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Beyond Protocol: Seventy-Six Years of Leader-to-Leader Diplomacy Between Beijing and Moscow (1949-2025)

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Abstract

This research paper provides a descriptive analysis of personal diplomacy and high-level engagements between China and Russia from 1949 to June 2025, tracing the evolution of their strategic relations against the backdrop of global geopolitical shifts. Beginning with Mao Zedong's 1949 visit to Moscow and the 1950 Treaty, the study examines how direct leader interactions, treaties, and summits shaped a resilient partnership aimed at countering Western, particularly U.S., influence. Key milestones, including the 1989 Gorbachev-Deng meeting, the 1996 Yeltsin-Jiang strategic partnership, and the 2001 Jiang-Putin Treaty, highlight transitions from ideological alliances to pragmatic cooperation. The analysis covers significant events like Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin's frequent meetings (e.g., 2013 Moscow summit, 2022 Beijing Olympics), reinforcing their "no limits" partnership amid Ukraine tensions and U.S. sanctions. Utilizing primary sources and historical narratives, the paper explores how personal rapport mitigated asymmetries, fostered economic (e.g., energy deals) and military ties, and promoted a multipolar order via SCO and BRICS. Despite challenges like trust issues and regional rivalries, these engagements have sustained a strategic alliance, adapting to modern dynamics while reflecting a legacy of anti-Western coordination, culminating in the 2025 Victory Day summit.

Keywords: China; Russia; Strategic Relations; High-Level Engagements; Personal Diplomacy; Contemporary

1. Introduction

The strategic relationship between China and Russia, spanning from 1949 to June 2025, represents a compelling case study in the role of personal diplomacy and high-level engagements in shaping international alliances. This period, marked by ideological fervor, Cold War rivalries, and contemporary geopolitical realignments, showcases how direct interactions between leaders have been instrumental in forging a partnership aimed at countering Western, particularly U.S., dominance. The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 set the stage for this evolving dynamic, with Mao Zedong's visit to Moscow initiating a communist alliance under Joseph Stalin, formalized by the 1950 Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. This early phase leveraged personal rapport to secure Soviet aid, establishing a foundation that, despite the 1960–1988 Sino-Soviet split, transitioned into a pragmatic partnership post-1989 with Mikhail Gorbachev's Beijing visit to Deng Xiaoping.

The post-Cold War era witnessed a strategic pivot, exemplified by Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin's 1996 meetings, which established a "strategic partnership of coordination" to challenge U.S. unipolarity. This trend intensified with the 2001 Treaty signed by Jiang and Vladimir Putin, shifting focus from mutual defence to economic and multilateral cooperation. The advent of Xi Jinping and Putin's leadership marked a new era, with over 45 meetings reinforcing their "no limits" partnership, notably during the 2013 Moscow summit and 2022 Beijing Olympics. These engagements have been pivotal

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in aligning their policies against Western sanctions, particularly following Russia's 2022 Ukraine invasion, and promoting initiatives like the Belt and Road and SCO.

This paper adopts a descriptive analytical approach, drawing on historical records, official statements, and media reports to chronicle these interactions. It examines how personal diplomacy—manifested through direct leader dialogues, state visits, and video calls—has mitigated historical mistrust, navigated asymmetries, and fostered economic (e.g., gas deals), military (e.g., joint drills), and cultural ties. The strategic objective has consistently been to counter U.S. hegemony, evolving from a Cold War communist front to a modern multipolar framework via SCO, BRICS, and G20 coordination.

The significance of this study lies in its timeliness, given the current date of July 22, 2025, which allows inclusion of the latest developments, such as the May 8–9, 2025, Victory Day summit. This event, omitting the “no alliance” clause, signals a deepening yet ambiguous partnership. The research addresses gaps in existing literature by providing a comprehensive timeline, analysing the impact of personal rapport on policy alignment, and assessing challenges like economic disparities and regional rivalries (e.g., Central Asia). It explores how these engagements have sustained a resilient alliance despite ideological shifts, economic dependencies, and geopolitical friction, offering insights into the durability of China-Russia ties in a unipolar-to-multipolar transition. By synthesizing primary and secondary sources, the paper aims to illuminate the mechanisms and outcomes of personal diplomacy, contributing to understandings of bilateral relations in a rapidly changing global order.

2. Detailed Analysis of Personal Diplomacy and High-Level Engagements

The China-Russia strategic relationship, from the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty to the 2025 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, was shaped by high-level visits and personal diplomacy. The 1950 treaty, signed after Mao Zedong's 1949 Moscow visit with Stalin, established a communist alliance with Soviet aid. The 1960s Sino-Soviet split under Khrushchev saw no leader exchanges, with 1969 border clashes marking hostility. Normalization began with Gorbachev's 1989 Beijing visit, where his rapport with Deng Xiaoping restored ties. In the 1990s, Jiang Zemin's Moscow visits with Yeltsin resolved border disputes, leading to the 1996 “strategic coordination” partnership. The 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, signed during Jiang-Putin summits, deepened trust, followed by 2005 joint military drills. Since 2013, Xi Jinping and Putin's over 40 meetings, including Xi's 2019 Moscow visit and Putin's 2022 Beijing trip, forged a “no limits” partnership, with Xi calling Putin his “best friend.” Putin's 2024 and Xi's 2025 visits reinforced trade (\$240 billion, 2024) and anti-Western alignment in BRICS and SCO. The detailed analysis of the high-level engagements and personal diplomacies which helps in leveraging strategic partnership between China and Russia from 1949 to June 2025 is given below: -

2.1. 1949: Mao Zedong's Visit to Moscow and Signing of Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in 1950

Mao Zedong's December 1949 visit to Moscow, his first overseas trip after the People's Republic of China's (PRC) founding on October 1, 1949, was a pivotal act of personal diplomacy and high-level engagement that laid the foundation for China-Russia strategic relations[1]. This two-month visit involved direct negotiations with Joseph Stalin to secure Soviet support against U.S.-backed Nationalists and establish a communist alliance, culminating in the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance” signed on February 14, 1950. Mao's cautious approach was evident in his three strict orders to guard Wang Dongxing—ensuring confidentiality, limiting stops, and avoiding local demands—reflecting his wariness of Soviet dominance and intent to maintain autonomy. Stalin's exceptional gestures, such as greeting Mao at the Kremlin and attending a Chinese Embassy banquet, signalled Soviet goodwill, fostering mutual trust.

The strategic objective was multifaceted: for China, the treaty secured US\$300 million in Soviet loans and technical assistance to kickstart industrialization, addressing the PRC's weak industrial base, a priority Mao emphasized since 1947. For Stalin, it extended Soviet geopolitical reach, using China as a buffer against American expansion in Asia, especially with the Korean War looming. The treaty replaced the outdated 1945 Kuomintang agreement, committing both nations to mutual defence, economic cooperation, and consultation on international issues. It mandated immediate military support against Japanese or allied aggression, particularly from the U.S., and aimed to strengthen the socialist camp by fostering economic and cultural ties, enhancing security in the Far East and global peace.

Mao's personal rapport with Stalin, supported by Premier Zhou Enlai's delegation, facilitated swift negotiations, aligning both nations against Western capitalism. The treaty emphasised on equality and non-interference formalized a united communist front, though it highlighted China's initial dependence on Soviet aid. This asymmetrical partnership allowed

Mao to gain resources for China's post-war stabilization and industrialisation, while Stalin extended influence in Asia. The commitment to consult on common interests aimed to counter U.S. containment and reshape global power dynamics during the early Cold War.

Despite its success, the engagement sowed seeds of future tension due to unequal power dynamics. Mao's cautious orders underscored his strategic intent to preserve autonomy within the alliance, while Stalin's gestures enhanced trust, enabling rapid alignment on military and economic fronts. The treaty's 30-year term established a durable, though complex, foundation for China-Russia relations, promoting friendship and economic ties while navigating ideological strains. This high-level engagement exemplified personal diplomacy, leveraging Mao and Stalin's rapport to negotiate a treaty that not only addressed immediate post-war challenges but also set the stage for long-term strategic cooperation, shaping the socialist camp's global stance[2].

2.2. 1954, 1958, and 1959: Khrushchev's Visits to China

Khrushchev's first visit to China in 1954 was greeted with a warm reception by Chairman Mao Zedong and the Chinese people. This engagement, rooted in a spirit of brotherhood, led to the signing of the "Sino-Soviet Economic Cooperation Agreement," where the Soviet Union committed to supporting 156 key industrial projects to bolster China's economic foundation and align their strategic interests. Additionally, the "Sino-Soviet Joint Communiqué" and "Friendship Declaration" were issued, coordinating international affairs and reinforcing socialist unity, with the strategic intent to counter U.S. imperialism on a global stage[3]. Khrushchev's 1958 visit to Beijing occurred amidst the Taiwan Strait crisis, initiated by China's shelling of Kinmen and Matsu on August 23, 1958, as a bold move to reclaim Taiwan and counter U.S. interference. Initially, Khrushchev expressed support and appreciation, promising nuclear weapons assistance to back China's resolve, but this support wavered when the U.S. deployed the Seventh Fleet, threatening nuclear retaliation[4]. Khrushchev's October 1959 visit to Beijing was met with a tense atmosphere of indifference and hostility from Mao Zedong, reflecting the deepening ideological and strategic rifts between China and the Soviet Union. The engagement focused on resolving disputes over Khrushchev's advocacy for peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries, which Mao strongly opposed, adhering instead to a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist line that emphasized opposing imperialism and revisionism. Discussions also highlighted tensions over nuclear support and the Taiwan Strait, where Soviet reluctance further undermined China's confidence in the alliance. This visit culminated in the cancellation of the "Sino-Soviet Economic Cooperation Agreement" and other key pacts, signalling a formal rupture in their strategic partnership as both leaders blamed and attacked each other[5].

2.3. 1960-1988: None

1960 to 1988, no significant high-level meetings occurred between China and the Soviet Union due to the Sino-Soviet split, a major disruption in their strategic relations. The absence of meetings stemmed from ideological and geopolitical tensions. The split, triggered by disagreements over Soviet de-Stalinization and China's independent policies, led to the withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1960 and border clashes, notably at Zhenbao Island in 1969. During this period, China aligned with the U.S. against the USSR, exemplified by Nixon's 1972 Beijing visit. The lack of engagement halted military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation, nullifying the 1950 Treaty's framework. The outcome was a prolonged rift, with both nations pursuing divergent Cold War strategies.

2.4. May 15-19, 1989: Mikhail Gorbachev Visits Beijing; Meets Deng Xiaoping

Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing from May 15-19, 1989, meeting Deng Xiaoping marking a turning point in Sino-Soviet strategic relations after a 30-year rift. Amid Tiananmen Square protests, this summit aimed to normalize ties, with Gorbachev seeking to ease Cold War tensions and Deng focusing on economic stability. The meeting, overshadowed by 50,000 protesters, facilitated rapprochement, ending hostilities and restoring party-to-party relations. Gorbachev's address, "*The world has changed, and so have the nature, role and place of these relations in world politics,*" reflected a vision for cooperation, while Deng's stance, "*If we can't grow faster than the capitalist countries, then we can't show the superiority of our system,*" prioritized economic reform over political change. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, laying groundwork for future arms sales and border talks[6].

2.5. May 1991: Jiang Zemin Visits Moscow; Meets Gorbachev

Jiang Zemin's visit to Moscow on May 15, 1991, meeting Mikhail Gorbachev, significantly advancing Sino-Soviet strategic relations post-1989 rift. Marking the first Communist Party leaders' summit in 34 years, this visit, hosted with a state dinner, aimed to normalize ties amid Cold War decline. Jiang's statement, "*Normal development of Sino-Soviet relations not only meets the common aspirations and vital interests of the peoples of the two countries but also promotes peace and stability in Asia and the Pacific region and an improvement of international relations as a whole,*" underscored mutual benefits. Gorbachev echoed, "*The problems facing our two countries are similar in many respects,*" highlighting shared

modernization goals against U.S. influence. The strategic objective was to counter Western containment, culminating in a border accord on May 16, reducing troop levels, and enabling arms sales (e.g., Su-27s). This high-level engagement leveraged personal diplomacy to negotiate a border pact and arms deals, aiming to counter U.S. dominance amid the Soviet Union's economic crisis. The goal was to stabilize regional security, enhance trade, and secure military technology (e.g., space-related), with Gorbachev and Jiang aligning on reformed socialism. It sought to rebuild trust post-Tiananmen[7].

2.6. April 25, 1996: Boris Yeltsin Visits Beijing; Meets Jiang Zemin

Boris Yeltsin's visit to Beijing on April 25, 1996, meeting Jiang Zemin, arriving amid a warm welcome with a 21-gun salute at Tiananmen Square, Yeltsin's talks aimed to build on five years of warming ties, despite nationalist tensions over border disputes. Jiang's greeting, *"It's very nice weather we are having, and it is a good sign for our relations,"* signalled mutual goodwill, while Yeltsin's remark, *"the Far East was and always will be Russian. It is for us and our descendants to live here,"* reflected domestic pressures but promised eventual border resolution. This engagement aimed to counter U.S. dominance post-Cold War, with Yeltsin and Jiang negotiating agreements on energy, trade, and security to stabilize their border and enhance cooperation. The goal was to promote regional peace and economic interdependence, despite border dispute setbacks[8].

2.7. April 23, 1997: Jiang Zemin Visits Moscow; Meets Yeltsin

Boris Yeltsin's state visit to Beijing from November 9–11, 1997, meeting Jiang Zemin, significantly advancing Sino-Russian strategic relations post-Soviet normalization. Held in a *"friendly and benevolent atmosphere,"* the talks, involving Premier Li Peng and NPC Chairman Qiao Shi, reinforced a *"trusting partnership of equals designed for strategic cooperation in the 21st Century."* Jinag's statement,

"Normal development of Sino-Soviet relations not only meets the common aspirations and vital interests of the peoples of the two countries but also promotes peace and stability in Asia and the Pacific region and an improvement of international relations as a whole."[9]

This statement highlighted mutual benefits. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, with finalized eastern border demarcation and plans for western sections, alongside agreements on energy, trade, and military cooperation

2.8. November 10, 1997: Yeltsin Visits Beijing; Meets Jiang Zemin

Boris Yeltsin's third visit to Beijing on November 9–10, 1997, meeting Jiang Zemin, arriving with a rapport that allowed them to *"forgo formalities and focus on work,"* Yeltsin's talks aimed to finalize a border agreement and strengthen ties, countering U.S. influence as UN Security Council members. Yeltsin's statement, *"The border demarcation alone made it worth coming,"* highlighted the accord's significance, resolving the eastern frontier after six years, while the western border remained under negotiation. The strategic objective was to promote a non-Cold War partnership, with Xinhua noting, *"The progress of certain bilateral relations will not harm the interests of any third party. In this way, this pattern of partnerships is totally different from that during the Cold War."* This visit advanced trade to \$20 billion by 2000, signed a gas pipeline memorandum, and discussed arms sales, deepening economic and military ties[10].

2.9. July 16, 2001: Jiang Zemin and Vladimir Putin Sign Treaty in Moscow

Jiang Zemin's state visit to Moscow on July 16, 2001, meeting Vladimir Putin, signed treaty in Moscow significantly advanced Sino-Russian strategic relations. The signing of the Good Neighbourly Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation replaced the 1950 Soviet Chinese alliance, aiming to counter U.S. influence over the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) pact. Putin and Jiang's joint declaration stated, *"Russia and China stress the basic importance of the ABM treaty, which is a cornerstone of the strategic stability and the basis for reducing offensive weapons and speak out for maintaining the treaty in its current form,"* reflecting their strategic alignment against U.S. missile defence plans. The strategic objective was to promote a multipolar world, enhance nuclear non-proliferation, and boost economic ties, despite replacing the military-focused 1950 pact with a non-threatening partnership. Personal relationships, evident in their coordinated stance, fostered trust, contrasting with past rivalry, and supported arms sales (e.g., Su-27s). The outcome strengthened bilateral cooperation, though trade (\$3.8 billion) lagged behind U.S. levels (\$115 billion), highlighting economic disparities[11].

2.10. June 2, 2005: Hu Jintao and Putin Meet in Moscow; Finalize Border Agreement

Hu Jintao visited Moscow on June 2, 2005, and met Vladimir Putin during the 60th anniversary of Russia's Victory Day. As Putin's guest, Hu attended the celebration, using the sidelines to discuss bilateral ties and international issues, as Assistant Foreign Minister Li Hui noted, *"The two state leaders will discuss major international and regional issues of both*

concern and how to further bilateral ties." This meeting finalized the border agreement, resolving a 40-year dispute, enhancing trust. The strategic objective was to promote the "Sino-Russian strategic cooperation partnership," counter U.S. influence, and reinforce a multipolar world, with Li adding, *"President Hu's Russia tour is aimed at promoting the Sino-Russian strategic cooperation partnership, enhancing political mutual-trust and elaborating China's independent foreign policy of peace and its determination to seek a peaceful development."* Personal relationship evident in Hu's veteran meetings, fostering economic and military ties. The outcome strengthened regional stability and SCO cooperation[12].

2.11. March 21, 2006: Hu Jintao Visits Moscow; Meets Putin

Hu Jintao visited Moscow on March 21, 2006, and met Vladimir Putin. Marking the 10th anniversary of their strategic partnership and the 5th of the 2001 Treaty, Hu welcomed Putin's large delegation, stating, *"The fact that President Putin is heading such a big delegation to China and will attend the opening ceremony of the Year of Russia in China demonstrates that Putin highly values the Sino-Russian relations."* This visit, featuring a closed-door meeting and the Year of Russia launch, aimed to enhance mutual understanding and counter U.S. influence. Putin echoed, *"the start of the Year of Russia in China... shows that the current Russia-China relations have reached a very high level and laid a better foundation for the future development of the Russia-China relations,"* reflecting their shared goal of a multipolar order. The strategic objective was to deepen military exercises, energy cooperation, and territorial support, as Qin Gang noted, *"All in all, the current stage of the China-Russia strategic partnership has reached a very high level, and we have diverse and rich progress in our cooperation."* This high-level engagement leveraged personal diplomacy to negotiate military exercises and energy deals, aiming to counter U.S. dominance through a strengthened SCO framework[13].

2.12. March 26, 2007: Hu Jintao Visits Moscow; Meets Putin

Hu Jintao's visited Moscow on March 26, 2007, met Vladimir Putin at the opening of the 'Year of China' in Russia. Attending the Kremlin ceremony, Hu praised Russia's stability under Putin, stating, *"Headed by President Putin, Russia has witnessed political stability and fast economic growth. The Russian people are leading a better life, too,"* reflecting mutual admiration. The strategic objective was to deepen economic, cultural, and military ties, as evidenced by their call for peaceful resolutions on Iran and North Korea's nuclear issues. Putin echoed, *"The theme years will uplift the bilateral relation to a new level and serve as a foundation for the future cooperation between the two peoples,"* highlighting the event's role in fostering trust. The outcome strengthened people-to-people contacts and implemented the 2001 Treaty, with 200 cultural events planned. The goal was to promote a harmonious, multipolar world, as Hu pledged,

"China is ready to continue working with Russia to further implement the Sino-Russian Good-Neighbourly Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, deepen mutually-beneficial cooperation and strategic coordination, promote common development and contribute to the building of a harmonious world featuring lasting peace and common prosperity."[14]

2.13. May 23, 2008: Dmitry Medvedev Visits Beijing; Meets Hu Jintao

On May 23, 2008, Dmitry Medvedev visited Beijing, where he met Hu Jintao. As Medvedev's first trip as president, the talks at the Great Hall of the People celebrated 12 years of their strategic partnership, with Hu noting, *"The Sino-Russian strategic cooperative partnership, since its establishment 12 years ago, has scored fruitful results."* The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, deepening political trust through border resolutions and over 200 legal documents, while expanding trade and military cooperation. Hu's four-point proposal emphasized mutual trust, economic ties (e.g., oil, gas), cultural exchanges (e.g., Year of Russia), and multilateral coordination via the UN and SCO, aiming for a multipolar world. Medvedev affirmed, *"Russia attaches great importance to developing strategic cooperative partnership with China and is ready to work with it to push for bilateral cooperation on economy, trade, energy, high-tech, environmental protection, humanities and exchanges between localities."* Personal rapport, enhanced by Russia's earthquake aid and Olympic support, contrasted with the 1950 Treaty's ideological focus, fostering resilience[15].

2.14. 2010: Medvedev's Visit to China

Dmitry Medvedev visited China from September 26–28, 2010. This three-city tour—Dalian, Beijing, and Shanghai—followed the August 29 opening of the Russia-China oil pipeline by Putin, setting a cooperative tone. In Beijing, Medvedev met Hu Jintao, signing the *"Sino-Russian Joint Statement on Comprehensively Deepening the Strategic Partnership of Coordination,"* enhancing political and economic ties. Hu noted, *"Medvedev's visit would 'have a powerful impact on the development of Russian Chinese relations,'"* while Medvedev affirmed, *"It is Russia's diplomatic priority to develop its partnership of strategic coordination with China and will never waver."* The strategic objective was to deepen interdependence, counter U.S. influence amid Korean and China-Japan tensions, and promote multipolarity through SCO's Peace Mission 2010. The visit also advanced energy and military-technical cooperation, with deals on nuclear power and potential aircraft sales. In Shanghai's Expo, Medvedev's "Russia Day" speech highlighted future collaboration,

stating, “the exhibition was a huge festival that has brought together great numbers of people, dozens of nations, and focused on the common idea of how a city of the future will appear.” This engagement fostered trust and expanded bilateral frameworks.

The Beijing talks, supported by Hu and Medvedev’s emphasis on “core interests” and antiterrorism agreements, sought to stabilize regional security amid Korean Peninsula and China-Japan disputes, as outlined in the joint statement. The strategic objective was to diversify Russia’s energy exports—shifting from Europe to China via the Skovorodino-Daqing pipeline—and secure China’s energy needs, with Putin noting, “*This is an important project for us as we are diversifying the supply of our strategic commodity.*” Economic resilience was targeted through nuclear and trade deals, while SCO exercises and Expo participation reinforced multilateralism. Lavrov’s optimism, “*I am confident that its results will be known in the near future,*” highlighted military cooperation’s potential. However, Russia’s role as a “material supplier” and price disputes revealed asymmetries, with the goal of a comprehensive partnership driving long-term growth against a unipolar world order[16].

2.15. June 17, 2011: Hu Jintao Visits Moscow; Meets Medvedev

Hu Jintao’s state visit to Moscow on June 17, 2011, included a meeting with Dmitry Medvedev. Marking the 10th anniversary of the 2001 Treaty, the leaders signed a joint declaration pledging mutual support on core security issues, with Hu noting the treaty’s role in regional peace, stating, “*The strategic partnership has been a key factor in the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.*” The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, opposing missile defence plans and advocating non-interference in global hotspots like the Korean Peninsula and Middle East. The declaration, issued during a “critical time” amid Middle East unrest, per Ji Zhiye, aimed to build a multipolar order through SCO and Six-Party Talks coordination. The goal was to foster a multipolar, stable regional order, as Feng Yujun noted, “It’s important for China and Russia, two major nations in Eurasia, to enhance cooperation in promoting peace and stability in the region,” moving beyond the 1950 Treaty’s mutual defence framework. It sought to deepen military and economic ties, though U.S. interference in Asia-Pacific posed challenges[17].

2.16. June 5, 2012: Hu Jintao Visits Moscow; Meets Putin

Hu Jintao visited Moscow on June 5, 2012, and met Vladimir Putin. Marking Putin’s first Beijing visit post-inauguration, the talks aimed to counter U.S. influence by setting a \$200 billion trade target by 2020, up from \$83.5 billion, as Hu stated, “*through closer co-operation China and Russia would set the global political and economic order in a more fair and rational direction.*” The strategic objective was to balance U.S. relations, with over a dozen cooperation agreements, including a joint aircraft venture and the Russia-China Investment Fund for timber and logistics. Putin’s article in *People’s Daily*, “*Without the participation of Russia and China, without considering Russia and China’s interests, no international matter or issue can be discussed and implemented,*” underscored their global stance, notably opposing Western intervention in Syria. Personal rapport, evident in Putin’s visit priority, contrasted with historical distrust, fostering economic ties despite a delayed gas deal. The outcome strengthened their multipolar agenda, though analysts like Dmitri Trenin noted no true alliance due to lingering suspicions[18].

2.17. March 22, 2013: Xi Jinping Visits Moscow; Meets Putin

Xi Jinping visited Moscow on March 22–24, 2013 and met Vladimir Putin amid U.S. and Japanese concerns. As Xi’s first overseas trip as president, the summit aimed to counter Western influence, with the leaders forming an “all around strategic partnership” to meld their interests. The strategic objective was to challenge U.S. hegemony and the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” with Xi and Putin explicitly affirming support for each other’s territorial claims, including the Diaoyu Islands and Southern Kuriles. This personal rapport, exceeding expectations, contrasted with the 1950 Treaty’s mutual defence focus, fostering trust. The outcome strengthened their anti-American alignment, alarming Tokyo and highlighting U.S. policy setbacks, with over 45 future meetings planned. Personal diplomacy navigated global tensions, laying a foundation for a potential geopolitical alliance[19].

2.18. February 7, 2014: Xi Jinping Attends Sochi Olympics; Meets Putin

Xi Jinping attended the Sochi Winter Olympics opening on February 7, 2014, and met Vladimir Putin. As the first Chinese leader to attend a major overseas sports event, Xi’s presence, invited by Putin, underscored China’s support amid Western boycotts over Crimea, with the leaders holding their first 2014 meeting. Hu noted, “*It shows that China highly values and supports the international Olympic Games, as well as the high level and distinctiveness of China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination.*” The strategic objective was to deepen their partnership through shared Olympic spirit and planning future relations. It reinforced economic and military ties, supporting China’s 2022 Olympic bid, while Putin’s record delegation signalled growing cooperation[20].

2.19. May 20, 2014: Putin Visits Shanghai; Meets Xi Jinping

Vladimir Putin visited Shanghai on May 20–21, 2014, marking his seventh meeting with Xi Jinping since 2013, and the visit resulted in the landmark signing of a 30-year, US\$400 billion gas supply contract by Gazprom and CNPC, alongside a 20-year LNG deal by Novatek, underscoring deep economic ties. Putin's remark, *"This is an important project for us as we are diversifying the supply of our strategic commodity. Until now most supplies were made to Europe ... and this is a noticeable competition to the European route,"* highlighted the strategic pivot toward China, reducing reliance on European markets. The joint naval exercise 'Maritime Cooperation-2014,' attended by both leaders, further solidified military trust, countering U.S. influence. The overarching goal was to challenge U.S. hegemony, secure alternative markets, and foster a polycentric world order, as reflected in their joint declaration to "renounce 'the language of unilateral sanctions.'" However, Beijing's restrained support on Ukraine and Russia's emerging role as a junior partner exposed underlying asymmetries. Putin's emphasis on personal rapport, a key element of his China policy, helped mitigate conflict risks while aligning efforts on multilateral platforms like the SCO, though economic cooperation beyond energy yielded limited results. Yet, the summit's modest non-energy outcomes and China's growing leverage in Central Asia underscored Russia's junior status. This long-term collaboration, driven by the polycentric order goal, relied on personal ties to navigate backstage contentious issues, reflecting a pragmatic yet asymmetrical partnership[21].

2.20. May 8, 2015: Xi Jinping Attends Moscow Victory Day; Meets Putin

Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow's Victory Day from May 8–10, 2015, significantly boosting China-Russia strategic relations against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis and Western sanctions. Arriving after a stop in Kazakhstan, Xi attended the 70th anniversary WWII parade, engaging in talks with Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, and meeting war veterans, which highlighted their shared historical narrative. This visit built on Putin's 2014 gas deal, with expectations of a joint statement to enhance their partnership, focusing on energy, aerospace, and cyber cooperation, including a potential western-route gas supply and a Russia-China military helicopter project. Xi's words, *"China and Russia are each other's most important strategic partners. Our relationship is special and significant,"* captured their deepening alignment. The Moscow visit aimed to strengthen China-Russia ties to counter U.S. and Japanese influence, support Russia's economy under sanctions, and promote a multipolar world order. Joint naval exercises and UN Security Council coordination reinforced this partnership. Despite China's neutrality on Ukraine and Central Asian competition, personal diplomacy facilitated expanded energy and investment deals to ease Russia's economic strain and diversify into Asian markets. Xi's parade attendance symbolized historical solidarity, while cyber and military agreements challenged Western dominance. As Dmitri Trenin noted, the closer "entente" reflects their strategic partnership, though Russia's heavy reliance on energy exports remains a challenge[22].

2.21. June 25, 2016: Putin Visits Beijing; Meets Xi Jinping

Vladimir Putin visited Beijing on June 25, 2016, and met Xi Jinping. The talks sealed energy deals, including Rosneft's sale of a 40% stake in VNHK to ChemChina and a 2.4 million-tonne oil contract, with Putin emphasizing economic ties, stating, *"We will stick to the volumes we have agreed on. It is around 40 million tonnes (per year)."* The strategic objective was to counter U.S. and NATO influence, strengthening global strategic stability by opposing missile defences, as the Kremlin statement urged nations to *"strictly abide by the norms of international law, keep military capabilities at the minimum level required for national security and refrain from steps aimed at expanding existing military-political alliances."* This visit enhanced economic interdependence and military alignment, supporting North Korea talks, despite Western criticism[23].

2.22. July 4, 2017: Xi Jinping Visits Moscow; Meets Putin

Xi Jinping's two-day state visit to Moscow on July 4, 2017, to meet Vladimir Putin significantly advanced Sino-Russian strategic relations amid U.S. policy shifts. Xi declared relations at their "best time in history," stating, "Russia and China were each other's 'most trustworthy strategic partners,'" reflecting their close personal friendship. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, with \$10 billion in agreements, including the Russia-China RMB Cooperation Fund for OBOR and Eurasian Union projects, and a \$882.35 million VEB-CDB deal for blockchain innovations. Personal rapport, evident in their joint stance against THAAD, with Xi noting, *"the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) in South Korea 'seriously undermines the strategic security interests of China,'"* fostered trust. The outcome strengthened economic and security ties, opposing U.S. missile defences and North Korea exercises, despite Central Asian tensions[24].

2.23. June 8, 2018: Xi Jinping Visits Qingdao; Meets Putin at SCO Summit

Marking Putin's first state visit post-re-election, Xi awarded him China's Friendship Medal, stating, "China-Russia partnership is a paradigm for today's state-to-state relations, and coordination between the two countries serves as a

key factor in maintaining the world's strategic balance and stability." The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, deepening their "comprehensive strategic partnership" through SCO coordination, Belt and Road-Eurasian Union alignment, and anti-terrorism cooperation. The outcome reinforced economic ties, military interoperability, and a joint stance against U.S. sanctions and Iran deal withdrawal, promoting a multipolar order[25].

2.24. June 5, 2019: Putin's visit to Beijing; Meets Xi

Vladimir Putin's visit to Beijing on June 5, 2019, to meet Xi Jinping underscored China's support for Russia during its Ukraine conflict, strengthening their informal alliance against the U.S. and democratic nations. The visit coincided with the 10th anniversary of Xi's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with Putin praising it in a CCTV interview, stating, "Yes, we see that some people consider it an attempt by the People's Republic of China to put someone under its thumb, but we see otherwise, we just see desire for cooperation." This highlighted their economic alignment, linking BRI with Russia's Central Asian initiatives. The strategic aim was to counter Western influence, with Putin and Xi discussing enhanced economic ties in energy, high-tech, and finance, as Alexander Gabuev noted, "For Russia, China is its lifeline, economic lifeline in its brutal repression against Ukraine." Military cooperation grew, focusing on interoperability and Arctic joint efforts, though not a full alliance. This high-level engagement harnessed personal diplomacy to negotiate BRI integration and economic support, aiming to mitigate Russia's sanction pressures from the Ukraine war by tapping China's market for raw materials and technology. The goal was to challenge U.S. dominance, with Xi's backing offering a counterweight, though tempered by China's balanced approach to Israel-Hamas dynamics. The model emphasized mutual benefit, as Gabuev highlighted, "Russia is a safe neighbour that is friendly, that is a source of cheap raw materials," fostering a pragmatic partnership[26].

2.25. 2020: Xi-Putin Video Summit

The video summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin on June 28, 2020, bolstered China-Russia strategic relations amid global tensions and U.S. policy challenges. Announced by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, this second meeting within six weeks—following the May 19 groundbreaking for the Tianwan and Xudapu nuclear projects—coincided with the 20th anniversary of the 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation. The Kremlin noted the leaders would review bilateral ties and international issues, with Yang Jin stating, "The signing of the Russia-China Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation is symbolic in the development of the China-Russia relationship." The strategic objective was to enhance mutual trust, counter U.S. containment, and promote a multipolar order, especially as Putin remarked in an NBC interview, "we have developed a strategic partnership relationship - between Russia and China that previously had not been achieved in the history of our nations, a high level of - trust and cooperation in all areas." This personal relationship reinforced by five phone calls since March 2020, deepened energy and space collaboration.

The intent behind this June 28, 2020, online meeting, where "The two heads of state will give full review of China-Russia relations and cooperation in various fields this year," and "make top-level designs for the development of bilateral relations next year," drove their strategic alignment. This high-level engagement leveraged personal diplomacy to counter U.S.-led Western pressure, including sanctions and NATO tensions, with Xi and Putin aiming to elevate their partnership ahead of the CPC's centennial and the treaty's anniversary. The goal was to foster an "all-dimensional and all-weather" relationship, as Zhao Lijian affirmed, "The sky is the limit for down-to-earth China-Russia cooperation," enhancing economic resilience through nuclear and high-tech projects. It sought to project stability amid the COVID-19 pandemic and EU sanctions, though China's balancing act on Ukraine and Russia's reliance on Beijing revealed limits. Personal trust navigated these challenges, targeting a resilient, multipolar framework, with the CPC-Soviet historical ties adding symbolic weight to their coordination[27].

2.26. February 4, 2022: Xi Jinping and Putin Meet at Beijing Winter Olympics

Putin's visit to Beijing on February 4, 2022, significantly advancing China-Russia strategic relations ahead of the Winter Olympics. Meeting Xi Jinping, the two leaders issued a joint statement opposing NATO expansion and affirming Taiwan as part of China, countering U.S. pressure amid Ukraine tensions. Xi's remark, "This is a strategic decision that has far-reaching influence on China, Russia and the world," highlighted their commitment to "deepening back-to-back strategic cooperation" against Western interference. Putin praised their "unprecedented" ties, noting a new gas contract for 10 billion cubic meters annually, stating, "For our meeting today, our oilmen have prepared very good new solutions for the supply of hydrocarbons to the People's Republic of China, and another step forward has been taken in the gas industry." The goal was to project a united front, with Xi and Putin opposing "the further expansion of NATO" and supporting each other's security concerns, as Wang Yi echoed to Blinken. It sought to bolster Russia's economy against sanctions and enhance China's global security role, though Beijing's balancing act with the West limited full endorsement. However,

regional rivalries and U.S. arms support to Taiwan posed challenges, with personal trust navigating these tensions to deepen their partnership against a unipolar framework[28].

2.27. February 24, 2022: Wang Yi and Sergei Lavrov Phone Call

Wang Yi's phone call with Sergei Lavrov on February 24, 2022, significantly advancing Sino-Russian strategic relations as Russia invaded Ukraine. Marking the conflict's onset, Lavrov outlined Russia's position, stating, "*the US and NATO violated their commitments by continuously expanding toward the east, refusing to implement the new Minsk Agreement, and violated the UN Security Council Resolution 2202,*" justifying Russia's actions. Wang responded, "*China always respects other countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity,*" while acknowledging Russia's security concerns, reflecting mutual understanding. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. and NATO influence, with Wang advocating, "*China advocates that the Cold War mentality should be completely abandoned, and a balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism should eventually be formed through dialogue and negotiations.*" This legacy of engagement shaped the "no limits" partnership, using BRICS and SCO to challenge U.S. dominance, reflecting a resilient alliance built on strategic dialogue and mutual support, with their stance on European security underpinning post-2022 cooperation[29].

2.28. February 25, 2022: Xi Jinping and Putin Phone Call

Chinese President Xi Jinping's phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 25, 2022, addressed bilateral issues. Conducted amid global tension, Xi's statement on CCTV, "*China supports Russia and Ukraine to resolve the issue through negotiation,*" reflected a balanced stance while supporting Russia against U.S. and allied provocation. The strategic objective was to counter Western influence, with China denouncing sanctions and blaming the U.S. for escalating the crisis, reinforcing their "no limits" partnership. This strengthened anti-Western alignment, positioning China as a mediator while deepening economic and political ties with Moscow, despite most Asian nations backing Ukraine[30].

2.29. March 29, 2022: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet in Beijing

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing on March 29, 2022. As Lavrov's first non-Ukraine-related trip since the war began, Wang declared, "China-Russia relations have withstood the test of the changing international situation, ensured the right direction and demonstrated a strong momentum of development," signalling resilience against Western pressure. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. dominance, reinforcing their February 4, 2022, "limitless friendship" pledge by promoting a multipolar order and opposing hegemony, as Lavrov noted, "*actively promote the process of multi-polarisation.*" This high-level engagement aiming to counter U.S. and NATO influence amid sanctions during Ukraine War. The goal was to promote a multipolar world, with Wang's call, "*In the long run, we should learn the lessons of the Ukraine crisis, respond to the legitimate security concerns of all parties based on the principles of mutual respect and indivisibility of security,*" seeking a Europe without U.S. dominance[31].

2.30. July 7, 2022: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet at G20 in Bali

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Bali on July 7, 2022, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Held before the G20 ministerial meeting, Wang and Lavrov's bilateral talks, where Lavrov stated, "*Both parties underlined the unacceptable nature of unilateral sanctions adopted by circumventing the UN,*" reinforced their anti-Western stance. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. and Western isolation efforts, with Beijing maintaining friendly ties despite global criticism, supporting Moscow's "denazify" narrative. This visit strengthened their "no limits" partnership, aligning against unilateral sanctions, though Blinken's avoidance of Lavrov highlighted tensions. It sought to bolster Russia's position, though China's neutrality and Blinken's stance posed challenges[32].

2.31. July 29, 2022: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet at SCO Summit in Tashkent

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the SCO Summit in Tashkent on July 29, 2022. Wang emphasized, "*Faced with the arduous task of development and stability, we must uphold the Shanghai Spirit,*" highlighting their commitment to mutual trust and common development within the SCO. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, promoting a multipolar world through solidarity, security, and sustainable development, as outlined in Wang's five-point proposal. Personal rapport, evident in their coordinated stance against Western interference and support for China's Belt and Road. The SCO members reaffirming mutual trust and planning a Development Bank, enhancing economic and cultural ties. The goal was to foster a multipolar order, opposing "the false narrative of 'democracy against authoritarianism'" and enhancing SCO's role. It sought to boost trade and security,

though regional challenges like Afghanistan posed hurdles. Personal rapport facilitated these talks, targeting stability and Global South solidarity via SCO[33].

2.32. August 16, 2022: Wei Fenghe Attends Moscow Security Conference Virtually

Wei Fenghe's virtual participation in the Moscow Security Conference on August 16, 2022, addressing the Russian-hosted event, Wei stated,

"The Chinese military is ready to work with the militaries of various countries to practice the Global Security Initiative, deepen defence and security cooperation, promote the settlement of hotspot issues, build a security pattern featuring fairness and justice contributed and shared jointly by nations, and build a solid and firm security barrier."

The strategic objective was to counter U.S. influence, aligning with Russia against Taiwan interference and Western hegemony, as Wei condemned Nancy Pelosi's visit[34].

2.33. September 15, 2022: Xi Jinping and Putin Meet at SCO Summit in Samarkand

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the SCO Summit in Samarkand on September 15, 2022, amid tensions over Ukraine. Calling Putin his "old friend," Xi stated, *"China is willing to work with Russia to play a leading role in demonstrating the responsibility of major powers, and to instil stability and positive energy into a world in disarray,"* reflecting their shared vision. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. and Western influence, with Putin appreciating China's balanced Ukraine stance, though their rapport masked an unequal dynamic due to Russia's reliance on China. Personal trust, evident in their "without limits" pledge, contrasted with the 1950 Treaty's ideological focus. The outcome leveraging Vostok 2022 drills and economic ties, despite Putin's military setbacks[35].

2.34. October 27, 2022: Wei Fenghe and Sergei Shoigu Phone Call

Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe held a phone call with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on October 27, 2022. Addressing mutual concerns, as Col. Tan Kefei noted, the call aimed to counter U.S. and NATO influence, with Shoigu sharing Russia's *"concern about 'possible Ukrainian provocations involving a dirty bomb,'"* aligning with their "no limits" friendship pledged by Xi Jinping and Putin. The strategic objective was to bolster anti-Western coordination, with China tacitly backing Russia while avoiding direct involvement. Personal rapport, reinforced by Putin's congratulatory message to Xi, fostered trust. The outcome strengthened their partnership[36].

2.35. October 27, 2022: Wang Yi and Lavrov Phone Call

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a phone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on October 27, 2022. Wang highlighted Putin's congratulatory message to Xi, stating, *"the fact that President Vladimir Putin sent a congratulatory message to General Secretary Xi Jinping right after the 20th CPC National Congress has reflected the high-level mutual trust and firm mutual support between China and Russia."* The strategic objective was to counter Western influence, with China supporting Russia's development goals and deepening their "no limits" partnership post-Xi's re-election. Lavrov's warm congratulations and commitment to multilateral cooperation, fostered trust and strengthened anti-Western alignment, enhancing exchanges, and stability efforts[37].

2.36. November 15, 2022: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet at G20 Summit

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the G20 Summit on November 15, 2022. Wang praised Russia's stance, stating, *"China noticed that Russia has recently reaffirmed the established position that 'a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,' which shows Russia's rational and responsible attitude,"* reflecting mutual support against Western pressure. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. and NATO influence, with China refusing to label the war an invasion and Xi urging dialogue with Russia, deepening their "no-limits partnership." Personal rapport, evident in Wang's call to *"work with Russia to push forward their high-level exchanges and communication in various fields, deepen bilateral practical cooperation and facilitate personnel exchanges,"*. The outcome reinforced supporting Russia's Black Sea deal and nuclear restraint[38].

2.37. March 20–22, 2023: Xi Jinping Visits Moscow; Meets Putin

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Moscow from March 20–22, 2023, for three days. Meeting Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, the two leaders, self-described "friends," highlighted their close rapport through a state visit, culminating in over a dozen agreements on trade, technology, and propaganda, as listed by the Kremlin. Xi's parting words, *"Together, we should push forward these changes that have not happened for 100 years. Take care,"* during a handshake, underscored their vision for a new world order. The strategic objective was to counter U.S.-led influence, with their joint statement

promoting a “multipolar world” and urging the U.S. to “stop undermining international and regional security.” Military trust deepened through joint drills, while economic ties expanded, with Putin noting readiness to support Chinese businesses replacing Western ones, including the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline. Despite no Ukraine resolution, personal rapport aligned their policies against NATO, though China’s balancing act with Europe and Japan’s support for Ukraine highlighted limits. Xi and Putin pledging to “deepen” their relationship and oppose NATO’s expansion, as reflected in their call to “respect the sovereignty, security, interests” of others. Xi’s reluctance to engage Zelensky and Europe’s backlash posed challenges. The model emphasized mutual support in energy and defence, with Putin’s “unprecedented” ties remark highlighting economic reliance. Personal trust navigated these tensions, targeting a resilient partnership, despite regional rivalries and the cost to China’s other relations[39].

2.38. October 16–18, 2023: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet in Beijing; Putin Attends Belt and Road Forum

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Beijing from October 16–18, 2023 and met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Coinciding with the Third Belt and Road Forum’s 10th anniversary, Lavrov’s presence laid groundwork for Vladimir Putin’s potential attendance, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov noting, “*the agenda of Putin’s visit to the Asian neighbour would include the discussion of issues that are already clear and that ‘are quite voluminous,’ such as bilateral trade, economic cooperation and the global and regional situations.*” The strategic objective was to enhance economic and geopolitical alignment via infrastructure projects. The outcome strengthened their partnership, with confirmed attendees like UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres signalling global outreach, despite Putin’s ICC warrant complicating his travel[40].

2.39. April 8–9 2024: Wang Yi-Lavrov Meeting in Beijing

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Beijing from April 8–9, 2024. Meeting Wang Yi, Lavrov aimed to highlight diplomatic ties, discussing Ukraine and Asia-Pacific issues, aligning their stances against NATO and democracies. This visit, coinciding with Janet Yellen’s talks, saw Wang assert, “*China has an objective and fair position on the Ukraine issue,*” and “*China is not a creator or party to the Ukraine crisis, and we have not and will not do anything to profit from it,*” reflecting China’s balancing act. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. pressure, with Mao Ning adding, “*relevant countries should not smear and attack the normal state-to-state relations between China and Russia ... let alone shift the blame onto China and provoke bloc confrontation.*” With Sun Weidong noting ties are “*at their best in history.*” Despite no arms support, their alignment aimed to influence developing nations and promote peace talks. It sought to enhance Russia’s isolation buffer through trade and military drills, though China’s peace advocacy and non-interference stance balanced Western relations[41].

2.40. May 16–17, 2024: Putin Visits Beijing and Harbin; Meets Xi Jinping

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Beijing and Harbin from May 16–17, 2024 and met with Chinese President Xi Jinping. As his fourth meeting since Russia’s 2022 invasion, Putin’s focus on trade, stating, “*the ‘inseparable’ partnership between the two countries acts as a guarantor of energy security,*” highlighted economic ties, reinforced by laying flowers at a Soviet memorial. The strategic objective was to counter U.S. pressure, deepening their partnership despite criticism of China’s peace proposals, with Xi noting, “*Beijing and Moscow agreed there should be a ‘political solution’ to the Russia-Ukraine war.*”[42]

2.41. September 10, 2024: Wang Yi and Sergei Shoigu Meet at BRICS Summit in St. Petersburg

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu at the BRICS Summit in St. Petersburg on September 10, 2024, amid global shifts. Marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, Wang emphasized, “*the stable and healthy development of China-Russia relations is fundamentally due to the guidance of the two countries’ heads of state,*” highlighting the role of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. The strategic objective was to enrich their “comprehensive strategic cooperation” through BRICS and SCO coordination, including the “six-point consensus” on Ukraine. The outcome strengthened anti-Western alignment, with China supporting Russia’s BRICS chairmanship and Russia backing China’s SCO role, promoting a multipolar order for the “Global South.” The goal was to deepen mutual trust and cooperation, as Wang noted, “*China is willing to strengthen strategic communication with Russia, give full play to the role of the China-Russia strategic security consultation mechanism.*”[43]

2.42. October 22, 2024: Li Qiang and Mikhail Mishustin Meet at SCO Summit in Islamabad

Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin at the SCO Summit in Islamabad on October 22, 2024. Held as Russia’s Ukraine war persisted and U.S.-China relations soured over territorial and human rights issues, the leaders reaffirmed their commitment, with the SCO joint statement noting, “*to further develop cooperation in the spheres of politics and security, trade, economy, finance and investment, and cultural and humanitarian*

ties in order to build a peaceful, safe, prosperous and ecologically clean planet Earth to achieve harmonious coexistence of man and nature." The strategic objective was to counter Western influence, supporting China's One Belt, One Road initiative and pledging "to cooperate on climate change and overcome its negative consequences." [44]

2.43. November 15, 2024: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet at APEC Summit in Lima, Peru

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the APEC Summit in Lima on November 15, 2024. Marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, Wang highlighted, "*President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin made a strategic plan for the development of bilateral relations in the next stage,*" reflecting their leadership's guidance. The strategic objective deepens their "comprehensive strategic coordination" through BRICS, SCO, and G20, while planning WWII and UN 80th anniversary commemorations. Lavrov noted, "*Russia-China relations have always been based on the principles of equality, mutual benefit and win-win, which are in line with the interests of the two peoples and are supported by Global South countries,*" reinforcing economic and security ties. The outcome strengthened their multipolar agenda, supporting Russia's BRICS chairmanship and China's SCO presidency. Wang stated, "*China is willing to work with Russia to further strengthen cooperation and alignment.*" Personal understanding facilitated these talks, targeting stability and Global South solidarity [45].

2.44. January 21, 2025: Xi Jinping and Putin Hold Video Call

Chinese President Xi Jinping's video call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 21, 2025, significantly advanced Sino-Russian strategic relations amid Trump's inauguration and U.S. threats. Held hours after Trump's tougher stance on tariffs and Ukraine, the leaders praised their growing partnership, with Putin stating, "*Russia and China's joint efforts play an important stabilizing role in international affairs,*" highlighting their anti-Western alignment. Xi echoed, "*Both sides should continue to deepen strategic coordination, resolutely support each other and safeguard the legitimate interests of both countries,*" aiming to elevate ties to "new heights." The strategic objective was to strengthen military and trade ties despite China's neutrality on Ukraine. Xi calling Putin his "best friend" and Putin describing Xi as a "reliable partner," fostered trust [46].

2.45. February 20, 2025: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet at G20 Summit in Johannesburg

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the G20 Summit in Johannesburg on February 20, 2025. Wang highlighted, "*President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping charted the course for Russia-China relations and strategic coordination,*" reflecting their leadership's guidance. Deepening their "comprehensive strategic partnership" through BRICS, SCO, and G20, while commemorating the 80th anniversary of WWII and the UN's founding. Personal bond evident in their commitment to Xi and Putin's consensus. Lavrov affirmed, "*Russia attaches great importance to China's objective and just position, and the 'Friends for Peace' group China initiated with Brazil and other countries,*" reinforcing economic and security ties. The outcome strengthened their multipolar agenda, supporting Global South interests and peace talks on Ukraine [47].

2.46. February 28, 2025: Sergei Shoigu Visits Beijing; Meets Xi Jinping and Wei Fenghe

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu visited Beijing on February 28, 2025, and met with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi highlighted their "time-tested ironclad friendship," noting, "*he and President Vladimir Putin have communicated twice this year, making overarching plans for the development of China-Russia relations and having in-depth exchanges on a series of major international and regional issues,*" reflecting their leadership's role. Shoigu conveying Putin's "cordial greetings" and affirming, "*Russia-China relations are at an unprecedented high level and do not target any third party,*" fostered trust between China and Russia. The goal was to promote a multipolar order, as Xi urged, "*continue to strengthen coordination in international and regional affairs.*" This engagement's legacy shaped the "no limits" partnership, using BRICS and SCO to challenge U.S. hegemony, reflecting a resilient alliance built on strategic planning and historical friendship, with Shoigu's visit reinforcing their commitment to a fair global order [48].

2.47. April 1, 2025: Wang Yi and Lavrov Meet in Moscow

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Moscow from April 1-3, 2025 and met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Wang emphasized,

"China is ready to work with Russia to shoulder its special responsibility as a UN Security Council permanent member, remove interference, stick to the right path, safeguard the outcome of World War II victory, international fairness and justice, move the world toward multipolarity and democracy in international relations,"

reflecting their shared vision. Lavrov noting, *“Russia and China should work closely together to inject stability into the nowadays complex world.”* Personal understanding, built on a “time-honoured tradition of good-neighbourliness,” and strengthened anti-Western alignment, enhancing cultural exchanges, SCO/BRICS coordination, and peace efforts on Ukraine via the “Friends of Peace” platform[49].

2.48. May 8–9, 2025: Xi Jinping Visits Moscow for Victory Day; Meets Putin

The Xi Jinping’s visit to Moscow on May 8–9, 2025, as the guest of honour at Putin’s Victory Day parade marking the 80th anniversary of the Nazi defeat, showcased personal diplomacy and high-level engagement, significantly enhancing China-Russia strategic relations amid global pressures. This 11th visit, with over 45 meetings, featured seven hours of talks, symbolizing their close rapport, despite the Trump administration’s return and U.S. tariffs. The May 8 agreement, omitting the “no alliance” clause unlike past “Three Noes” formulations, stated their partnership had “unique strategic value,” echoed in China’s May 12 White Paper: *“China-Russia relations have strong endogenous driving force and unique strategic value. They are non-confrontational and not directed against any third party, and are not affected by any third party, nor are they interfered with or coerced by external parties.”* The strategic objective was to counter U.S. “hegemonism and neocolonial thinking,” reinforced by detailed security critiques and military trust through joint drills. Economic ties deepened with Power of Siberia 2 discussions, though unresolved, and wildlife protection agreements. Despite no Ukraine breakthrough, personal control, as Putin noted, *“we are keeping and will continue to keep all aspects of the Russian-Chinese partnership under constant personal control,”* aimed to ensure resilience, though analysts like Zhou Bo warned, *“China and Russia are like two lines in parallel, that is, however close they are, they won’t meet to become an alliance.”*

This high-level engagement leveraged personal diplomacy to negotiate economic and security cooperation, aiming to resist U.S. pressure and NATO expansion, with Xi and Putin’s rapport highlighting resilience against tariffs and Ukraine war demands. The goal was to foster a multipolar order, critiquing Western alliances while deepening military and energy ties, though China’s South China Sea stance and Mongolia’s hesitance on Power of Siberia 2 revealed limits. It sought to project stability, with personal oversight ensuring adaptability, as Xi highlighted historical friendship. However, analysts noted friction points—economic shifts, North Korea differences, and regime longevity—challenging the partnership’s depth. Personal trust navigated these tensions, targeting a durable, ambiguous alliance against a unipolar framework, with a September Beijing meeting anticipated[50].

3. Conclusion

The evolution of China-Russia strategic relations from 1949 to June 2025, as analysed through personal diplomacy and high-level engagements, underscores a resilient partnership forged to counter Western, particularly U.S., influence across diverse geopolitical landscapes. This study reveals how direct leader interactions have been the linchpin in transforming an initial ideological alliance into a pragmatic, multipolar-oriented collaboration. Beginning with Mao Zedong’s 1949 Moscow visit and the 1950 Treaty, personal rapport with Stalin secured critical Soviet aid, laying a foundation despite the 1960–1988 split. The 1989 Gorbachev-Deng summit marked a turning point, shifting from enmity to cooperation, while post-1991 engagements under Yeltsin and Jiang, culminating in the 1996 and 2001 Treaties, established a strategic partnership focused on economic and security coordination.

The Xi-Putin era, with over 45 meetings, exemplified this evolution’s maturity. Key events like the 2013 Moscow summit, 2022 Beijing Olympics, and the 2025 Victory Day summit highlight a “no limits” partnership, reinforced by energy deals (e.g., \$400 billion gas contract), military drills (e.g., Vostok 2022), and multilateral platforms like SCO and BRICS. These engagements have effectively countered U.S. sanctions, NATO expansion, and Taiwan tensions, promoting a multipolar order. Personal diplomacy mitigated historical mistrust—evident in Xi calling Putin his “best friend”—and navigated asymmetries, such as Russia’s reliance on China post-Ukraine, fostering economic interdependence and strategic trust.

However, challenges persist. Economic disparities, regional rivalries (e.g., Central Asia), and differing stances on Ukraine reveal limits to their alliance. China’s hedging against sanctions and Russia’s military setbacks, as noted by analysts like Alexander Gabuev, underscore an unequal dynamic, yet their shared anti-Western stance sustains cooperation. The omission of the “no alliance” clause in 2025 suggests strategic ambiguity, balancing autonomy with interdependence, a lesson from the 1960 split’s ideological pitfalls.

This partnership’s legacy is a model of state-to-state relations, influencing global governance by challenging U.S. hegemony through SCO, BRICS, and Belt and Road. The 2025 Victory Day summit, with its focus on historical solidarity and economic resilience, signals a durable alliance adaptable to Trump’s second-term pressures. Future research could explore the impact of leadership transitions or climate cooperation, but current trends suggest China-Russia will

continue leveraging personal diplomacy to navigate a multipolar world, maintaining strategic coordination against Western dominance while managing internal tensions. This analysis affirms their alliance's resilience, shaped by personal trust and high-level foresight, as a cornerstone of 21st-century geopolitics.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Rajinder Singh serves as a Senior Research Scholar in the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies at Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India. He completed his Bachelor of Science in Non-Medical studies at DAV College, Malout, which is affiliated with Panjab University, Chandigarh, in 2018. Subsequently, he earned a Master of Arts in Defence and Strategic Studies from Punjabi University, Patiala, in 2020. Currently, he is pursuing his Ph.D. under the guidance of Dr. Kamal Kinger (Professor) and Dr. Harsangeet Pal Kaur (Assistant Professor) in the same department, since 2021. His research interests encompass International Relations, the strategic dynamics among China, Pakistan, and Russia, as well as Contemporary Global Affairs.

