

China-Russia Dichotomy: Cooperation or Confrontation on Global Issues? Forthcoming Talks between Putin and Xi regarding Ukraine Peace Plan?

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Global Research, March 15, 2023

Region: [Asia](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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As geopolitical confrontation intensifies between the United States and Europe on one side and China and Russia on the other, it has increasingly become tight for offering much information publicly. And of course, that would be the case especially with Russia facing criticisms for its 'special military operation' in the neighbouring Ukraine. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kremlin administration have been extremely cautious the least on leaders visiting Moscow.

Local Russian media have reported that the Kremlin would not comment on the agenda of possible talks between Presidents Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping until their meeting is officially announced. "I don't know. Once we make an announcement, we will be able to say something," Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told TASS this March 14, when asked if Putin and Xi could discuss China's plan to resolve the situation in Ukraine.

"We haven't made any announcements (about the Chinese president's visit). Every contact between the two leaders is an additional impetus for stepping up cooperation on a variety of tracks," Peskov pointed out, adding that the two sides usually announced such visits simultaneously.

Moscow and Beijing have established friendly relations based on partnership and intend to develop them further collaboratively against the collective West.

"The Russian-Chinese dialogue continues. It is of a friendly, partnership-based, strategic nature. It will remain on course. The relationship is multidimensional, and it is important for both sides. And both sides devote significant attention to the theme of developing this relationship further," Peskov said.

Nevertheless, the main news-stream are all awash with the forthcoming visit, various analysis and presumptive expectations. The Chinese media have earlier followed up to splash the news over their media space and global foreign media, and that Xi Jinping intended to visit Moscow for a meeting with Putin as early as next week.

Our media monitoring, for instance, shows that the two leaders last met in person on the sidelines of a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in the Uzbek city of Samarkand in September 2022. In late December, Putin held a video conference call with Xi Jinping, inviting him to make a state visit to Moscow in the spring of 2023.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported that China's Xi expected to make symbolic visit to Russia, and that comes off, soon after he was awarded a third term to lead China during the 14th National People's Congress. Over the years, Xi Jinping has performed excellently, transforming the internal economy and prominently put his Asian country on the global stage. In addition, he consolidated the Chinese economic presence or footprints around the world. China is considered as an emerging global leader.

However, just like in any other country, authorities in China do not discuss everything openly and they sometimes allow leaks. These include a Reuters report saying that Xi will visit Russia next week. His visit will take place sooner than expected, and the news is important, for it is China who proposed a peace plan for Ukraine. Since Beijing has been providing diplomatic support to Moscow, the West was skeptical about the peace plan.

Scientific Director of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of China and Contemporary Asia Alexander Lukin told Nezavisimaya Gazeta that visits are paid every year, but that they were postponed during the pandemic. "Now, it's the Chinese leader's turn to visit Russia. This is fine. Of course, the international situation has changed. I think, they will discuss this as well as the political and economic cooperation which has been growing by leaps and bounds in price terms. Often, new contracts get signed and new gas or oil pipeline projects are approved during such visits," Lukin said.

"Over the past decade, China has seen a significant consolidation of power in the hands of Xi Jinping, and the Communist Party's supremacy over the state and society has also become more apparent," Deputy Director of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of World Economy and International Relations Alexander Lomanov told Kommersant. According to him, the next decade will be a difficult one for China, given that the old economic development model is exhausted, with cheap labor and free resources no longer available, while the external environment - relations with the US and its allies - is getting more and more toxic.

"In this situation, the old structure of power, which involved fighting factions and looked like collective leadership from the outside, has lost its usefulness as it does not allow decisions to be made quickly when responding to threats and challenges. In contrast, Xi Jinping's current model of government is aimed at ensuring stability amid internal and external difficulties. Hopes for the liberalization of this model may emerge only when China is confident that the hardest times are behind it," Lomanov concluded.

The likelihood that the United States and China will continue consistently engaging in a direct confrontation is quite high, political scientist Vladimir Kireyev told Izvestia. According to him, some predicted back in the early 2000s that as China's economic and hence political

influence in the world increased, the country would “inevitably start collapsing the US-centric system” by the simple fact of its existence.

“These forecasts were made in the US political, expert and military communities. In the mid-2010s, this understanding drove (44th US President Barack) Obama and then (45th US President Donald) Trump to adopt a policy to contain China, which reflects real US interests aimed at preserving its global dominance,” the political scientist pointed out, added that economic tensions were invariably pushing political elites in both countries towards a confrontation, in one form or another.

According to the analyst, Washington has started to realize that it “wasted too much time,” because the best moment to contain China was ten years ago. However, the Americans’ focus was on Russia back then, Kireyev stressed.

“Now, the probability that the US and China will come to a direct conflict is quite high. It is the US that is provoking the situation as the window of opportunities to cause serious damage to China is closing. China is trying to postpone the conflict as much as possible and even avoid it altogether. The reason is that taking into consideration economic development, in 10 to 15 years, China will be much stronger than the US and the Chinese won’t need to engage in a conflict to protect their interests,” the expert concluded.

In spite of the arguments and debates on various important global issues involving China and Russia, however, the South China Morning Post said that Russia’s special military operation has harmed China’s national interests. What is of the most common interest and concern relates the emerging new configuration, multipolar system which should necessarily work to find suitable solution to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis. China has called for cooperation while Russia adopts more confrontation approach.

Our monitor shows that majority of global leaders, researchers and analysts has already lifted their up for China’s expected muscular role, efforts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. Under its headline “White House hails possibility of Xi Jinping speaking with Ukrainian president Zelensky” published March 14, South China Morning Post wrote that a senior White House official has praised a reported plan by Chinese President Xi Jinping to speak with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and confirmed US President Joe Biden’s “willingness” to schedule a talk with the Chinese leader.

“We have been encouraging President Xi to reach out to President Zelensky because we believe that the PRC and President Xi himself should hear directly the Ukrainian perspective and not just the Russian perspective on this,” National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.

Sullivan was referring to a Wall Street Journal report which, citing people familiar with the plan, said that Xi would make the call after visiting Moscow next week. Beijing’s recent engagements with Moscow, including a trip there by its top diplomat last month, have prompted US and other Western governments to accuse the Chinese government of siding with Russia in the war, which has dragged on for more than a year.

A 12-point peace proposal Beijing offered on the war’s one-year anniversary did little to change that assessment, partly because it did not call on the Kremlin to withdraw its forces. Reports that Xi would visit Moscow soon have thrown more doubt on Beijing’s claims to be

impartial. Sullivan cast some doubt on the Xi-Zelensky call plan when he added that Kyiv officials were not able to confirm the report.

For the discussions here, it is necessary to consider carefully here, in the context the China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) that could play important role in resolving the Russia-Ukraine crisis and many others around the world. In the first place, China prominently places "cooperation" as the key component in its foreign policy, as oppose to Russia that is confrontational and yet talk about multipolar - in fact 'multipolar' in its basic sense means inclusive and integrated approach to global developments including conflict resolutions.

According to the concept, the Global Security Initiative aims at eliminating the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and changing era, and promote durable peace and development in the world.

The concept is guided by six commitments or pillars, which are

- (i) pursuing common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security;
- (ii) respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries;
- (iii) adhering to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter;
- (iv) taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously;
- (v) peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation; and
- (vi) maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains.

Gleaning from these core principles, it's safe to say that the GSI could and probably would become a catalyst for the world to chart a new path to building sustainable peace, stability and development. The Global Security Initiative (GSI) was first proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference on April 21, 2022.

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