

Russia, China denounce US missile shield at summit meeting

Alex Lantier**24 May 2008**

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev arrived yesterday for a two-day visit in Beijing after a one-day stopover in Kazakhstan, on his first trip abroad since being elected president in March. Upon his arrival, he issued a joint statement with Chinese President Hu Jintao, denouncing plans for a US nuclear missile shield. However, this unity enforced by fear of the US military did not immediately lead to more substantive cooperation on economic matters.

The US' planned nuclear missile shield is a complex set of airbases and defenses, which aims to locate and shoot down nuclear missiles fired at the US or its allies in Europe. It is in early design stages and not thought currently to be effective as a defense. However, potential adversaries of the US must keep in mind the possibility that it might one day become effective; moreover, with the US planning to station many of the shield's defensive bases in Eastern European countries near Russia (e.g., Poland, the Czech Republic), the missile shield has become a major source of tensions in US-Russia relations.

The joint statement by Hu and Medvedev said: "Both sides believe that creating a global missile defense system, including deploying such systems in certain regions of the world, or plans for such cooperation, do not help support strategic balance and stability, and harm international efforts to control arms and the non-proliferation process."

Some of the reasons underlying Russia's and China's concern were indicated by a March 2006 analysis in an influential US policy journal, *Foreign Affairs*. In an article titled "The Rise of US Nuclear Primacy," Keir Lieber and Daryl Press noted that—due to the deterioration of Russian nuclear weaponry after the fall of the USSR, and the relatively primitive character of China's nuclear weapons—US military planners now believed that they could launch and win a nuclear war against both powers, by using a portion of the US nuclear arsenal to destroy all

of their nuclear weapons, with enough US nuclear weapons left over to force Russia and China to surrender.

In this insane and horrible world of mass slaughter envisaged by top US strategists, the US nuclear missile shield might play a significant role.

Lieber and Press wrote: "The sort of missile defenses that the United States might plausibly deploy would be valuable primarily in an offensive context, not a defensive one—as an adjunct to a U.S. first-strike capability, not as a standalone shield. If the United States launched a nuclear attack against Russia (or China), the targeted country would be left with a tiny surviving arsenal—if any at all. At that point, even a relatively modest or inefficient missile-defense system might well be enough to protect against any retaliatory strikes, because the devastated enemy would have so few warheads and decoys left."

Such plans have taken on a fearsome relevance to international politics, amid the tensions released by the debacle of US attempts to militarily conquer and control the Middle East.

In 2001 Russia and China together formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) consisting of Russia, China, and the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The SCO successfully lobbied in 2005 for the removal of most of the US military bases in Central Asia obtained in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In 2007, it held joint military exercises in northwestern China and neighboring regions of Russia.

The campaign of US war threats against Iran has played a major part in exacerbating such tensions. In October 2007, then-Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Iran and rejected "the use of force, but also the mention of force as a possibility" in dealing with Iran and other states neighboring the Caspian Sea. US President Bush replied by threatening that Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program might trigger "World War III."

The common position of China and Russia on US military policy did not extend to agreements on economic and commercial matters.

In the lead-up to Medvedev's trip, Russian officials hinted that trade deals might be sealed. Sergei Kiriyenko, CEO of Russian state atomic energy firm Rosatom, said Russia would sign a deal to sell a \$1 billion uranium enrichment plant to Russia. Medvedev told Chinese state media on May 22 that Russian oil company Rosneft and the China National Petroleum Corporation had reached a "basic agreement" on the pricing of crude oil that would be transported by the planned East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline. As of this writing, however, no major economic initiatives had been announced at the summit.

The ESPO pipeline would transport Russian oil from the Irkutsk region to Russia's Pacific Ocean port at Nakhodka, with a branch pipeline extending southwards to the Chinese industrial center of Daqing, in Manchuria. Another pipeline under consideration, the Altai gas pipeline, would deliver Russian natural gas from Nadym and Urengoy in Western Siberia to Lunnan in northwestern China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. From Lunnan it would connect to China's West-East gas pipeline, which delivers natural gas to the industrial centers of the Yangtze River Delta, notably Shanghai.

Trade relations between Russia and China have rapidly increased in recent years, as a boom in Russian oil wealth has attracted large-scale imports from China, notably of medium-technology goods like cars and consumer electronics. Trade has grown to \$48 billion in 2007 from \$33.4 billion in 2006 and \$7 billion in 1996, with Russia's main exports being petrochemicals and timber. China and Russia hope to increase trade to \$80 billion by 2010. Reflecting Russia's economic weakness after Soviet industry collapsed amid the dissolution of the USSR, Russia's trade deficit with China has reached \$8.8 billion.

This deficit leads to considerable political tensions. Medvedev put pressure on China to buy Russian aviation and space technology, commenting: "Our task is not just to increase the amount of trade overall [between Russia and China]—it's also to optimise it." Until now, energy pipeline deals have remained largely blocked by Russia's insistence that China pay higher prices for its oil and gas.

Competition has developed between Russia and China over access to the petrochemical resources of Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, who have the richest deposits. China has made significant strides in

purchasing energy directly from these countries, which used to export their products exclusively through Russia, via the old Soviet pipeline network. An oil pipeline connecting Kazakhstan to China became operational in 2003, and a Turkmenistan-China pipeline began construction in August 2007.

The day before arriving in Beijing, Medvedev stopped for a one-day meeting with President Nursultan Nazarbayev in the new Kazakh capital, Astana. Nazarbayev, who has recently mentioned the possibility of purchasing weapons from NATO as opposed to Russia, left the impression of someone eager to pressure Medvedev for a better bargain.

Reuters news agency wrote that Nazarbayev "said he had no intention of breaking from his traditional ally unless Russia failed to provide strong economic incentives." Nazarbayev said, "We are being told that we are trying to bypass Russia via our pipelines and all that. We have no such plans.... Every country should look at benefits and which ways to lay its pipelines." The two presidents discussed joint use of Russia's GLONASS global navigation system, and cooperation in building chemical factories.

According to the Russian financial paper *Kommersant*, Nazarbayev also agreed to help build the Russian-backed Burgas-Alexandroupoli pipeline in the Balkans. The pipeline, which would skirt the narrow waterways of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles connecting the Black and Mediterranean Seas, would help export Russian and Central Asian petrochemicals towards Europe. It would compete with a US-backed project, the Albanian Macedonian Bulgarian Oil Corporation (AMBO) pipeline.



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