

China and Russia

- Panel:** Session 6 (Cosmos & Violet Room)
Date/Time: Wednesday, December 12, 2012 / 15:15-16:30
Speakers: Kang Yoon Hee, Kookmin University (Moderator)
Andrey Kortunov, Russian International Affairs Council
Sergey Lukonin, Institute of World Economy and International Relations
Georgy Toloraya, BRICs Research National Committee of Russia
Yang Shu, Lanzhou University
Zhao Huirong, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Rapporteur: Steven Oliver, University of California at San Diego

Panel Short Summary

Kang Yoon Hee of Kookmin University began as moderator by highlighting the similarities between China and Russia as increasingly prosperous countries that have recently experienced leadership turnover. Kang then raised the question of how recent turnover in the leadership of both China and Russia might affect future bilateral relations and where the panelists saw potential for convergence or divergence in the interests of the two states.

Andrey Kortunov from the Russian International Affairs Council addressed these questions by noting that though current bilateral relations are at a high point, issues still remain. Kortunov then posed a normative vision for bilateral relations whereby China and Russia might develop a relationship similar to that of the United States and Canada within the decade by emulating some of the key features of the US-Canada relationship. Although Kortunov was careful to stress that failure to emulate these features was not a guarantee of a bilateral relationship characterized by conflict, he suggested successful emulation would assure much smoother bilateral relations between China and Russia in the long run.

Sergey Lukonin of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations also recognized that bilateral relations appear to be at a high point, but focused attention on the potential sources of divergence in the future. In particular, Lukonin focused on the problem that current relations between China and Russia are largely based upon trade in energy

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resources with China. Whereas Russia may be capable of serving China's energy needs in the present, production of coal, oil, and natural gas by Russia will decline in the coming decades. This could be problematic for bilateral relations in the long term.

Georgy Toloraya from the BRICs Research National Committee of Russia echoed the sentiments of the prior panelists in stating that China-Russia relations were at an all-time high point. Toloraya identified a number of aspects of China-Russia relations including historical, political, economic aspects that he argued were important for explaining the present conditions. Furthermore, Toloraya argued that despite some divergence in interests between China and Russia, Russian elites see good relations with China as an important anchor for Russia's global position in the future.

Yang Shu of Lanzhou University approached questions of China and Russia's relationship from a different angle by arguing that whereas both Chinese and Russian elites appeared to exhibit a high degree of mutual trust, this mutual trust does not appear to be mirrored in their respective publics. Yang then argued that the most effective way to address this potential issue for future bilateral relations was through a greater emphasis on cultural communication between both China and Russia.

Zhao Huirong of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences rounded out the panel by placing Chinese and Russian relations in the context of their shared neighborhood of Central Asia. Zhao argued that despite questions about competition between China and Russia over investment and trade with Central Asian states, both China and Russia shared an understanding that Central Asian states have the right to choose whom they wish to partner with and that this understanding offered a basis for continued stability in bilateral relations.

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