

MULTINATIONAL MILITARY EXERCISE IN RUSSIAN TERRITORY

The Vostok 2022 military exercise, held from September 1 to 7 in the Russian region of Siberia, is a foreign policy response to the isolation generated by the West on Moscow due to the invasion of Ukraine. The word Vostok in Russian means “East”, which in the specific case refers to Eastern Siberia, bordering the Arctic and China. The previous exercise of this type was carried out in 2018. It had a much larger magnitude than the current one. The troops that participated were five times the number they are now. But this year's event takes on greater political-strategic importance, as it takes place simultaneously with the war in Ukraine. Then only three countries participated: Russia, China and Mongolia, which by themselves occupy a large area of the vast Asian continent. It was the first step in terms of an eventual military alliance between Moscow and Beijing.

Now it has expanded to fourteen countries and India is also participating, a country that is a power in Asia and is on its way to becoming one in the global arena towards the end of the decade that has just begun. New Delhi has maintained a neutral policy in the face of the war in Ukraine, but in economic terms it has refused to participate in economic sanctions against Russia and to vote against it in international forums. The five former Soviet republics that make up the CSTO, the Russian military alliance in its environment, also participate: Belarus in Europe, Armenia in the Caucasus and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in Central Asia. Of the former Soviet republics, Azerbaijan of the Caucasus also participates in the exercise. In Southeast Asia, Laos, and in Saharan Africa, Algeria. So do Syria in the Near East and Nicaragua in Latin America. For Russia, the maneuvers rehearse actions of coalition groups of various kinds, which aim to guarantee the military security of the Russian Federation and the allied states in the area of responsibility of its Eastern military constituency.

From a military point of view, approximately 90% of the military personnel and equipment for the exercise are provided by Russia. A total of 50,000 men, 140 planes, 60 ships and 5,000 armored vehicles of different types participate. The exercises take place simultaneously at 13 training and firing ranges of the Russian Armed Forces in Siberia. China participates with 2,000 men and 3 ships, which are the Nanchang destroyer -it is the first 10,000-ton Type 005-class destroyer independently developed by China-, the Yancheng frigate and

the Dongpinghu replenishment ship. This fleet participated in the joint operation with the Russian ships. It was carried out in the Sea of Japan - a key ally of the United States in the Indo-Pacific - and in particular in the so-called Sea of Okhotsk. Chinese military expert Song Zhongping told the official newspaper The Global Times that "the interaction between China and Russia in various fields of military affairs has been normalized", for which he considers that "under the current situation, it is crucial that China and Russia strengthen comprehensive cooperation, especially in the military field, which helps maintain regional peace and stability, but military cooperation does not target third parties." The Japanese Ministry of Defense followed the naval phase of the Vostok exercise with special attention, publicly detailing the names and capabilities of the ships that participated in the naval phase of the exercise, and deployed its own units on alert. This exercise could be the precedent for systematic joint Russo-Chinese patrols in these seas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was present at the military exercise, highlighting its significance in the midst of the war with Ukraine. The exercises were performed in four stages. The first was the deployment of troops, the second the planning of joint campaigns, the third the implementation of these, and the last was the organization of the withdrawal of forces. Although symbolic, India's participation had a strong political meaning: it sent 75 men, despite its historical rivalry with China, today attenuated by the participation of both Asian powers in the Shanghai Group, which seeks to coordinate cooperation actions in the field of security. Chinese government spokesmen have said that their country's participation in the Vostok 2022 exercise is unrelated to what is happening in Ukraine. This is so from a strictly military point of view, but not from a political and diplomatic point of view, given the position of Beijing, which between Washington and Moscow has been a solid supporter of the latter in the economic and diplomatic fields. The exercises were carried out with "live fire" both on land and at sea and in the air.

Military training operations between allied countries are increasingly becoming a tool of diplomacy and foreign policy, and are being conducted in parallel by the United States and its allies. The United States is conducting exercises with South Korea less than 20 miles from the North Korean border. This country has been launching experimental missiles, but with a clear political-strategic connotation, accentuating regional instability at the same time that it is selling

military equipment to Russia. It should be noted that two weeks earlier, Australia and Canada participated in a joint exercise with US forces off the coast of Hawaii, in which forces from South Korea and Japan also participated. The United States has also conducted bilateral military exercises with other countries. Such has been the case in Morocco. In this country, US forces carried out joint military exercises with local forces (Morocco is part of the dozen countries that cooperate with NATO in the war in Ukraine). The exercise was called "African Lion" and involved 7,000 men in regions near the Algerian border. Spain was also going to participate, given its strategic interests in the region, but at the last minute it suspended its presence. In response to the US maneuvers in Morocco, Algeria confirmed its participation in Vostok 2022 and announced that in November it will carry out the first military exercises with Russia, called "Desert Shield", 50 kilometers from its border with Morocco. The joint Russian-Algerian forces will simulate an anti-terrorist operation with the participation of paratroopers of the Russian mechanized infantry. It will be the first time that Russian forces have been deployed in this African country. Algeria has become a vital supplier of gas to Europe at the moment.

In conclusion: Russia's Vostok military exercise in Siberia with 14 other countries, including China and India, is a response to the isolation Russia is experiencing in the Western world. From the military point of view, 90% of the men and equipment are provided by Russia, and the presence of various countries is more symbolic than quantitative. Putin was present at the exercises, highlighting his relevance and in particular the Russian-Chinese actions in the Sea of Japan. Finally, combined military exercises between countries are becoming an effective tool of diplomacy and foreign policy.