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Putin, Xi Pledge Closer Cooperation Amid Opposition to Trump

By Bloomberg

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Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin / Kremlin.ru

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin pledged to bolster ties as Moscow stages its biggest military exercises since the height of the Cold War with Chinese participation. Both face pressure from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

“We have a relationship of trust in the sphere of politics, security and defense,” Putin told Xi at the start of their talks. “We know that you personally pay great attention to the development of Russian-Chinese relations.”

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Neither mentioned the U.S. directly, but at a later session with Putin and regional officials, Xi

underlined that Russia and China agreed to oppose unilateral actions and trade protectionism. "Amid the quickly changing international situation and the factors of instability and unpredictability, the cooperation of Russia and China takes on greater and greater importance," he said.

Tuesday's summit at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, in Russia's Far East, was the third this year between the two leaders, and the first time Xi has participated in the annual event. The event saw the signing of a $2 billion deal between Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and billionaire Alisher Usmanov's Mail.ru Group Ltd., with the participation of the Kremlin's Russian Direct Investment Fund.

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The forum began as Moscow kicked off its largest military drills for 40 years in its vast eastern and central military districts, ranging from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific coast. The weeklong Vostok-2018 exercises include the participation of some 300,000 Russian troops, with China contributing 3,200 soldiers and 30 aircraft.

The joint drills "will send a message to the U.S. and its allies: if they continue the current course of containing Moscow and Beijing, the two largest powers in Eurasia will be forced to join hands," said Alexander Gabuev, head of the Carnegie Moscow Center's Russia in the Asia-Pacific Program.

Putin said he expects trade between Russia and China to reach a record $100 billion in 2018, up from about $87 billion last year.

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