



Russia-China: Potential Allies or Adversaries?

OE Watch Commentary: The Chinese and Russian militaries continue to strengthen their joint capabilities. While the term “alliance” may be too strong to describe their relationship, the leadership in both countries share good personal relations and a number of similar strategic objectives. The first excerpt from the weekly *Voенно-Promyshlenny Kurier (VPK)*, provides an overview of what they define as a “comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction” within the military realm.

The article begins by describing how “in early September,” senior Chinese and Russian defense officials “signed an Agreement on further deepening cooperation.” It then goes on to list the major joint military exercises the two countries have conducted over the past several years, whether “on land, in the air and at sea,” asserting that their “military cooperation is not directed against third countries.” The article reminds readers that in 2014, the Chinese leader said “that the PRC would not join the military bloc with either Russia or anyone else,” but that by “relying on its ‘soft power’” would rather “form a network of partnerships around the world.”

Not all Russian observers, however, view their country’s growing relationship with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in a positive light. The second excerpt from another article in the same issue of *VPK*, argues that modern China will pursue its own interests—even at the expense of Russia. The author reminds readers that during the Afghan war, “the PRC became the most important member of the anti-Soviet coalition in Afghanistan,” and asserts that “at least half of the Soviet troops were killed by Chinese weapons.” The bulk of the author’s argument against a closer alignment with China stems from the Chinese “demographic [and economic] expansion into Central Asia.” The author describes how Chinese officials have offered loans to Central Asian countries, and when they can’t settle these debts, these countries “have to pay with mineral resources, enterprises, and in some cases, apparently, territories.” For instance, the article states that in exchange for a \$1.5 billion debt, Tajikistan “paid China with territory, moreover, we are talking about no less than a thousand square kilometers.”

Relations today between Russia and China, particularly in the military realm, are as good as they have ever been. However, these relations may become strained if China continues to expand its economic prowess into regions where the Kremlin hopes to retain a privileged sphere of influence. (Also see: “Russian Analysis of China’s Military,” “Chinese Regions to Begin Working Directly with Russian Ones,” “Growing Sino-Russia Ties: How Real are They?” *OE Watch*, August 2019; and “China Upgrades Relations with Russia,” *OE Watch*, July 2019) **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Most loans come naturally from China, which is not going to forgive anything even to its most important strategic ally, and only enslaves it even more.”

Source: Vladimir Vinokurov, “Глобальное совместное патрулирование (Global Joint-Patrol),” *Voенно-Promyshlenny Kurier*, 30 September 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/52737>

...Today, China and Russia have raised bilateral ties to the level of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction. This was fully confirmed by the results of the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Russia on June 5–7 and the signed documents: “Joint statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the development of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction entering a new era.”

...In early September, Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Council of the People’s Republic of China Zhang Yusia and Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu signed an Agreement on further deepening cooperation....

...The White Paper on Defense, published by Beijing on July 24, states that military cooperation with Russia is developing at a high level and plays a significant role in maintaining global strategic stability. It is emphasized that military cooperation is not directed against third countries and will increase on land, in the air and at sea. Since 2012, officers of the two armies held seven rounds of strategic consultations. In 2017, Russia and China organized the first joint naval maneuvers in the Baltic Sea. In 2018, PLA formations took part in the Vostok strategic exercises. In April-May of this year, “Naval Interaction” took place in the Qingdao area.... To participate in the Center-2019 large-scale Russian military exercises held on September 16–21, China deployed 3,500 troops, 900 heavy weapons, and 30 PLA Northern Command units....

...If you rely on the official statements of the Chinese top leaders, they adhere to a non-aligned policy, exclude military alliances with anyone, oppose the use of force, and the peaceful resolution of disputed issues. So, speaking at the end of 2014 to the members of the standing committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPC and high-ranking officials with a lengthy speech on the country’s foreign policy, Xi Jinping said that the PRC would not join the military bloc with either Russia or anyone else. It would only tie Beijing’s hands. China will strengthen its influence in the world by forming a network of friends on all continents, relying on its “soft power.” The Chinese leader stressed the need to stay away from military blocs, in other words, pursue a non-aligned course. Blocs are not needed; instead, China will form a network of partnerships around the world.



Continued: Russia-China: Potential Allies or Adversaries?

Source: Alexander Khranchikhin, “Острые углы Шелкового пути (Sharp corners of the Silk Road),” *Voенно-Промышленный Курьер*, 30 September 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/52736>

...In the 80s, the PRC became the most important member of the anti-Soviet coalition in Afghanistan. At least half of the OKSV troops were killed by Chinese weapons.... With the collapse of the USSR, the situation in the region has changed markedly. Economic reforms were in full swing in the PRC, which made it possible to quickly begin commodity, and at the same time, demographic expansion into Central Asia.

...The PRC is increasingly dependent on supplies of raw materials from Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.... Most loans come naturally from China, which is not going to forgive anything even to its most important strategic ally, and only enslaves it even more. This is Beijing's style; there are never exceptions for anyone.

...A very similar situation is developing in Central Asia - the countries of this region are already in debt... and have to pay China with mineral resources, enterprises, and in some cases, apparently, territories.

...In Tajikistan, Chinese companies, in payment for the construction of thermal power plants and roads, received the right to develop several gold deposits, and the conditions for the Chinese were much more favorable than if the parties signed an equal commercial contract. The total debt of Tajikistan with China is approaching one and a half billion dollars - a huge amount for a weak economy... There is evidence that Dushanbe has already paid with China and territory, moreover, we are talking about no less than a thousand square kilometers.

...It is only natural that Beijing's economic influence in the region develops into a military-political one.... This means the actual transformation of China into a world power with global geopolitical ambitions. Apparently, a step has already been taken, and the PLA contingent is deployed in Tajikistan. Officially, neither Beijing nor Dushanbe announced this, but the proof is there.

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