

No Alarm Over Russia, China War Games

The Russia-China joint military exercise that kicked off on Tuesday is the biggest since the height of the Cold War. The week-long Vostok exercise marks progress in Russia's pivot to the east, and marks the rise of a power centre that is an alternative to the United States. India, just like the United States and Europe, must take note of this development while not being unduly alarmed.

Ties between Russia and China have strengthened in the aftermath of the West's sanctions on Russia in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. While Russia remains a pre-eminent military power, it is not an economic powerhouse. On the other hand, China has emerged as the world's second-largest economy, and



counting. Even though Russia has been historically suspicious of China's intentions in its eastern provinces, circumstances have brought the two together in a strong partnership. Russia's suspected meddling in American and European domestic affairs, including elections, has not made relations between Moscow and the

West easier. Under Xi Jinping, Beijing has made its ambitions for global expansion clear, and the Vostok exercise is a major step in this endeavour. Given these developments, it makes sense for Europe to step up and move forward on French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal of a European defence force, one that is independent of the United States, and move ahead with strategic engagement with Russia. For Moscow, engagement with the West as an equal is the endgame.

The war games strengthen India's role as a stabilising power in the region, which is not part of any bloc and can work with all countries, to collective advantage. India's diplomacy in Africa, channelling Japanese funds, using Indian goodwill and ability to be effective locally, is but one example.