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PARSING CHINESE-RUSSIAN MILITARY EXERCISES

Richard Weitz

Strategic Studies Institute
U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA



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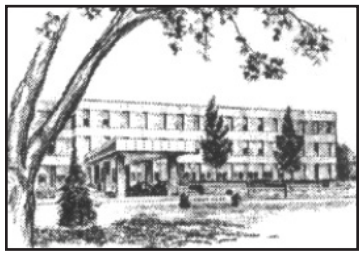
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FOREWORD

China and Russia have two of the world's most powerful militaries, and their growing defense cooperation has long been a subject of interest to the United States. Studying their military exercises provides insights for several questions of critical importance for the U.S. Army: What are the evolving power-projection capabilities of the Chinese and Russian armed forces? How have their tactics, techniques, and procedures evolved over time? How do the Chinese and Russian militaries conduct joint operations, from planning to execution? What is their level of operational interoperability—physical and otherwise? How might they conduct a future counterterrorist or counterinsurgency campaign in Central Asia, or maintain regional security in the region following the withdrawal of most North Atlantic Treaty Organization combat forces from Afghanistan?

This monograph helps us to answer these questions, as well as consider the broader nature of the trilateral relationship between China, Russia, and the United States.



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SUMMARY

China and Russia have engaged in an increasing number of joint exercises in recent years. These drills aim to help the two countries deter, and if necessary defeat, potential threats—such as Islamist terrorists trying to destabilize Central Asian governments—while also reassuring their allies that China and Russia will protect them from such threats. Furthermore, the recurring exercises, and other joint Russia-China military activities, have a mutual reassurance function insofar as they inform Moscow and Beijing about the other's military potential and thereby build mutual confidence. Finally, the joint exercises attempt to communicate the message to third parties, especially the United States, that China and Russia have a genuine security partnership that extends to cover Central Asia (a region of great importance for Moscow and Beijing) and possibly other areas such as Northeast Asia. Although still limited in key aspects, the Sino-Russian defense relationship deserves to be monitored by the United States as potentially one of the most significant international security developments of recent years.

PARSING CHINESE-RUSSIAN MILITARY EXERCISES

The People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation continue to develop their defense partnership to encompass a wide range of activities, including arms sales and joint military exercises. Their governments share important security concerns and do not perceive each other as near-term military threats. Russia has been unable to develop a robust relationship with Western countries or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) collectively, leaving the PRC as its most important defense partner outside the former Soviet Union. In recent years, China has become more eager to pursue defense diplomacy with the United States and other countries, but Russia remains its primary foreign arms supplier and military exercise partner.

BACKGROUND

From its origins as primarily a Russia-to-China arms transfer in the 1990s, the security relationship between China and Russia has evolved into something more closely resembling a balanced, though limited, defense partnership between two unallied but nonadversarial countries. During the Cold War, Chinese and Soviet armed forces stared each other down across the world's longest border. They even engaged in a small-scale shooting war in the late-1960s over contested islands lying along a shared river. During the 1990s, the two defense establishments largely ignored each other. The Russian high command was seeking to recover from the collapse of the integrated military

structures of the Soviet armed forces and the Moscow-led Warsaw Pact. It was also striving to manage the conflicts that had arisen along Russia's periphery following the messy disintegration of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Russian commanders were trying to suppress an unexpectedly vicious and robust insurgency in Chechnya. In China, the military was seeking to come to terms with its June 1989 crackdown on mass anti-regime protests centered in Tiananmen Square. The brutality of the repression led Western governments to sever defense ties with Beijing and impose arms embargoes and other sanctions. In this context, Chinese-Russian defense relations consisted mostly of haggling over how much the PRC would pay to purchase Russia's excess holdings of Soviet-era weapons. Though by no means a traditional defense alliance, the Sino-Russian military relationship has become a more balanced (though limited) security partnership between two countries that are neither adversaries nor allies, but share certain security concerns such as avoiding direct military conflicts, managing security along their border and nearby regions like Central Asia, maintaining Eurasian stability, and balancing the United States and its allies. Neither perceives the other as a near-term military threat; indeed, many Russian and Chinese leaders view reconciliation after decades of wars and armed confrontations as a major achievement and strive to maintain cordial ties, even as they recognize the possibility of renewed tensions in coming years. Although China has become more open to engaging in defense diplomacy with the United States and other countries, Russia remains Beijing's defense exercise partner of choice and main foreign arms supplier. Meanwhile, Russia has been unable to develop robust defense relationships with NATO

or other potential partners outside of some of the former Soviet Republics, which leaves China as its most important defense partner outside of Eastern Europe. While Russian and Chinese officials, including their presidents, have advocated strengthening the defense partnership further, both governments credibly deny any intent to establish a genuine mutual defense alliance such as the United States has with Japan, South Korea, and its NATO allies.

Over time, this bilateral defense relationship has become more institutionalized and better integrated. As befits the governments of two large and powerful neighbors, the senior military leaders of China and Russia now meet frequently in various formats. Since 1997, they have held yearly "strategic consultations" between their deputy chiefs of the general staff, and their direct encounters now include annual meetings of their defense ministers and their armed chiefs of staff, with other Chinese and Russian foreign, defense, and internal security officials often joining these bilateral summits.[1] All of these national security officials also interact frequently at various multilateral gatherings, especially within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO, Eurasia's most important regional security institution, is comprised of China and Russia, along with four of the five Central Asian countries (excluding only Turkmenistan). In March 2008, the Chinese and Russian defense ministers established a direct telephone line—the first such ministerial hotline ever created between China and another country.[2] In December 2008, the chiefs of the Chinese and Russian general staffs created their own similar such link.[3] Contacts between mid-level military officers are even more common, especially between commanders of border security units and units

in neighboring Chinese and Russian territories. Russian and Chinese military experts also engage in regular direct discussions related to their functional expertise in such areas as communications, engineering, and mapping.[4] Academic exchanges also occur frequently; more than 1,000 Chinese students have studied at over 20 Russian military academies since 1996.[5] The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, signed in 2001, does not include a mutual defense clause, but does stipulate both nonaggression and mutual consultations clauses.

Since 2003, the SCO members have organized a number of "anti-terrorist exercises" involving their armed forces and law enforcement personnel. On October 10-11, 2002, China and Kyrgyzstan conducted Exercise-01, which was the first bilateral anti-terror exercise within the SCO framework. Hundreds of their troops participated in joint border operations in this drill, which Xinhua says represented "the first time for PLA [People's Liberation Army] to hold a joint military maneuver with a foreign army *(sic)*."[6] (Like the organization's other projects, most SCO exercises, even those described as occurring within the SCO, typically involve only two or three member countries.) This was the case in August 2010, when the law enforcement and internal security forces of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan spent a week participating in what the Russian authorities called an "international operational and strategic exercise of SCO member states" against a hypothesized terrorist threat.[7] However, some SCO exercises do involve additional members. From August 6-12, 2003, some 1,300 troops from five SCO countries joined Coalition-2003, a series of anti-terrorism exercises held in the border city of Ucharal in eastern Kazakhstan and in Ili, located in China's

Xinjiang region. Out of the SCO members, only Uzbekistan failed to participate. The operation marked "the first time China participated in multilateral joint military maneuver."[8] Three years later, Uzbekistan, having broken with the West in 2005 and oriented towards Moscow, not only participated in, but hosted the SCO multilateral exercise, East-Anti-terror-2006. In this drill, representatives from the member governments' special forces and law enforcement personnel rehearsed defending public facilities from terrorists.[9]

MAJOR MILITARY EXERCISES

In addition to humanitarian relief, military exchanges, and numerous small-scale border drills, China and Russia have conducted a major bilateral or multilateral joint exercise on an almost yearly basis. The bilateral war games are unprecedented in the history of relations between Beijing and Moscow.

Peace Mission 2005.

The first of these Peace Mission exercises occurred from August 18-25, 2005. The Chinese and Russian militaries conducted a three-phased operation that began in Russia's far eastern city of Vladivostok and then moved to China's Shandong Peninsula, where the participants conducted land and then amphibious maneuvers.[10] Whereas the PLA supplied most of the troops (8,000 versus 2,000), the Russians provided the most sophisticated equipment, such as Russian Tu-160 and Tu-95 strategic bombers, as well as some 140 warships.[11] The maneuvers practiced during Peace Mission 2005 included neutralizing anti-aircraft defenses, enforcing a maritime blockade, and conducting an am-

phibious assault and other joint naval operations. One Russian analyst described the exercise as rehearsing "a conventional all-out assault using the Russian and Chinese tactics developed in the 1970s and 1980s."[12]

Not even during the 1950s—when China belonged to the Soviet bloc and had a formal mutual defense treaty with Moscow—did the two countries carry out such a large joint exercise. Although their stated purpose was to fight terrorists and restore peace among hypothetical local combatants, the large scale of the air, sea, and ground drills made it appear to both Russian and foreign observers like a rehearsal for a joint amphibious invasion of Taiwan, with tactics designed to deter or defeat U.S. military intervention on the island's behalf.[13] The U.S. Defense Department (DoD) also interpreted the exercise as an attempt by China, at least in part, to strengthen its power projection capabilities with respect to Taiwan.[14] The Russian government, at least, did not seek to impart such an impression. Moscow had reportedly rejected an earlier PRC proposal to conduct the exercise in Zhejiang, a Chinese coastal province near Taiwan.[15]

Another possible scenario could have been a joint Chinese-Russian military occupation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), undertaken if the regime in Pyongyang were to collapse. In addition to the risk of a massive flight of DPRK refugees fleeing into neighboring Chinese and Russian territory, Beijing and Moscow might worry that South Korean and U.S. military forces might move into North Korea to avert the humanitarian disaster; secure the DPRK's nuclear explosive devices and other weapons of mass destruction before they could fall into the hands of terrorists, criminals, or other rogue regimes; and further the Republic of Korea (ROK)-U.S. goal of reunifying

the Korean Peninsula under Seoul's leadership. Beijing and Moscow might therefore want to occupy the territory first to prevent U.S. forces from moving close to their borders.[16]

Peace Mission 2007.

Peace Mission 2007 began on August 9 in Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Area, and ended on August 17, with a live-fire exercise at the Russian military training range near Chelyabinsk, in Russia's Volga-Urals Military District. Unlike Peace Mission 2005, this exercise, which did not involve military ships, was better oriented toward suppressing a major Islamist insurgency (such as occurred in Chechnya) or popular rebellion (such as occurred at Tiananmen Square in 1989 or Andijan in 2005), presumably in one of the landlocked Central Asian countries. Perhaps due to the fears prevailing at the time that the SCO was trying to drive NATO out of Central Asia, several scholars have already written detailed studies of this exercise.[17]

Unlike in Peace Mission 2005, the armed forces of all six full SCO members participated in the 2007 war games, contributing a combined 7,000 troops, 1,270 weapons systems, and 86 combat aircraft. Russia provided 2,000 personnel, 122 millimeter (mm) and 100-mm artillery systems, and 40 aircraft. China supplied 1,300 soldiers, 40 *Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty* (BMP) and 14 *bronyetransportyer* (BTR) armored infantry vehicles, 18 pieces of 122-mm and 100-mm artillery systems, 340 air force personnel, and 46 aircraft. Except for the PLA, all the countries used Russian-made ammunition, arms, and equipment. Even during the exercise, the Chinese forces would engage in solo military actions and displayed a higher level of secrecy.[18]

The declared purpose of the war games was to show the determination of the SCO member states to combat the three evils of terrorism, separatism, and extremism.[19] Lieutenant General Vladimir Moltenskoy, deputy commander of Russia's Ground Forces, said that the exercise could also be used as training and educational material for SCO militaries for anti-terrorism operations.[20] Other goals enunciated by the participants included ensuring regional security, stability, and prosperity.[21] Observers ascribed additional motives to the participating governments. According to Roger N. McDermott, Chinese military analysts used this exercise to assess their "strategic insertion capabilities, cooperative operational capabilities, ability to carry out precision operations and long-range integrated support capabilities"; and some Chinese military officers believed that this exercise could help to reform and modernize the PLA.[22] Russia used the opportunity to put forward anti-Western views. For example, Russian Colonel General Yuriy Baluyevskiy claimed that promoting Western-style democracy in Central Asia would contribute to regional instability.[23] Putin exploited the occasion to announce the resumption of long-distance patrol flights by Russian strategic nuclear bombers, which had been suspended in 1992 with the end of the Cold War.

Peace Mission 2009.

Unlike in 2007, only Chinese and Russian troops participated in Peace Mission 2009, which took place from July 22-27 of that year. Chinese and Russian representatives sought to place the exercise within the SCO framework, but the only concrete involvement of that organization came from its secretariat and the

four other SCO members—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—that sent observers to the drill.[24] In this respect, the 2009 exercise more closely resembled Peace Mission 2005, which formally occurred under the rubric of their bilateral friendship treaty, than Peace Mission 2007, which involved combat troops from other SCO members. Peace Mission 2009 differed from the previous two exercises in the series in other respects. For example, the operational phase took place only on Chinese territory, with a single day of staff discussions in Russia looking like a simple attempt to involve some Russian territory in the drill. In addition, the number of troops participating was considerably lower than in previous years, though both Chinese and Russian forces deployed surface-to-air missiles (somewhat out of place in a nominal anti-terrorist drill) for the first time in one of their joint exercises.[25]

Peace Mission 2009 began with a day of political-military consultations among senior Chinese and Russian defense personnel in Khabarovsk, the largest city in the Russian Far East and the headquarters of the Far East Military Command.[26] The opening ceremony also took place there, with dozens of senior officials in attendance, including Chen Bingde, the Chief of the PLA General Staff, and Nikolai Makarov, his Russian counterpart.[27] The officials reportedly discussed "the overall anti-terror situation" and "the terrorism trends in member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," as well as Afghanistan.[28] The operational phases of the exercise occurred at the Taonan training base in China's Shenyang Military Area Command, which borders the Russian Far East. Both parties established a theater-level command headquarters there. They then spent 3 days jointly plan-

ning and organizing for a combined anti-terrorist campaign. The most important exercise segment was the 90-minute live-fire drill held on the last day at the base.[29] All told, about 1,300 military personnel from each country participated in some phase of Peace Mission 2009. The Russian air force contributed about 20 military aircraft to the maneuvers in China, including Su-25 and Su-27 combat jets, Il-76 transport planes, Su-24 bombers, and Mi-8 helicopters.[30] The Russians had considered sending strategic bombers to the exercise, but ultimately declined, following the practice of 2007 rather than 2005.[31] The Russian ground forces involved included BMP-1 and BTR-70 armored vehicles, as well as T-80 tanks.[32] A Russian airborne assault unit also practiced parachuting from Il-76s.[33] The Chinese armed forces contributed combat aircraft, artillery, air defense, army aviation, and special forces contingents as well as logistical support to both sides.[34]

This Chinese-Russian drill differed from the previous two Peace Mission exercises in certain respects. First, the operational phase occurred only on Chinese territory, with the single day of discussions at Khabarovsk looking like an attempt to involve Russian territory in some capacity. Second, the troop numbers were considerably lower. Several factors might explain the smaller size of Peace Mission 2009. Lieutenant General Sergei Antonov, the first deputy chief of staff of the Russian ground forces, argued that the two armed forces wanted the drills to correspond to their actual experience fighting small groups of mobile terrorists.[35] Russian analysts interpreted this as applying lessons learned by Russian forces in the northern Caucasus and the Chinese military in Xinjiang.[36] Other reasons for the smaller scale might have included operational considerations (the shorter time

for preparation and the more genuine focus on countering terrorism), the costs constraints on the two governments due to the global economic recession, their desire not to alarm foreign observers, and China's declining purchases of Russian weapons systems, which reduced Moscow's incentive to use the drill as a sales opportunity.

In any case, both countries conducted much larger national exercises around this time. Russia's Kavkaz 2009, which ran from June 29 to July 6, involved more than 8,500 military personnel, as well as more tanks, fighters, helicopters, and warships than had ever participated in a bilateral exercise with China.[37] A month following Peace Mission 2009, China conducted Stride 2009, a 2-month-long PLA exercise involving some 50,000 military personnel—including divisions from the Shenyang, Lanzhou, Jinan, and Guangzhou regional military commands—at the same base that Peace Mission 2009 occurred. At the time, the August-September Stride-2009 drill represented the largest tactical training exercise ever conducted by the PLA.[38]

Peace Mission 2010.

From September 9-25, 2010, the SCO rehearsed joint operations against a terrorist group in an urban setting as part of Peace Mission 2010, which took place in southern Kazakhstan's Zhambyl region. This exercise more closely resembled the multinational Peace Mission 2007 than the 2005 and 2009 war games, which were exclusively Sino-Russian drills, though other SCO members received invitations to send observers to the latter exercises. However, Peace Mission 2010 ran 1 week longer than Peace Mission 2007.

With 5,000 troops and considerable advanced military equipment, Peace Mission 2010 remains the largest SCO military exercise ever held outside of Russian and Chinese territory. The 2010 exercise occurred against a backdrop of continuing ethnic-religious minority unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet, newly resurgent terrorist activity in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and the Russian-controlled territories of the North Caucasus. Hundreds of people died the previous year in vicious street fighting between Uighurs and Han Chinese in Xinjiang and other parts of China. The PLA authorities, who used the military to suppress the disorders after the police and other internal security forces lost control of the situation, blamed the ethnic rioting on foreign-backed terrorists seeking to create a separate state of East Turkmenistan.

The exercise consisted of three phases. The first stage involved consultations among senior political officials and military officers in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The defense ministers, general staff chiefs, and others involved discussed how to employ SCO troops to resolve emergencies as well as the global and regional security environment, defense cooperation within the SCO, and other shared interests among the member states. The Chiefs of the General Staffs then issued instructions to start the drills.[39] The next two phases involved combat exercises among the forces that had deployed to the Matybulak Air Base near Gvardeisky in Kazakhstan. Stage two, which began on September 13, focused on joint maneuvers and drills in which the SCO contingents practiced making preparatory fire, mobilizing reserves, besieging residential areas, conducting breakouts, and using suppressing fire at night. During the main hour-long drill on Septem-

ber 15, the forces employed more than 1,000 armed vehicles, artillery pieces, rocket launchers, and other ground equipment, as well as more than 50 military aircraft.[40] Phase 3, which started on September 24, saw some live-fire drills, and then ended with a display of combat equipment from the member states.[41] Peace Mission 2010 also involved more demanding live-fire drills than previous SCO exercises. In those cases, the simulated combat operations often appeared as media shows, timed to coincide with the annual SCO heads-of-state summits. In 2010, the live drills occurred over several days, and about 50 percent took place at night.[42]

Peace Mission 2010 included some 5,000 troops, 300 major combat pieces such as tanks, sophisticated defense equipment for engineering and communications, and more than 50 combat planes and helicopters.[43] Russia, China, and Kazakhstan each sent at least 1,000 troops to the war games, whereas Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan contributed smaller numbers, though even these represented at least one self-standing operational-tactical group.[44] Russia sent the largest amount of military equipment—some 130 tanks, self-propelled artillery systems, and infantry fighting vehicles, as well as over 100 trucks and about a dozen aircraft from its nearby base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan, including Su-24 Fencer tactical bombers, Su-25 Frogfoot close-support aircraft, and Mi-8 transport helicopters.[45] In the end, Uzbekistan, which traditionally has been uneasy about Russia's military presence in Central Asia, declined to send troops. At the time, Uzbek officials had been leading the effort to resist expanding the SCO's military functions. They had criticized SCO exercises for resembling a Soviet-era military drill that did not meet the contemporary security needs of the organization's Central Asian members.[46]

The PLA sent a major contingent that consisted of a ground force of approximately 1,000 soldiers, an air force combat group, and a logistics group under the command of Ma Xiaotian, deputy chief of the PLA General Staff.[47] The Chinese contingent included some of the PLA's most sophisticated indigenous weapons systems, including T-99 tanks, H-6 strategic bombers, J-10 fighters, as well as aerial tanker and early warning aircraft.[48] The H-6 and the J-10 warplanes were participating in their first foreign exercise.[49] Western observers noted that, uniquely among the participating militaries, the Chinese forces possessed and employed sophisticated "network-centric capabilities" that allowed them to display impressive combined armed tasks.[50] In Peace Mission 2010, the PLA demonstrated improved logistics, command and control, and more sophisticated weapons and tactics. Before the exercise began, the PLA forces undertook extensive pre-deployment theoretical, basic, and combined combat training, optimized for joint counterterrorist training.[51] In early September, hundreds of PLA soldiers traveled by train from a PLA training military base at Zhurihe, located in North China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, to Matybulak air base in Kazakhstan. The total distance covered during the week-long trip was 5,000 kilometers (km), after which the PLA soldiers immediately began preparing for their drills.[52] One Chinese writer boasted that this represented "a big test for PLA's comprehensive transportation capability."[53] According to Li Zhujun, deputy chief of the Chinese military's exterior liaison for the exercises, the PLA moved a total of six contingents of almost 1,000 troops, 1,000 tons of materials, and additional quantities of military equipment. PLA logisticians also had the opportunity of loading and unload-

ing carriages as they passed from the 2.98-meter gauge used in China to the 2.87-meter gauge employed in Kazakhstan. "By improving the quality of service and logistics in various links," Li declared, "we have created conditions for the soldiers and officers to devote themselves to the exercises in high spirits and full of vitality."[54] In addition, the Chinese Army's helicopters rehearsed their first nighttime shooting exercise at the war games.[55] Perhaps the most interesting skill demonstrated by the PLA was how the air force conducted its first simulated long-range air strike. Four H-6 bombers and two J-10 fighter jets took off from air bases in Urumqi, China. They then divided into two groups that, following mid-air refueling, each rehearsed bombing ground targets in Kazakhstan, 2,000 km away from their departure base. According to the PLA, these planes could have conducted their bombing runs even without refueling.[56] Having the capacity to conduct long-range air strikes and coordinate air-ground battle maneuvers could prove useful for attacking insurgents in Central Asia as well as combating Indian ground forces. A PRC analyst claimed that the H-6 bombers hit their target every time, and that the helicopters were able to fly only 40 meters above the ground in a valley.[57] A Western analyst termed the strikes a "milestone" in the PLA's ability to intervene rapidly in Central Asia.[58]

Naval Interaction 2012.

From April 22-27, 2012, China and Russia held their first official bilateral naval exercise (variously referred to as Naval Interaction 2012, or Maritime Cooperation 2012) around China's Yellow Sea port of Qingdao, the base of the PLA Navy's Northern Fleet. Peace Mission 2005 featured a much larger maritime component,

but the 2012 maneuvers were bilateral exercises held outside the SCO. On this occasion, the combined fleet simulated the rescue of a hijacked ship, escorting commercial vessels in pirate-infested waters, joint air defense, maritime search and rescue, and anti-submarine tactics.[59] The aircraft and special forces in Naval Interaction 2012 did conduct a joint maritime anti-terror task.[60] Nevertheless, the two governments declined to characterize the war games as formally having a primarily anti-terrorist purpose. Instead, they referenced a more diverse set of goals such as improving interoperability, sharing techniques, rehearsing skills, and enhancing regional stability. These are the same declared purposes of many of the multinational naval exercises conducted in the Asia-Pacific region by the United States and other countries.

Both China and Russia made major contributions to Naval Interaction 2010. Although the Chinese supplied more ships than their partner, some of the Russian vessels were very advanced. The Chinese and Russian navies shared important command, control, and communications functions during the drills, which helped them practice their combat interoperability and the effectiveness of their control, electronics, and information systems.[61] The PLA Navy (PLAN) contributed 4,000 service members, 16 ships (five missile destroyers, five missile frigates, four missile boats, a support vessel, and a hospital ship), two submarines, and 13 aircraft (along with five shipboard helicopters).[62] The PLAN Type 052 Luhu-class multirole destroyer *Harbin* (a domestically-produced, second-generation ship that is the Northern Fleet's flagship) acted as the command vessel—responsible for directing both sides' ships, submarines, and fighters.[63] The rest of the Chinese contingent consisted of four guided missile de-

stroyers—including the *Shenyang* (Type 051C Luzhou-class), the *Fuzhou* (of the Russian Sovremenny-class), and the *Taizhou* (an improved Project 956EM Sovremenny)—the guided missile frigates *Luoyang* and *Mianyang* (both Type 053H3 Jiangwei-II-class), and the Type 054A Jiangkai-II-class frigates *Yiyang*, *Zhaoshan*, and *Xuzhao*; the Fuqing-class fleet oiler *Hongzhu* was tasked with replenishment duties.[64] The Chinese fleet also included four missile boats, two submarines (at least one of which was a Type 039G1 Song-class), and a hospital ship.[65] Meanwhile, Russia deployed four combat ships and three supply vessels from its Pacific Fleet, which is headquartered in Vladivostok: the Slava-class cruiser *Varyag*, the flagship of the Russian Pacific Fleet, was present, along with three Udaloy-class anti-submarine destroyers (the *Admiral Vinogradov*, *Marshal Shaposhnikov*, and *Admiral Tributs*—the last of the three being from the Northern Fleet), the tugboat MB-37, the fleet tanker *Pechenga*, and the supply ship, SB-22.[66] Throughout the live-fire drills, ship-to-ship communications were conducted in Russian.[67] This was also not the first time that the *Varyag* had taken part in one of these joint naval exercises; in April 2009, the 11,500-ton *Varyag* had led the formation of foreign ships on review at the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the PLAN's founding.[68]

Naval Interaction 2012 involved two phases. The first phase consisted of preparation of headquarters and naval units and the deployment of ships.[69] The Russian ships arrived at Qingdao on April 21, and the exercises themselves began the next day.[70] The two sides also practiced relaying information between Chinese and Russian naval command stations and the joint headquarters of the exercises.[71] The second "active" phase included live-fire exercises and ship

maneuvers. (The naval component of Peace Mission 2005 included these two phases but also had a third phase consisting of amphibious operations.[72]) Starting on April 25, the active phase of the exercises began, with sailors engaging in tactical drills with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) aimed at defending their ships from posited hijackers. The PLAN and Russian ships then practiced fending off simulated air attacks, resupplying at sea, and moving into an area containing enemy submarines.[73] On the morning of April 26, the two sides engaged in a joint counterhijacking and naval escort drill using 13 naval vessels, four helicopters, and two special operations teams. Five of the warships conducted a naval escort for four merchant ships, which, minutes later, were attacked by four designated pirate boats. The naval escorts and their shipboard helicopters rapidly drove the pirates away. The two sides then simulated a raid on a hijacked Chinese merchant ship, with 20 Chinese and Russian special force operators successfully boarding the ship and rescuing the hostages. Both sides also conducted live-fire exercises that involved shelling ships some 30 km away, as well as joint anti-aircraft and anti-submarine drills. The anti-submarine exercise employed a sonar target that was used to test submarine detection capabilities, as well as rocket-propelled depth charges. The drill was conducted with the *Admiral Tributs'* shipboard Ka-27 helicopters searching for the sonar target, and then reporting their coordinates to the anti-submarine ships, which deployed countermeasures.[74] Following these live-fire drills, a fleet review was held later that day (still April 26), marking the end of the active phase of the exercise.[75] The exercises officially ended on April 27 with a closing ceremony.[76]

Peace Mission 2012.

From June 8-14, Peace Mission 2012 was held at the Chorukh-Dayron training range in northern Tajikistan's Sughd Province. More than 2,000 soldiers and 500 vehicles from SCO members China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan participated.[77] The host government said that the drills simulated fighting terrorists operating in Central Asia's mountainous terrain.[78] The exercise included "military maneuvers, including air and ground strikes, encirclement, and suppression, as well as pursuit and vertical interception."[79] China contributed 369 army soldiers. The PLA ground troops travelled by vehicle via Kazakhstan from Xinjiang, while the PLA army aviation flew over Kyrgyzstan after departing from Kashi Airport.[80] Russia used some troops already in the region that were supporting the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO): a reinforced motorized rifle company from one of the battalions at its 201st Military Base in Tajikistan, which forced marched to the exercise site through mountainous terrain, and some attack planes stationed at the CSTO base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan.[81] Kazakhstan sent an air assault battalion and air defense forces as well as armored personnel carriers, combat helicopters, and fixed-wing warplanes; Kyrgyzstan dispatched a mountain warfare company and a special forces unit; and host Tajikistan contributed a motorized rifle battalion reinforced with tanks, an air assault unit, military transport helicopters, and emergency response units.[82] The Uzbekistani government sent only some observers while denying the government of Kazakhstan's request to allow its troops to traverse Uzbekistan's territory to reach Ta-

jikistan, with which Uzbekistan has poor relations; the Kazakhstan units ended up having to go through Kyrgyzstan to reach northern Tajikistan.[83] With only some 350 soldiers coming from China and from Russia, this combined figure of 700 military personnel represented the smallest number of forces ever participating in a Peace Mission exercise from these two great military powers. A description of the counterterrorism drill itself also suggests a relatively limited operation: soldiers battled terrorists at a roadblock and at a residence where they held hostages. They were supported by armored vehicles, helicopters, and a few combat aircraft.[84]

Naval Interaction 2013.

From July 5-13, China and Russia conducted an 8-day naval drill in the Sea of Japan. These war games (which the Russians termed Naval Interaction 2013 and the Chinese Joint Sea-2013), were larger and more sophisticated than the first exclusively Sino-Russian naval exercise held the previous year. During the live-fire drills, which ran from July 8 to July 10, the Chinese and Russian ships simulated escorting commercial vessels, rescuing a hijacked ship, and defending a convoy of ships from sea and air attacks.[85] The 2013 exercise was comprised of 18 surface vessels, including four guided-missile destroyers, two missile frigates, and a supply vessel, as well as a submarine and three helicopters. The drills involved a total of 4,000 military personnel, including special forces units from both countries. China sent fewer ships than in 2012—a total of seven vessels, which included four guided-missile destroyers, two guided-missile frigates, and a supply ship, as well as three shipborne helicopters

and a special operations detachment.[86] Nevertheless, these vessels, which came from the PLAN's North Sea and South Sea fleets, included some of the PLA Navy's most advanced warships such as a guided-missile destroyer that had an Aegis-type radar and an anti-submarine warfare missile frigate.[87]

Peace Mission 2013.

Two weeks later, Peace Mission 2013 took place from July 27 to August 15 at the Chebarkul military range in Russia's Chelyabinsk Region in the Urals. Some 600 Chinese troops and 900 Russian troops participated, but no other SCO country sent troops in this exclusively Sino-Russian exercise.[88] This exercise marked the first occasion when both countries' regional military area commands, rather than their national military headquarters, planned a joint exercise together.[89] In this case, the United Strategic Command of the Russian Central Military District, led by the deputy chief of staff of the District, Major-General Sergey Chuvakin, and the PLA's Shenyang Military Region, led by its deputy chief of staff, Zhang Yan, organized the drills with a joint command of 60 Chinese and Russian staff officers. Both sides no longer followed their former tradition of depending solely on their respective national command systems and executing the planned flow of events with little bilateral interactions. Instead, they now worked side by side with each other, coordinating activities in a real-time manner, thereby transforming their previous parallel planning into a joint planning process. The two regional commands also contributed the troops to the exercise, as well as more than 250 pieces of military hardware.[90] PLA spokesperson Geng Yansheng said

that the Chinese contributions to the joint drill included a planning cell, a command element, and infantry, air force, and logistics groups. Their weapons systems included armored vehicles, self-propelled guns, and fixed- and rotating-wing aircraft, including Z-9 and M-171 helicopters.[91] The Russian media related that:

> Chinese troops brought along their own tanks, light reconnaissance vehicles, 120-mm self-propelled howitzers, 152-mm self-propelled guns, JH-7A 'Flying leopard' fighter-bombers and Harbin Z-9 gunships and Mi-171 transport helicopters.[92]

Peace Mission 2013 simulated a campaign-level operation with more than 25,000 soldiers (rather a large size for a mere "counterterrorism" exercise). As only 1,500 soldiers were physically present, the remaining personnel were "virtual soldiers," which worked fine for the deployment and planning phases, which involved computer simulations as well as joint staff meetings.[93] According to the Chinese Ministry of Defense, the three components of the war games were "troop deployment, battle planning, and simulated combat."[94] Getting to the Chebarkul military range was a challenge for the PLA units departing from Shenyang. Since the training range was more than 4,000 km away, they required a week of travel, and the exercises stipulated that this had to occur under simulated combat conditions.[95] The ground forces could travel by rail, but the helicopters had to land eight times and be escorted through Russian air space by Russian Mi-8 combat helicopters.[96] In the live-fire drills on August 15, Chinese and Russian elite troops operated in mixed ground formations consisting of tanks, artillery, and special forces; for the first time, the Chinese and Russian special forces used the same

helicopters in the simulated combat phase, which in this case lasted only an hour.[97] Russian and Chinese planes and helicopters formed a united air group to provide support for the ground operations.[98] These units coordinated operations, shared intelligence, operated helicopters, and gave orders bilingually. Colonel General Nikolai Bordanovskiy, chief commander of Russia's Central Military District, explained that, "Although they speak different languages, the two militaries have worked out a set of rules to facilitate communication by using gestures with military signals."[99]

Naval Interaction 2014.

Russians called the maritime drills Naval Interaction 2014, whereas the Chinese referred to the exercise as Joint Sea-2014.[100] Sources offer varying dates when the maneuvers formally began and ended, with the earliest start date being May 20 and the latest end date being May 26.[101] The location of the exercise was vaguely described as taking place in the "northern waters and aerial space of the East China Sea."[102] Before sailing there, the Russian ships participating in Naval Interaction 2014 engaged in joint maneuvers with the PLA at Usun naval base in Shanghai.[103] The two commands finalized the subsequent drills there, and then their fleets departed together for the exercise's staging grounds in the East China Sea.[104] On May 19, 2014, Chinese and Russian sailors toured each other's ships in port.

On this occasion, the joint maritime exercise coincided with a state visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to China, which lasted May 20-21. Putin and PRC President Xi Jinping were both in the city attending the summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building in Asia (CICA), an emerging Eurasian security institution that China had begun chairing in May 2014.[105] Both presidents attended the exercise's official opening and praised Naval Interaction 2014 for enhancing mutual cooperation and security. Putin argued that, "the military ties are an important part of the Russia-China comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination." He "called for enhanced cooperation to tackle various threats and challenges to safeguard regional and world peace and stability."[106] Xi said that the exercises "would showcase the two sides' resolve in responding to threats and challenges as well as safeguarding regional security and stability." Xi further stated that the 2014 drills "display the new level of strategic mutual trust and coordination between the two countries."[107]

During the second day of Putin's visit, China and Russia announced the signing of a major gas deal. There was also media speculation of further Russian arms sales to China: to include advanced air and missile defense systems such as the S-400, the Lada class air-independent propulsion submarines, and Su-35 multirole fighter jets—all assets that would enhance China's ability to project power over disputed maritime territories.[108] These developments confirmed for many the impression of a further strengthening of the China-Russia partnership since the Ukrainian crisis led to a sharp downturn in Russia's relations with the West.

According to Russian and Chinese sources, Naval Interaction 2014 consisted of 12 ships[109] (six Chinese, six Russian); two submarines (both Chinese); nine fixed-wing aircraft (seven Chinese, two Russian); six helicopters (two to four each); and two marine commando units (one Chinese, one Russian).[110] Interestingly, until just a few days before the exercise began, 14 ships were originally reported as planning to participate.[111] The reductions in the number of ships involved, along with the confusion over when the drills started, suggest the exercise underwent some last-minute changes. The six Russian ships came from Russia's Pacific Fleet; it was led by the guided-missile cruiser *Varyag*, capable of carrying 16 advanced SS-N-12 anti-ship missiles armed with nuclear warheads in a configuration designed primarily to destroy U.S. aircraft carriers.[112] The Russian contingent also included the fleet destroyer *Bystry*, the submarine warfare ship *Admiral Panteleyev*, the amphibious warship *Admiral Nevelskoy*, and two service vessels, the tanker *Ilim* and the tug boat *Kalar*.[113]

Overall, the Russian Order of Battle consisted of the following ships: Slava Class Guided Missile Cruiser *Varyag*, Sovremenny Class Destroyer *Bystry*, Udaloy Class Anti-Submarine Destroyer *Admiral Panteleyev*, Large Landing Ship Project 775 *Admiral Nevelskoy*, Tanker *Ilim*, and Tugboat *Kalar*.[114]

Host-country China made a somewhat larger contribution to the drills. The participating PLAN vessels included the latest-generation Russian-built destroyer *Ningbo* and the Chinese-built Type-052C *Luyang II* destroyer.[115] The *Zhengzhou* is one of the most advanced combat vessels in the PLA's East Sea Fleet. It can carry 48 HQ-9 long-range surface-to-air missiles, based on the Russian-built S-300, to intercept enemy aircraft, as

well as C-805 and YJ-62 missiles, capable of attacking enemy ships and land targets. China's Su-30 fighters and JH-7 bombers provided air support for both fleets. In addition, J-10 fighters took part in the Russia-China exercises for the first time.[116]

The Chinese Order of Battle consisted of the following ships: Type 052 Guided-Missile Destroyer *Harbin*, Type 052C Guided-Missile Destroyer *Zhengzhou*, Type 956 Destroyer *Ningbo*, Type 054 Guided-Missile Frigate *Yantai*, Type 054 Guided-Missile Frigate *Liuzhou*, Type 903 Replenishment Ship *Qiandaohu*, Type 022 Houbei-class missile boats, attack submarines Kamov Ka-28; and/or Harbin Z-9 helicopters, and seven warplanes of multiple classes.

Although China and Russia each contributed six major ships to Naval Interaction 2014, the overall Russian contingent was smaller this time and played more of a support role. Russia provided only three of the eight surface combatants and none of the submarines, but did supply two of the exercise's three support ships. Furthermore, only two of the nine fixed-wing aircraft were Russian. The larger contribution of the PLA Navy was most likely due to the exercises taking place off China's coast. When China and Russia conducted their first joint naval exercises in 2012, the drills took place off China's coast, and PLA Navy ships predominated. When the 2013 exercises took place near Vladivostok, the Russian Navy contribution was larger than that of China. It would thus appear that whichever country is hosting the exercises provides the bulk of their participants. If anything, Russia's contribution in 2014 was somewhat robust, compared to the last time the PRC hosted the exercises in 2012, when the Chinese contingent was considerably larger than the Russian one.

The 2014 exercises consisted of a wide range of missions, including jointly identifying potentially hostile aircraft, combating submarines, providing joint air defense, escorting vessels, engaging in search-and-rescue missions, recapturing a seized ship, and intercepting missiles.[117] For example, Chinese and Russian ships conducted a drill to fight underwater "frogmen," and stop terrorists on speedboats. In addition, they rehearsed defending ships at anchorage by providing early warning against possible enemy attacks, evacuating the warships under attack, and countering the attack with kinetic actions and through electronic systems.[118] On May 24, 2014, the militaries conducted joint anti-submarine exercises. Both navies used live weapons in the drill, with eight ships firing main guns, high-speed guns, and rocket depth charges.[119]

Some of these missions appear geared towards anti-piracy and anti-terrorism operations of the type that the Chinese and Russian navies have been engaged in for years, primarily in the Gulf of Aden—though the two fleets do not cooperate closely with each other or the other navies on patrol there. Chinese researchers note that protecting sea lanes is important for China, which relies heavily on maritime trade.[120] Their May 23 anti-piracy drill occurred under the command of the *Varyag*, which ordered special forces to eliminate "pirates" on a "hijacked" ship.[121] The simulated defense of ships at anchorage is a skill that is needed to counter pirate attacks, though the Chinese may also have wanted to remind observers that Imperial Japan had also conducted such attacks.[122] Naval Interaction 2014 also saw much simulated ship-to-ship combat. The Chinese and Russian fleets split into two teams that simulated combat against one another (as they have in previous years), but they also formed three mixed

groups, commanded by both Russian and Chinese officers in both languages, that engaged one another.[123] Wang Chao, head of a PLAN coordinating team, said that the mixed grouping would enhance naval coordination between the two countries.[124] Furthermore, by assuming responsibility for providing air cover to both fleets during the drills, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) gained experience in controlling airspace through coordination of fighter and surface vessels.[125] According to Li Jie, an expert at the PLA's Naval Military Studies Research Institute, "the exercises operate more like a real battle."[126]

Peace Mission 2014.

From August 24-29, the SCO held its largest multinational exercise in history, Peace Mission 2014. The drills took place at Zhurihe Training Base, located in Inner Mongolia in North China. Zhurihe has become China's main base for engaging in large-scale exercises with foreign armies on its soil.[127] Five of the six SCO members sent troops (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, but not Uzbekistan). The war games saw a panoply of weapons in use, including unmanned aerial vehicles, air-defense missiles, tanks, armored vehicles, other ground vehicles, and special operations units. A total of about 70 aircraft flew roles in the exercise, including fighter planes, airborne early warning aircraft, armed helicopters, and surveillance and combat drones.[128] The combined forces practiced ground and aerial reconnaissance, joint precision strikes, integrated air-ground assaults on fortified positions, joint hostage rescue and urban assault missions, and extensive information sharing.[129] According to Liu Zhenli, Commander of China's 38th Army:

> The level of collaboration this time is much higher than in previous joint military exercises. We have established a joint commanding center, and another affiliated commanding center for five armies and air forces. An information sharing mechanism has also been set up among five parties for reconnaissance. Joint actions have also been carried out, especially in terms of hostage rescue.[130]

The exercise scenario involved an international terrorist organization supporting a separatist movement in a country, plotting coups, and aiming for violent regime change. More specifically, the scenario hypothesized that a city in an unnamed Eurasian country (implicitly a SCO member) had become a hub of political instability and terrorist activity, and its government called on the SCO to intervene to resolve the issues.[131] The fictitious separatist organization has more than 2,000 fighters armed with tanks, missiles, and even light aircraft—something on the scale of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) rather than al-Qaeda.[132] The exercise's three phases included troop deployments, battle planning, and simulated combat. Before the live drills, the multinational forces moved to the Zhurihe base, conducted some planning meetings, and held an opening ceremony in which the deputy chiefs of the general staff from China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and deputy commander of Russia's Eastern military command participated.[133] The first stage of the third live-fire phase involved the SCO forces using electronic warfare measures against their adversary's communication systems. Chinese and Russian planes, helicopters, and drones then conducted air strikes against the "terrorists." The SCO forces subsequently employed high-precision artil-

lery attacks that destroyed the terrorists' command centers. Finally, SCO ground forces with combined air support liberated the terrorist-occupied zones and freed their hostages.[134]

China provided the most troops by far. In addition to some 5,000 personnel and more than 400 combat systems from the 38th Combined Corps and the air force under the PLA's Beijing Military Area Command (MAC), China assigned some forces directly under the PLA general headquarters/departments, including aerospace reconnaissance, mapping, hydrometeorological, and mobile logistics support detachments providing "strategic and operational support."[135] The PLAAF CH-4 unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) made its first appearance at an SCO exercise. The CH-4 (Cai Hong 4 or Rainbow 4), which resembles the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper, shot several targets during the live-fire drills.[136] One PLA official said that the drones' ability to monitor, identify, and destroy ground targets in real time made it an important counterterrorist tool.[137] PRC authorities claim that Uighur insurgents fighting Beijing's rule in Xinjiang's vast northwestern region have used illicit border crossings and desert encampments that can be monitored by air.[138] Chinese aerospace firms have developed dozens of drones, and the PLA is eager to take advantage of these unmanned systems. The Chinese also contributed some of their most sophisticated manned aircraft such as its J-10 and J-11 fighter jets, its JH-7 fighter bombers, and its KJ-2000 airborne early warning and control aircraft.[139] Also debuting in the SCO exercises were the WZ-10 and WZ-19 attack helicopters used by the PLAAF and the Ground Force. The larger Z-10, Fierce Thunderbolt, is designed primarily for anti-tank missions, but has some air-to-air

capability; the smaller Z-19 Black Whirlwind is an upgraded version of the Z-9 attack helicopter, which is also manufactured by the Harbin Aircraft Industry Group.[140] During the war games, the helicopters practiced reconnaissance and rocket barrages.[141] Meanwhile, three IL-76 transport aircraft from an aviation regiment of the Guangzhou MAC air-dropped people and equipment during the drills.[142] The PLA Army's most modern Main Battle Tank, the Type 99—a variant of the former Soviet T-72—also took part in the exercises.[143]

Almost 1,000 Russian troops participated in Peace Mission 2014, travelling by rail from Russia's Eastern Military District.[144] The main units assigned to the drills were the 36th Separate Motorized Infantry Brigade and an aviation group from the 3rd Air Force and Air Defense Command.[145] Russia also contributed 60 armored vehicles (including 40 BMP-2 infantry combat vehicles and 13 T-72 main battle tanks); more than 20 missile and artillery systems (including the SAU 2S3M self-propelled guns and BM-21multiple-launch rocket systems); more than 60 other military vehicles; eight Mi-8 AMTSh helicopter gunships; four Sukhoi Su-25 attack planes; and two IL-76 military transport planes.[146] The Russian media reported that the artillery systems used Krasnopol semi-automatic laser-guided explosive projectiles during their drills.[147] Unlike in Peace Mission 2013, the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan each sent hundreds of elite soldiers: Kyrgyzstan deployed about 500 members of its special forces units, along with a few dozen combat vehicles (including eight tanks); [148] Kazakhstan, which often sends the largest Central Asian contingent, provided only about 300 elite airborne troops.[149] Finally, some 200 rapid reaction troops came

from Tajikistan.[150] As usual, Uzbekistan, though a SCO member, again did not send troops to participate in the exercises.[151] The observers at the exercise included representatives from the SCO Secretariat, the SCO regional anti-terrorism organizations, the five SCO observer states, the three dialogue partners, and military attachés from more than 60 countries.[152]

The day before the exercise ended, President Xi met with the SCO chiefs of staff, who were then meeting in Beijing, and praised the drills for "having made positive contributions to regional security and stability."[153] In addition to China's large troop contribution, Wang Ning, chief director of the Joint Directing Department of the exercise and deputy chief of the PLA general staff, boasted at the start of the war games that the SCO "exercise will be conducted in China throughout the process for the first time" and, also for the first time, would occur simultaneously with a meeting of the chiefs of the SCO members' general staffs and with a military music festival.[154]

ASSESSMENT

These joint Russian-Chinese military exercises serve several important national security purposes for both governments. One of their original aims was to facilitate Russian weapons sales to China. Russia has used the drills as an opportunity to showcase to the Chinese defense community certain weapons systems that they want to sell to the PLA. The Chinese presumably welcome the chance to examine the capabilities of Russian systems through these exercises. Peace Mission 2005 in particular could be seen, in part, as an elaborate staging ground for demonstrating Russian military technologies to potential Chinese buyers. At

the time, China, along with India, was the leading buyer of Russian weapons. During the exercises, Russia showed off the Tu-95 strategic bombers and Tu-22M long-range bombers that Moscow was then trying to sell to Beijing. Although these strategic bombers are older platforms (the Tu-160 is Russia's most advanced strategic bomber), they can launch long-range cruise missiles against air and ground targets, including U.S. aircraft carriers.[155] The sales motive was also evident in the Russian decision to leave the bombers that participated in the exercise, as well as other types of military aircraft, on display in China for several days following the maneuvers. The policy of exploiting the opportunity to highlight a few advanced weapons systems to the Chinese during the exercise may have worked. A few weeks after the drills, China placed a large order for one of the participating warplanes, the Il-78 tanker.[156] In recent years, this function has declined in importance, since the Chinese armed forces, benefiting from growing indigenous capabilities of the Chinese defense industry, have been buying fewer Russian weapons. However, the resumption in recent years of large-scale Chinese purchasing of Russian arms might revive the use of this exhibit function. China may also start using these exercises for this purpose, especially if the SCO expands in size. Beijing has until now declined to sell weapons to Russia's Central Asian allies out of deference to Moscow, but has practiced no such constraint regarding Pakistan, Iran, or Turkey.

A more enduring goal of the exercises is to improve the operational and tactical proficiency of both militaries and increase their interoperability. Chinese defense representatives have traditionally cited the advantage of using exercises with foreign countries as opportunities to learn new tactics, techniques, and

procedures. For example, the 2007 live-fire drills in Chelyabinsk allowed the PLA to practice deploying and supporting a large military force at a considerable distance from mainland China.[157] The same challenge was overcome with Peace Mission 2013, when the PLA forces had to travel more than 4,000 km from the PLA's Shenyang Military Region to the Chebarkul training field in the Urals. At the time, deputy chief of staff for the Shenyang region Shi Xiangyuan told the media that "exercises like Peace Mission 2013 are called with an eye to helping both armies to strive as close to perfection as possible."[158] The PRC can use the maneuvers with Russia to practice coordinating large and varied forces with one of the world's leading military powers. At the time of Peace Mission 2013, Wang Haiyun, vice president of the Chinese Society for the Study of the History of Sino-Russian Relations, explained that, "Holding joint drills will enable China and Russia to learn from each other, deepen mutual trust and boost each other's combat power."[159]

China seeks the same goals in the maritime domain. Yin Zhuo, an adviser to the PLAN, said the Chinese Navy was eager to interact with the more modern Russian Navy, telling Chinese TV that, "Both sides will have deep exchanges in terms of tactics and technology."[160] For example, the Russian and Chinese warships that participated in Naval Interaction 2012 simulated rescuing a hijacked vessel, protecting commercial ships from pirates, anti-submarine warfare, and joint maritime air defense and search and rescue.[161] Then Naval Interaction 2013 practiced a wider range of skills, including at-sea replenishment, anti-piracy convoying, surface warfare, and fleet air defense.[162] Zhang Junshe, deputy director of the Naval Military Studies Research Institute, acknowledged

that the PLAN had achieved significant technological advances in recent years, but he argued that Russia's military technology was still more advanced.[163] At the time of the 2014 naval exercises, the PRC Defense Ministry described their purpose as, "to deepen practical cooperation between the [Chinese and Russian] militaries, [and] to raise the[ir] ability to jointly deal with maritime security threats."[164] PRC experts also state that joint defenses can allow navies to cooperate more efficiently in coping with maritime security threats than if they acted unilaterally.[165] As for Peace Mission 2014, these land exercises rehearsed combating international terrorist organizations supporting a separatist movement and boosting intelligence sharing in response to such events.[166] In recent years, the PLA has developed a cadre of Russian-speaking officers to coordinate with the Russian and other SCO militaries, thereby promoting interoperability.[167]

The Russian armed forces also aim to improve their performance through these exercises. The movement of Russian troops and equipment to China in preparation for Peace Mission 2009 represented the largest foreign deployment by the forces of Russia's Far Eastern Military District since Soviet forces invaded northeastern China to attack the Japanese occupation troops at the end of World War II.[168] Furthermore, whereas previous Sino-Russian exercises focused on suppressing terrorists, guerrillas, and possibly rebellious cities or provinces, the latest naval drills explicitly have as one of their goals the enhancing of their ability to cooperate against maritime piracy. The two navies have been operating together (though mostly in parallel) in the Gulf of Aden, fighting Somali-based pirates, and some experts said they wanted to improve their interoperability in such operations.

The Russian and Chinese forces involved in these war games have demonstrated increased proficiency over time, though it is unclear whether this improvement results from the exercises themselves or the strengthening capabilities of both sides' conventional forces in recent years due to other initiatives. The 2005 series saw only a limited degree of operational interoperability. That year's drills involved mostly parallel Chinese and Russian military maneuvers in the same area of operations.[169] The subsequent exercise rounds have demonstrated greater integration, though it is still dubious if both militaries could conduct a joint battle, with integrated tactical operations, rather than a joint campaign in which they operated independently in parallel sectors (e.g., with Russian troops moving into Kyrgyzstan from the north while Chinese forces enter from the east). Their ability to organize a rapid joint military response even in a neighboring state is also questionable. The Chinese media cited a PLA general who boasted that, after deciding to hold Peace Mission 2009, they spent "only 6 months" getting ready for the drill to better "demonstrate Chinese forces' quick [sic] response capabilities."[170] The SCO lacks the integrated command and control mechanism to organize a more rapid collective military intervention, even in one of its member countries. Perhaps for this reason, the Russian government has been trying to develop a rapid response force within the Moscow-controlled CSTO that Russia and its allies can employ for urgent scenarios.

These exercises could enhance the ability of the Russian, Chinese, and perhaps other SCO armed forces to deter—and if necessary suppress—another popular rebellion or large–scale terrorist movement, such as the ones that occurred in Tiananmen Square in

spring 1989 and Andijan, Uzbekistan, in May 2005.[171] At the time, the 2007 drills in Xinjiang led some observers to speculate that exercise aimed "to intimidate the Uighur population in East Turkestan and to warn the democratic forces in Central Asia not to challenge the authoritarian regimes."[172] The 2009 maneuvers between the Russian and Chinese militaries occurred against the backdrop of mass unrest in Xinjiang and a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and the Russian-controlled territories of the North Caucasus. Hundreds of people had died the previous month in vicious street fighting between Uighurs and Han Chinese in Xinjiang and other parts of China. The authorities, who used the military to suppress the disorders after the police and other internal security forces lost control of the situation, blamed the ethnic rioting on foreign-backed terrorists seeking to create a separate state of East Turkmenistan. During the weeks preceding the exercises, the governments in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan reported that Taliban-linked insurgents were infiltrating their countries from Afghanistan.[173] Wang Xinjun, researcher with the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, wrote at the time of Peace Mission 2013 that, "The foreign media tend to focus on military cooperation between China and Russia in the context of geopolitical strategy, while ignoring the fact that the two countries face a common threat from terrorism." He added that Peace Mission 2013 communicated to the world that:

> China and Russia will work together to firmly crack down on terrorism, which causes significant harm to a world that is trying to achieve peace and development. The resurgence of terrorist forces in China and Russia in recent years demonstrates the need for cooperation between the two countries.[174]

The Chinese representatives especially emphasized the counterterrorist dimensions of the 2009 exercise. A series of PLA military experts called the drills a "warning" meant to deter terrorists.[175] Major General Wang Haiyun, a former military attaché to Russia, observed that, "To some extent, the July 5 Xinjiang riot pushed forward anti-terrorism cooperation between China and Russia."[176] According to General Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the PLA, "China and Russia have a very clear objective to jointly eliminate terrorism, separatism, and extremism." Chen added: "We fight for peace."[177] In describing the tactics involved, Chinese Major General Luo Yuan, a researcher with the PLA's Military Sciences Academy, stressed that, "The major subjects of the exercise are not designed to train positional attack-and-defense or mobile warfare, but to encircle and suppress unprepared terrorists."[178] At the opening ceremony, General Makarov also emphasized the counterterrorist purpose of the drills, arguing that the Urumqi riots "show that more and more terrorist, separatist, and extremist forces are emerging, and, recently, to that we have to add pirates" that were operating off Somalia and attacking foreign vessels defended by Russian, Chinese, and other international warships. "I believe the joint task of our two armed forces is to fight such illegal forces," Makarov insisted.[179] Despite the lack of a clear counter-terrorist purpose for the surface-to-air missiles, the rest of the order of battle for Peace Mission 2009 seems well-suited for fighting terrorist groups such as the Taliban and Chechen insurgents.

In contrast, the massive 2014 war games saw tanks, warplanes, and precision missions being used against a terrorist group that had thousands of fighters as well as its own light aircraft and ground equipment.

In justifying the exercises, Chinese writers pointed to the growing threat that terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries could spillover into Central Asia and argued that "joint military drills and other moves taken by SCO members for defense and security cooperation will send a strong deterrent signal to the 'three forces' of terrorism, extremism, and separatism in the region."[180] The exercise occurred after Chinese authorities had become alarmed by the surge in Uighur domestic terrorism during the past year in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. PRC Defense ministry representatives declared that the exercise would help deter the "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism by strengthening the militaries' ability to coordinate counter-terrorism operations.[181] Fang Fenghui, Chief of the PLA General Staff, said that, "The success of the joint drill demonstrated . . . their resolution to fight against the three evil forces. . . ."[182] He maintained that the situation around Afghanistan was becoming more complicated and "terrorists are rapidly infiltrating into Central Asia."[183] Even if they do not establish a military presence in Afghanistan, which became a formal SCO observer in 2012, China and Russia might work with their Central Asian partners to establish some kind of barrier to try to limit the flow of Afghan-based terrorists and narcotraffickers into their countries. China is aiming to construct a New Silk Road through Central Asia as well as deepen transportation links with Pakistan and Iran, while Russia is trying to establish an integrated economic and security bloc among the former Soviet states, some of which border Afghanistan.

Another goal is to underscore the high level of defense cooperation between China and Russia. The exercises are not explicitly intended for the classic pur-

pose of collective defense. The bilateral Sino-Russian friendship treaty, signed in July 2001, lacks a mutual defense clause, instead obliging both sides to refrain from aggressive acts toward one another and to consult in the case of mutual threats and international crises. Furthermore, Chinese government representatives have stated repeatedly for years that they will not join foreign military alliances. At the May 2014 CICA summit in Shanghai, President Xi, while joining Putin at the concurrent China-Russia naval drills, attacked the concept of Cold War alliances that exist at "the expense of others . . . and leave the rest insecure."[184] Nonetheless, the combined maneuvers do affirm the two countries' commitment to defense cooperation as one dimension of their evolving relationship. Major General Wang Haiyun, a former military attaché to Russia, observed that, "Military cooperation is the highest level and most sensitive exchange between two countries and China and Russia's joint military drill has demonstrated the solid bond between the neighbors."[185] Major General Qian Lihua, director of the Ministry of National Defense's Foreign Affairs Office, specifically described Peace Mission 2009 as contributing to the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Beijing and Moscow:

> This drill is a specific move to consolidate and deepen the two nations' strategic cooperation partnerships, an important practice to implement the consensus reached at the [June 2009] SCO summit and a key program for celebrating the two nations' diplomatic relations.[186]

Nikolai Markov, the chief of the Russian General Staff, said that "Russia sees great importance in pro-

moting cooperation between the two militaries and the naval exercise shows that bilateral strategic coordination is at a high level."[187] According to Viktor Litovkin, the chief editor of the *Independent Military Review*, the exercises help "confirm" to both sides as well as external audiences "that Russia and China are committed to military cooperation in the region."[188]

Collaborating through joint exercises could also be seen as a form of mutual confidence building aimed at reassurance and mutual trust. Since the end of their Cold-War antagonisms, Russia and China have adopted a series of arms control measures along their joint border, including advanced notification of large military exercises in the vicinity. The Russia-China border demilitarization talks began in November 1989. They soon split into parallel negotiations: one on reducing military forces along the Russian-Chinese frontier, the other on establishing confidence and security building measures in the border region. The other newly independent former Soviet republics bordering China—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—also participated in demilitarization and confidence-building measures involving China. In July 1994, the Russian and Chinese defense ministers agreed to a set of procedures to avert future incidents, including arrangements to prevent unauthorized ballistic missile launches, prevent the jamming of communications equipment, and warn ships and aircraft that might inadvertently violate national borders. In September 1994, Chinese and Russian authorities pledged not to target strategic nuclear missiles at each other. On April 26, 1996, the governments of China and the four former Soviet republics signed a Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions, which established a set of military confidence-building measures along

their shared borders. At their second meeting, which occurred in Moscow on April 25, 1997, the "Shanghai Five," as these countries were known before they added Uzbekistan and created the SCO, signed a Treaty on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions. This accord has restricted conventional military deployments and activities within a 100 km-wide demilitarized zone along their shared frontiers. The Shanghai Five also established a Joint Control Group, which still holds sessions, to monitor implementation of these confidence-building measures.[189] In April 1998, China and Russia established a direct presidential hot line—China's first with another government. Some of these agreements are largely symbolic in that they are not accompanied by any verification or enforcement procedures. For example, either country can rapidly retarget its strategic missiles. Leaders can choose to use the hot line, or not pick up the receiver. Yet, most of the accords are self-enforcing. China and the former Soviet republics were eager to demilitarize following the end of the Cold War.

Chinese authors commonly refer to the value of these exercises for promoting, or at least confirming, a high level of mutual trust among the participants. Wang Ning sees them having an "important and far-reaching political significance on strengthening mutual trust among the SCO member states."[190] The Russian-Chinese exercises, whether they occur bilaterally or occur within the multilateral SCO framework, help supplement the formal arms control agreements by providing additional information regarding the tactics, techniques, and procedures practiced by the other military as well as its capabilities and intentions. Recurring exercises and other forms of cooperation also increase both states' confidence that the

other will stand with them, or at least stand aside, if they enter into a conflict with another party. Chen Bingde, Chief of the PLA General Staff, said that the exercises promote "strategic coordination and mutual trust" between the Chinese and Russian military establishments.[191] Luo Yuan, a researcher with the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, also said that the:

> Joint drills have become the regular means of military cooperation between China and Russia, helping to improve both armies' structures, mutual trust, and military transparency.[192]

Ren Yuanzhe, a researcher at China Foreign Affairs University, said that the two navies "took concrete steps to increase military transparency through the exercise."[193] Li Shuyin, a research fellow with the Academy of Military Sciences, called the 2014 naval exercise "a clear show of enhanced mutual trust between the two militaries, and of increased transparency." Noting that the Sino-Russian maritime drills had occurred 3 years in a row, Li said that they had become a "routine and institutionalized cooperation mechanism between the two sides."[194] According to Chinese sources, during these exercises, tactics, technical performances, and data were shared between the two navies, and each showed its respective tactical concepts and weapons employment practices.[195] The Chinese and Russian fleets also allowed the other country's sailors to board their ships, both during combat and when they were docked in port before the exercise.[196] Perhaps most importantly, not only did the two navies simulate combat against one another, but they also split into mixed groups under joint command. Although NATO and other navies have

engaged in joint drills with their alliance partners, Naval Interaction 2014 marked the first time that the PLAN has engaged in this kind of joint drill with a foreign country.[197]

Shi Xiangyuan, deputy chief of staff of the PLA Shenyang Military Region, which organized China's participation in Peace Mission 2013, told the Russian ITAR-TASS news agency that, "We're not competitors, but we're partners. Trust between the two countries became the unique feature of the Peace Mission."[198] Commenting on the most recent Peace Mission 2014, Meng Xiangqing of the PLA National Defense University argued that China had displayed a high level of trust in allowing the other SCO members to send their armed forces into its interior.[199] A deputy commander of Russia's Eastern military command described these countries military ties as "unbreakable," emphasizing Russia's commitment to its role in the SCO.[200] Shao Yuqun, at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, argued that the SCO exercises "can help build up mutual trust between the member states and thus enable the SCO to play a greater role in stabilizing the region" including by nonmilitary means.[201]

In this regard, the two militaries are presumably also interested in learning more about the evolving capabilities of a possible future adversary (e.g., each other). Alexander Khramchikhin, the Director of Russia's Institute for Political and Military Analysis, argues that the joint military operations provide an occasion for both militaries to check each other: "China intends to study Russia's strong and weak points during the drills in case Russia becomes its adversary in the future."[202] Unlike during the Cold War, China and Russia no longer fear engaging in a shooting war. The two countries have largely accepted their com-

mon border, which at almost 2,700 miles (consisting of a small segment in China's northwest and a much larger frontier along China's northeast) is one of the longest borders between two neighboring countries in the world. Yet, Russians worry about the long-term implications of China's exploding population for Russia's demographically and economically stagnant eastern regions. In addition, militaries like to develop contingency plans for a range of possible scenarios.

Furthermore, the exercises provide an opportunity for China and Russia to demonstrate their capabilities to external audiences. The Chinese and Russian denials that they intended to send messages to others with their joint exercises appear *pro forma*. Using military exercises to communicate signals to third parties is a common objective of these drills. These activities typically attract greater attention than simple political declarations or other routine civilian government activities. For example, Director Wang Ning described Peace Mission 2014 as "pushing forward establishment of a fair and reasonable new international political order."[203] Demonstrating military prowess is a time-honored tactic for reassuring friends and deterring adversaries. Through such operations, the Russian armed forces can counter doubts that they have not yet fully recovered from their post-Soviet meltdown, while the Chinese can show off their growing sophistication of their own military.

One target audience might be Central Asia. Through their exercises, which typically involve observers if not always combat troops from Central Asian states, China and Russia underscore their ability to defend Central Asian governments from foreign or internal threats. Eurasia's precarious regional security situation, combined with the SCO's failure to in-

tervene in Kyrgyzstan to suppress the June 2010 riots, alarmed many Central Asians about whether they can confidently rely on the SCO to protect them against external and domestic security threats. By reassuring Central Asian governments that they can depend on Beijing and Moscow, the drills also weaken Western influence in the region by helping persuade their SCO allies that they need not rely on NATO and the United States for their defense.[204] Russia in particular has benefited from highlighting its commitment to combating threats to regional stability to justify its military presence in Central Asia. Unlike the United States and other NATO countries, Russia has not experienced problems obtaining military bases on the territory of its SCO allies. Central Asian governments also generally appear to prefer working within the SCO, which is not dominated by a single country. China's balancing presence presumably reduces fears of external subordination and gives them more room to maneuver. For example, with low-key Chinese support, Uzbek officials have been leading the effort to resist expanding the SCO's military functions. Conversely, it is easier for the Central Asian governments to deal with the Chinese colossus through the SCO rather than directly. In terms of political signaling to third parties, moreover, the maneuvers affirm to the United States and other extra-regional countries that Russia and China consider Central Asia as lying within their overlapping zones of security responsibility. Chief of Russia's general staff General Nikolai Makarov said at the opening ceremony of the Peace Mission 2009 exercises that they "must show the international community that Russia and China have the necessary resources to ensure stability and security in the region."[205]

The Chinese and Russian governments and media regularly affirm that their military exercises are not aimed at any third party. For example, trying to reassure Westerners that they need not worry about the recent holding of back-to-back ground and maritime Sino-Russian exercises, one Chinese commentator wrote that:

> The simulated enemies of the joint forces in the Joint Sea 2013 and Peace Mission 2013 drills are obvious: pirates and terrorists. So people who allege that China and Russia are targeting a third country or that they are trying to establish a 'military alliance' are only betraying their Cold War mentality.[206]

One year later, both countries dismissed notions that Peace Mission 2014 represents a joint Sino-Russian response to the recent Western sanctions on Russia and U.S. pressure on China. In July 2014, Chief of Russian presidential staff Sergei Ivanov insisted that Russia and China would not "create a new military alliance, union or something like that," and that Sino-Russia co-operation "was not targeted at anyone."[207] In August 2014, *The People's Daily* published a commentary by Zhang Junshe, a researcher at the China Naval Research Institute, which read:

> Some Western media have described this drill as 'a Central Asian grouping that is dominated by China and Russia, aiming to challenge U.S. influence in Asia as well as the international order ruled by U.S. and its European allies'. Any reasonable analysis of this drill will expose the fact that these doubts and criticisms stand on shaky foundations.[208]

Junshe further stated that the drills' dates and plans were determined well before the Ukraine crisis,

that the exercise focused on helping members deal with "the threat of increasingly severe territorial attacks," that the exercises were very transparent to outside observers, and insisted that the tasks had nothing to do with capturing "disputed islands."[209] The Chinese government has generally pursued a low-key approach toward the Ukraine crisis, while Russia has relied mostly on its independent military exercises as well as those conducted in partnership with the CSTO, Moscow's main military alliance, which includes all SCO members except China. However, Fyodor Lukyanov, an independent Russian foreign affairs specialist influential in Russia's foreign policy community, acknowledged that any major Russian-Chinese military exercise would appear as a signal to the West that China and Russia are developing closer political and military ties.[210]

That Naval Interaction 2014 coincided with a period when both countries had tense relations with the West naturally led to speculation that the drills were intended to send a message to Western countries, especially the United States, that Beijing and Moscow had other security options than siding with the Western powers. However, while the 2014 Sino-Russian maritime exercise might seem a joint reaction to the countries' mutual troubles with the West, its timing is likely coincidental. Since 2012, China and Russia have held annual naval exercises, with the Chinese defense ministry reporting in 2013 that they were "to be normalized and institutionalized."[211] Given this, and the fact that the 2012 exercise occurred in late April and the 2013 drill in early July, a Sino-Russian naval exercise was likely to occur sometime in spring or summer 2014.

The naval exercises show that China and Russia are willing and able to cooperate to advance their joint interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Chen said that, through the joint naval drills, China and Russia "demonstrate their confidence to maintain peace and stability in the region and world."[212] These exercises have occurred amidst growing tensions in the western Pacific over territorial disputes. China has overlapping maritime claims with several of its neighbors, with the disputes centered on islands located within overlapping exclusive economic zones, including with Japan over islands in the East China Sea. Meanwhile, China's and Russia's territorial disputes with Japan have become newly acute in recent years. Rear Admiral Leonid Sukhanov, Deputy Chief of the Main Staff of the Russian Navy and the commander of the Russian contingent to the 2012 maritime maneuvers, said that the "[p]articipating naval forces will train in the prevention of armed conflicts in exclusive economic zones,"[213] implying a desire to affirm these disputed territorial claims. Naval Interaction 2012 took place at the same time as a large U.S.-Philippines amphibious drill and followed a series of U.S.-South Korean military exercises that some Chinese and Russian commentators had denounced as exacerbating tensions on the Korean Peninsula. PRC officials have been especially incensed that some of these exercises have occurred in the Yellow Sea, near China's industrial heartland and along routes where imports reach key Chinese coastal cities.[214] Yana Leksyutina, associate professor of international relations at St. Petersburg State University, said that the China-Russia naval exercise served as a warning to Washington to respect both countries' interests and that "the joint drill is a response to recently intensified military drills in the

Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea by the U.S. and its allies."[215]

Chinese and Russian analysts also attribute the exercises to a general Sino-Russian desire to counter the U.S. rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific region. Russian sources cited retired PLA generals as describing Naval Interaction 2012 as a response to the Pentagon's increased activities in the Asia-Pacific region.[216] Igor Korotchenko, chief editor of the *National Defense* magazine, added that while "China is not Russia's military ally . . . as strategic partners, we want peace and stability on our borders."[217] Rear Admiral Duan Zhangxian, PLA Navy deputy chief of staff and the executive director of the Chinese navy for the drill, warned that, "The Chinese navy strives for peace. However, if anyone infringes on the country's peace, we will not be afraid to fight for it."[218] Chinese sources listed a desire to counter U.S. influence in Asia as one of Russia's goals in Naval Interaction 2013. A Russian-language web site controlled by the Chinese government described Naval Interaction 2013 as "'an attempt to resist the ongoing U.S.-Japan alliance'."[219] Perhaps the clearest sign of China's anti-Japan intent was how, following the end of Naval Interaction 2013, five PLAN vessels conducted their first known passage of the Soya Strait located between Hokkaido in northern Japan and Russia's Sakhalin Island. Xinhua, China's official news agency, described the drills as providing China and Russia with "the experience to compete against the United States Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in a real combat environment."[220] Although the specific timing of the exercises seem unrelated to any specific Japanese or U.S. statement of action, a general Chinese desire to show displeasure and capabilities in response to the heightened tensions

with Japan, supported by the United States, is probable. PRC analysts have been complaining throughout the Barack Obama administration that the Asia Pivot has been encouraging Japan, the Philippines, and other Asian countries to challenge more assertively Beijing's territorial claims. The military exercises would underline China's assertion of sovereignty and serve as a warning and deter the United States.[221]

China also tried to use the exercise to legitimize the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that Beijing declared in November 2013 but which Japan, the United States, and other countries have been contesting. Naval Interaction 2014 included air identification drills. Although they are routine in naval exercises to ensure that civilian planes are not targeted, Li Jie, an expert at the PLA's Naval Military Studies Research Institute, explicitly claimed that Moscow's participation in the air identification drills "showed [that it] supported China's move to set up the zone."[222] Although no Russian official or expert confirmed this interpretation, the PRC government naturally wants the world to think this is the case. In addition to attempts to make it appear as if Russia supported its ADIZ, China also used the joint exercises as an opportunity to implement the zone. Before then, China had done little to actually interfere with U.S. or Japanese violations of the ADIZ that it had declared in November 2013. However, on May 24, at the height of Naval Interaction 2014, two Chinese fighters flew threateningly close to Japanese planes that, according to Beijing, had violated the ADIZ by coming so close to watch the China-Russia war games.[223] The PRC explanation for the buzzing is odd. An ADIZ would only require the planes to identify themselves to China, not avoid flying in international waters, where the drills were then occurring.

In addition, Russia's participation reflects Moscow's recent efforts to raise its global naval profile. Russian fleets are increasing their presence on the high seas and, after years of falling budgets, finally acquiring newly built warships. More recently, the Russian media used the Peace Mission 2014 exercise to highlight that, despite Moscow's alienation from the West and the many sanctions imposed on Russia due to the Ukraine conflict, Moscow still had important foreign partners. Nevertheless, the increased size of the latest exercise may not be related to the most recent international tensions since Russia's contribution was comparable in size and status to what Moscow sent to earlier SCO exercises.[224] Some analysts do depict Russia as trying to enhance the SCO to counter NATO and advance a more multipolar world.[225] But it was China, not Russia, that greatly increased its contribution to the latest drill. The growth of terrorist attacks in China during the preceding year and the exercise's location in China might explain the PLA increase.

CONCLUSIONS

The joint China-Russia military exercises provide several benefits to both countries that contribute to their security partnership. The drills help the Chinese and Russian armed forces to improve their tactical and operational capabilities, thereby enhancing their ability to pursue unilateral and joint operations. The PLA, which has not fought a major war in decades, particularly strives to learn lessons from other militaries. At times, the Russian government has used the drills as a way of showcasing military technologies that it wanted to sell to China. The joint shows of force also aim to deter and, if necessary, defeat potential threats,

such as Islamist terrorists trying to undermine Central Asian states, while at the same time reassuring SCO member states that China and Russia can protect them from such threats. Furthermore, the recurring exercises and other joint China-Russia military activities have a mutual reassurance function, as they inform Beijing and Moscow about the other's military potential and thus build mutual confidence about their friendly intentions toward one another. Finally, the joint exercises attempt to communicate the message to third parties, especially the United States, that China and Russia have a genuine security partnership and that it extends to cover Central Asia, a region of high priority concern for Moscow and Beijing, and possibly other areas, such as northeast Asia.

The China-Russia defense partnership looks likely to continue for at least the next few years. The new Chinese leadership seems eager to cultivate defense ties with Russia. During Xi's March 2013 Moscow visit, when he became the first Chinese president to visit the Russian Armed Forces Operational Command Center, Xi said that:

> My visit to the Russian Defense Ministry is intended to confirm that military, political and strategic relations between the two countries will strengthen as will cooperation between the Armed Forces of China and Russia.[226]

At the time, PRC Defense Minister General Chang Wanquan told his Russian counterpart, General Sergei Shoigu, that "China is ready to work with Russia to tap that potential and expand the scope of bilateral defense co-operation, so as to lift it to a new level."[227] At the beginning of Peace Mission 2014, General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff of the armed

forces of Russia, said that, "Russia is ready to make joint efforts with China to lift the relationship to a new high."[228] After the drills, Liu Zhenli, Commander of China's 38th Army, said that further SCO military cooperation should seek an expanded "exchange of ideas on tactical thoughts, joint command, and fighting methods of anti-terror operations."[229] NATO's decision to suspend military cooperation and contacts with Russia following Moscow's annexation of the Crimea is leading Moscow to place more emphasis on strengthening security cooperation with Beijing.

One should not exaggerate the significance of these Sino-Russian military exercises. Russia and China do not have a formal defense alliance, and there is no pledge or expectation that they would conduct joint combat operations anytime soon. In principle, SCO members might come to one another's defense in case of an external invasion, but the organization's charter does not formally authorize collective defense operations. In practice, China would prove reluctant to make such a defensive commitment since Beijing has shunned formal military alliances, while the other five governments belong to the Moscow-led CSTO, whose explicit function is to provide for the mutual defense of its members from external attack.

The exercises that the Chinese and Russian armed forces undertake without foreign participation are considerably larger than their joint drills with one another. Lieutenant General Wang Guanzhong, deputy chief of the PLA general staff, clearly exaggerated last year when he said that, "After a decade of cooperation, I am confident that the two militaries are absolutely able to conduct joint combat under any conditions."[230] Despite their many contributions, these exercises have not established a solid basis for a sustained major joint

Russia-Chinese military operation. Even in the SCO context, Russia and China lack the interoperability or integrated command, control, and support mechanisms required to conduct an effective combined military campaign. The Chinese and Russian armed forces do not rehearse integrated military operations to the same degree as, for example, do the U.S. military drills with its NATO allies or South Korea and Japan. The United States and other countries regularly engage in many comparably large and often more challenging exercises with foreign partners, including China and Russia. At best, the Chinese and Russian armed forces could probably conduct a joint counterterrorist or peacekeeping mission in a nearby country, but only if the environment was not too challenging—like Kyrgyzstan in 2010, but not Chechnya in 1999 or Afghanistan today. In those more demanding cases, Russia and China could at best employ a sectoral approach in which they would conduct parallel but geographically separate operations in a common military campaign, such as might occur in a joint effort to suppress a major Islamist insurgency in a Central Asian country.

Regarding their joint naval exercises, the prospects of the two countries fighting foreign navies together seems remote. Even in the case of Japan, with which Russia and China each have bilateral territorial conflicts, neither Moscow nor Beijing have strongly sided with the other against Tokyo. In particular, the Russian government has been seeking to regularize its territorial dispute with Japan rather than establish a common anti-Tokyo front with Beijing. When Chinese warships sailed off toward Japan following the 2013 Russia-China naval exercise, Russia's vessels declined to follow them in what could have been a joint show of force designed to intimidate Tokyo. In addition,

while the general number of Chinese and Russian capital warships has been increasing, the size of their annual naval exercises has remained modest. The small prospect of a joint Chinese-Russian naval operation combined with their governments' limited commitment to the joint maritime drills suggests that other considerations are driving their naval exercise program, such as building trust and sending messages to third parties.

Thus far, the U.S. defense community has reacted with appropriate watchful calm to the Chinese-Russian defense engagements. If anything, these exercises present less of a threat to U.S. regional security interests than the Sino-Russian arms trade relationship, which at times seems as if it could allow Beijing to contemplate using its Russian-supplied capabilities to pursue military options against Taiwan or in other Asia-Pacific scenarios. The U.S. military should continue to monitor the Chinese-Russian defense cooperation as it sustains its own robust exercise and exchange series with the far larger number of international partners available to the United States. As we are daily reminded, unlike Beijing or Moscow, Washington has many genuine military allies.

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