2013



STATE GUEST: Chinese President Hu Jintao and his visiting Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev review honor guards at a welcoming ceremony in Beijing on September 27, 2012

Since China and Russia signed a joint statement on the foundation for bilateral ties in 1992, their relationship began a new chapter. In 1996, the two countries established a partnership of strategic coordination. In 2001, China and Russia signed the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, laying a strong legal foundation for the two countries to develop their strategic partnership. In February 2013, China and Russia signed a joint statement to deepen their comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, bringing bilateral relationship to an unprecedented level.

During this period, China and Russia have also solved complex boundary demarcation issues, putting prior border disputes behind them.

Another important factor that guarantees the stable development of the China-Russia relationship is the establishment of a set of effective cooperative mechanisms.

The two countries have successively established a mechanism for annual exchange of high-level visits and numerous non-governmental exchange platforms to enhance

mutual understanding and settle differences in time.

State heads of the two countries also hold regular meetings on international occasions, such as annual summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS group of emerging economies and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. Since Chinese President Xi Jinping took office in March 2013, he has met Russian President Vladimir Putin on nine occasions.

As of 2013, there had been 18 annual meetings between Chinese and Russian prime ministers since their regular meeting mechanism was launched in 1996. The mechanism has become another important platform to outline and coordinate bilateral cooperation in various fields.

After China and Russia conducted their first joint military drill in 2005, the frequency and scale of such exercises have both increased. Over the past two years, they held two joint exercises each year, including a joint anti-terror exercise under the SCO framework. Last year, the Russian Defense Ministry invited President Xi to visit its command center, revealing a strong

mutual trust between the two countries.

The scale of people-to-people exchanges between China and Russia in recent years has been unparalleled. Since 2006, the two countries have successfully held a series of events such as the National Year, Year of Languages and Year of Tourism. In 2014 and 2015, the two sides will also hold their Year of Youth Friendly Exchanges. Benefiting from close interactions, there are a growing number of people on both sides who regard each other as friends, which has consolidated public support for good-neighborly friendship between the two countries.

Internal impetus

Currently there is a view that Washington is the major cause for Moscow and Beijing's close embrace; if Washington changes its stance, contradictions between Beijing and Moscow will emerge. But this viewpoint has underestimated the role that an internal impetus for cooperation has played for the two countries in deepening their relations. It is common interests that have driven them closer while external factors have

merely accelerated the process.

Both countries learnt lessons from the China-Soviet confrontation in the 1960s-80s, which greatly hindered economic development and threatened national security for both nations.

As large emerging economies, China and Russia are complementary to one another. Russia is a big exporter of energy, while China is a major buyer. Russia faces labor shortages and its light industry is congenitally deficient. Meanwhile China is known as the world's factory. Russia has advantages in aerospace and nuclear energy sectors, while China has advantages in areas such as high-speed railway technology and telecommunications.

As both China and Russia undergo a social and economic transition, they are confronted with similar challenges. Russia must change its resource-based economic development mode, and China also faces

the task of sustainable economic transformation and industrial upgrading. While both countries need to deepen economic restructuring, they are also expected to maintain social stability. The two sides need to support each other on these prominent issues.

China and Russia have common aspirations for the democratization of international politics. Both countries are opposed to unilateral actions that push the UN aside. They call for inclusiveness of all civilizations and oppose forced regime changes or altering the institutions of other countries recklessly. They are opposed to attempts to rewrite the history of World War II. All these are both for their interests and the well-being of most international community members. However, China and Russia will not form an alliance as it would possibly lead to new bloc confrontations, bringing more risk of conflicts.

The internal impetuses that galvanize China-Russia ties will exist for a long time. Therefore, even without the U.S. factor, their cooperation will not slow down. And experience has shown that even as Washington raised the concept of "G2" or moved to ease Russian-U.S. relations, China-Russia relations had not been affected.

Increasing mutual trust

China-Russia relations have developed rapidly and smoothly over the past decades, but it doesn't mean there are no differences between the two. Actually, Russia worries China will exert more influence in the former Soviet Union nations as it attaches importance to sphere of influence. Russia fears becoming a raw material appendage of China as well as Chinese immigrants. In addition, Russia still needs time to adjust to a more pow-



DAYS OF OLD: China and the Soviet Union sign a science and technology cooperation protocol in Moscow on January 18, 1958