

AS WEST UNRAVELS

China, India, Russia Seek Closer Ties

by Ramtanu Maitra

Feb. 2—In several high-profile meetings in Beijing Feb. 1-2, the leadership of China, India, and Russia sought closer cooperation, at a time when the global financial structure, under control of Wall Street, the City of London, and other financial hubs in Europe, is on the verge of collapse, and the West is deepening the security crisis around the world, by fueling violent activities in Southwest Asia and provoking a military confrontation against Russia over Ukraine.

The formal occasion was the 13th meeting of the foreign ministers of the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping, which represents more than 2.5 billion people, and the core of the emerging new world order being organized by the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and their allies. What emerges from the reports on the deliberations, is a determination to move that process of economic and security cooperation forward in an inclusive way, with the urgency appropriate to the exploding global crisis.

During these two days, China's President Xi Jinping met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. Xi told Lavrov that "over the past year, we have together been advancing the development of the overall strategic relationship between China and Russia. Our joint efforts have yielded rich results.... Our cooperation grows ever deeper.... You know that due to our joint efforts we have achieved great results in our coopera-

tion and we support rather intensive contacts at a high and the highest level, and a further expansion and deepening of cooperation in various spheres is seen."

In his meeting with the visiting Indian Minister, Xi said China-India ties "have entered a new stage of growth" since he visited India in September. "The positive side of China-India relations has been growing, the momentum of our cooperation has been strengthening," he added. "The two nations have to properly control their differences with patience, and the differences should not affect the overall picture of their relations."

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is scheduled to visit China at the end of May, sent a message to the "Visit India Year 2015" event in Beijing, saying that India and China are bound by an "unbreakable bond," while advocating that the two countries should know and understand each other better. Citing the legacy of ancient civilization, he said the two nations have had "some bond of relationship" for thousands of years. "In this century, once again we have to give something to the world, say something. For this, it is important that we look at each other, know and understand [each other]."

A Symphony, Not a Solo

The optimism for enhancing trilateral relations among China, India, and Russia expressed by President Xi and Prime Minister Modi was matched equally by

the visiting foreign ministers. Swaraj, who is on a four-day (Jan. 31-Feb. 3) visit to China to attend the tripartite meeting, and also to do the groundwork for Prime Minister Modi's May visit, told Xi that "relations between our two countries have risen to a whole new level." Lavrov pointed out that Xi and Russian President Putin met five times last year. "The consensus reached at the highest level between the two leaders has played an extremely important role in pushing the development of relations in the right direction," he said.

In his remarks following the talks, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China is ready to cooperate with all countries located along the economic corridors that connect China with Europe. "This is not a Chinese solo, this is a symphony for all our partners," Wang stated, adding that China will cooperate with all interested parties, above all, Russia and India to achieve mutual benefits in the 21st Century.

The assembly of the three most powerful nations of the Eurasian region, pledging closer collaboration for the common good, took place less than week after the much-hyped visit to India by U.S. President Barack Obama. During that trip, Obama was keen to plant seeds of distrust between India and China, and pushed the provocation that India and the U.S. should protect "freedom of navigation" across the South China Sea, over which Beijing claims sovereignty.

It is evident that such insinuations did not work. Xinhua Jan. 26 termed India's relations with the United States "superficial" and said Obama's Jan. 25-27 trip to New Delhi was more symbolic than pragmatic.

"After all, only one year ago, U.S. diplomats were expelled from New Delhi amid widespread public outrage over the treatment of an Indian diplomat in New York, and Narendra Modi, India's Prime Minister and then chief minister of Gujarat, was still banned from entering the United States," Xinhua wrote.

The Dream of an 'Asian Century'

As a contrast to what Obama is seeking to do, a few days later, on Feb. 1, Minister Swaraj, addressing the founding of the Second India-China Media Forum at Beijing, said that the Modi government was committed



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The foreign ministers of the RIC—Russia, India, China—at their meeting in Beijing Feb. 2. The three countries represent the core of the BRICS, whose initiatives are organizing new just world economic order. Left to right: India's Sushma Swaraj; China's Wang Yi; Russia's Sergei Lavrov.

to bringing ties with China "to a qualitatively new level." "The two economies are moving to invest in each other. Serious discussion on enhancing connectivity have been initiated. On that foundation, we are now seeking to take our economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level," she said. Since both countries play a large role internationally, she added, "our contacts and dialogues must commensurately grow." She said that she has a six-point proposal to present to the Chinese authorities "to jointly realize with Beijing, the dream of an Asian Century."

Listing the proposals, *The Hindu* reported Feb. 1, Swaraj stressed that New Delhi-Beijing ties can reach the next level if both sides take an action-oriented approach and broad-based bilateral engagement. She asserted that the two countries need to achieve convergence on common regional and global interests and develop new areas of cooperation. The two sides need to expand strategic communication and fulfill the common aspiration to usher in an "Asian Century," Swaraj said.

China's Minister of the State Council Information Office Jiang Jianguo, who also spoke at the Media Forum, acknowledged that Sino-Indian relations have entered a new period of major-country relations, a nuanced formulation reserved to describe Beijing's ties with regional and global heavyweights, including the United States, *The Hindu* noted. Jiang quoted the late leader Deng Xiaoping as saying that only when China and India have developed, will a real century of Asia emerge. Jiang invited India to participate in the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road—President Xi's historic projects to achieve Eurasian economic integration, based on a land and sea transportation network, complemented by a grid of energy pipelines, fiber-optic highways, industrial parks, and smart cities.

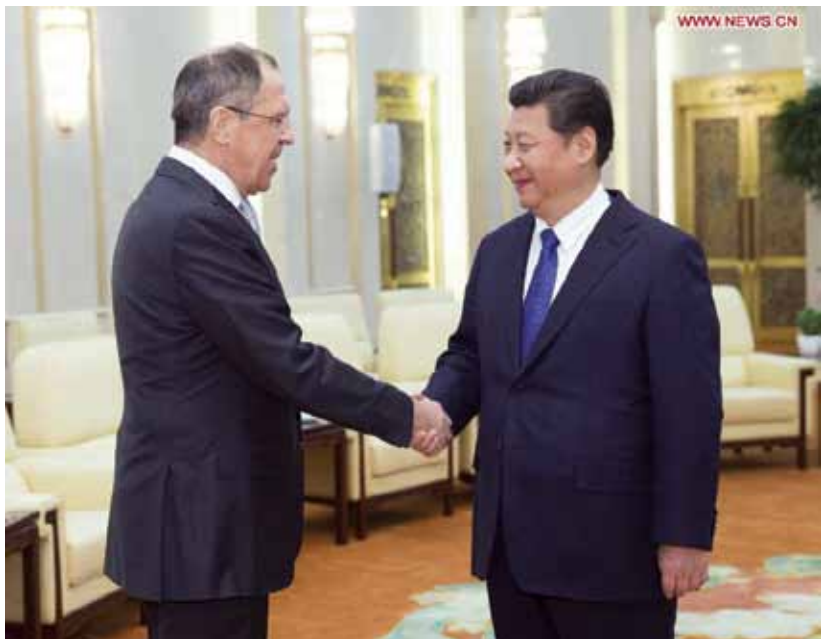
During his meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on Feb. 2, Tass reported, Lavrov pointed out the importance of Russia-India-China collaboration. "Our relations are at the highest level ever," he said.

Wang called Lavrov his old friend, and noted that Beijing will develop further the strategic contacts and cooperation with Moscow according to the benchmarks outlined at the top level. "We should cope with various 'crisis spots,' which are emerging one after another, thus observing our international obligations," Wang said, adding, "China's President pays special attention to cooperation with Russia and 'over the past year, the foreign ministers of our countries applied great efforts to implement the agreements, reached by leaders of our countries.'"

Concern Over World Economy, Global Security

At the Feb. 2 meeting in Beijing, the three foreign ministers focused on the global economic situation and the security crises around the world, created by the West, that threaten global war. The highlight of the joint communiqué (see box), was the vow to "build a more just, fair, and stable international political and economic order" and a "multi-polar" world.

"The Ministers agreed that Russia, India and China (RIC), as countries with important influence at interna-



Xinhua/Li Tao

Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) greets Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Beijing, Feb. 2. Xi told Lavrov, "Our joint efforts have yielded rich results...."

tional and regional levels and emerging market economies, need to further strengthen coordination on global issues and practical cooperation, in the spirit of openness, solidarity, mutual understanding and trust." "They agreed that Russia, India and China should enhance their cooperation in think-tanks, business, agriculture, disaster mitigation and relief, medical services and public health," said the joint communiqué.

In his speech, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang said "developing countries are an important driving force of the world economy." "We call for improving the system of the global economy's governance, enhancing the voting power of developing countries' representatives and implementing the 2010 decisions on the IMF's reform as quickly as possible." Wang said Russia, India and China are also "looking for possibilities to tap potential in such spheres as the energy sector, high technologies and environmental protection."

Addressing the security issues, the joint communiqué said: "They [the RIC] called for the development of an open, inclusive, indivisible and transparent security and cooperation architecture in the region on the basis of universally recognized principles of international law. In this regard, they welcomed the continued discussion on regional security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region under the framework of the East Asia

Summit. . . In this connection, they agreed to establish a trilateral Russia-India-China consultation mechanism on Asia-Pacific affairs, with the first meeting to be held at an early date.”

Wang, in his speech said: “We advocate the principle of partnership rather than alliance.” Lavrov said all states should be involved in creating “a modern security architecture” in the Asia-Pacific.

In addition to addressing the security in the Asia-Pacific region, the RIC foreign ministers also addressed the Syrian crisis, the escalating dangers in the Palestine-Israel conflict, and the ongoing talks between P5+1 (U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany)

and Iran to resolve the dispute over Iran’s nuclear program. “The Ministers discussed the latest developments in Syria. They reiterated that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis and urged all parties to abjure violence and resume peace negotiations based on ‘Geneva Communiqué’ of June 2012,” said the joint communiqué.

Planning for the Future

During a meeting of the three foreign ministers, Wang said that Russia, India, and China will, in 2015, have several highest- and high-level meetings to improve coordination of foreign policies, Tass reported.

The Foreign Ministers’ Joint Communiqué

Here are excerpts from the Joint Communiqué issued by the Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, and India, following their Feb. 2 meeting in Beijing.

24. The Ministers noted that collectively BRICS economies have consolidated their position as the main engines for sustaining the pace of the international economy as it recovers from the recent economic and financial global crisis. Emerging market economies and developing countries continue to contribute significantly to global growth and will do so in the years to come.

25. The Ministers welcomed the successful conclusion of the 6th BRICS Summit, particularly the signing of the Agreement on the New Development Bank and the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement. They agreed to build a closer economic partnership in keeping with the BRICS spirit of openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation to facilitate the market inter-linkages, financial integration, infrastructure connectivity as well as people-to-people contacts, cultural and educational exchanges among BRICS countries. The Ministers welcomed the decision taken by the Fortaleza Summit on opening negotiations on the Draft Strategy of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and

Framework of BRICS Closer Economic Partnership. China and India expressed their full support to Russia for a successful 7th summit of the BRICS leaders in July 2015.

26. The Ministers highly valued the fruitful achievements of the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting, including launching the process of Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), promoting innovative development, economic reform and growth and enhancing connectivity of the Asia-Pacific. They commended China’s efforts in making the conference a full success and deemed that the Meeting is of great significance in achieving long-term development and common prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. Acknowledging India’s important role in driving global economic growth, and supporting the openness of APEC, China and Russia would welcome India’s participation in APEC.

27. The Ministers stressed the importance of regional connectivities, which will inject strong impetus in enhancing political mutual trust, economic cooperation, and promoting cultural and people-to-people exchanges. In this context, they discussed initiatives, including China’s initiatives of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. They welcomed synergy of various initiatives to improve regional connectivity in Asia. They emphasized the necessity to explore all connectivity options for greater economic integration of the common region and stressed that the three countries will closely coordinate and work together to ensure that various initiatives bear fruit and benefit all countries and people in the region.

“The three leaders will have many opportunities for contacts to improve further coordination and cooperation on major international issues,” Wang said.

During their talks, the three ministers expressed their support for placing Second World War commemorations on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. “We will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the UN and the world’s victory against fascism. This provides a great opportunity for countries in the world to cherish history and look forward to the future,” Wang said. Lavrov and Swaraj backed his call, with Lavrov saying the world needed to be on alert for a new threat of fascism. “We must remember the tragic lesson of the events of those years,” he said. It was also reported that a military parade will be held in Beijing in September to commemorate the occasion, to which Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to be invited.

The three countries also called for an early conclusion of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT), a resolution moved by India to address gaps in the international legal framework against terrorism, *The Tribune of India* reported. Citing India’s Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Syed Akba-

ruddin, *The Tribune* noted, “Russia-India-China call to bring to justice perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of terrorist acts.”

Following the RIC foreign ministers meeting in Beijing, the five BRICS heads of state are scheduled to meet in the 7th BRICS Summit to be held at the Russian city of Ufa July 9-10, to further their plans. During those two days, members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with Russia at the helm, will also be holding their talks. The SCO is now scheduled to expand, and India, now an observer, will be included in the organization as a full member. The SCO has, up till now, mainly dealt with security matters, but will now also address economic issues.

The insecurity in Afghanistan, the proliferation of terrorism, and the explosion of opium production there, following the U.S./NATO’s 13-year occupation, has been a focus of the SCO, including at its summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan last year. It is expected that the upcoming summit, with the inclusion of India, and likely inclusion of Pakistan and Iran, will come up with concrete measures to deal also with the security issues that were touched upon at the Beijing trilateral talks on Feb. 2.

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