

Background

No. 1883
September 30, 2005



Published by The Heritage Foundation

Sino–Russian Military Maneuvers: A Threat to U.S. Interests in Eurasia

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Peace Mission 2005, the unprecedented Sino–Russian joint military exercises held on August 18–25, should raise concerns in Washington. The war games are a logical outcome of the Sino–Russian Treaty of Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation, signed in 2001, and the shared worldview and growing economic ties between the two giant powers.

Moscow and Beijing view U.S. predominance in the post–Cold War world as a threat to their power. The steadily improving Sino–Russian partnership is limiting and may significantly diminish the U.S. strategic presence in the Eurasian landmass from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea.

Notwithstanding China's and Russia's best efforts to undermine U.S. influence in Eurasia, Washington can take some steps in the short to medium term to manage this challenge effectively. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Strengthen** military, security, and economic cooperation with India and Japan, including cooperation on joint business projects in the Russian Far East and Central Asia;
- **Secure** observer status for the U.S. in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); and
- **Use** U.S. public diplomacy to focus attention on the problems inherent in closer Sino–Russian relations.

The War Games

China and Russia kicked off Peace Mission 2005 at a joint ceremony in Vladivostok, just 30 miles from

Talking Points

- Today, Moscow and Beijing share a belief in a multipolar world, which means diluting American global supremacy and opposing the U.S. rhetoric of freedom and democracy.
- Washington needs to formulate a clear strategy to preserve U.S. influence in the region, develop energy resources, cultivate democratic reforms, and oppose authoritarianism.
- The Bush Administration should do this by (1) strengthening military, security, and economic cooperation with India and Japan, including cooperation on joint projects in the Russian Far East and Central Asia; (2) expanding cooperation against radical Islamist groups and drug trafficking in Central Asia; (3) securing observer status for the U.S. in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; and (4) using U.S. public diplomacy to focus attention on the problems inherent in closer Sino–Russian relations.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/russiaandeurasia/bg1883.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center
for Foreign Policy Studies
of the

Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute
for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002–4999
(202) 546–4400 • heritage.org

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the North Korean border. The war games involved nearly 10,000 troops (including 1,800 Russian military personnel); scores of advanced aircraft (including Russian TU-95 and TU-22 heavy bombers, which can carry cruise missiles); and army, navy, air force, marine, airborne, and logistics units from both countries.

For the first time, Russia demonstrated for the Chinese the supersonic “carrier-buster” cruise missile Moskit, one of the most advanced weapons in the Russian arsenal and a weapon clearly designed to get the attention of the U.S. Navy.¹ The combined operations were conventional and looked like a preparation for a large-scale maritime landing.

The war games included large-scale troop maneuvers on China’s Shandong peninsula, located on the Yellow Sea near North Korea. However, despite the proximity to North Korea, observers should not infer that the war games are a signal to Pyongyang to make progress in the six-party talks. For their part, Moscow and Beijing have disingenuously declared that the maneuvers are aimed at combating terrorism, extremism, and “separatism” (a veiled reference to Taiwan).² None of these is a credible explanation.

The Russian daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was more blunt about the purpose of the war games: “This is above all an assault on the uni-polar world that has so suited Washington since the end of the Cold War.”³ Chinese commentators were similarly frank. Jin Canrong, professor of international relations at the People’s University of China, stated

that “[t]he main target is the United States. Both sides want to improve their bargaining position in terms of security, politics, and economics.”⁴ As *Pravda.ru* announced, “the reconciliation between China and Russia has been driven in part by mutual unease at U.S. power and a fear of Islamic extremism in Central Asia.”⁵

The Second Honeymoon

Relations between Russia and China have steadily improved since 1986, when Mikhail Gorbachev was General Secretary of the Soviet Union. After the February 1989 withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and especially during the Yeltsin and Putin administrations, Russia emerged as China’s primary supplier of advanced weapons systems.⁶ The two countries have since completed the demarcation of their borders and launched wide-scale cross-border trade.

The Moscow–Beijing axis is not unprecedented. In February 1950, China and the former Soviet Union signed a formal alliance aimed at the U.S. and its allies in Asia. The alliance reached its peak during the Korean War. Ideological strains split the alliance in 1956 after Premier and Communist Party First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced Joseph Stalin’s crimes and rebuffed Chairman Mao Zedong’s demand to be recognized as a co-leader of the global communist movement. By 1969, Moscow had signaled to Washington that it intended to launch a preemptive strike on China’s nuclear facilities and perhaps even initiate “regime change” in Beijing.⁷ The prospect of Soviet hegemony in Eurasia led Pres-

1. See Agence France-Presse, “Chinese, Russian Defense Chiefs Assess Joint Exercises,” August 24, 2005, at www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1054075&C=asiapac (August 25, 2005). China’s Sovremenny-class destroyers are armed with Moskit cruise missiles.
2. Al Pessin “Rumsfeld Not Concerned About Russia–China Exercises, Experts Divided,” *Voice of America News*, August 23, 2005, at www.voanews.com/english/2005-08-23-voa60.cfm (August 24, 2005).
3. Reuters, “Sino–Russian War Games Move on to China,” *Yahoo! News*, August 20, 2005, at news.yahoo.com/s/nm/china_russia_dc (August 24, 2005).
4. *Ibid.*
5. “Chinese, Russian First Joint Military Maneuvers Scheduled on Aug. 18–25,” *Pravda.ru*, August 2, 2005, at newsfromrussia.com/world/2005/08/02/60899.html (August 24, 2005).
6. Tung Yi, “Russian Experts Said Helping PRC Make High Tech Weaponry,” *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, September 6, 2000, p. A39. Areas of cooperation extend to submarine construction (including advanced models 93 and 94) and the Jian J-10 fighter jet, nuclear weapons development, cruise missiles, and jet propulsion.

ident Richard Nixon to go to China and prompted an urgent U.S. campaign to enlist China in America's containment strategy against the Soviet superpower.

Today, however, Moscow and Beijing share a belief in a multipolar world, which means diluting American global supremacy and opposing the U.S. rhetoric of freedom and democracy. China traded support for the heavy-handed Russian tactics in Chechnya for Russian support for Chinese demands to reunite Taiwan with the mainland.⁸

Kicking Out the U.S. Military. During the July 6 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization⁹ in Astana, Kazakhstan, Beijing and Moscow demanded that the U.S. provide a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Central Asia.¹⁰ On July 31, Uzbek President Islam Karimov notified Washington that the U.S. should withdraw its forces from the Karshi-Khanabad airbase.

In other words, the anti-American axis has already begun to work. However, in the long term, by keeping Central Asian dictators in power, Sino-Russian efforts will likely have the perverse effect of strengthening the cause of radical Islamists and lead to more extremism and violence in the post-Soviet Muslim areas and in China's Xinjiang province.¹¹

Iran. Both China and Russia have close relationships with Iran. Energy-starved China has signed a 25-year \$50 billion deal to develop and import oil and liquid natural gas from the giant South Pars field in Iran. Other projects under discussion are potentially worth \$200 billion. The Russian military-industrial and nuclear complex benefits from large-scale contracts with Iran, including construc-

tion of the \$800 million Bushehr nuclear reactor.¹² Given these economic ties, it is likely that Russia and China will veto any proposed U.N. Security Council economic sanctions on Iran for violations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Geo-economics. The growing geostrategic cooperation between Russia and China against the U.S. in Central Asia also has a geo-economic dimension. While U.S. and other multinational major oil companies successfully developed large energy projects in the Caspian basin in the 1990s, China eyed oil and gas in Russia and the Caspian region to satisfy its own rapacious appetite.

China has signed deals with Kazakhstan for the construction of oil and gas pipelines, multibillion-dollar deals with Russia on long-term oil and gas supply, and an agreement with Islam Karimov to supply Uzbek gas. China is also interested in building an oil pipeline from Siberia to the city of Daikin in northeast China and has bid \$4.2 billion for the Canada-based PetroKazakhstan oil company.¹³ To achieve its strategic goals, China is interested in keeping U.S. companies out of Eurasia and delimiting U.S. power projection in the region.

Responding to the Challenge

The willingness of both Moscow and Beijing to participate in these joint maneuvers lies in the fact that each country now views the other as its "strategic rear." Some believe that Russia's aims are the more benign, while China's are worrisome to the U.S., Japan, and especially Taiwan.

Several press reports indicate that Moscow wanted to limit the recent military exercise to the

7. Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), p. 183.

8. BBC Monitoring, "Sino-Russian Joint Statement Excerpts," *BBC News*, December 10, 1999, at news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/558306.stm (August 24, 2005).

9. The SCO member states are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and China.

10. Robert Burns, "Kyrgyzstan: U.S. Troops Can Stay for Now," *Union Leader* (New Hampshire), August 2, 2005, at www.theunionleader.com/articles_showa.html?article=58557 (August 24, 2005).

11. Ariel Cohen, "Uzbekistan's Eviction Notice: What Next?" Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 978, August 18, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/em978.cfm.

12. U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Information Agency, "Iran," March 2005, at www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html (August 24, 2005).

13. *Ibid.*

Central Asian region, where the danger that pro-extremist forces might take over a national regime is highest, while China insisted that the drills be held in China opposite Taiwan.¹⁴ The Shandong site was evidently a compromise and should not be seen as a hopeful sign that China and Russia are pressuring North Korea.¹⁵ Finally, a Taiwanese newspaper claimed that China is apparently paying for the entire cost of the war games.¹⁶ China is the primary instigator of Peace Mission 2005 and is paying handsomely to send a message to the United States that China is the rising power in East Asia.

Given this reality, the United States can take prudent steps to curtail the temptation on either side to enter into a closer alliance. The Bush Administration should expand its diplomatic dialogue in Central Asia to emphasize security and economic issues. In the context of U.S. commitments to the global war on terrorism, Central Asia must continue to be a top-tier strategic concern in Washington.

Washington needs to formulate a clear strategy to preserve U.S. influence in the region, develop energy resources, cultivate democratic reforms, and oppose authoritarianism. Specifically, the Bush Administration should:

- **Strengthen military, security, and economic cooperation with India and Japan, including cooperation on joint business projects in the Russian Far East and Central Asia.** The Bush Administration should strengthen U.S. military cooperation with India in conventional forces, missile defense sensor and signal processing technologies, and information warfare. These are areas in which India and the U.S. could collaborate usefully with value added to both sides. The U.S. should seek greater diplomatic and intelligence cooperation with India on security issues in Central Asia. Washington and
- **Expand cooperation against radical Islamist groups and drug trafficking in Central Asia.** Radical Islamist subversion in Central Asia is a threat to regional and global security. Opposing Islamist terrorism and militancy is a joint interest for all powers involved in the area. The U.S. Department of State and the intelligence community should launch joint working groups and task forces to collect intelligence on, intercept the communications of, and neutralize radical Islamist organizations and drug trafficking operations. This can be accomplished under the umbrella of the U.S.–Russia Anti-Terrorism Working Group, co-chaired by R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Sergei Kislyak, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia.
- **Secure observer status for the U.S. in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.** One of the current SCO members, such as Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan, should suggest U.S. observership in the organization. To avoid a veto of such a suggestion by Moscow or Beijing, Washington should persuade friendlier hosts of future SCO summits to invite U.S. observers as a formal prerogative of the host, as well as persuade Moscow and Beijing to agree to U.S. participation. Some SCO members, such as Kyrgyzstan

14. Mark Magnier and Kim Murphy, "An Exercise Fit for Sending U.S. a Message; Joint Troop Maneuvers by China and Russia This Week Point to Wariness About America's Strong Presence in Their Backyards, Analysts Say," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 2005, p. A5.

15. Wu Min-chieh, "Choice of Venue for Military Exercises 'Kills Two Birds With One Stone,'" *Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), August 19, 2005, p. 1.

16. "China Paid for Wargames: Newspaper," *The Taipei Times*, August 20, 2005, p. 4, at www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2005/08/20/2003268462 (September 29, 2005).

and Kazakhstan, have already indicated that they are amenable to this.

- **Use U.S. public diplomacy to focus attention on the problems inherent in closer Sino-Russian relations.** Russians have had many apprehensions regarding China, especially its intentions in the Russian Far East and Siberia.¹⁷ U.S. diplomats in Moscow should explain American concerns about Russian–Chinese military cooperation.¹⁸ The State Department’s public diplomacy strategy should be to encourage debate on Sino–Russian relations in Russia and involve the U.S. academic community, non-governmental organizations, U.S. international broadcasting, and the Russian media.

Conclusions

The balance of power in Eurasia may be changing—and not in favor of the United States. How-

ever, as the Sino–Russian relationship develops, the Russian bear might not be so comfortable with the Chinese dragon, at which point a renewed Russian interest in a genuine partnership with the United States may emerge. Developing a policy to address this challenge will require monitoring Sino–Russian “friendly” developments and pursuing proactive policies aimed at preventing the bear and the dragon from getting closer.

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17. See Burt Herman, “Chinese Presence Grows in Russian Far East,” Associated Press, August 24, 2005.

18. See editorial, “U.S. Ambassador Complains to Russia RE Arms Sales to China,” International Broadcasting Board, July 29, 2002, at www.ibb.gov/editorials/10034.htm (August 25, 2005).