

The Dynamic Change in China and Russia's Military Diplomacy

Written by Ralph Winnie, Contributing Editor
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The Kremlin recently revealed that Moscow has pledged \$640 billion in an effort to bring 80 percent of the Russian military establishment up to modern standards by 2020. Consequently, Vladimir Popovkin, Deputy Defense Minister in charge of arms procurement, recently suggested to the media that the Russian Defense Ministry plans to buy around 600 airplanes and 1000 helicopters. He further stated that the Ministry was planning to fund the development of a “new liquid fuel heavy intercontinental ballistic missile to replace aging RS-18 Stilleto and RS-20 Satan”. These missiles would be able to carry up to 10 warheads with solid fuel missiles each carrying a maximum of three warheads. It was further revealed that the Russian government plans to lend \$24 billion to defense companies to help prepare for bigger contracts after 2015.

Current trends in Russia's foreign security and defense policies are driven primarily by Russia's domestic development. This is based on a strong and sustained economic growth trajectory that has coincided with a tightly controlled structure. This structure, it has been alleged, has led to the curtailing of democratic principles and reforms. It has been widely asserted that the system of power engendered by Vladimir Putin and continued under Medvedev does not provide for a smooth transition of power, but instead focuses on stability and predictability.

The Russian leadership believes that military force is an essential component of the idea of restoring Russia's status as a global superpower. Thus, the Russian government feels that it is necessary to show that the period of “degradation and shrinking of its armed forces is over”. The trend is to allow investment decisions related to the production, transport, and export of all energy sources to no longer be purely business matters, but an essential element of state control. This securitization implies that US and other foreign companies cannot be allowed to execute major projects and can only be involved as minor partners or shareholders.

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Furthermore, Russia's political trajectory would seem to create greater tensions with the West, given the inevitability of new energy wars based on control over key business decisions by the Kremlin and the desire of the Russian government to allow the prevalence of natural gas interests over petroleum and other energy sectors. Indeed, it has been widely speculated that Putin and Medvedev may be exploiting the leverage provided by oil and gas in order to build close personal ties with two key allies of the United States. These allies included Angela Merkel of Germany and Nicolas Sarkozy of France.

Consequently, for the first time, the People's Republic of China has global economic interests complementing its global political interests and a widening national security agenda very similar to the Russian Federation. The ideological policies espoused by the Chinese government under Mao have been replaced by both economic and security driven policies. Furthermore, objective pragmatic considerations of energy supply, international trade and investment, technology transfer, ports, and infrastructure development are an integral part of China's overseas diplomatic objectives. While political considerations are important considerations by both the Russian and Chinese governments, the Chinese government has allowed diplomacy to evolve into the promotion of an economic agenda as a way to build close personal ties and alliances among the global community.

China is integrally involved in scientific and technological conferences, military visits/exchanges and programs, peacekeeping operations, and bilateral and multilateral political activities. The country is entering into a web of international activities unprecedented in its history, which mirror the efforts of the United States at global diplomacy post-World War II. If this pattern continues, China will fit squarely in the umbrella of interdependent nations for whom such contact is potentially disruptive and counterproductive.

There are at least three implications of China's military diplomacy for the United States.

First, it has been alleged that as China becomes an increasingly strong superpower, economic incentives will clash with defense-related concerns, having dangerous repercussions for United States interests. Thus, the debate over lifting the EU arms embargo becomes just the beginning of these types of discussions.

Second, like Russia, China's approach to military diplomacy is largely tied into its political agenda. When evaluating China's military diplomacy, analysts must look at Beijing's political agenda, which focuses on trade and economic development with the West. While this agenda

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establishes strong global ties between China and the West, it is possible that new ideas and technologies may create an increased level of mistrust and suspicion on both sides.

.Third, China's military does conduct a comprehensive program of military diplomacy. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that China's military activities, through economic development assistance, will likely become even more numerous as the country moves along the path of military modernization. Consequently, the more the United States and Russia can engage China in professional military exchanges, such as Track II dialogues and other joint military co-operation exercises, the better off Russia and the United States will be vis-à-vis China.

As previously articulated, the demand for energy and other resources by Russia has increasingly stimulated the development of the Russian economy. Russia relies on NATO-member states not to engage in any direct or indirect military plans or political statements, which might impair Russian interests. Therefore, it has sought to avoid any direct confrontation with NATO and is increasingly expanding its sphere of influence in Iran and the Caucasus as well as the Asia-Pacific region. Russia's increased military spending and modernization require Russia to become increasingly active in building complex relations with all leading Asia-Pacific actors to the detriment of the United States, which asserts its military and economic hegemony in the Asia-Pacific sphere.

Considering the role and place of Russia in the Asia Pacific region, one cannot but help to pay close attention to Russia's participation in APEC as an effort to establish its military and economic dominance in the region. Since APEC is an important forum where meetings take place at the highest level among representatives of Russia, China, Japan, and the United States, it becomes increasingly likely that the economic and military objectives of Russia will merge as it is increasingly alleged that Russia seeks to expand its sphere of influence and possibly undermine US strategic interests in the Pacific Rim.

In conclusion, both China and Russia are changing their policies and investing more financial resources in military modernization in an effort to complement their respective economic objectives and expand their sphere of influence in the global community. Both countries seek to expand political, military-political, and economic cooperation with the U.S. as well as to develop further strategic stability partnership.

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