
RUSSIAN MILITARY SEEKING TO COUNTER GROWING CHINESE ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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In March 2019, Dmitry Zhelobov, a specialist on China at Russias Urals Federal University, warned that Beijing was shifting from relying on soft power in Central Asia to using hard power. If Russia did not take this threat seriously, he added, China might have its own military bases in that region within five years, seriously undermining the Russian position there (Regnum, March 28, 2019; see EDM, April 4, 2019). At that time, he appeared to be a voice crying in the wilderness. Indeed, for the previous two decades, Moscow had defined its challenge in Central Asia as preventing any expansion of Western (mainly United States) influence in the five countries of this region as well as blocking the spread of Islamist instability from Afghanistan and the greater Middle East into post-Soviet Eurasia; it has viewed China as an ally on both counts. Yet, more recently, that assumption of Chinese activities in Central Asia being compatible with Russian goals is coming under increasing strain.

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