

Chapter 7

Sino–Russian relations in the 'post'-Putin era

Yu Bin

Introduction: guns and games of August

August 2008 was quite eventful for Russia and China, as well as for their bilateral relations. Against all the odds (pro-Tibet protests and the devastating Sichuan earthquake in the second quarter), the twenty-ninth summer Olympic Games in Beijing opened and concluded with extravagant ceremonies and a record 51 gold medals for the host country. Shortly before the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics on 8 August, Georgia's attacks against South Ossetia and Abkhazia—two separatist regions of Georgia—led to a massive military response from Russia, a five-day war and Russia's recognition of the independence of the two disputed regions. Thus, the August guns and games brought the two strategic partners—China and Russia—back to the world stage, though through separate paths and with lasting geo-strategic implications for themselves and the rest of the world. One consequence of the Georgian–Russian war is that China's 'neutrality' is widely seen as a crisis in China's strategic relations with Russia.

For many in the West, China's cautious neutrality is a departure from, if not a betrayal of, its strategic partnership with Russia. China's 'strategic ambiguity' regarding the Georgian–Russian conflict has been the focus of the media and pundits ('China cannot back Russia in Georgia crisis: analysts', *AFP*, 28 August 2008, <<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5guAa5jCMIWCy-SMYWZY4-0451p5w>>; Pronina and Alison 2008; Manthorpe 2008). Many observers tend to highlight the differences and conflicts of interest between China and Russia. China's move is seen as an effort to maximise its interests while Russia is going through difficult times with the West. China's own problem with Taiwan is perhaps one major reason why China cannot publicly support Russia on the South Ossetian issue (Hua 2008b). Most Central Asian states are also said to have reservations about Russia's policy due to the large number of ethnic Russians living in this 'near abroad' area and their cautious neutrality also shows the growing influence of China in this sphere of traditional Russian influence. These apparent differences between Russia and its Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) partners are indications, accordingly, of the fragility of this regional security group, and of the fact that many of its members simply dream different

dreams while sleeping in the same 'bed' as Moscow (Hua 2008a). Georgia also lost no time thanking China for not taking sides in its most recent conflict with Russia (Hua 2008c).

This interpretation of reactions to the war in Georgia misreads the current state of the Sino–Russian relationship and lacks adequate understanding of its depth, breadth and complexity. As a result, the Western perception of the Beijing–Moscow relationship has swung from one of 'threat' against the West before the South Ossetian crisis, to the current premature celebration of the relationship's demise. Neither view is correct: both focus on the superficial and discount more substantive considerations.

This misperception of the Sino–Russian relationship took shape when the world was overwhelmed by dynamics and disorder in the second half of 2008. In East Asia, Pyongyang was finally on a path to de-nuclearisation after repeated threats to reverse this process; Japanese politics continued to fluctuate as Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda was replaced by Taro Aso, who was far more hawkish than his predecessor on Japan's militarist past; and, coming on top of the successful Beijing Olympics, a 'taikonaut' from the People's Republic of China conducted that country's first space walk. Beyond East Asia and in addition to the US–Russian confrontation over South Ossetia, America's war on terror remained open-ended (now being conducted in the three separate theatres of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan) six years after the Bush Doctrine of pre-emption made its debut. Moreover, the financial tsunami—originating in the United States—left no nation untouched and heightened the sense of a world far less secure than before. As Americans voted to put the first black president in the White House, the world's strongest power was losing influence among its friends and foes.

The nature and dynamics of the Moscow–Beijing strategic partnership, therefore, need to be comprehended within the broader context of a rapidly changing region and world. Specifically, this chapter will examine the Sino–Russian relationship by asking the following questions: what have been the patterns and trajectory of the Sino–Russian relationship since the normalisation of relations 20 years ago (in 1989)? How do the features of the current bilateral relationship compare with those in earlier periods? What are the prospects for Russian–Sino relations under Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, and his 'copilot', Vladimir Putin? What are the areas of bilateral relations where cooperation outweighs competition? How will this relationship adapt to the ever-changing domestic and international environment? One could go on to ask how 'strategic' the current 'strategic partnership' really is. How and why did China opt for a posture of 'strategic ambiguity' over the conflict between Russia and the West? At the operational level, how will Moscow and Beijing continue and improve this 'best ever' relationship?

For this purpose, among others, this study begins with an overview of bilateral relations in the past 30 years. This is followed by an analysis of the nature of the two countries' 'strategic partnership'. With this in mind, recent developments in their bilateral ties will be examined, including Medvedev's May 2008 visit to Beijing, China–Russia interactions during and after the recent Russian–Georgian war, and their implications for relations between Russia and China.

Putin's eight years and beyond

By the end of Putin's presidency in March 2008, Sino-Russian relations had experienced almost two decades of stability since the historic normalisation of relations in 1989.¹ Few people at the time expected that the two countries would be able to live normally with one another for such a sustained period in the wake of three decades of intense rivalry across political, economic and military areas.

Under Putin, Russia and China managed to deepen and broaden their strategic partnership. As a result, bilateral relations have been transformed from the worst security nightmare to one of common strategic vision for regional and global stability; from a position of ideological rivalry within the communist world to coexistence between the two largest states on the Eurasian continent, with entirely different cultural and political systems; from an absence of any meaningful economic intercourse to rising trade relations (worth \$48.2 billion in 2007); and from sharing the longest fortified border to a relationship of stability and flourishing economic interaction. In the past decade of their strategic partnership, the two continental powers have been taking joint action on various multilateral issues—including the United Nations, the SCO and the North Korean and Iranian nuclear talks—promoting a 'fair and rational world order' based on sovereignty, equality, dialogue and a new international security mechanism ('China–Russia joint statement regarding the international order of the 21st century', *Xinhua*, 1 July 2005).

About the time of the Russian presidential election in March 2008, 'continuity' was the buzzword for Russian domestic and foreign policies. Beijing, too, expected continuity for its bilateral relations and Chinese leaders were eager to invite Medvedev for an official visit as soon as the dust of the presidential election settled.

How strategic are Sino-Russian relations?

There has been, of late, a proliferation of so-called 'strategic' relationships among nation-states. China and Russia, for example, apply it to interstate relations vital for their national interests.² Such a relationship essentially means that the two sides attach great importance to their bilateral ties and share a strong willingness to commit to the enhancement of these ties. At the operational and functional

level, it is largely a pragmatic approach to interact with one another on the basis of equality and with considerable freedom of action. According to Chinese analyst Cao Xin (2007), Beijing and Moscow conduct 'strategic coordination without alliance and [a] close relationship without excessive dependence'. A strategic partnership with these qualities is perhaps the result of the long and sometimes painful learning experience in the second half of the twentieth century: bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing oscillated between excessive dependence (particularly of China on Russia) and almost no interaction. What is essential for today's Russian–Sino relationship is the absence of ideological factors and border disputes, which constantly besieged the two nations until the early 1990s. Moreover, there is a willingness to develop the more cooperative aspects of their relationship while managing issues of disagreement and competition.

In contrast, in the West, the term 'strategic relationship' is usually reserved for relations between members of a formal 'alliance', within which junior members are expected to come to a consensus with the leading state (the United States). Deviation from Washington's view is possible, but not encouraged. A typical case of this is the United States' fury over French and German opposition to its 2003 Iraq invasion, hence the famous dichotomy enunciated by Donald Rumsfeld of the 'Old' versus the 'New' Europe ('Outrage at "old Europe" remarks', *BBC*, 23 January 2003, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2687403.stm>>). Regarding China, Washington has resisted characterising the relationship as 'strategic'. Instead, the United States insisted that a de facto 'strategic dialogue' between the two nations at the deputy foreign minister level, on 1–2 August 2005 in Beijing, was 'senior dialogue'.³

Regardless of the official pronouncement of their relationship as being the 'best ever', or the more cautious depiction of it as a 'marriage of convenience', the Sino–Russian strategic partnership since 1996 has essentially been a normal and stable relationship. This is substantially different to their highly volatile relations during the 'honeymoon' period (1949–60) and the period of hostility (1960–89), when problems and disagreements were either ignored or allowed to explode.

By no means should the Sino–Russian strategic relationship be idealised. At the operational level, it is a complex interactive process with elements of cooperation and competition at all levels and across all issues. Given the huge differences in their political, cultural, religious and socioeconomic developmental levels, the fact that the two countries' often have different perceptions of the same issue is natural if not desirable.

The complexities of their strategic relationship also mean that Moscow and Beijing are interrelated through a multidimensional (political, diplomatic, economic, security, societal, and so on) and multilevel (top leaders, governmental agencies and ordinary people) interface thanks to the broadening, deepening and institutionalisation of bilateral relations since normalisation in 1989. Within

this web of interactions, policymaking and implementation may or may not lead to desirable outcomes. High-level trust and strategic cooperation, for example, might not preclude economic competition. Growing economic transactions frequently lead to more friction. Meanwhile, ordinary citizens do not know, let alone like, each other.

To a certain extent, the current strategic partnership between Beijing and Moscow may or may not be a reliable barometer for the future. For one thing, the current state of bilateral relations developed and was enhanced at a time when Russia was weak and disoriented after the disintegration of the Soviet empire. Now Russia is on its way back—not necessarily to the levels it attained as the core of the USSR, but to its traditional status as a major power on the Eurasian continent. China will—perhaps more than anyone else—have to deal with and adjust to such a changing reality.

It is within this context of their strategic partnership—featuring pragmatism, normalcy and complexity—that post-Putin era Sino-Russian relations are examined below.

The ordinariness and extraordinariness of Medvedev's visit

Perhaps more than anything else, President Medvedev's state visit to China on 23–24 May 2008 underscored the three 'Ss' for the two nations: strategic partnership, its stability and sustainability. It also means that Moscow and Beijing have managed to achieve policy stability and continuity through three leadership transitions: Boris Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev for Russia; Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao for China.

No matter how presidential Medvedev's appearance in Beijing was, his summit with his Chinese counterpart was considerably discounted in the West as routine, unsubstantial⁴ and, of course, taking place in Putin's ubiquitous shadow (Erlanger 2008). This parallels a new trend in the West's Russia bashing, which has moved from mystifying Putin's 'soul' (Ignatius 2007) to minimising and even mocking his successor. The growing conflicts of interest between Russia and China—real or perceived—over various issues such as trade, energy, military sales, and so on, are also said to be eroding the strategic quality of relations between the two Eurasian giants (Marcus 2008; 'Chinese media reports only good things about Russia's president visit', VOA, 29 May 2008, <www.6park.com/news/messages/83390.html>).

While such assessments might touch on some of the technicalities of Moscow–Beijing ties, they nonetheless miss some important aspects of the evolving, deepening and broadening relations between the two largest nations on the Eurasian continent.

Perhaps more than anything else, Medvedev's two-day visit to China was to reaffirm the continuity and stability of Russia's China policy under the new

president, with or without Putin's influence. In the past eight years, China gained considerable experience working with Putin when Medvedev served as head of Putin's 2000 presidential election campaign headquarters, as presidential chief of staff (2003–05) and as Deputy Prime Minister (2005–08). This time, the Chinese side would have taken a closer look at Medvedev as Russian President and at how he and Putin coordinated policies towards Beijing. In the longer run, Medvedev will have to put his own stamp on how to approach China and certain policy adjustments might be unavoidable. In the meantime, China wants to avoid surprises.⁵ This is why China took the initiative to invite Medvedev as soon as he was officially elected Russian President in March.⁶

It so happened that China was Medvedev's first foreign visit outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); he was also the first foreign head of state to visit China after the Sichuan earthquake. The Russian military mounted the largest international relief effort in its history (Hongjian et al. 2008) when it sent a rescue team, which was among the first to arrive in the quake area, and was the only foreign search team to find any survivors. Once in China, Medvedev authorised additional assistance (eight cargo planes carrying 250 tonnes of goods) (Hongjian 2008; 'Medvedev orders more humanitarian aid to quake-stricken China', *Itar-Tass*, 24 May 2008). Before leaving China, Medvedev also suggested that Russia would host summer camps for dozens of Chinese children who had suffered as a result of the devastating earthquake ('Summer camps in Sverdlovsk region to receive Chinese children', *Itar-Tass*, 29 May 2008; 'Chinese children from quake-hit Sichuan to rehabilitate in Kemerovo', *Itar-Tass*, 7 June 2008). The real number of Chinese children going to Russia, however, quickly snowballed to more than 1000 as various Russian resort campuses competed to host Chinese children ('Russian President's representative visits students from China's quake-hit Sichuan Province', *Xinhua*, 26 July 2008).⁷ The 'ordinariness' of Medvedev's first official visit to China as president assumed some degree of extraordinariness.

Medvedev's choice of China as the destination for his first foreign visit should not be overrated. It was, however, a quite different decision compared with Medvedev's two predecessors. In 2000, Putin chose Britain for his first foreign tour, despite the Kremlin's announcement shortly after Yeltsin's resignation that Beijing would be the first trip abroad for Putin and after China's repeated invitations in early 2000. In time, however, Putin became increasingly interested in the 'Euro-Asian dimension' (Palata 2008), which was quite different from the first few months of his presidency, when he toyed with the 'hypothetical' idea of Russia joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and when he 'confessed' to the visiting US Secretary of State his 'European essence' and his Asian superficiality (practicing judo and eating Chinese food) (Bin 2000).

Medvedev's explicit '*Ostpolitik*' at the onset of his presidency was also the opposite of Yeltsin, who was obsessed with Western-style political democratisation and economic 'shock therapy'. Before his sudden exit from power at the end of 1999, Yeltsin chose Beijing to remind the West of Russia's huge nuclear arsenal, in a manner more in keeping with 'a recidivist Soviet premier' (Wines 1999). In between, the father of the Russian Federation became progressively more disillusioned with the West.

Medvedev's '*Westpolitik*' through Beijing

Medvedev's visit occurred at a time when Moscow and Beijing were facing growing challenges from the West: for Russia, a new round of NATO expansion and missile defence; for China, mounting protectionism in the West and surging energy prices—not to mention Tibet and the Olympics. This led to the Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation on Major International Issues, signed by the two heads of states. The 11-point declaration stressed common perceptions and preferences between Moscow and Beijing, ranging from the crucial role of the United Nations in peace, development, security and counter-terrorism to the need for a more equal, fair and multipolar world, concerns about missile defence and space weaponisation, cooperation on environmental protection and energy, negotiations and dialogue for regional issues such as the North Korean nuclear crisis, Iran, Sudan, and so on ('Full text of joint statement of the PRC and the Russian Federation on major international issues', *People's Daily*, 23 May 2008, <<http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/7290647.html>>).

At the policy level, Beijing and Moscow have worked closely in creating a soft landing for regional crises such as North Korea and Iran; they co-sponsored a proposal in Geneva in February 2008 for an international treaty to ban weapon deployment in outer space; extended their eighth round of foreign ministerial meetings with India to a four-party dialogue including Brazil in May 2008; and vetoed a British-sponsored UN Security Council bill to apply sanctions against Zimbabwe in July 2008 ('China and Russia vetoed UNSC draft to sanction Zimbabwe, US and UK expressed disbelief', *Jiefang Net*, 12 July 2008, cited from <www.6park.com/news/messages/87718.html>).

Not everything was synchronised between Moscow and Beijing. By the end of Putin's presidency, Russia's reaction to NATO expansion and missile defence in Europe led to a series of confrontational responses from Russia, including the resumption of Russia's strategic bombers' routine patrols and military posturing in several 'near abroad' areas. Beijing shares Russia's concerns but might not want to see further deepening of the Russia–West breach to the point that it has to take sides (Hongfeng 2008). For the same reason, Beijing seems happy to see the SCO remain as it is—that is, a community of nations working for regional stability and economic development rather than an explicit counterforce to

NATO or the United States. Such a view also seems to be the consensus of most, if not all, of the other members and observers of the SCO. Short of a steep deterioration in the regional security situation, SCO members need to maintain working relations with Washington and the West, as much as they need each other. This could explain why the SCO's annual foreign ministerial meeting on 25 July in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, continued to uphold a moratorium regarding Iran's full SCO membership ('Shanghai ministerial session ends in Tajikistan', *Asia-Plus* [Online], 25 July 2008).

It appears that the more Russia wants to be identified with the West, the less likely it is that this will happen. Yeltsin and Putin tried to plant Russia fully inside Western civilisation, only to be dismayed by persistent Western policies ranging from NATO expansion and its stance on Kosovo, to missile defence and the 'colour revolutions'. At the end of their presidencies, both resorted to some high-profile strategic posturing, although Yeltsin's nuclear roar was somewhat hollow.

Medvedev's China trip should perhaps be understood in light of Russia's unrequited affection for the West. Medvedev was also widely believed to be 'liberal' and 'pro-West' before his presidency. This perception of Medvedev contrasted sharply with the image of Putin, who rose through the ranks of the KGB before the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the goals of Medvedev's China 'detour' was, therefore, to promote Russia's '*Westpolitik*'. Indeed, 10 days after his visit to China, Medvedev was in Berlin unveiling his grand blueprint for a Euro-Atlantic community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Within this community, Russia and Europe would share common roots, history, values and thinking (Medvedev 2008). A month later, the Russian President again tossed around the same 'Medvedev doctrine' at the G8 summit in Japan. On the same day, however, the United States and the Czech Republic signed a missile defence agreement—to the dismay of Moscow (Gearan 2008). As a result of the five-day war over South Ossetia, the new Russian President did not even have a honeymoon period with the West—unlike his predecessor, Putin, in whose eyes US President, George W. Bush, saw the soul of the former KGB colonel.

China's 'old friend' and new challenges

Russia's enduring identity as a Eurasian power is its strength as well as its burden. Such a dichotomy could cast limits on its relations—as friend or foe—with the West and the East. After nearly 60 years of relations with the former Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation, Chinese analysts seem to understand this well (Hongfeng 2008; Haiyun 2008).

Within the realm of feasibility, however, China has lost no time in stretching Medvedev's Orientalist temptation. Indeed, Medvedev, the new and young

Russian President, is perhaps quite unusual in that he became popular in China long before his Beijing summit in May 2008, thanks to his co-chairmanship of China's 'Russia Year' (2006) and Russia's 'China Year' (2007). The Russian President is described as China's 'old friend', despite his (relatively) young age and youthful appearance. As part of the China Year activities, Medvedev, then Vice-Prime Minister, even spent an hour and a half with Chinese 'netizens' (Internet surfers) from Moscow in February 2007. No top Chinese leader has ever done that with either Chinese or Russians. In the eyes of many Chinese, the young Russian President is indeed quite different from his predecessor in his familiarity and comfort with Chinese culture. Many times, including during his talk at Beijing University, Medvedev demonstrated his knowledge and appreciation of Chinese culture and philosophy ('Medvedev meets Chinese students, says he loves Chinese philosophy, culture', *Itar-Tass*, 24 May 2008). Putin, in comparison, is more interested in Chinese kung-fu ('"I've seen genuine Shaolin Kong Fu," Putin', *People's Daily* [Online], 24 March 2006).

Partly because of the two 'national years', mutual understanding between ordinary Chinese and Russians has improved. A national survey by the Russian Public Opinion Study Center in April 2008, a month before China's earthquake, showed that ordinary Russians believed that China was the country with which Russia had the best relations.⁸ Separately, a poll in several major Chinese cities conducted by the Chinese Public Opinion Study Institute in Beijing for the same period indicated that more than 80 per cent of Chinese believed relations between Russia and China were very good ('Over 80 percent of Chinese believe relations with Russia very good', *Itar-Tass*, 16 May 2008).

These more positive mutual perceptions are occurring at a time when Russia and China are faced with several major bottlenecks in their bilateral relations. Under President Putin, frequent high-level interactions did not lead to tangible economic gains. In 1994, former President Yeltsin tossed around the idea of building an oil pipeline to China. To date, the world's emerging manufacturing giant (China) and its energy superpower neighbour (Russia) are still talking. Meanwhile, Russia is perhaps one of the few developed nations that benefits from current high energy prices. Ironically, Russia's declining manufacturing capability and reluctance to become China's 'raw material supplier' have led, at least partially, to its first trade deficit with China (\$8 billion in 2007) since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Even the once thriving Russian military sales to China have come to a standstill. Perhaps the time has passed for China to purchase from Russia large quantities of air and naval armaments based largely on Soviet research and development—unless Moscow is willing to elevate China to the level of India in military sales and technology transfer (Haiyun 2008). Without large-scale military sales to China, the 'trade structural problem'—meaning Russia as a raw

material supplier to China—might not be easily resolved given the growing structural difference between China's manufacturing capability and Russia's raw material-based recovery.

These issues or bottlenecks, among others, are far from desirable for Russia and China, though none of them has spilled over to other issues or become politicised thanks to the thickening of the web of connections and institutionalisation of various governmental contacts. Their existence and deepening, however, are not in the interests of Russia or China. Working on these issues with China requires patience, perceptiveness and pragmatism. Medvedev's presidency seems to provide an opportunity for that.

South Ossetia and its fallout

In the early morning of 8 August 2008, when Medvedev was on vacation (Stanovaya 2008)⁹ and Putin was in Beijing to attend the twenty-ninth Olympic Games, Georgia launched a military offensive to surround and capture Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. The Georgian assault started with a preparatory artillery attack from Georgian positions with fire support, including from notoriously imprecise truck-mounted multiple-barrelled rocket launchers (the LAR-160 rocket system, which fires 160mm unguided rockets). In the 14 hours before Russia's intervention, 1700 people were killed, including 12 Russian peace-keepers, and many parts of the region were devastated, according to Russia's account (Wang 2008). Prime Minister Putin blamed Washington for Georgia's war: 'If what I presume turns out [to be] true, then there is a suspicion that there are forces in Washington that deliberately fueled the tensions in order to create an advantage to one of the presidential challengers' ('Allies let him down—Moscow', *Kommersant.com*, 29 August 2008). After Georgian forces entered South Ossetia and initially seized the capital, Tskhinvali, in an attempt to subdue the separatist region, Russian forces responded—belatedly and awkwardly—with an overwhelming show of force. Although Russia eventually established air superiority, it did not achieve this until some unexpected losses of its ground-support jet-bombers and a Tu-22M3 strategic bomber, which should not even have been used in such limited warfare.¹⁰ In five days, the war was over and Russian forces were in control, first of South Ossetia and then Abkhazia, plus the Georgian port city of Poti (Giragosian 2008; Stepanov 2008). On 12 August, President Medvedev and French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, reached a six-point plan for a cease-fire. This was followed by a visit by US Vice-President, Richard Cheney, to Tbilisi on 2–3 September and US\$1 billion in economic assistance to Georgia ('Cheney attacks "illegitimate" Russian invasion on visit to Georgia, US vice-president holds talks with Georgian president, raising "grave doubts" about Russia's reliability as international partner', *The Guardian*, 4 September 2008, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/04/>

georgia.russia>). A Russian–American confrontation loomed large on the horizon in the Caucasus.

Putin, who was in Beijing for the Olympics opening ceremony, immediately informed the Chinese side of the situation in his meeting with Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, on 8 August ('Russian PM Putin informs Chinese counterpart of situation in South Ossetia', *Vesti TV*, 8 August 2008). China's reaction to Georgia's assault, according to Putin, was that 'nobody needs the war', which was also US President Bush's reaction ('Russia: Putin says China, US against war in South Ossetia "unleashed by Georgia"', *Itar-Tass*, 8 August 2008). Meanwhile, China expressed serious concern about the escalated tensions and armed conflict in South Ossetia, and urged all sides to exercise restraint, institute an immediate cease-fire and resolve their dispute peacefully through dialogue ('Foreign Ministry spokesman: China urges various parties in the South Ossetia conflict to cease fire immediately', *Xinhua*, 9 August 2008). Beijing did not publicly and explicitly support Moscow.

A Chinese source pointed to a dilemma in that 'Russia and Georgia are countries with which China maintains diplomatic relations and friendly ties, hence it should hold a very cautious stance so as not to damage these relations' ('Chinese leader calls for ceasefire in South Ossetia', *Interfax*, 11 August 2008). What the sources did not say was that Washington, too, was part of this list of 'friendly' nations with whom China did not want to jeopardise relations. Strategic ambiguity, if not neutrality, is perhaps the only rational stance for Beijing. Moreover, Washington had been Tbilisi's strongest supporter. A more cautious approach to the still evolving situation was therefore entirely understandable.

There were some exceptions to China's carefully balanced posture of evenhandedness. One was China's decision to send \$1 million in humanitarian aid to South Ossetia, for which the Russians publicly expressed appreciation ('China to send humanitarian aid to South Ossetia', *Itar-Tass*, 22 August 2008). Meanwhile, China's official ambiguity contrasted sharply with the critical views of Georgia and the United States in China's Internet chat rooms, including those run by official media outlets ('PRC netizens criticize US over Georgia's action in South Ossetia', China–OSC Summary, 15 August 2008, *Foreign Broadcasting Information Service*).

Six days after the Russian troops halted their military offensive on 12 August, the Russian Security Council Secretary, Nikolai Patrushev, arrived in Beijing for a 'working visit'. The situation in the Caucasus was discussed in his one-hour, closed-door meeting with his Chinese counterpart, State Councilor Dai Bingguo. Very little about this meeting has been disclosed to date ('Russian official meets Chinese state councilor, hails high-level Olympics', *Interfax*, 18 August 2008; <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/18/content_9490099.htm>). Two days after the end of the Beijing Olympics and two days before the SCO's annual

summit in Tajikistan, President Medvedev declared that Moscow recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Beijing's immediate reaction came in a news release by the official Xinhua News Agency, citing the negative reactions from various Western countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden and Germany). Towards the end of the story, this Xinhua news 'round-up' noted that 'the two regions broke from central Georgian rule during wars in the early 1990s after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, but their self-proclaimed independence is not recognized internationally' ('Some Western nations slam Russia's recognition of Georgian breakaway regions', *Xinhua Roundup*, 26 August 2008).

China did not immediately react to Moscow's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with good reason: President Hu and President Medvedev were to meet the next day in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, before the opening of the SCO's eighth annual summit. During the meeting, Medvedev briefed Hu on the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and on Russia's stance. Hu said in this meeting that the Chinese side had noted the latest changes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and hoped that the relevant parties would resolve the problems appropriately through dialogue and consultation. A Chinese media report noted that Hu had also told Medvedev:

At present, [the] China–Russia strategic cooperative partnership maintains a good development impetus. Not long ago, both sides exchanged in-depth views on major issues related to China–Russia energy negotiating mechanism and energy cooperation [sic], and *conducted explorations on the operation of the China–Russia strategic security consultation mechanism and the third round of consultations*. The smooth operation of the aforesaid two mechanisms and other mechanisms between the two countries will increase both sides' political mutual trust, strengthen the two countries' strategic cooperation, and play an important role in upgrading the level of [the] China–Russia strategic cooperative partnership. (Lei et al. 2008, emphasis added)

It is unclear exactly how the two sides 'explored' the 'operation of the China–Russia strategic security consultation mechanism'. The Patrushev–Dai talks on 18 August 2008 in Beijing did look like a 'strategic security consultation', but the Chinese media never referred to the meeting as 'the third round of consultations'. What was clear from the Hu–Medvedev meeting in Dushanbe was the lack of unambiguous Chinese public support for Moscow's policies towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

According to Chinese sources, the Russian Foreign Ministry presented a revised proposal for the Dushanbe Declaration, requesting that a statement be included on joint action on security and conflict-prevention issues, but China did not agree to the proposal ('HK commentator lauds PRC handling of SCO

“embarrassment” over Georgia conflict, Chang Ching-wei: artfully defusing embarrassment of SCO summit meeting’, *Ta Kung Pao* [Online], 11 September 2008). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang reiterated China’s official position on 28 August that ‘China assumes a principled position on analogous issues: all problems need to be resolved through dialogue and consultations’ (‘China confirms difference with Russia on Abkhazia, S. Ossetia independence updated version, amending tagging and precedence’, *Interfax*, 28 August 2008). As a result, the Dushanbe Declaration essentially adopted a similar posture of ‘neutrality’ as its third clause states:

The member states of the SCO express their deep concern in connection with the recent tension around the issue of South Ossetia, and call on the relevant parties to resolve existing problems in a peaceful way through dialogue, to make efforts for reconciliation and facilitation of negotiations.

The same document reiterates:

In the 21st century interdependence of states has grown sharply, security and development are becoming inseparable. None of the modern international problems can be settled by force, the role of force [as a] factor in global and regional politics is diminishing objectively. Reliance on a solution based solely on the use of force faces no prospects, it hinders comprehensive settlement of local conflicts; effective resolution of existing problems can be possible only with due regard for the interests of all parties, through their involvement in a process of negotiations, not through isolation. Attempts to strengthen one’s own security to the prejudice of [the] security of others do not assist the maintenance of global security and stability.

The participants of the Dushanbe meeting underline the need to respect historical and cultural traditions of every state and every people and the efforts aimed to preserve in accordance to international law unity and territorial integrity of states as well as to encourage good-neighbourly relations among peoples and their common development.

Aside from these familiar principles, the Dushanbe Declaration does contain a somewhat more comforting statement for Russia regarding the Georgian conflict: ‘The member states of the SCO welcome the approval on 12 August 2008 in Moscow of the six principles of settling the conflict in South Ossetia, and support the active role of Russia in promoting peace and cooperation in the region’ (Dushanbe Declaration of Heads of SCO Member States, 28 August 2008, <http://www.sectSCO.org/news_detail.asp?id=2360&LanguageID=2>).

Russia’s story

The SCO’s position, along with that of China, was a disappointment for Russia, despite the effort of Russian leaders to explain it away. *Gazeta*, a Moscow-based daily, believed that

the SCO has given Russia exactly the amount of support that corresponds to their interests in the international arena, without hurting their relationship with the United States and the European countries and without *seriously offending* Moscow. The joint declaration the SCO members adopted at the summit in Dushanbe on 28 August is a classic example of the art of diplomacy. (Shermatova 2008, emphasis added)

Separately, some Russian analysts equated the wording of the Dushanbe Declaration with the statements of many EU members after the Medvedev–Sarkozy plan was signed.

The SCO's apparent neutrality was, nonetheless, not necessarily a surprise for Moscow. Two days before the SCO summit, Russian analysts predicted such an outcome regarding China and the SCO's policies of neutrality. Political analyst Vyacheslav Nikonov argued that Russia should not expect China's support on this issue: 'China has domestic problems. This is not only Taiwan but also Xinjiang Uyghur Region and Tibet. This problem will be a barrier to approving Russia's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia.' For the same reason, 'Russia cannot count on 100-percent support from SCO but [the] understanding of a considerable number of its members, or perhaps even all, is quite feasible. But there will be no formal support,' he said (Interview with *Interfax*, 26 August 2008).

Despite this lack of support, as well as lack of criticism, regarding Russia's policies, a source in the Russian delegation to Dushanbe revealed that the SCO leaders verbally expressed their approval of Moscow's line. Still, in its final declaration, the SCO supported the principle of territorial integrity and opposed the use of force in interstate relations. Before the summit, President Hu was quoted as saying that he 'understood the Russian position', but explained that 'we'll be unable to officially side with Moscow'. Later, the Kazakh President was quoted apologising for having failed to support Moscow due to different reasons.

To explain the discrepancies between the SCO's informal and formal positions, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, in his press conference after the summit, said that 'Russia didn't seek to persuade its partners to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia'. 'Unlike certain Western partners, we prefer that every country should make [up] its mind with[out] any external pressure,' Lavrov said. Moscow knew about American envoys' visits to other states, during which they 'told them what to say regarding the problem'. 'Such sort of boorishness is not inherent in our political tradition,' the Russian minister told journalists. In his address, Medvedev was said to have even thanked his colleagues 'for the understanding and the unbiased assessment of Russia's peacekeeping role' ('Allies let him down—Moscow', *Kommersant.com*, 29 August 2008). A week after this, the Russian Ambassador to Beijing again expressed his 'appreciation' for China's

'understanding' of Russia's position (Wang 2008). Vitaliy Tretyakov (2008), Dean of the Moscow State University Higher School of Television, went a step further by claiming that the 'silence' of China was in fact recognition of Russia's right to do what it did, and that other factors, including its own worries about separatism, were not, in fact, the main reasons for China's stance.

In mid September, Prime Minister Putin also offered his own story. In an interview, he alluded to the flexibility inherent in the Sino-Russian strategic relationship in saying:

This [China's] position has absolutely not disappointed us. Moreover, we perfectly understand the People's Republic of China's foreign and home political priorities and do not want to put them in some uncomfortable situation. We have openly told our Chinese partners about this. I said it myself while attending the Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing. We relieved them from this responsibility in Russian-Chinese relations beforehand...In terms of international law, one country's recognition is enough for the appearance of a new entity under international law. ('Russia not disappointed by China's position on Abkhazia, S. Ossetia', *Interfax*, 13 September 2008)

The Russians, therefore, understood the limits of their strategic relations with China.

China's 'independent' foreign policy: beyond the Georgian-Russian conflict

Beyond bilateral relations, China's neutrality regarding the Georgian-Russian conflict derived from some other, perhaps more complex and deeper, underpinnings. To begin with, the timing of the conflict was an irritant for Beijing. China did not like any war at its historic moment of hosting the Olympics, whether Russia was part of the conflict or not. Given the complexities of the ethnic conflict, dating back to the 1920s ('Georgian-South Ossetian conflict', *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian-Ossetian_conflict#Origins_of_the_conflict>), its evolving nature and the United States looming large in the background, China's cautious reaction was expected by, if not desirable for, Moscow.

Since the outbreak of the conflict, several leading Chinese analysts observed that the Georgian-Russian conflict was in essence between Russia and the United States. While there was finger pointing between Moscow, Washington and Tbilisi regarding who made the first move, it was inconceivable that a small state (Georgia) would dare to take on its giant neighbour (Russia) without explicit support from Washington. Indeed, Washington was not only aware of Georgian military action before it started, it explicitly sided with Tbilisi in the August surprise,¹¹ which could well have contributed to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's recklessness and miscalculation (Whitmore 2008).

China's vision of a 'harmonious world' means stability of the existing international system, despite the fact that the West dominates that system. Indeed, China would like to see—as much as the West would—the stability and continuity of the existing international system, from which China has benefited enormously. Beijing has in fact been on good terms with all three players in the crisis—Moscow, Washington and Tbilisi—and does not want to choose sides. Doing so might please one side but inevitably at the expense of China's relations with the others. Maintaining amicable relations with all of them is perhaps the least harmful position for China.

That said, China has invested more heavily in its relations with Russia than with Georgia. Despite this investment, it is a relationship without the mutually binding commitment that is typically the case in a military alliance. As noted earlier, it is largely a pragmatic approach to 'conduct strategic coordination without alliance and [a] close relationship without excessive dependence' (Xin 2007).

Within the context of such a normal relationship, both sides retain a considerable degree of freedom of action. One typical case was Moscow's response in 2001 when a US spy plane (an EP-3) collided with a Chinese jet-fighter (J-8II) off China's coast, leading to a major crisis between China and the United States. During the crisis, Moscow remained neutral and even 'helpful' in that it opted to load the seriously damaged American spy plane onto a Russian military cargo plane and fly it back to the United States. China's current neutrality over the Georgian conflict is perhaps what Russia would do in a scenario of conflict between China and the United States over Taiwan—that is, Russia would be likely to remain neutral, though expressing sympathy for China.

Much of the 'normal' nature of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership also constitutes the reason behind the SCO's 'neutrality'. All of the SCO's Central Asian states are former Soviet republics, where many ethnic Russians still live and work. Most, if not all, of these states do not want to see any replay of the Georgian-Russian conflict in their part of the world. Such a concern among the Central Asian states, however, remains a distant possibility, given the fact that the SCO provides a framework for its members to resolve disputes and to achieve common purposes for security and development. The key to the SCO's stance towards the Georgian-Russian conflict, however, lies in the nature and structure of the regional security group. Far from becoming a military bloc such as NATO, in which members are obligated to defend one another, the SCO is a huge and diverse community of nations. If its observer members are included, the SCO comprises almost half of the world's population, the three largest nations (Russia, China and India) and almost all major civilisations: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism. The SCO's decision-making procedure of consensus building makes it very difficult for any single member to impose its will on the others. Meanwhile, the SCO's charter allows considerable space for individual members

to pursue their own policies for their own interests. There is simply no obligation for SCO members to automatically commit themselves to support other members, as is usually the case in military alliances. For these reasons, Moscow perhaps never explicitly asked for or demanded public support from the SCO members over the South Ossetian conflict.

In these circumstances, the SCO’s joint Dushanbe Declaration could mean quite a lot for the Russians, as it supports the ‘active role of Russia in promoting peace and cooperation in the region’. The member states of the SCO also expressed ‘their deep concern’ over the tension around the issue of South Ossetia and called for dialogue for peaceful reconciliation and facilitation of negotiations (Dushanbe Declaration of Heads of SCO Member States, 28 August 2008, <http://www.sectsco.org/news_detail.asp?id=2360&LanguageID=2>). This could be seen as being directed towards both sides, but particularly Georgia, which started the ball rolling on 8 August.

The expectation that Beijing and Moscow are heading towards some sort of ‘separation’ is, therefore, an overstatement at best. It is also largely derived from the West’s own experience and practice, which insists on unity because of (and for) uniformity. Hence, NATO members must be democracies and the members of the European Union must be European, Christian and perhaps white. Applying the same ‘recipe’ to the SCO and recent Sino–Russian relations, which have largely transcended the past practice of alliances, is quite inappropriate.

Last if not least, Beijing’s public neutrality towards the Georgian–Russian conflict should not be a surprise in that it has been the pattern of China’s diplomacy since the 1980s. In almost all cases, ranging from international crises (North Korea, Iran, Kashmir, and so on) to bilateral disputes (over the South China Sea with the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the East China Sea with Japan, border settlements with Russia, Vietnam and India), China has opted for dialogue and compromise, rather than confrontation or taking sides. The same operational principle has also been applied to difficult issues such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, for which China negotiated with Britain for the ending of colonialism there in the 1980s. In contrast, India, which is a democracy, used force to take back Goa from Portugal in December 1961 (see ‘Goa’, *Wikipedia*, <www.wikipedia.com>). Since the adoption of its ‘independent foreign policy’ in 1982, China has seldom judged others along the friend–foe fault line; rather, it has taken a more pragmatic, independent and case-by-case approach. Even with its allies such as North Korea, China will be critical of its neighbour’s policy if it is destabilising. The Georgian–Russian crisis simply provided another opportunity for China to display the independent nature of its foreign policy.

Even if the Russians did not get all of what they wanted from China and the SCO summit in late August 2008, this was by no means the beginning of the end of their strategic partnership with China. In the past 30 years, China’s

diplomacy—particularly its relations with Russia—has become far more sophisticated, nuanced, measured and mature. To a large extent, China's foreign policy has gone back to its deeper philosophical underpinnings of 'unity/harmony with or without uniformity' (*'he er bu tong'*). This is also one of the psychological anchors for Sino-Russian strategic relations after the two rather extreme types of relationship of 'honeymoon' (1950s) and 'divorce' (1960s and 1970s) between Beijing and Moscow. What has happened in the past 60 years between the two largest Eurasian nations, and particularly in the past 20 years, is important to both sides.

The 'West's civil war' ¹² again? Stupid!

The observations above on China's vision for a harmonious world, and its recognised dependence on the existing, Western-dominated international system made the Georgian conflict (particularly when seen as a thinly disguised US-Russian conflict) particularly troublesome for China. Whether the world is heading back to the Cold War (Bhadrakumar 2008) or pre-World War I settings, the ghost of the 'West's civil war'—which it was claimed ended with the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991—is being rekindled by the Georgian/US-Russian conflict. Given this spectre of general instability in the international system, ¹³ Beijing's cautious approach is perhaps quite natural.

'South Ossetia is a crisis with far reaching consequences,' declared veteran Chinese political commentator He Liangliang in early September. 'It is, nonetheless, a crisis of the West, not one for China.' He saw the root cause of the crisis as America's relentless effort to squeeze Russia's security space, which was necessary for any 'normal' major power. Ever since Peter the Great, according to He, Russia had pursued an unrequited desire to join Europe (the West). Such sentimentality is particularly keen at the moment when Russia has largely recovered from its difficult transition from the wreckage of the Soviet Union. Western policies such as NATO expansion, the 'colour revolutions' and missile defence have created in Russia feelings of betrayal and rage. South Ossetia was, therefore, Russia's strategic countermove. Unfortunately, He argued, neither the Russian-speaking Condoleezza Rice, who majored in Cold War history, nor German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who grew up in a Soviet-type system, seems to have understood Russia's 'West complex' (Liangliang 2008).

Medvedev's predicament is, however, not new. Putin, like Yeltsin before him, began his presidency with an unambiguous '*Westpolitik*' (visiting Britain for his first foreign tour as Russian President, toying with the idea of Russia joining NATO and confessing to visiting US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, of his 'European essence' and his Asian superficiality). In time, however, Putin adopted an increasingly Eurasian dimension, moving away from his Euro-centric stance.

Perhaps it is time for the West to reflect on its current '*Ostpolitik*' (missile defence, NATO expansion, and so on), not necessarily only for its own interests, but for those of the Russians. The alternative, of course, is to stay the course in making Russia a 'problem' for the twenty-first century.

When the 'Georgian dust' settles, the West could start to comprehend that the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is perhaps not as strong or as weak as it appears. It is still unclear how the current crisis between Washington and Moscow might play out. Washington has rushed \$1 billion in aid, and Vice-President Cheney, to Georgia and NATO amassed warships in the Black Sea (Myers 2008). The US presidential candidates, too, rushed to demonise Russia and glorify Georgia as if there was no tomorrow. If this continues, the 'West's civil war' could well turn out to be a 'brave' new page for the twenty-first century, focusing on Russia as 'THE problem'. A key difference between this newfound obsession of the West and past stages of the West's civil war is that the world is now in an era of weapons of mass destruction. Already, pundits are talking about possible 'mushroom clouds' of World War III if Russia's rusting conventional military hardware fails to deter the other side (Sokov 2008). This scenario, no matter how distant, remains a possibility, which is qualitatively different from the nineteenth century, when the West dealt with the 'French problem' (the Napoleonic Wars), and of the twentieth century, with the 'German problem' (World War I and II). The latter sucked the whole world into the West's own senseless, mutual slaughter.

If this remains a possibility, China will be better off staying out. This neutrality, according to He Liangliang (2008), is an indicator of maturity—not crisis—in China's diplomacy.

References

- Bhadrakumar, M. K. 2008, 'The end of the post-Cold War era', *Asia Times Online*, 13 August 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JH13Ag02.html>
- Bin, Yu 2000, 'New century, new face, and China's "Putin puzzle"', *Comparative Connections*, First Quarter 2000.
- Bin, Yu 2003, 'Party time!', *Comparative Connections*, vol. 5, no. 2, Second Quarter, July.
- Erlanger, Steven 2008, 'Putin in Paris, not president but presidential', *New York Times*, 31 May 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/31/world/europe/31france.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin>

- Gearan, Anne 2008, 'US, Czech Republic sign defense agreement', *Associated Press*, 8 July 2008, <<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gL5oQoIDzcGtENsih2jr24j6DDMwD91Q1SIG1>>
- Gharib, Ali 2008, 'Kosovo comes back to bite the US', *Asia Times Online*, 21 August 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JH21Ag02.html>
- Giragosian, Richard 2008, 'Georgian planning flaws led to failure', *Asia Times Online*, 20 August 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JH20Ag01.html>
- Haiyun, Wang 2008, 'Current trends in Russia's China policy and how to deepen bilateral relations', *People's Daily* (Online), 12 May 2008, <<http://world.people.com.cn/GB/42032/7226448.html>>
- Hongfeng, Xu 2008, 'Four dilemmas in Russian-US relations Medvedev will face after his inauguration as Russian President', *People's Daily* [Online], 12 May 2008, <<http://world.people.com.cn/GB/57507/7226820.html>>
- Hongjian, Yu 2008, 'Standing by the Chinese people', *People's Daily* (Online), 28 May 2008.
- Hongjian, Yu, Guangzheng, Zhang and Xiaodong, Zhang 2008, 'Crisis led to genuine friendship: Russia disaster relief assistance to China', *People's Daily* (Online), <<http://world.people.com.cn/GB/14549/7285875.html>>
- Hua, Bai 2008a, 'SCO summit did not support Russia's policy', *VOA*, 28 August 2008, <<http://www.voanews.com/chinese/w2008-08-28-voa49.cfm>>
- Hua, Bai 2008b, 'Russia's confrontation with the West, China benefits from it?', *VOA*, 29 August 2008, <<http://www.voanews.com/chinese/w2008-08-29-voa57.cfm>>
- Hua, Bai 2008c, 'Georgia praised China's position regarding Russia-Georgian conflict', *VOA*, 31 August 2008, <<http://www.voanews.com/chinese/w2008-08-31-voa35.cfm>>
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1993, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, Summer 1993, p. 23.
- Ignatius, Adi 2007, 'A tsar is born: Person of the Year 2007', *Time*, 4 December 2007, <www.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1690757_1690766,00.html>
- Lei, Liao, Zuokui, Wang and Jingli, Lu 2008, 'President Hu Jintao meets Russian President Medvedev', *Xinhua*, 27 August 2008.
- Liangliang, He 2008, 'Zhongguo gengjia chengshu, helai "zhongguo de nanao waijiao weiji"?', *Wenhui Bao*, 3 September 2008, <<http://www.6park.com/news/messages/93953.html>>

- Manthorpe, Jonathan 2008, 'China plays it cool on Russia's escapade in Georgia', *The Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 2008,
<<http://www.canada.com/vancouversun/news/editorial/story.html?id=75ea3659-7ab6-49dd-a9a1-1aa7f773cdb2>>
- Marcus, Jonathan 2008, 'Russian-Chinese message to US', *BBC*, 23 May 2008,
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7417400.stm>>
- Medvedev, Dmitry 2008, Statements on major issues, Speech at meeting with German political, parliamentary and civic leaders, Berlin, 5 June 2008,
<http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/06/05/2203_type82912type82914type84779_202153.shtm>
- Myers, Steven Lee 2008, 'White House unveils \$1 billion Georgia aid plan', *New York Times*, 3 September 2008,
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/04/world/europe/04cheney.html>>
- Palata, Lubos 2008, 'Russian Europe; divided Europe is not an equal partner for Russia, to our own and Russia's detriment', *Lidovky.cz*, 30 June 2008.
- Pronina, Lyubov and Alison, Sebastian 2008, 'Medvedev seeks China's support on recognizing regions', (Update 2), *Bloomberg.com*, 27 August 2008,
<www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=aoZq9X9gOaKU&refer=europe>
- Shermatova, Sanobar 2008, "'Diplomatic" SCO reaction to Russian recognition of breakaway republics analyzed', *Gazeta*, 8 September 2008.
- Sokov, Nikolai 2008, 'Let's talk about World War III', *Asia Times Online*, 26 August 2008,
<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JH26Ag03.html>
- Stanovaya, Tatyana 2008, 'World seen supporting Saakashvili as Georgia attacks South Ossetia's Tskhinvali', *Politkom.ru*, 8 August 2008.
- Stepanov, Anton 2008, 'Children under fire. Georgian army fired on civilians', *Tvoy Den*, 8 August 2008.
- Tretyakov, Vitaliy 2008, '11 Sep; place not given: "August 2008: lessons and consequences"', *Izvestiya* (Moscow edition), 15 September 2008, RBIS.
- Wang, Zhong Xin 2008, 'Russian ambassador to Beijing on Russian-Georgian conflict: Russia values China's understanding', 4 September 2008,
<<http://www.6park.com/news/messages/94019.html>>
- Whitmore, Brian 2008, 'Saakashvili overplays his hand', *Asia Times Online*, 12 August 2008,
<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JH12Ag01.html>
- Wines, Michael 1999, 'Yeltsin waves saber at West; his premier speaks softly', *New York Times*, 11 December 1999,

<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9507E6DE1231F932A25751C1A96F958260>>

Xin, Cao 2007, 'Russia into post-Putin era', *South China Weekend*, 10 October 2007, <<http://www.infzm.com/content/5695>>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Previously, the 'honeymoon' between Beijing and Moscow lasted only 10 years (1949–59).
- ² Other nations, such as India and Pakistan, adopt a similar definition. The European Union, which is a non-military group, also elevated its relations with China to one of strategic partnership in 2005; see Joint Statement for the EU–China Summit (5 September 2005, <http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/china/summit_0905/index.htm >).
- ³ It was held between US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert B. Zoellick, and Chinese Executive Vice Foreign Minister, Dai Bingguo.
- ⁴ The visit could have contributed to the West's assessment: no surprise, no breakthroughs, still no new large military contract, and no new paperwork for the long-talked-of Russian oil pipeline to China.
- ⁵ China was quite surprised by Putin's succession arrangement.
- ⁶ To a certain extent, Medvedev's choice of China as his first foreign visit in the capacity of Russian President was an act of reciprocity to Hu Jintao's visit to Russia in 2003 as his first foreign trip. See Bin (2003).
- ⁷ The number of Chinese children who will travel to Russia for recuperation in 2008 and 2009 is expected to reach 1500; see 'First group of Chinese children affected by recent earthquake arrives in Russia' (*Interfax*, 20 July 2008).
- ⁸ The poll showed that 23 per cent of the respondents named China as the country with which Russia had the best relations. This was followed by 17 per cent for Germany; 14 per cent for Belarus; 6–9 per cent for Kazakhstan, the United States, India and France; 4 per cent for the European Union; and 3 per cent for Bulgaria and Japan (see 'China is Russia's best friend: opinion poll', *Interfax*, 8 May 2008).
- ⁹ Georgia began its military operation at about midnight on 7 August 2008. Beijing, which is four hours' ahead of Tbilisi time, was yet to wake up to the morning of 8 August for its Olympics opening ceremony that evening. Russian Prime Minister Putin arrived in Beijing on 7 August.
- ¹⁰ In hindsight, many in Russia blamed bad intelligence and the Russian military's lack of preparation (< <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/p/2008-09-04/0833519716.html> >).
- ¹¹ In July 2008, two US policies clearly emboldened Tbilisi. US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, travelled first to Prague, where a treaty on the placement of radar was signed, and then to Tbilisi, where she precisely and unequivocally sided with Georgia in its conflicts with Russia.
- ¹² Lind cited in Huntington (1993).
- ¹³ At the time of the Georgian–Russian crisis, circumstances on China's periphery had also become quite 'fluid': President Musharraf's resignation as Pakistani President; violent demonstrations in Thailand; the sudden exit of Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda, and the prospect of Taro Aso, then Secretary-General of the governing Liberal Democratic Party, becoming the next Prime Minister.