

Closer Chinese-Russian ties on display in Moscow

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15 May 2015

The prominence of Chinese President Xi Jinping at last weekend's commemoration in Moscow of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe has highlighted growing economic and strategic relations between Russia and China. Despite unresolved bilateral issues, Washington's aggressive stance towards both Moscow and Beijing is pushing them together.

Xi was given pride of place, seated alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin, during the military parade through Red Square. Xi "warmly" invited Putin to Beijing in September to participate in Chinese ceremonies to mark seven decades since the defeat of Japan and the end of World War II in the Pacific.

In remarks reported in China's state-owned Xinhua news agency, Xi declared: "We are strong if united but weak if isolated." He ascribed the closeness of the two countries to their common sacrifice during World War II, ignoring decades of open hostility that followed the 1960 Sino-Soviet split including border clashes in 1969.

Relations only began to mend in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. China and Russia forged closer ties particularly in the aftermath of the US invasion of Afghanistan that both regarded as a threat to their interests. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was established in 2001 to counter US and NATO intrusion and intervention in Central Asia, which both countries regard as critical to their strategic and economic interests.

Over the past year, the US and its allies have confronted and imposed sanctions on Moscow over Ukraine and are now recklessly stoking up tensions with Beijing over disputed territory in the South China Sea (see: "The growing danger of a US war against China"). Washington's ambition is to secure its dominance of the vast Eurasian landmass which

strategists like former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski have long argued is central to global hegemony.

Significantly, Russian state-run television broadcast a documentary last Friday entitled "Russia and China: The Heart of Eurasia," underscoring the strategic importance of a partnership between the two countries and, like Xi, suggesting that the antagonisms of the 1960s and 1970s were largely in the past.

Prior to the weekend's ceremonies, Xi and Putin signed 32 agreements including for an estimated \$6 billion in Chinese investment in infrastructure projects and a non-aggression pledge in the sphere of cyber warfare. The deals are forecast to double annual bilateral trade to \$200 billion over the next few years.

On key issues, however, differences remain.

After years of negotiations, the two countries signed a \$400 billion energy deal last year involving the development of Siberian gas fields and pipelines to supply China over the next three decades. The agreement is yet to be finalised, however, amid continuing haggling over price and other details.

At the same time, while talks are underway, Russia is yet to agree to Chinese requests to purchase advanced weaponry, including two dozen Su-35 fighter jets, and to jointly upgrade the Mi-26 helicopter. Russia's reluctance to relinquish its military edge over China points to on-going suspicions and tensions.

The two presidents have been promoting potentially competing plans for the economic integration of Eurasia. Putin is pushing for the development of a Eurasia Economic Union currently involving Russia, Belarus, Armenia and Kazakhstan. Xi proposed his Silk Road Economic Belt plan in 2013, along with a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, to vastly upgrade land transport and other infrastructure linking Europe and

East Asia.

Nevertheless the display of solidarity in Red Square last weekend reflects real fears in the ruling classes in Moscow and Beijing of the threat posed by the US and its efforts to militarily encircle both countries. In a pointed reference to German and Japanese remilitarisation, Putin declared that both countries “consistently oppose any attempt to rehabilitate Nazism and [Japanese] militarism or falsify history.” In both Germany and Japan, a military build-up is being accompanied by attempts in ruling circles to whitewash wartime crimes.

The ceremonies in Moscow were accompanied by the first-ever joint Chinese-Russian naval exercises in the Mediterranean Sea. While relatively small in scale, the operations, which were due to last a week, were clearly aimed at signalling closer military ties between Russia and China.

Two Chinese 054A/Jiangkai II class missile frigates—the Linyi and the Weifang—along with a supply vessel, the Weishanhu, joined six Russian naval ships. The exercises were to include safety drills, escort missions, replenishment at sea and some live firing. The Chinese vessels had previously visited the Russian Black Sea base of Novorossiysk as part of the end of World War II celebrations.

A *Los Angeles Times* article complained: “Neither Russia nor China has one inch of coastline on the Mediterranean Sea, making it an unlikely and provocative venue for their first joint naval war games.”

Leaving aside that the two countries have previously conducted joint naval exercises in East Asia, the latest Chinese-Russian in the Mediterranean are clearly aimed at attempting to counter US-orchestrated regime-change operations in Libya and Syria that have seriously undermined Russian and Chinese interests in the Middle East and North Africa.

The NATO-led war on Libya in 2011 overnight threatened billions of dollars of Chinese investment and forced China to evacuate more than 30,000 Chinese citizens. The war provoked a debate within the Chinese regime over the necessity of having the means to defend its interests.

As a first tentative step, Chinese naval vessels joined international anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. Earlier this month, Djibouti announced that China was

seeking to establish a small base in that country alongside facilities operated by the US, France and Japan.

As well as the growing threat posed by the United States, China and Russia are being drawn together by their deepening economic and social crisis at home. Both regimes represent the interest of tiny layer of corrupt oligarchs that have amassed huge wealth at the expense of the working class as a result of the processes of capitalist restoration.

Neither Beijing nor Moscow has any answer to the war drive of the US. Their attempts to appease Washington take place alongside a frantic arms build-up to counter American military dominance that only further heighten tensions and the danger of conflict.



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