

China and Russia hold naval exercise in Sea of Japan

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Tensions in the Sea of Japan were raised last week as a major naval exercise between China and Russia came under close observation by a simultaneous air exercise conducted by Japan and United States only a few hundred kilometers away.

The joint exercise conducted by China and Russia from July 8–10, in Peter the Great Bay, off the coast of Vladivostok, was the largest ever between China and another nation. It demonstrated the growing relationship between the two countries, aimed at countering the US “pivot to Asia,” which includes deploying 60 percent of American naval and air forces to the Asia-Pacific as part of a drive to confront China.

The “Joint-Sea 2013” exercise involved 11 surface ships and one submarine from Russia, including the Varyag, a guided-missile cruiser and the flagship of the Russian Pacific Fleet, and seven Chinese ships, all newly built in the 2000s. China’s contingent consisted of four destroyers, two guided missile frigates and a support ship. The commander of the Chinese fleet, Major General Yang Junfei, said it was “our strongest lineup ever in a joint naval drill.”

The drills between the two navies were clearly aimed at repelling an attack from a hostile force, not dealing with terrorism or piracy as previous exercises have been presented. Chinese media outlets highlighted reports that the Chinese warships had more than 160 surface-to-air missiles, “enough to deal with the warplanes of a US aircraft carrier.” Russian SU-24 fighter-bombers simulated air strikes on the fleet, while Chinese and Russian vessels conducted anti-submarine drills against a Russian Kilo, reputed to be one of the quietest submarines in the world.

Russia and China plan to follow up the naval exercises with joint land/air drills, to be held between July 27 and August 15 in the Ural Mountain region of

Chelyabinsk, ostensibly focusing on anti-terrorism.

Provocatively, the US and Japan held a joint air exercise on almost exactly the same dates, from July 8 to 12, in the airspace around Hokkaido. The drills were designed to send a message to China and Russia that American military dominance in the region would remain. The air drills involved eight F-15s and eight F-16s from each country and continued 24 hours a day. Japanese officials admitted that the exercises were monitoring the “entire process” of the Russo-Chinese naval drills.

This is just the latest in a long line of US provocations. Despite the claim that China is a growing military threat in the region, it is the US that is using its superior military might in a bid to arrest its relative economic decline while trying to undermine China’s influence. In April, Washington flew nuclear-capable B-2 and B-52 strategic bombers to the Korean peninsula in the midst of sharp tensions with North Korea, China’s ally, over its nuclear programs.

Last month, Japan and the US conducted a two-week joint exercise in California, codenamed “Dawn Blitz,” with a scenario of retaking an island. China called for the exercise to be cancelled but was ignored. With China and Japan locked in a tense dispute over the Senkakus/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea, the Obama administration sent a thinly-veiled message to Beijing that Washington will back Japan against China if war breaks out over the islets.

Russia and China have developed a closer relationship in response to the growing US threats. Ever since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Russia and China have developed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to counter the US intervention into the Central Asia region. The regional rivalry was evident when Washington backed the

former Soviet republic of Georgia against Russia, leading to a brief regional war in 2008.

In March, Chinese President Xi Jinping made Russia his first stop during his first foreign visit as president, in order to emphasise the “top priority” of the “special relationship” with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime. Xi was the first foreign leader to be invited into Moscow’s military command centre, where he was reportedly shown a computer simulation of how the US missile defence system undermines global nuclear “balances.”

Beijing and Moscow have enhanced their strategic cooperation in recent weeks. This included signing a \$270 billion deal to triple Russian oil shipments to China for the next 25 years. The supply will reach 46 million tonnes a year—or nearly one tenth of Russia’s current oil output. Russia is due to receive \$70 billion as an immediate payment, because China is desperately seeking to secure energy supplies in the face of an increasingly overt American threat to cut off its shipping lanes via the “pivot” strategy.

In an attempt to bolster China as counterweight to the US, Russia also agreed to sell Beijing advanced weapon systems. China reportedly secured a deal last month to buy 100 of the latest SU-35 fighters from Russia. This aircraft is believed to be able to outperform any of its rivals, such as Japan’s F-15Js, except America’s most advanced F-22 stealth fighters.

Closer strategic ties between Russia and China are another clear sign that, by recklessly building up military capacities and alliances to confront the two countries, US imperialism is sowing the seeds for a new global conflagration.



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