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- Iraq
- America
- Europe
- Middle East
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- Home
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- World
- Business
- Money
- Sport
- Comment
- Travel
- Entertainment
- Tech & Net
- Law
- Crossword
- Driving
- Property & Gardens
- Women
- Health
- Jobs
- Food & Drink
- Books
- Education
- Student
- Sunday Times
- Site Map

- SPECIAL REPORTS
- Everyday Revolution
- Business Energy
- Spanish Property
- French Film Café
- Best 100
- Child Welfare
- Connected Business
- Business Travel

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## World News

August 03, 2005

### Old enemies' wargames send a powerful message to the US

BY JANE MACARTNEY

Russia and China hope to sign a massive arms deal after staging joint exercises for the first time

RUSSIA will show off its most modern bombers to its best military customer and China will have a chance to demonstrate that it is a force to be reckoned with when the giant neighbours hold their first joint military exercises this month.

The decision to hold the drills off the east China coast in the Yellow Sea came after a disagreement over Beijing's initial desire for the games to take place further south, opposite the island of Taiwan — which it hopes one day to recover, by force if necessary.

Yesterday's announcement that 100,000 troops would mass from August 18 to 25 marked the culmination of years of rapprochement between countries that were once bitter enemies, which went to war in a minor territorial dispute in the 1970s, but now see themselves as strategic partners.

Their common interests include the sale of Russian oil to help to meet the energy needs of China's fast-growing economy as well as the strategic goal of showing the United States that other powers were rising in the East.

History has enabled them to leave behind old enmities. Shi Yin hong, Professor of the School of International Studies at Renmin University, Beijing, said: "China needs to buy Russian military equipment and resources. For Russia, China is an important market and a source of hard currency."

Peace Mission 2005, involving army, navy, air force, marine, airborne and logistics units, will begin on August 18 near the Russian Pacific Fleet headquarters in Vladivostok, moving to the Yellow Sea and then to an area off the Jiaodong peninsula in the coastal Chinese province of Shandong. "The exercises neither aim at any third party nor concern the interests of any third country," the Chinese Defence Ministry said.

Russian paratroops will jump on to the peninsula, while Russian ships will engage in amphibious landing exercises.

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Air force exercises involving Sukhoi Su27 fighter aircraft and Tupolev TU95MSs and TU22M-3s will round out the drills, with long-distance bombing runs and cruise missile attacks. The exercises could also involve China's nuclear submarine fleet and antisubmarine warfare capability.

Analysts say there is little doubt that China is keen to send a message to the US. Not only is it gradually expanding its influence in Asia, eroding decades of dominance by Washington, but it also has the cash to go on a spending spree to update its military.

Russia's TU160, TU95MS and TU22M3 strategic bombers and the improved Su27SM fighters will scream through the skies. It is not only their high-tech cockpits that Russia wants to show off. China may want to update its fleet of old, lumbering bombers with TU22M3s and TU95s capable of carrying long-haul nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. Russian nerves tingled when the European Union considered lifting its arms embargo on China earlier this year and since then Moscow has shown an interest in offering higher-technology arms to its top buyer.

The war games will involve a Russian airlift of an airborne unit to the training location by Il76 transport aircraft, launching a cruise missile to an imaginary target with TU22M3 medium-range bombers and bombing ground units with Su27SM fighters.

The two governments have invited observers from other governments in the six-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a security group led by Beijing and Moscow. The group, meant to combat separatism and Islamic extremism in Central Asia, includes Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

The show of strength is enough to shake China's neighbours, but may not go too far in tipping the balance of power in the Pacific. So China is relying on diplomacy as well to boost its influence, quietly eroding the pre-eminence of the United States in the process. Li Zhaoxing, the Chinese Foreign Minister, has had a helping hand recently from Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State. She stayed away last week from an annual strategic forum involving the US, Japan and China in a meeting of South-East Asian nations. That left the stage to Mr Li, who dropped in to show Asia that China cared. The unspoken message was that Washington had seen fit to send only less-senior officials.

Vadim Solovyov, the Chief Editor of the *Independent Military Survey*, said: "These exercises are a challenge to the US and its allies — a new military alliance is forming. Now there is a unipolar world. Russia and China can make a second pole."



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