Russia, China conduct joint military exercises in East Asia

Ben McGrath
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Russia, alongside China and 12 other countries, launched the Vostok 2022 military exercises in East Asia last Thursday that are scheduled to run through September 7. The military collaboration between Moscow and Beijing is developing as the US provocatively deepens its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and continually inflames tensions with China over Taiwan.

The countries participating in the war games in addition to Russia and China are India, Mongolia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Laos, Nicaragua, Syria, and Algeria. The military exercises are taking place at seven locations in the Russian Far East and in the Sea of Japan, involving some 50,000 troops, 5,000 weapon units, 140 aircraft, and 60 warships. They are being overseen by Russia's General Staff Chief, General Valery Gerasimov.

In conducting the exercises, Moscow seeks to demonstrate that it is capable of fighting on more than one front in the face of ongoing US provocations. However, the Vostok exercises are smaller than the last time they were held in 2018 when 300,000 troops were reportedly mobilized. The US proxy war against Russia and Washington's provocations against China over Taiwan are pushing Moscow and Beijing towards a de facto military alliance. Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated that he has not ruled out the possibility of an alliance with China in the future.

Underlying the growing cooperation, this is the first time Beijing has sent three branches of its military to take part in a single, Russian-led exercise. China has dispatched more than 2,000 troops, 300 vehicles, 21 aircraft, and three naval vessels.

Commenting on the nature of the drills, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Fomin stated on August 29: "The exercise isn't directed against any specific countries or military alliances and is purely defensive." The Russian Defense Ministry added that Russian and Chinese navies in the Sea of Japan would "practice joint action to protect sea communications, areas of marine economic activity, and support for ground troops in littoral areas."

China's defense ministry spokesman Colonel Tan Kefei stated on August 25 that China's participation in the exercises "aims to deepen pragmatic and friendly cooperation between the militaries of the participating countries, enhance the level of strategic cooperation among all participating parties, and enhance the ability to jointly respond to various security threats."

It is noteworthy that India has also sent a contingent to the exercises, albeit a small one comprised of 75 soldiers, taking part in army drills. While New Delhi is part of the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), alongside Japan and Australia, a quasi-military alliance aimed against China, India has not joined the US in denouncing Russia over Ukraine, as it depends on Russia for resources such as oil and for weapon sales.

Vostok 2022 takes place amid a sharp escalation of the US confrontation with both Russia and China. The United States has provided Ukraine with more than $50 billion in weaponry and other funds, including pledging an additional $3 billion dollars on August 24. Washington is providing Kiev with the tools to force Russia into an expansion of the conflict that began in February as a result of US and NATO military expansion up to Russia's border.

In addition, on September 2, the Biden administration notified Congress that it had approved a $1.1 billion arms sale to Taiwan. It includes 60 Harpoon anti-ship missiles, 100 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles and

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logistics support for radar systems. It is the sixth, and largest, provision of military equipment to the island under Biden, whose government, following in the footsteps of the previous Trump administration, is seeking to normalize military contact and collaboration with Taipei.

Washington is using Taiwan and Ukraine as launching points for larger wars aimed at carving up and turning China and Russia into semi-colonies, subordinated to the US. This agenda includes highly provocative visits to Taiwan by US officials, including last month by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and sending military vessels on so-called "freedom of navigation" exercises through the Taiwan Strait. Washington is increasingly challenging the "One China" policy that states Taiwan is a part of China, and to which Washington formally adheres.

Washington hypocritically criticized Moscow and Beijing over the Vostok exercises. Pentagon Press Secretary General Patrick Ryder stated at a press briefing on August 31, "Well, certainly, it is the right of all militaries and all nations that have militaries to conduct exercises. Our own military obviously conducts exercises. It's certainly something that we'll keep an eye on, given the nature of those nations, and in some cases, the instability that they are seeking to cause in various regions of the world."

Over the past 30 years, Washington has carried out criminal invasions and bombings of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving the Middle East and North Africa in ruins. The US has threatened to destroy other countries like North Korea, and recently held its own war games in East Asia with South Korea, dubbed Ulchi Freedom Shield.

Yet, according to Washington, it is Russia and China that are destabilizing the region. By implication, the latter two should not be allowed to conduct military exercises in and around their own territories while the US regularly conducts war games in Asia, thousands of kilometers from the US mainland.

Furthermore, Japan, a major US ally in the region, has made clear that it would join a Washington-instigated conflict over Taiwan, deepening tensions with Beijing. Japan's Defense Ministry unveiled plans last Wednesday to develop and mass produce cruise and ballistic missiles in violation of the Japanese constitution. The ministry justified the move, stating, "China continues to threaten to use force to unilaterally change the status quo and is deepening its alliance with Russia."

Encouraged by Washington, Tokyo has also taken a more aggressive stance towards Russia over the four disputed Southern Kuril Islands (called the Northern Territories in Japan), which sit just north of Hokkaido and are controlled by Moscow. Russia is using two of the islands, Iturup/Etorofu and Kunashir/Kunashiri as locations for the Vostok drills, drawing protests from Tokyo. Japan, however, hosts 56,000 US troops, with an additional 28,500 US troops stationed in South Korea, putting US soldiers on Russia's doorstep.

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