

**CHINA'S MILITARY EXERCISES WITH  
RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIAN  
COUNTRIES: CONCEPTION AND  
PRACTICE OF A REGIONAL  
SECURITY ORDER**

LI Nan

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## Executive Summary

1. China's joint military exercises in the past two decades include the *Peace Mission* multilateral, biennial exercises with Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) countries and bilateral, annual *Joint Sea Exercises* with Russia. China also participated in a few multilateral and bilateral joint manoeuvres dominated by Russia.
2. The United States-led, Western-style alliances and exercises are largely driven by critical external security threats from a third country or a group of countries. In comparison, China's joint exercises with SCO countries and Russia are primarily motivated by concerns about domestic and intramural threats emanating from within the non-state actors inside these countries.
3. While some joint China-Russia manoeuvres may be intended against external threats from a third country or a group of countries, they appear highly symbolic since they are relatively short and intermittent and do not reflect a high level of interoperability of the forces involved.
4. China's partnership-based security cooperation relationships with SCO countries and Russia are also characterised by the absence of mutual defence obligations in times of crisis and war.
5. Such relationships can be understood as China's attempt to build a regional security order in Central Asia. Ethnic and religious unrest in Xinjiang have motivated Beijing to think about developing a sustainable regional security order that can reassure the Chinese people and China's close neighbours about border and internal security and stability.
6. Such a security order can deny safe havens for Uyghur militants from Xinjiang attempting to build links and conduct training with other Islamic militant groups across Central Asia. This security order can also help to create a secure and stable environment in regional countries for developing their economies.

7. Successful economic development, particularly through infrastructure development, can contribute to economic prosperity and social and political stability, thus improving the odds of regime survival, the top concern of the leaders of the Central Asian states.
8. The Chinese strategy is characterised by a comprehensive approach that integrates enhanced security with economic development. In developing the SCO security architecture, China has also followed its commitment to non-interference in other countries' internal affairs.
9. This non-interference-in-internal-affairs policy may win “grudging fealty” from Central Asian countries. However, it may also reduce the effectiveness and credibility of a China-dominated regional security order.