



Sino-Soviet Conflict Remembered with Concern

OE Watch Commentary: While relations today between Moscow and Beijing are strong, 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of what is often referred to as the Sino-Soviet border conflict. During a seven-month period in 1969, Soviet and Chinese forces skirmished over ownership of a number of islands in the rivers which separated China from the USSR. The border has since been delineated and relations restored, but as the accompanying excerpt from the centrist-daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* points out, today there are increased Russian concerns over China's growing military prowess.

The article begins by comparing defense budgets, asserting that in 2019, China's military expenditures will be "almost four times bigger than the amount that Russia spends on defense." The author traces the increase in Chinese defense spending, pointing out that since 2000 "it had grown almost 18-fold," where today it amounts to \$177.6 billion. And while "the Chinese defense industry stills lags behind Russia in... aviation and rocket engines, submarines, and new kinds of weapons," the article asserts "that the lag is shrinking rapidly." Moreover, it appears that China has become more of a danger to Russian arms sales, indicating that "in global arms trade, especially in the post-Soviet space, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, they [Russia and China] act as competitors."



Russian ship sprays water cannon on Chinese fisherman on the Wasuli River (1969).
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sino-Soviet_border_conflict_May_1969.jpg, CC 3.0.

The article concludes on a sobering note, suggesting "that with such ambitious plans and large-scale financing, China might also overtake Russia in military strength in the future." When referring to threats from the west, Russian military analysts insist that capabilities are more important than intentions. Even though relations between China and Russia are good today, this article suggests that Russian analysts have already started paying greater attention to Chinese military capabilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“It can be assumed that with such ambitious plans and large-scale financing, China might also overtake Russia in military strength in the future.”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Китай на свою оборону тратит в четыре раза больше, чем Россия Пекин к 2035 году планирует создать на флоте шесть авианосных групп (China Spends Four Times More Than Russia on Defense: Beijing Plans to Create Six Fleet-Based Aircraft Carrier Groups by 2035),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 March 2019. http://www.ng.ru/world/2019-03-05/6_7524_oborona.html

As seen from China's 2019 draft budget, its defense expenditures in the current year will increase by 7.5 percent and amount to \$177.6 billion when expressed in dollars. This is the second-largest defense budget in the world after the United States. And it is almost four times bigger than the amount that Russia spends on defense. China has the most numerous (more than 2 million military servicemen) military in the world. And in combat power, this military is second only to those of the US and Russian armed forces.

The Chinese leadership does not consider the increase in military expenditures a sign of excessive militarization. The growth rate of military expenditures in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in contemporary history is impressive; 20 years ago the PRC's defense budget amounted to about \$10 billion. In other words, by 2019 it had grown almost 18-fold compared to the start of the century...

...According to expert estimates, the Chinese defense industry stills lags behind Russia's in some other areas as well: aviation and rocket engines, submarines, and new kinds of weapons. But it is emphasized that the "lag is shrinking rapidly." And if Beijing and Moscow act as strategic partners on the world stage, then in global arms trade, especially in the post-Soviet space, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, they act as competitors...

“Chinese nuclear-powered aircraft carriers (with electromagnetic catapults) are expected to join the fleet by 2035, increasing the overall number of aircraft carriers to at least six, though only four of them will be engaged on the front lines,” the newspaper quotes Wan Yunfei, an expert on the PRC's naval forces and former PLA destroyer officer, as saying. He is confident that Beijing will not be slashing the budget for aircraft carriers despite the slowdown in economic growth and trade disagreements with the United States. It can be assumed that with such ambitious plans and large-scale financing, China might also overtake Russia in military strength in the future.