



In the Shadow of the War in Ukraine, Russia Holds Vostok 2022 Manoeuvres

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On 1-7 September, in Russia's Far East (in the Eastern Military District), the largest military drills this year involving the Russian Armed Forces, Vostok 2022, took place. Because of Russia's involvement in the armed conflict in Ukraine, the importance of the drills was to be much greater than in the previous edition in 2018. Russia's goal was to show that its involvement in Ukraine has not adversely affected its operational capabilities and that it has an established network of military partners, including China and India. However, the course of the exercises showed that the losses in Ukraine have reduced the potential of the Russian Armed Forces, especially the Land Forces.

The largest Russian military exercises this year took place in the Far East despite the significant scale of losses Russia has suffered since the invasion of Ukraine (the General Staff of Ukraine reported on 14 September that Russia had lost 53,650 soldiers, 2,180 tanks, 4,665 infantry fighting vehicles, 246 aircraft, and 215 helicopters). According to Ukrainian reports, the fighting that took place at the beginning of September on the 1,300-kilometre front line, especially in Kharkiv Oblast, was a [counteroffensive](#) that has forced the Russians to retreat, as well as action in Kherson Oblast. The intensity of the *Vostok* exercises, however, was affected by the losses on the Russian side just from 1st to 7th September, with Ukraine claiming it has killed more than 2,200 troops and knocked out 100 tanks, 115 infantry fighting vehicles, 79 artillery systems, and 13 rocket artillery systems.

The Course of the Exercises. *Vostok 2022* is the largest manoeuvres of the Russian Armed Forces this year. According to official data, 50,000 troops took part in them and 5,000 pieces of equipment were used, including 140 aircraft and 60 ships of various types. The drills took place on the training grounds of the Eastern Military District (MD), including the Kuril Islands—which sparked a protest from Japan—and the Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan. The forces of the 5th and 35th Combined Arms Armies (units of both took part in the invasion of Ukraine) and the Pacific

Fleet were the main units involved. The scale of the manoeuvres was therefore much smaller than [four years ago](#) when, in the largest exercises in Russia's post-Cold War history, 297,000 troops from the Eastern and Central MDs were involved, along with about 36,000 vehicles, 1,000 planes and helicopters, and 80 ships. Unlike four years ago, the exercises were not carried out in the Arctic, most likely due to costs and the lack of equipment and personnel.

The *Vostok 2022* manoeuvre scenario assumed that the enemy "Eastern" attacked the "North" and their allies and drove 200 km into the defence line. Although it was contained and suffered losses, it maintained operational reserves, and the main task of the troops of the "North" was to eliminate them using, among other things, rocket and artillery strikes, as well as landing craft. The nature of the scenario and the actions taken, such as artillery fire, landing air cover, attacks on enemy air defences, as well as evacuation from the battlefield and technical maintenance of equipment in the field, partially indicate that the Russians are trying to prepare forces that will be sent to the war in Ukraine.

Also unlike in 2018, when the exercises were to show Russia's readiness to carry out a full-scale military operation, this year maritime activities prevailed (detection and elimination of both individual ships and their groups), as well

as air operations (attacks on enemy targets, cover for land force actions) and anti-aircraft defence (mainly S-300, S-400, Tor-M2 systems), as Russia has the largest reserves in these areas. However, relatively few parts of the scenario were played out with the use of Land Forces, with mainly armoured units, mechanised units and artillery used. In the course of operations, the Russian Armed Forces used mainly older equipment, such as T-72B3 and T-80 tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and MT-LB tracked armoured fighting vehicles. During the artillery and missile exercises, the equipment of allied participating countries (Armenia, Belarus, and Mongolia) was used, as well as older systems, such as Uragan rocket launchers. Of the newer types, the most often used were the Iskander-M systems. This may indicate that the Russians, due to the costs and losses in Ukraine and the military operations conducted there, had problems allocating a sufficient number of units, equipment, and ammunition for the exercises.

The International Dimension of the Drills. This year's *Vostok* manoeuvres had a much more international character than the previous ones. Apart from China, which sent the largest contingent of 2,000 troops, and Mongolia, which participated in the previous edition of the exercises, this edition was attended by forces from all CSTO countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), as well as Algeria, Azerbaijan, India, Laos, Nicaragua, and Syria, whose units previously participated in the August *International Army Games* held in Russia. One of the objectives of the *Vostok* exercises was to increase the level of cooperation between the military formations of the participating countries, some of which involved artillery, logistical, and rear operations.

The drills, and especially the naval operations performed during them, were to show the efficient cooperation of the Russian and Chinese navies, which regularly conduct joint exercises in various waters. Joint actions aimed at groups of enemy ships were also to be a demonstration directed mainly at the U.S. and Taiwan in reference to the recent crisis in the [Taiwan Strait](#). Once again, the *Vostok* exercises were also targeting Japanese interests, as evidenced by the actions taken in the Kuril Islands (earlier, in March, Russia terminated the 1999 agreement with Japan that facilitated entry to the Kuril Islands for Japanese citizens, among other actions).

The manoeuvres involving so many other countries were intended to show Russia's ability to form a political-military coalition regardless of the war in Ukraine. Some of the participating states are Russia's permanent partners (China,

members of the CSTO), some are recipients of military equipment (Algeria, India, Laos), while the participation of Nicaragua and Syria was mainly political and had an anti-American dimension, although at the same time it was supposed to show the durability of Russia's cooperation with those states.

Conclusions. Although the Russians tried to show that they were capable of conducting large-scale exercises independently of the military operations in Ukraine, the emphasis on the use of aviation and the navy in the course of the manoeuvres confirms that the Russian Armed Forces are lacking manpower and equipment. The limitation on land operations and the use of mainly older equipment shows that Russia is unable to conduct large-scale, long-term military operations in two theatres, which was suggested in the exercises held in the west of the country during the *Vostok 2018* drills. Once again, this year's drills showed increasing military cooperation between Russia and China, and the nature of the exercises conducted by their navies proved that they have an anti-Japan dimension and their purpose is to undermine the U.S. ability to support that country. However, the exercises did not demonstrate a breakthrough in Russian-Chinese military cooperation, rather only the essential elements. By including all CSTO countries for the first time, Russia wanted to show that it still has a dominant position in the organisation and that its member states are ready to cooperate with it to fight against common threats. Indirectly, it was also supposed to be evidence that the CSTO members support Russia regardless of the war in Ukraine. The *Vostok* drills were also presented as one element of joint exercises to strengthen the interoperability of units of various countries within this organisation.

Although the manoeuvres also were supposed to be a form of training for some units that will be sent to Ukraine, they confirmed that Russia does not have significant and well-trained reserves and resources of modern military equipment that can be used in further military operations against Ukraine. This means that Russia may be forced to go on the defensive along the entire length of the front. Therefore, to continue to defend Ukraine and recover occupied territories, the need for equipment supplied from Western countries is only growing. The continuation of sanctions, especially those related to military and dual-use technologies, also means that Russia will have limited possibilities to repair and modernise its equipment, which significantly hampers its ability to conduct a long-lasting, high-intensity conflict in Ukraine.