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War Games Seen As 'Message'

By Bill Gertz, The Washington Times

A joint Chinese and Russian military exercise set to begin tomorrow is meant as a political signal to the United States, in addition to helping Moscow showcase its weapons for sale to China, U.S. defense and intelligence officials said yesterday.

"For the Chinese and the Russians, this is a message to the United States," one U.S. official said. "They want to see our bases in Central Asia and presence in Asia cut back."

The fact that the United States was not invited to observe the war games is a sign of the anti-U.S. nature of the exercises, said several officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Defense officials from India, Iran, Pakistan and Mongolia will be present in China to observe the exercises.

"We expect that China will feature some of its latest assets alongside visiting Russian forces, showcasing their military power and credible force," said a defense official. This official said any time that nuclear powers such as China and Russia conduct exercises together "it is of international interest."

The eight days of exercises have been dubbed Peace Mission 2005 and will involve about 10,000 Russian and Chinese troops who will fight "terrorists" in a simulated regional conflict.

Because China defines terrorism as including "separatists," U.S. intelligence officials think the exercises are directed at Taiwan, which Beijing views as a breakaway province, and the United States, which has vowed to protect Taiwan from mainland attack.

Defense officials said the forces participating in the war games are designed to practice amphibious landings and anti-submarine warfare -- not traditional counterterrorism operations.

Both China and Russia notified the United States about the exercises, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, and "we would hope that anything that they do is not something that would be disruptive to the current atmosphere in the region."

Meanwhile, U.S. military and civilian intelligence agencies are stepping up monitoring activities in the western Pacific, defense officials said.

Numerous intelligence-gathering aircraft, ships and satellites are focusing on China's Shandong Peninsula and the Yellow Sea, where the war games will be held.

"We are observing the activities," said Pentagon spokesman Larry Di Rita.

The U.S. Pacific Command will use EP-3 surveillance aircraft along China's coasts and two Navy surveillance ships that were dispatched to waters near the exercises.

A particular concern over the maneuvers is Russia's planned use of four strategic bombers, some

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Pentagon officials said.

Russia's Interfax military news service reported last week that more than 20 Russian strategic bombers and transport jets will participate, including two Tu-95 bombers and four Tu-22 bombers that will fire cruise missiles as part of the games.

The games will begin with Russian and Chinese military forces conducting anti-submarine and anti-ship warfare simulation with two Russian warships, six Chinese warships, and two Chinese diesel submarines.

A second part will involve joint Russian and Chinese amphibious assault on the Shandong Peninsula. Several hundred paratroopers also will be dropped from aircraft.

Russian military chief of staff Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky said in Moscow last week that the idea of the war games "is that Russia and China are helping a third country tackling issues connected with proliferation of illegal militarized formations that are beginning anti-state activities."

"Naval forces can and must be used to blockade -- in particular from the sea -- part of the territory of this state, just as aircraft can also be used to blockade from the air," he told the Izvestiya newspaper.

Chinese troops have been spotted preparing for the exercises at Weifang, about 50 miles from the Yellow Sea port of Qingdao, according to Chinese press reports.

The war games will be held over eight days in the area of the Shandong Peninsula, which is located close to the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

Yesterday in Moscow, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said the joint exercises with China are one of four major military maneuvers set for August.

An Atlantic military exercise set to begin today will include long-range missile flight tests and an aircraft carrier deployment across the Atlantic, he said. Other exercises will be held near the Caspian Sea and in Uzbekistan with that country's military forces.