



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Chinese military exercises in Belarus – support for Russian aggression and confrontation with the West at all crisis points



China prepared a very explicit response for the NATO summit, where it rightly expected condemnation for actively supporting Russia in its invasion of Ukraine.

China will never accept the "unfounded accusations" made against it, chief of Chinese diplomacy Wang Yi **said** on Tuesday, while the summit in Washington was still ongoing. It was just a verbal response from Beijing to the Alliance's views on China's support for Moscow in the Ukraine campaign.

Beijing, however, decided that it should not confine its opposition to NATO's position to a diplomatic response. What followed (and still follows) was a very clear military version of Mr Wang's political statement.

Almost at the same time, during the NATO summit, the Chinese army conducted joint exercises with Russia and Belarus, its closest ally.

Joint exercises of the naval and air forces of Russia and China began "in early July" in the south of China, the Ministry of Defence in Beijing announced on Friday. According to the annual plan of the two countries on maintaining joint military engagement, the Joint Sea 2024 exercise around the city of Zhanjiang will continue until the middle of the month.

At the same time, and far more significant for NATO, are the joint exercises of the Chinese and Belarusian armies in Belarus, near the border with Poland.

They are held in the far west of Belarus, around the city of Brest, near the border with Poland, in an area that has long been prone to frequent security tensions. They represent a real "finger in the eye" to the Western allies.

Loyalty of Belarus

On this occasion, Chinese soldiers came to Belarus for the first time in six years. Their arrival is therefore a clear sign of Beijing's support for the Russian war effort in Ukraine,

as Belarus has been an active helper to Russia in its aggression against a shared neighbour from the very beginning.

For Belarus, these exercises are new proof of unconditional loyalty to Moscow, as the joint engagement with the Chinese military fits in with Moscow's view that the partnership with China is "unlimited."

Moreover, the joint Belarusian-Chinese exercises are Minsk's first major military action after the changes in the military leadership last May, which took place almost simultaneously with the changes in Russia's military leadership.

The Belarusian army has appointed General Pavel Muraveyka as Chief of the General Staff, a hardliner known for his very aggressive stance towards his closest neighbours, including NATO members Poland and the Baltic republics.

The joint military exercises confirm the rapidly rising level of China's relations with Minsk and its authoritarian leader, Alexander Lukashenko

Over the next ten days, Chinese soldiers will rehearse "anti-terrorist" operations on the territory of Belarus, where joint Russian and Belarusian pressure against Poland by controlled sending of large numbers of migrants from Asia has been ongoing for a long time.

Poland is responding to these waves with blockades and a stronger security presence in the corridor, but the arrival of Chinese soldiers sheds new light on this crisis point, which is part of Russia's overall strategy towards Ukraine and NATO.

The joint military exercises confirm the rapidly rising level of China's relations with Minsk and its authoritarian leader, Alexander Lukashenko.

Belarus became the tenth member of the

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation at the beginning of July, certainly with the strong support of Russia and ultimately the approval of China, which dominates this economic and security organisation that also includes the countries of Central Asia.

First security, then economy

This is a new and active promotion of their alliance, characterised by a strong anti-Western charge in direct alignment with Chinese interests. Belarusian President Lukashenko wants to get even closer to China because his economy, like Russia's, has been suffering due to Western sanctions, and he sees the way out in **expanding** trade and investment with China.

In the case of Belarus, however, Beijing shows no particular enthusiasm for complying. Investment has been at a standstill for a long time, including major projects under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Participation in the joint military exercise is therefore a signal from Beijing that it demands loyalty from Minsk first and foremost in the security aspect of mutual relations.

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Poland is rightly concerned about this kind of development on its eastern border, so it **decided** at the beginning of the week to increase the number of troops in the zone towards Belarus to 17,000.

The Chinese-Belarusian military manoeuvres in the immediate vicinity of the Polish border, which is just a few kilometres away, are a very unpleasant answer to Poland after its President Andrzej Duda **visited** Beijing at the end of June and spoke with Chinese head of state Xi Jinping.

What looked like a positive development for

the conservative Duda and his supporters in terms of expanding the Polish market, particularly for food and agricultural products, turned into an open security threat in just a few weeks.

China's understanding of the security balance

For NATO, which has just celebrated its 75th anniversary, Chinese military involvement on its borders can only mean confirmation not only of Chinese support for Russian aggression against Ukraine but also of its general security rivalry with Beijing.



Beijing's authorities made it clear that their military operations in Europe should be regarded as a response to Western allies' involvement in China's backyard - Wang Yi

This time, Beijing's authorities made it clear that their military operations in Europe should be regarded as a response to Western allies' involvement in China's backyard.

"NATO should know its place and refrain from interfering in Asia-Pacific affairs and China's internal affairs, and not challenge China's legitimate rights and interests," said the chief of Chinese diplomacy, Wang Yi.

China continues to demonstrate its de facto support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine with its exercises with its most important Russian ally, just a few kilometres from the NATO border, at the same time as the Alliance's summit.

Furthermore, after the Chinese naval

manoeuvres with Russia and Iran in the Gulf of Oman last March, they are a continuation of China's confrontation with Western allies at key crisis points, where NATO and its members see their greatest security risks.