

Russia's "Vostok 2022" War Games: Massive Military Exercise on "Invasion Scenarios"

Has Big Messages

By [M. K. Bhadrakumar](#)

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The announcement by Russian Defence Ministry on Tuesday on Vostok-22 strategic command post exercises during August 30-September 5 gives a big message to the West in political and military terms.

The announcement said,

"In addition to the troops (forces) of the Eastern Military District, units of the Airborne Troops, Long Range Aviation and Military Transport Aviation, as well as military contingents from other states, will be involved in these manoeuvres."

If there is going to be participation by China, it will be highly significant in the present context of global politics, especially in the Far East.

Vostok 2018, held exactly four years ago, was the first time such a massive military exercise was held after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. (At the height of the Cold War in 1981 under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Union held its last Vostok exercise). In the event, Vostok 2018 turned into a Russia-China gun show.

The Russian Federation put more than 300,000 troops in the field—alongside tens of thousands of tanks, helicopters, and weapons of every sort—for a huge war game in Russia's far-eastern reaches, and invited the Chinese People's Liberation Army to play along, which it did.

And a whole new groove in international affairs began appearing, signifying that the interests of Russia and China have once again begun to align — this time around, in response to US military power under a pugnacious president, Donald Trump.

On the sidelines of the exercise, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping had a breakfast of

blinis together in Vladivostok. It was a powerful signal that Russia no longer saw China as an adversary but as a potential military ally. It was widely noted internationally as heralding a major shift in the co-relation of forces in world politics.

To be sure, any Chinese participation in Vostok 2022 will be similarly subjected to close analysis by Washington and its allies at a time of heightened tension in US-China relations, with Beijing warning last week to take “resolute and strong measures” should the Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi proceed with reported plans to visit Taiwan.

China has vowed to annex Taiwan by force if necessary, and has advertised that threat by flying warplanes near Taiwanese airspace and holding military exercises based on invasion scenarios. At a meeting in Singapore early July with Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the chief of the Joint Staff Department of China’s Central Military Commission Gen. Li Zuocheng had warned that Chinese military would “resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. If anyone creates a wanton provocation, they will be met with the firm counterattack from the Chinese people.”

However, at the end of the day, Chinese participation in Vostok 2022 will be seen as an expression of solidarity with Russia in the best spirit of the [February 4 joint statement](#) by the two leaderships, which states that “Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation.”

No matter the usual mantra that the Vostok 2022 is not directed against any third party, its optics will be as a counter to the US pressure on Russia and China. Both Russia and China face new security challenges in the Far East in the recent period — especially, the revival of “militarism” in Japan, NATO’s growing Asia-Pacific posturing, and the belligerence in the US’ provocations over Taiwan.

Tass news agency has reported that Russian Defence Ministry has proposed certain amendments to Russia’s Federal Law “On territorial waters, territorial sea and the contiguous zone of the Russian Federation”, putting restrictions on the passage of foreign military ships through the Northern Sea Route connecting Europe and East Asia.

The proposed amendment will require foreign military and state ships to sail through the Northern Sea Route without entering ports or naval bases, and, furthermore, seek permission from the Russian authorities at least 90 days in advance. The amendment will be effectively restricting the use of the shortest sea route to Asia for the western navies operating in the Asia-Pacific region.

Significantly, this Russian move comes in the wake of the NATO’s plans to forge stronger security links between the North Atlantic area and Asia-Pacific countries (Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand) in a coordinated strategy to counter China’s rise.

Equally, the staging of Vostok 2022 comes at a juncture when Russia’s military operations in Ukraine are entering a crucial phase. In a major speech in Moscow on July 7 at a meeting with leaders of the parliament, Putin warned that everyone should understand that Russia “by and large hasn’t started anything seriously yet” in Ukraine.

To be sure, Vostok 2022 flies in the face of western propaganda that Russian military capabilities are steadily weakening due to the conflict in Ukraine. The MOD announcement

on Vostok 2022 made it a point to touch on it indirectly.

The MOD statement said,

“A number of foreign media are spreading inaccurate information about alleged mobilisation activities. Please note that only a part of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation is involved in the special military operation, the number of which is sufficient to fulfil all the tasks set by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

“Moreover, none of the planned operational and combat training and military-technical and international cooperation activities of the Russian Ministry of Defence have been cancelled and will be provided with the necessary personnel, weapons, military equipment and materials.”

This is only logical, since, following the massive haemorrhage suffered by the Ukrainian military in the past 5-month period, the military balance is now working favourably for the Russian forces. Equally, the Russian military strategy to grind the Ukrainian forces with heavy artillery and missile strikes and the slow pace of the conflict also meant that the operations are sustainable over a prolonged period.

At any rate, given the hostile posturing of the NATO forces all along Russia’s western borders, it is inconceivable that Moscow would have risked by heavily committing its forces to the Ukraine operations. Interestingly, Germany’s army chief Lieutenant General Alfons Mais told Handelsblatt newspaper recently in an interview that Russia has “almost inexhaustible” resources.

In the general’s estimation,

“With its artillery superiority, the Russian army is apparently working its way forward kilometre by kilometre. This is a war of attrition that will raise the question of how long Ukraine can hold out... The Russian army is getting stronger, and Russia has resources that are almost inexhaustible.”

The focus of Vostok 2022 will be “on the use of groupings of troops (forces) to ensure military security.” It will be staged in 12 different locations spread across the Eastern Military District, one of Russia’s five military districts, with a vast geographical spread of 7 million sq. kilometres, headquartered in Khabarovsk on the Amur river in the Russian Far East near the Russia-China border, and comprises the regions up to Sakhalin Oblast, which includes Kuril Islands.

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