



## Near, Far, Wherever You Are: Views on Sino-Russian Relations



A scene from the fifth session of the SRC International Summer Symposium “Northeast Asia’s Faultline: One Hundred Years of Sino/Russian/Soviet Competitive Cooperation” held on 14 July 2017.



## Mongolia's view on Sino-Russian relations

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First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the invitation to participate in this conference.

Actually, there is no Mongolian view on Sino-Russian relations. Officially, the Mongolian government doesn't publicly comment about other states' relations with third parties. But Sino-Russian relations are unique, since these are the only two states that could influence Mongolia's international position and internal development.



My presentation will be in three parts. Firstly, I'm going to start out with a history. Then I am going to talk about Mongolia and Sino-Russian relations during the Cold War. Finally, I will discuss Mongolia's view of Sino-Russian relations after the Cold War. Many of you know that Mongolia is between geopolitical giants – Russia and China. Mongolia cannot match its two neighbors in any quantitative criteria. This is a rare case in the political geography of the world given that both countries are nuclear powers, permanent members of the UN Security Council, and two of the main political and economic players in the world. Mongolia is a small country with a territory of 1.5 million square kilometers and a population of 3 million people.

To represent the history of relations between Mongolia and its two neighbors, I decided to go back to the times of Chinggis Khaan. I am obviously not the first person to talk about him. Mongolia is better known to the world through its great leader Chinggis Khaan. In Sherry Ortner's view, Chinggis Khaan is a key symbol for Mongols. In an analysis of historical personalities, in 1995 the *Washington Post* named Chinggis Khaan the "Man of the Millennium". Chinggis Khaan built the largest contiguous land empire in world history ranging from Korea and China to Eastern Europe. The empire included the Middle East and he wisely ruled this vast territory with its countless number of people. This was the only period in history when the Mongols dominated the relationship with their two neighbors. It's a historical fact that Eurasia has gained its present geopolitical shape only after many nations were brought under the united rule of Chinggis Khan, his children and grandchildren.

Actually, the Mongols provided the first historical context between Russia and China, because of the direct contact with the Qing Dynasty. In 1689, Russia and the Qing Dynasty signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk. It was the first document of its kind in the history of Russia-China relations. While setting the framework for political and trade



relations between the two countries, the document failed to specify the borders. According to this treaty, Mongolia had lost territory in the south to the Manchu, and in the north to the Russians. The remaining central part began to experience increasing pressure on both sides.

From 1691 to 1911, Mongolians were under Manchu rule for 220 years. From the beginning of the 1900s, Mongolia attracted Russia's attention and gained its political strategic respect. In Russian strategy, this region was supposed to become a "buffer zone" between Russia and China and to assure a "balance of power" in East and Central Asia where the rivalry of great powers had started to intensify.

Taking into the consideration the great powers' sharpening competition, Mongolians helped to preserve the status quo in Asia. The independence of Mongolia and potential deterioration of relations with China over the Chinese-Mongolian disputes did not correspond with the important foreign policy goals of Russia. Given this situation, the Russian government agreed to support Outer Mongolia only in achieving autonomy under China's suzerainty. The proclamation of independence by Mongolia in December 1911 brought Russia to complicated diplomatic ground with China over Mongolia.

Mongolia again became a factor in international relations at the end of World War Two. In 1945 the Mongolian People's Republic was not an independent state. It was legally part of China, although the Chinese had not been able to exercise effective control. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Soviet Union insisted that the position of Mongolia between the USSR and China be clarified. The Soviet Union played an active role in eliminating the duality of the status of Mongolia from the point of view of international law. However, Roosevelt secured the recognition of Outer Mongolia's



status quo by the provision, “The status quo in Outer Mongolia shall be preserved”, which was spelled out in the Yalta Treaty.

Both China and the Soviet Union obligated themselves not to subjugate Mongolia in the future, and the two sides agreed to grant independence to Mongolia after a “referendum on independence” was organized. In October 1945, the Mongolian people cast their votes in favor of full independence. Based on returns of the referendum, the People’s Republic of China officially recognized the Mongolian People’s Republic on 6 January 1946. When the United Nations was established in 1945, Mongolia applied for membership. However, due to the different excuses by the Republic of China and the Western powers, its application for membership was rejected several times until 1961.

Border clashes between China and the USSR almost led to war in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mongolia concluded a bilateral treaty with the USSR in 1966. The 20-year treaty included defense-related agreements and the Soviet Union stationed troops in Mongolia to enhance its strategic advantage over China. The Sino-Soviet rapprochement process resulting from General Secretary Gorbachev’s proposals during his speech at Vladivostok in July of 1986 had a positive impact on the normalization of Sino-Mongolian relations, particularly in the 1990s. The withdrawal of Soviet/Russian military forces stationed on the territory of Mongolia contributed greatly to the normalization of Sino-Russian and Sino-Mongolian relations. The withdrawal also led to the beginning of a new era in Mongolia’s security environment.

In the early 1990s, the disintegration of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for Mongolia to free itself from the dominating Soviet influence. In 1994 Mongolia made sweeping changes to its national security and foreign policies by adopting three basic documents – National Security, Foreign Policy Concepts and the Military Doctrine.



Foreign Policy Concepts provides that Mongolia shall safeguard its security and vital national interests by political and diplomatic means, and create a favorable external environment. According to this concept, Mongolia's top foreign policy priority is good relations with its two neighbors. It does not mean keeping equidistance between them or taking identical positions on all issues. This policy means strengthening trust and developing good-neighbor relations and mutually beneficial cooperation with both of them. Mindful of its experience from 1960 to the 1980s, Mongolia pursues a policy of non-involvement in relation to the future possible disputes between Russia and China, unless the disputes affect its vital national interests.

As a practical step towards a balanced relationship with Russia and China, Mongolia has declared nonalignment with any great power. It will not allow any state to use its territory for the purpose of committing acts of aggression or other violent acts, nor will it conclude any treaty or agreement that would run counter to the sovereignty and independence of its neighbors. Mongolia's policy of the non-stationing or non-transit of foreign troops on its territory is in full conformity with the Sino-Russian declaration not to use the territory, territorial waters and airspace of other countries against each other.

Mongolia's open, multi-pillar foreign policy is designed not only to overcome its former isolation from the outside world, but also to accelerate its development and thus to add some political and economic weight as well as to obtain some credible counterweights to its Southern and Northern neighbors. Hence, its foreign policy priority is to develop broad relations with the world's influential countries such as the US, Japan, Britain, Germany and France. Mongolia aims to foster the political and economic interests of these countries in Mongolia. Therefore, Mongolia is looking for a third neighbor, while understanding that not one single state, but a group of states, could



together add up to a “third neighbor”. Since Mongolia borders only Russia and China, this third-neighbor strategy aims at forging special ties with more distant countries that might be willing to make investment and support Mongolia’s development. The policy of Mongolia in respect of the third neighbor is not directed against any state, especially against the two neighboring powers.

After the Cold War, Russia and China created a political and economic alliance called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Since the beginning of 2000, both neighbors invited Mongolia to the SCO. Mongolia is now participating in this organization as an observer.

Mongolia is interested in promoting trilateral Mongolia-Russia-China relationships, including the possibility of its becoming a bridge for cooperation between the two neighbors.

Mongolian leaders held separate bilateral summit meetings with their Chinese and Russian counterparts in the summer of 2014 in Ulaanbaatar. Mongolia pushed for a new trilateral mechanism to make certain that these two powerful neighbors did not proceed with transportation and energy cooperation without considering the interests of Mongolia.

The first trilateral summit among the three presidents took place on the sidelines of the 11-12 September 2014 SCO annual meeting in Dushanbe. Tajikistan President Elbegdorj suggested all sides work together on specific projects related to transnational transit infrastructure development. The three countries agreed in principle to build a ‘Steppe Road’ in Mongolia, reviving a pre-modern transport network that facilitated trade between China and Russia. They also agreed to incorporate the ‘Steppe Road’ into



the Chinese ‘One Belt and One Road’ and the Russian Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

Since that first tripartite summit, there have been two others. On 9 July 2015 Mongolian President Elbegdorj met Xi Jinping and Putin at the second trilateral summit meeting in Ufa, Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS meeting and 15<sup>th</sup> annual SCO summit. At this meeting, the three presidents approved a roadmap for trilateral cooperation.

The third tripartite summit on 23 June 2016, organized on the sidelines of the 16<sup>th</sup> SCO annual meeting in Uzbekistan’s Tashkent, saw the breakthrough agreement on establishing an economic corridor between the three countries. They signed an “Economic Corridor Plan” agreement, the purpose of which is to coordinate specific plans to facilitate economic traffic among the countries.

The concept of One Belt One Road is very positive for Mongolia. But some of the decisions may be politically difficult to implement as far as they might involve more influence from China, both economically and politically. Therefore, Mongolia should be able to determine what kind of conditions should be tolerable and how it could use those initiatives in a beneficial way.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Mongolia has complicated relations with China and Russia. The independence and sovereignty of Mongolia depend on the balance of power between Russia and China. Distortion of this balance may endanger Mongolia’s independence. The beginning of the last century was marked by the release of Outer Mongolia from the Qing Empire with the Russian Empire’s support. Further developments related to the attainment of Mongolia’s independence and national sovereignty were also associated with the use of force. This was the case with the



struggle against Chinese occupation, in the battles against Japan on the river at Khalkhin Gol, and confrontation in the 1960s and 1980s with China. Only the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Mongolia in the late 1980s led to the country no longer being seen as an arena of direct military confrontation between the two neighbors. These changes have become a precondition for the radically new international political situation around Mongolia, characterized by non-military rivalry between the great powers. An important principle of the foreign policy of Mongolia was not joining any military-political blocs. Now five nuclear powers have recognized the territory of Mongolia as a nuclear weapon free zone. Mongolia's two neighbors also reaffirmed their legally binding commitments with respect to Mongolia assumed because of bilateral treaties.

Peaceful relations between these two nuclear powers leads to stability, not only in Mongolia but also in Eurasia. The time in the 1960s and the 1970s when China and the Soviet Union were opposed was very dangerous. Mongolia also views closer ties between Russia and China as helpful to Mongolia's interests in a variety of areas. For example, the most important economic exchange between Russia and China involves energy. Russia is a major energy exporter, while China's imports grow each year. Moreover, China has become a profitable market for Mongolian products of the mining industry.

Mongolia should take advantage of its geographical location. Mongolia can participate in building a railway network because the country is the shortest route that can link China and Russia, and Asia and Europe. In addition to this, Mongolia could develop its transit transport under the project "Russia- Mongolia- China Economic Corridor". Both Russia and Mongolia are interested in the involvement of China's Road and Belt initiative, and its implementation is important for all concerned.



## Russia-China Relations: an Indian Perspective

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The India and China relationship has many paradoxes. On the one hand, both are cooperating on a global level in many multilateral forums. Also, simultaneously, there are a lot of competitive elements to the relationship and engagement. Russia on the other hand, which had a very difficult relationship with China in the 1970s and 1980s, has developed this relationship to a phenomenal level. I want to consider how I should look at Russia in this paradox of the India and China relationship. Russia is developing its relationship with China. Does it impact India? Or, does India have the same views as Russia as far as its relationship with China is concerned?



Obviously, certain aspects of the Russia-China relationship are compatible with India's long-term interests. For example, these include building a multi-polar world order, cooperation through multilateral economic institutions and climate negotiations. In the long-term, we have a lot of compatibility. However, in certain respects, China's policies and actions have negatively affected India's interests. The reason for which India did not go to the Belt Road Initiative conference in China is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Other controversies include aggressive energy acquisition in Eurasia by China, and blocking India's entry into global forums like the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council. These issues create difficulties in the India-China relationship.

This paper will analyze how Russia is caught between two friendly countries: one with economic progress — that is China — and, the other (India) with great expectations from a traditional friend like Russia. China is growing at a very fast rate as an economic power. It is not difficult to understand why Russia has taken so much of an interest in developing this relationship, especially after the Ukrainian crisis and sanctions. But at the same time, India has been a traditional friend, and Russia would not like to see India as a declining power, or as a weak power in Asia. Also, it is not in Russia's interest to let that happen. What I am saying is, Russia would like China and India to be important vectors in its Asia policy. However, there is a problem with some of the Chinese moves. These moves have the potential for creating strong disappointment with Russia's failure to factor in India's concerns effectively with Beijing.

The three states are, nevertheless, working in tandem on some global and regional issues. We should have hope that Russia's relationship with India and China can be helpful in minimizing the differences between New Delhi and Beijing. Russia was instrumental in the India-China relationship going to a higher level. All three countries



were looking towards cooperation with the United States and Europe. Then, in 2006 BRICS was formed and the first summit was held in 2009. There has been this urge to come together and Russia has always been a catalyst to bring India and China closer.

There are still unsettled borders, but all three countries have some convergence of interest in changing the global order - the order that is being created in the post-Cold War period. The three countries are worried that their emergence as global players could be blocked if this unipolar world continues. Consequently, you find in summit after summit, the emphasis is on a multipolar world order. That has been a common concern for India, China, and Russia, because the three countries favor a global order where there is no single dominant power. All three are now rising up, and they would like to have their voices heard. The current institutions that have existed since the Second World War such as the European Union are not compatible with the interests of these countries. They see their sovereignty being constrained in the name of human rights and democracy.

There is also more focus in BRICS on climate negotiations. Each country is trying to create a clean environment using different energy sources rather than relying on the coal-based power sector. With the Americans withdrawing from the Paris climate talks, the onus is not just on Western Europe but also India, China, and Russia. India, China and Russia are big polluters but also interested in sustainable growth and arresting climate change. They are committed to the Paris Agreement, and they will continue to be so.

Similarly, these countries have come together on the issue of international terrorism. Why did India join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) after its initial reluctance? It was because of the anti-terrorism networking that the SCO could do by



exchanging information. India's reluctance to join a multilateral organization led by China changed. When India found terrorist elements crossing its borders the SCO became a more useful platform so it applied to join. Nevertheless, from India's perspective, China has a double-standard on Pakistan-based terrorists targeting India. India's efforts to get some individuals based in Pakistan named as terrorists by the United Nations has faced resistance from China. Even though America has already declared these individuals 'terrorists', China is blocking. Beijing has blocked every move by India in the United Nations Security Council to name Pakistani terrorists as global terrorists, or even their organizations as global terrorist organizations. From India's point of view, China has been ignoring these Pakistan-based terrorist networks, focusing more on other areas and not taking into account India's concerns.

Pakistan has been one of the factors that shapes the India-China relationship. Russia has been instrumental in bringing India to the SCO and BRICS. However, there are multilateral institutions where Russia supports India's case but is unable to persuade China. India is keen on becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council, but is unable to find support from China. India hopes Russia will help. In fact, quite recently, the Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, was quoted as saying, "We are not putting any pressure. What we feel, since Russia and China share good relations, Moscow should talk with China. Our effort is to convince China on the issue and also involve nations friendly with both countries." It was also reported in the Indian press that lack of help from Moscow was possibly the reason why India was delaying an agreement on two additional nuclear reactors at Kudankulam (The Times of India, 6 June 2017).

The Sino-Pakistan nexus often hinders attempts to improve bilateral and multilateral engagement between New Delhi and Beijing. When China decided to build the CPEC,



there was no engagement with India. India's concerns were not considered. This project has further strained the relationship between India and China. Russia's interest in the CPEC will not go down well with India. In my latest book, I had advocated the idea of "India's Silk Road Strategy". India's establishment would like Russia to show more interest in the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC) which is progressing at a slow pace. A lot of work has been done to put this corridor in place, but there are stretches where they are not complete. India, like China, has also shown interest in a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union, but nothing much has come about on this. If China manages to broker a deal between its BRI and the EEU, India will have reason to feel aggrieved with Russia.

You can also see the first-ever joint military exercise by Russia and Pakistan. The exercise, though not on a big scale, was called Druzhba-2016 and held from 24 September to 7 October 2016. Russia supplied four helicopters to Pakistan and this annoyed India. Because of mounting concerns in India, Russia announced that it would not hold the exercise in the future. The episode did introduce some irritants into the relationship. Pakistan is also set to receive four MI-35 attack helicopters from Russia for \$153 million in 2017.

So, Russia's interest in the CPEC, is wonderful from the Chinese perspective, but from India's point of view, CPEC passes through an area which is disputed. The area is occupied by Pakistan. Whenever Indian leaders or heads of the military visit areas occupied by Pakistan, China raises huge objections. Inside India but disputed by China, Beijing raises huge objections. I'm not saying the entirety of China's Silk Road corridor is bad. In fact, I have a different view about India's INSTC and China's Silk Road project — they can be harmonized with each other and encourage cooperation in



Eurasia. It's not impossible for us to cooperate, but there are serious sovereignty issues where India will not compromise. China never does. Responding to queries about India's non-participation in One Belt One Road (OBOR), the official spokesperson of the Indian External Affairs Ministry commented that the international community is well aware of India's position on the CPEC, which is being projected as the flagship project of the OBOR (MEA, 13 May 2017).

No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns and sovereignty of territory and integrity. The disconnect between Russia and India on this issue is quite clear. Russia has shown interest in the CPEC and wants closer cooperation with China. The CPEC riles India more than anything, so as far as China's recent activities in the region are concerned, New Delhi probably hoped for a less-enthusiastic response from Russia to such Chinese moves.

To counter China's moves — this is also important — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a pitch for developing the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor with support from Japan, while addressing the annual general meeting of the African Development Bank in Gujarat's capital, Gandhinagar, in May 2017. The Indian and Japanese governments presented a vision document. This move was a desire to curtail the ever-increasing presence of China on the continent. Further details on this corridor were expected to be discussed during the scheduled meeting of these two Prime Ministers later in 2017.

Now, India's simple strategy, as I said, is to go through Iran, and to have this railway corridor right up to Russia — it's the INSTC. Another port in Iran is Chabahar, from where one can enter into Afghanistan and enter into three Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. This will be India's look-north policy of the



north-south axis of the Silk Road. India is also trying — but not doing much, and hoping Russia will put pressure on neighboring countries to fast-track these projects.

There are differences on the nature of military cooperation between Russia and China. The Sukhoi 35 is one of Russia's most advanced military aircraft, and it is being sold to China. Obviously, this will bolster Chinese capability, which might ultimately help Pakistan. Actually, many things are Pakistan-centric here. Russia is selling its most advanced aircraft, which the Chinese sometimes have been accused of reverse-engineering. The Chinese might then sell this aircraft to Pakistan. India is not happy that such advanced weapons are being exchanged in this region by China. This is a situation where some of the actions of Russia might not gel well with India's interests. I believe that big countries have to pursue independent national interests. Nevertheless, since you are working towards a synergy at the global level, you also have to limit the possibilities of competition and conflict and try to moderate defenses to a level where big countries can work together. Recently, this has not been the case.

China is also a competitor on the energy market. Over the last 10 years, China has become India's main competitor. In 2005, India lost the PetroKazakh bid in Kazakhstan to China. India offered 3.9 billion dollars for PetroKazakh, so China had to give 4.1 billion dollars. India lost another important bid to China in 2008. Putin has been speaking since 2006 about the SCO energy club, but nothing has really come out of that. For example, there has been no collective joint project. India believes Moscow is close to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan so why can't there be joint collective efforts for energy in this region? Why do India and China need to compete with each other?



To conclude, Russia needs to reassure India about its concerns regarding territorial sovereignty issues, even as China tries to overlook India's concerns. Moscow needs to bring Beijing to accept that there can be no different attitude towards terrorists in Xinjiang and terrorists in Kashmir. Both are linked and need to be dealt with firmly. Without this recognition, the SCO will be a forum which only takes care of China's interests. Russia can change this perception by making the SCO a truly universal forum for combating international terrorism. Russia, India, and China are already cooperating globally. Finally, the BRICS framework must act as a catalyst in fostering greater India-China cooperation on the contentious issues that plague the relationship. Thank you.



## Sino-Russian Competition/Cooperation in Latin America

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My research is about Sino-Russian competition and cooperation in Latin America. A big question is whether a new era of Washington antagonism versus China and Russia is in the making. Another significant question is what Russia and Chinese interests are in Latin America? Why are their interests more visible than before? The Russian and Chinese presence in Latin America can be understood as a kind of reaction to America's lack of interest in the region. This is a common view among some specialists who argue that the US, since 9/11 and President Obama's pivot to Asia, has been preoccupied with



other parts of the world. Or perhaps the US took for granted a region that some Americans think of as a 'backyard' of the US.

Consequently, the Chinese and the Russians have been going slowly but steadily into Latin America. This has been the case since the 1990s. Russia's foreign policy strategy has given special attention to Latin America. This is especially true for South America more than Mexico and Central America. China, too, since the 1990s, has been interested in Latin America. However, its interest is different from Russia. The Chinese presence and interest in Latin America goes back many years. China has had a long tradition of friendship with the region since the 1970s. The basic policy of Chinese engagement in Latin America is based on the One China policy. This is the frame which has been shaping the relationship between Beijing and most Latin American countries. Recently, in 2008 and in 2016, there were Chinese policy papers on Latin America. China's foreign policy to Latin America is becoming more complex. The Chinese government has put much effort in using Latin America for their economic development. So, what is the nature of the Chinese and Russian presence in the hemisphere? How do they respond to US hemispheric policy? How complementary or competitive are Beijing and Moscow's interactions with countries in the region?

My presentation is as follows. I identify some features of Chinese involvement in the region. This is followed by an analysis of the cooperative nature of Russia's and China's presence in Latin America, and a discussion as to what extent they might compete and cooperate. Finally, I will consider what the limits might be of the overall Chinese and Russian presence in Latin America.

Volatile political processes in Latin America are important to remember because they might affect future Chinese and Russian engagement in the region. First, I want to say



that the Chinese interest in Latin America is framed by the One China policy. To date, 11 countries in Central America and the Caribbean still have diplomatic relations with Taipei, so the basic policy of Chinese engagement in the region is trying to strengthen this One China policy, and if it's possible, to change diplomatic recognition. The most recent example of a country changing its diplomatic recognition of Taipei is Panama.

President Xi Jinping travelled to the region in 2013, 2014, and 2016. On the last occasion, he went to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Lima, Peru. For China, Latin America is very important because it is a huge market. Especially Central and South America are important for raw materials. Trade has been growing in the last few years. China has been engaging in active UN diplomacy with some selected countries in South America. China is also active at the multilateral level with the Forum of China and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. This forum has to be updated next year. We will have a meeting with the Chinese representatives, I think, in October. There will be a meeting for specialists in order to give new ideas and proposals for how to foster this bilateral relationship. It's very important that the relationship is based on two white papers. The 2008 white paper was aspirational in nature so it was updated in September 2016. There are also new concepts that I observed after the One Belt One Road (OBOR) meeting in Beijing. Is it possible for Latin America to be inserted in this OBOR grand strategy? I don't know how exactly, but we will find out.

China belongs as an observer to some multilateral mechanisms in Latin America like the Pacific Alliance. China has been very active with Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, and with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Chinese companies are very interested in forging trade relationships in the region, but the huge problem is that they don't invest a lot. Foreign Direct Investment is still very low in Latin America. During



last year's APEC meeting in Lima President Xi Jinping offered his own vision of an Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area (FTA) that was initially proposed in 2014. He is very interested in forging these FTAs as a super FTA in the Asia-Pacific region. FTAs already exist with Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and Mercosur.

In comparison, Russian interest in Latin America started in the early 2000s. Russia is currently an observer of the Organization of American States (OAS), Mercosur and the Central American Integration System. Trade has been growing between Russia and Latin America, but on a lower level as compared with China. Why is Russia in Latin America? I think that since the Georgia conflict in 2008 and after events in Crimea in 2014 the Russians are looking for partners in the Western Hemisphere. Some countries have supported Russia by abstaining to vote against it in the UN. Bilaterally, Russia has forged particularly good relationships with Cuba, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, and to a certain extent, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. With Nicaragua, it is very interesting to know that, like the Chinese, the Russians too are interested in the trans-oceanic channel.

Russia is very interested in Argentina and Brazil. Some State-Owned Enterprises are doing deals in oil and gas, and in the arms industry. Venezuela is also a good partner in trade dealings in the oil industry. Finally, bilateral relations with Cuba have been growing since 2000. Russia has written off 90% of the outstanding debt of Havana. It is important to point out that the Trump factor is important. It's necessary to put Russian advances in Latin America in a global perspective. Until the election of US President Donald Trump, I think observers noted that Russian interests were mainly in Eurasia, not in the Americas. Actually, Jose Insulza, the former Secretary General of the OAS, recognized two years ago that Russia's intention to influence Latin America is practically impossible. I don't think it's impossible, but it seems limited.



So, there is cooperation between China and Russia in the region. I think at the global level, there are some conventions of interest, but conversion of interest is mostly in Eurasia, not in Latin America. I think Latin America might be of secondary importance for Russia and China from the geographical perspective, as compared with Europe, the Middle East, or the Asian realm.

At the institutional level, cooperation is framed within BRICS. Despite BRICS, at the bilateral level, Russia-China cooperation beyond mere statements of cooperation appears difficult. There might be one exception — Venezuela. Venezuela is having trouble paying its debt. It has also fallen behind on shipments of crude oil. It is possible that a coordinated political decision between Moscow and Beijing might be reached in the near future, but it's not certain. It is improbable to see a mechanism for Sino-Russian cooperation in Latin America, such as an SCO-type organization. This is because both countries understand that the level of terror activities in the hemisphere is almost non-existent. Furthermore, they recognize that US political influence in the hemisphere remains strong and cannot be easily confronted. As a result, there are limits to cooperation.

What about Sino-Russian competition in the hemisphere? There is a certain degree of competition. Russia is looking to maintain partners — especially Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia. As for Moscow in the political realm, I think there is a kind of shadow over the political process in the region. Moscow's interest in anti-American candidates for future presidential elections in the region, including Mexico in 2017, might be likely to emerge soon. But in the economic realm, there might be some kind of competition because of China. I think Sino-Russian competition is more likely to develop in the race for economic partners. In Argentina, we have seen recently that Russia has lost some bids to China and America for steam turbine contracts for nuclear



power plants. Another area is arms transfer to Venezuela and to other countries. Arms sales market in Latin America are very small, if you think globally. However, there is some kind of competition between China and Russia.

The Cuba case is particularly interesting. I think that Cuba is very keen to have both Beijing's assistance (such as a new batch of computers), but is also hoping to have deals with Russia in other areas (like oil shipments). But I don't think this is a conflict. I think the presence, in general, of Russia and China in Latin America goes in parallel. The two powers are not clashing, but neither are they cooperating. It's like a bad neighbor that you live with, but you don't speak to him, so we live our own lives.

My basic conclusions are that Russian interests in the region have intensified recently, especially since 2014. The Chinese presence is more consistent and more complete. China and Russia's objectives in the region are not identical. They have a different story in the region, and their own projection of hard and soft power is unique. In politics, I think Russia is thought of as a greater threat, because of the potential for triggering US intervention. There may be more links with left-wing candidates in future presidential elections, like in Mexico. China is more worried about economic and commercial aspects in Latin America. The economy is of paramount importance for Beijing.

So, what is in the future? I think Sino-Russian cooperation is extremely limited beyond the BRICS model. Venezuela and Cuba are two special cases where cooperation is possible. I think it's possible to see a pattern of commercial competition between Beijing and Moscow in big infrastructure projects and arms sales in the region, and it's important to know that China will be likely to have the upper hand here, because it's economically more powerful.



In sum, it's possible to characterize the Sino-Russian presence in Latin America as co-existence, rather than cooperation and competition. On a final note, politics in Latin America is changing quickly. Until two years ago, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile had left-wing, anti-American politicians and heads of states. Now things are changing, so that might influence the short, medium, and long-term Russian and Chinese presence in the area.



**Comments to the Papers Presented during the  
Panel *Near, Far, Wherever You Are: Views on  
Sino-Russian Relations***

Jarosław Jańczak

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The three papers: *Mongolia's view on Sino-Russian Relations* by Adiya Nyamdoljin, *Russia-China Relations: An Indian Perspective* by Ajay Patnaik and *Sino-Russian Competition/Cooperation in Latin America* by Ulises Granados, present a very



interesting and holistic approach to Russian-Chinese relations. The last one, developed not in the context of direct neighborhood, but through the perspective of “third states”, creates a much wider perspective for understanding the nature and dynamism of these relations. The three papers deal, in fact, with three levels of how the competition and cooperation between the two big actors have been built. The case of Mongolia reveals the local dimension of the processes (being sandwiched between two dominant neighbors), India – the regional dimension (considering the Asian continent as a mega-region) and Latin America – the global. This variety of perspectives contextualizes Russian-Chinese relations in a multi-level approach.

The papers reveal at least four common factors when debating the relations. First, what is stressed by all the authors is the long-lasting presence, influence and/or competition of Russia and China in the debated states and regions. At the same time, however, their model differs. China seems to have built its position there gradually, consistently and employing a step-by-step strategy, as opposed to Russia, which after the post-Cold War withdrawal entered the regions concerned with a new impetus, especially following the Georgian and Ukrainian wars. The isolation of Russia by the West pushed it towards the East, as well as other global regions. The question arises, however, of how lasting this shift is. The neo-functional approach – especially in the context of the West still dominating in Russian import-export – would suggest that, sooner or later, the relations will have to be normalized. Would that mean diminishing Russian interest in the



non-western dimensions of foreign policy? If so, will China be left as the dominant actor in the debated regions?

Second, the three papers employ (even if the authors do not declare it directly) the perspective of classical border studies to understand the dynamism of the analyzed processes. Russian-Chinese relations, as examined from the perspective of third parties, reveal that state borders are not static, even from the non-neorealist perspective. States try to expand, not necessarily by territorial expansion, but by building zones of influence, alliances, integration groupings, client relations, etc. To understand the domestic dynamism of a state, a look at how its edges are organized and how they change is relevant (Walters 2004). Using, for example, the concept of geopolitical models (as proposed by Browning and Joennimi 2008), it seems that both China and Russia implement a *neo-imperial* model, based on nested, concentric circles. Here, the influence zones have been created by powers, attracting (or forcing) other states to belong to their “own” respective camps. At the same time, however, the discourse of both Russia and China follows the neo-medieval order (with many more or less equal centers), criticizing American domination and calling for a multi- or polycentric world order. The same refers to their borders and the geostrategies visible there. While the border between Russia and China follows the model of a *limes* (a final, confirmed line separating political-territorial entities), especially after the final solution of territorial disputes (Iwashita 2008), Mongolia exemplifies a *march* (a buffer zone) or *colonial*



*frontier* (border of expansion) in Russian-Chinese relations, and India – a *colonial frontier* with China, due to boundary disputes.

Third, all the texts are dominated by a (neo-)realist approach, with states, interests and geopolitical games involving Russia and China, and seem to be rooted in the Huntingtonian concept of clashing civilizations (Huntington 1996). One should remember, however, that apart from the dominating element of conflict in his considerations, the model also stresses integration within civilizations, which is often underestimated. It should be noted that other academic approaches could additionally enrich the understanding of the processes investigated, for example – social constructivism, with its concentration on norms, ideas and identities, and a strong explanatory value in international relations. The question is how strong Russia and China are as “normative powers.” What norms, values and ideas that they promote are attractive for Mongolia, India or Latin American states? But also, in the mutual relations of both powers, which of the above-enumerated elements flow across their common border and in which direction?

Fourth, the issue visible in all the texts is the world order, with both Russia and China promoting a multipolar model. This global approach means that the two powers are aiming at local and regional leadership. Leadership in international relations means that a state is willing and capable of encouraging other actors to contribute to achieving



collective goals (Lübke-meier 2007, p. 7) followed by the recognition of this leadership by other actors. Russia seems to have strong ambitions for leadership, but its capabilities, especially economic, are limited, in contrast to China, which appears to have more resources but is moderate with its aspirations. The question arises of whether a joint leadership of a new world order, mutually supplementing respective shortages, is possible, especially in the debated regions?

The above general comments allow me to make further remarks regarding each of the texts. In the case of Mongolia as presented by Adiya Nyamdoljin, several aspects are worth stressing, as they add new insights into the Russian-Chinese neighborhood. For example, the historical legacy of the Mongols, who ruled Russia and China in the past. Is this period of history only a symbol of foreign domination in both states, or can it be transformed into a symbolic manifestation of the unity or roots of “Asianness”? Another aspect discussed is the current self-positioning of Mongolia with regard to its neighbors in response to their foreign policies. Is Mongolia going to play the role of a buffer zone, or rather a bridge? Both strategies can be politically and economically beneficial, yet their implementation depends on the external environment. The same refers to modernization: is it to be executed in the form of “Russification”, “Chinization” or maybe “Westernization”? Finally, who are the Mongols today and who do they want to be: how do they define their (geo)political and normative belonging? The author stresses the Russian interest in Mongolia that appeared two decades after the collapse of



the Soviet Union, which can be interpreted as counterbalancing China's growing economic, and thus political position in the region. This makes Russia a rival of China in Mongolia (Radchenko 2017). Since the shared Russian-Chinese border was finally set, competition has taken place in other forms and locations, as reflected in the direct relations of both states with Mongolia, as well as in multilateral projects affecting it (for example One Belt One Road vs. Eurasian Economic Union).

The Indian perspective, as presented by Ajay Patnaik, adds a set of further considerations. His argument of India always opposing a unipolar world order well explains the hopes this state has had about China and Russia. On the other hand, the geopolitical realities, especially related to China-Pakistan relations, have revised this strategy. Consequently and paradoxically, especially recently, the US has been playing a key role, as reflected in the last summit of Prime Minister Modi and President Trump, where America was announced to be “a primary partner” of India. Another dimension where Russian-Chinese relations as visible in the Indian context is the One Belt One Road initiative, especially with regard to the argument of bypassing India and privileging Pakistan. This argument reminds us of other grand infrastructural projects that were to link the West and the East, and were initially enthusiastically welcomed by numerous states. Step by step, however, they became the reasons for distrust and the potential revision of the world order (Kozziel 2017). This was the case of the Berlin-Baghdad railroad, initiated by the reunified, economically booming and politically expanding



Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. Initially considered a tool of free trade and globalization, it eventually became one of the reasons for the First World War (that started in the Balkans, the weakest link between Germany and the Ottoman Empire), having threatened the British colonies in the Middle East and India (Engdal 2014). Similarly, the Belt and Road initiative can be considered a manifestation of bridge building between China and the West, and additionally strengthening Chinese-Russian cooperation. But it also provides a non-military instrument for redefining power relations with a highly conflictive potential. A question can be also posed, what would be the aim of the Mumbai-St. Petersburg transportation corridor? Another aspect of the text also seems to be relevant. If India is favoring cooperation with Russia in order to block growing China that supports Pakistan, a normative explanation is still missing: how much can the world's biggest democracy tighten an alliance with a semi-autocratic partner? This means that the anti-western Indian position collides not only with the geopolitical but also normative misfit in the region. Finally, the argument about India supporting the “voices from the South” reorients the axes of interpretation: from the West vs. the East, towards the North vs. the South (paradoxically, the Russian Federation is a part of the South).

Finally, the paper by Ulises Granados, investigating how Russia and China interact in Latin America, presents several interesting ideas. What is striking here is the policy of both states to promote multipolarity, a policy implemented in the “inner court” of the



USA. The key question is, however, not how the only global superpower reacts, but why Russia and China are attractive to the states of the region. By offering investments (China) and subsidies (Russia) both can try to counterbalance the US, additionally proposing assistance without a “normative conditionality”. It might have been interesting to include one more actor here – the European Union and its involvement in the region, especially with regard to human rights and environmental protection principles. Another question refers to the durability of this strategic convergence of Russia and China in Latin America. The economic interests of both countries dominate there but, sooner or later, the necessity of their protection may appear. This would mean the necessity of their political (or even military) presence (Grady 2017), which again may lead to a situation where coexistence is replaced with competition or even conflict.

Russian-Chinese relations, marked with asymmetries and difficulties, but also with pragmatism and cooperation, have been changing together with domestic changes in Russia and China. Yet this partnership, visible both in border relations (elimination of long-lasting border disputes) and Eurasian cooperation (as visible in the declaration of the complementary character of the One Belt One Road and Eurasian Economic Union projects) is sometimes interpreted as a signal of Russian pragmatism. If Moscow is not able to counterbalance Beijing, it decided to join it as part of a *bandwagoning* strategy (Kaczmarek and Rodkiewicz 2016). The relative strength of states never remains constant (Kennedy 1988). It is an open question if the same strategy will, sooner or later,



be employed in the areas where both states compete, for example in Mongolia, India or Latin America.

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