

The real winner of Russia's war with Ukraine could be China's military

Harry J. Kazianis



Vladimir Putin will likely turn to President Xi Jinping and China to bail out Russia from the strain of the West's economic sanctions. TASS / Barcroft Images

Russian President Vladimir Putin had one goal in Ukraine: Make Russia great again through 19th-century-style military conquest. He's failed in spectacular fashion.

It may even be that all Vlad will have done is turn his country into a vassal state of China — think a giant North Korea — that ends up

dependent on the Chinese Communist Party for essentially everything economically.

Quite soon, Moscow might need Beijing to buy almost all its oil, coal and gas, along with its grain and timber, process its credit-card transactions and supply it with nearly all its high-end technology to run its Internet services and anything that involves a microchip.

And that's just the beginning. This sad arrangement might also extend to Russia selling China its best military hardware — and that should make the Pentagon absolutely terrified.

Clearly, China's military is licking its chops, ready to buy — officially or unofficially — any of Russia's advanced weaponry as Putin and his cronies get desperate to ensure the country's ability to keep its arms industry intact in a time of war as sanctions batter its economy and past clients look elsewhere.



Russia could help Beijing build another 100 jets in China under a licensing deal.

Alexander Zemlianichenko



Russian RS-24 Yars ballistic missiles roll in Red Square during the Victory Day military parade in Moscow, Russia.

AP Photo / Alexander Zemlianichenko

In fact, Putin could turn China's armed forces into a military colossus in the coming decades. It's happened before.

The story goes like this. As the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia was frantic to keep its arms-manufacturing hubs working and needed new partners to buy its military goods. China was all too happy to fill the void.

Beijing agreed to buy a small batch of Moscow's Su-27 Flanker fighter jets, a warplane similar to the US Air Force's vaunted F-15 fighter. The deal was then extended: Russia would sell the Communists 100 Su-27

jets and help Beijing build another 100 jets in China under a licensing deal.

Unfortunately for the Russians, Beijing would screw them over — and it wouldn't be the first time or the last.



Russian 2S35 Koalitsiya-SV self-propelled howitzers roll toward Red Square during the Victory Day military parade in Moscow, Russia, Sunday, May 9, 2021.

AP

China canceled the deal in just a few years, claiming the jets did not

meet its needs any longer. The CCP then not only stole all the best technology from this elite warplane — it made its own version, the J-11, and sold it on the international arms market, undercutting Russia's pricing dramatically as it competed for the same customers.

Moscow was enraged, but it only got worse. Russia forged similar deals with China on air-defense systems, submarines and other military platforms, only to see Beijing lie, cheat and steal any tech it could integrate into its armed forces.

The CCP was even brazen enough to buy on the cheap a dead Soviet aircraft carrier it claimed was to be a floating casino. It now serves in the Chinese Navy as its first carrier, rebuilt and ready for war against the US Navy in the Pacific. The designs for that aircraft carrier helped build not one, not two, but likely three more flattops.



China has a high chance to receive Russia's best military hardware.

Mark Schiefelbein

Indeed, China's military was able to leap decades in development and save tens of billions of dollars thanks to what it bought or stole from Russia. The CCP would not be anywhere close to as lethal militarily as it is today if not for its infusion of Russian DNA.

Fast forward to the present, and Russia might even be more desperate to make deals with China. And this time the Kremlin might not care what happens to the technology after it gets its cash.

Russia could sell China, for example, advanced hypersonic weapons technology — which some experts think surpasses the United States' — to develop futuristic weapons that can hit a target at Mach 5.



Chinese People's Liberation Army soldiers march in formation during a parade to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in Beijing.

AP Photo / Mark Schiefelbein

Moscow can also help Beijing construct advanced nuclear attack and ballistic missile submarines that are ultra-stealth, an area in which China has struggled over the years. The list goes on: The Kremlin could aid China in building better aircraft carriers, torpedo-based nuclear weapons, stealth fighters, stealth bombers and much more.

All this would come at the worst time possible for the US military. The Biden administration will need to refocus more military might into Europe to deter Russia from taking bigger bites out of Eastern Europe. We could see in the coming decade a Chinese military that has the power to overwhelm easily Taiwan, Japan and even the collective might of US forces in the region — all thanks to an upgrade from Russia.

So, yes, it does seem that China will indeed be the winner of the war in Ukraine. And it might just be the Chinese military that gets the golden goose.

Harry J. Kazianis is the senior director at the Center for the National Interest. [Twitter: @Grecianformula](#)