

Prospects & Perspectives



When Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un walked side by side during the September 3rd military parade in Beijing, the image symbolized the emergence of a China-led coalition challenging the U.S.-dominated international order. Picture source: PRC, September 3, 2025, gov.cn <https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202509/content_7038994.htm>.

2025 China's Victory Day Parade and Regional Security Implications

By Tzu-Chieh Hung

When Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un walked side by side during the September 3rd military parade in Beijing, engaging in continuous



conversation, the image instantly overshadowed the presence of the other attending heads of state. The absence of most Western leaders only reinforced the impression that this parade, ostensibly to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II, was in fact a showcase of China's rising military power. The gathering of Xi, Putin, and Kim further symbolized the emergence of a China-led coalition challenging the U.S.-dominated international order.

The parade sent multiple signals both at home and abroad. Internationally, Beijing sought to project itself as the architect of an alternative global order. Politically, the spectacle cemented the image of an emerging anti-Western bloc under China's lead. On the propaganda front, it reinforced the narrative of China as a great power. Militarily, the display highlighted rapid advances in Chinese military technology, backed by an implicit message: the realization of Xi's "strong military dream," deterrence against Taiwan, a warning to the United States that China is no longer to be underestimated, and intimidation aimed at surrounding countries.

The Dual Significance of China's Military Parade

At its core, the parade was about consolidating domestic support through nationalism and signaling power abroad. Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) contributed little to the war against Japan, its unmatched skill in political propaganda allowed it to transform the parade into a powerful domestic narrative. For audiences at home, the spectacle reinforced the rhetoric of nationalism, Xi's "Chinese Dream" and "the dream of a strong army," while temporarily masking deep internal challenges: a sluggish economy, soaring youth unemployment, mounting local government debt, and sporadic anti-CCP unrest.

Yet the grand parade was not merely about reassuring a domestic audience; through the display of advanced weapons systems, China also showcased its expanding military might to the outside world. The display underscored Xi's calls to expand "emerging domain capabilities" (新興領域能力), cultivate "new quality combat capabilities" (新型戰鬥力), and build a "powerful strategic deterrence capability system" (強大戰略威懾體系). It also reflected China's hallmark efficiency in executing state policy. This duality — consolidation at home and signaling abroad — explains why the significance of the parade extends far beyond China's borders.



The parade's narrative also dovetailed with Beijing's recently released white paper, "[*China's National Security in the New Era*](#)" (新時代的中國國家安全). The document frames the West — particularly the United States — as the principal external threat, while promoting its "holistic approach to national security" (整體國家安全觀). Internationally, it portrays China as a great power committed to global security governance, promising cooperation in building a so-called "community with a shared future for mankind" (人類命運共同體). Yet, at its core, this vision remains centered on China's own values and interests — what might best be described as a "collective security with Chinese Characteristics."

Amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, the event also highlighted the growing strategic interdependence between Beijing and Moscow. China shields Russia from international isolation through political and economic backing, while Russia provides military cooperation and energy security to Beijing. The presence of Kim Jong Un and Iran's president further elevated the parade into more than a military spectacle: it symbolized the consolidation of an emerging "anti-U.S. coalition," directly challenging the U.S.-led international order.

PLA Military Display Shows Deterrence Against the U.S.

Beyond symbolism, the parade also demonstrated concrete military capabilities. From the range of weaponry unveiled at China's latest military parade, many weapons appeared for the first time, collectively projecting a far greater level of threat than a decade ago — particularly from the perspective of the United States. Among them were platforms clearly designed with Taiwan in mind: the newly revealed Type-100 tank, the PHL-191 modular rocket system, the AJX-002 unmanned underwater vehicle possibly capable of carrying torpedoes, airborne armored vehicles, and more agile wheeled amphibious carriers. But in the context of overwhelming cross-Straits asymmetry, the more consequential message of the parade lay elsewhere: Beijing's determination to showcase strategic systems aimed squarely at deterring Washington.

These included the multiple-warhead-capable DF-61, the DF-5C intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the U.S. mainland, the DF-26D intermediate-range missile targeting Guam, the debut of the silo-launched DF-31BJ, and the JL-3 submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Chinese state media even claimed that the DF-5C's range could cover



the globe. For the first time, the PLA Air Force also presented the JL-1 air-launched ballistic missile — together representing the full “nuclear triad” of land, sea, and air deterrence.

Beyond its ICBMs and intermediate-range missiles, Beijing also paraded an array of anti-ship weapons, including the YJ-15, YJ-19, YJ-20, and YJ-21, underscoring China’s expanding focus on anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities. In addition, Xi emphasized in his remarks that China today stands at a new historical crossroads, with humanity once again facing a choice between peace and war, and that the Chinese people are “on the right side of history.” The speech sounded less like a commemoration of WWII than a thinly veiled warning directed at Washington.

In recent years, Beijing’s posture toward Washington has become increasingly adversarial, moving beyond the language of competition. This shift has been evident in repeated accusations of “external interference” in cross-Straits matters, in the May release of *China’s National Security in the New Era* white paper — which reflected the contradiction between China’s security vision and the Western-led order — and now, in the firepower on display at the parade. Taken together, these signals show that China is consciously cultivating a narrative of hostility toward Washington, positioning deterrence as both a message and a strategy.

China Rises as U.S. Wavers in Its Alliances

China’s latest military parade exemplifies Xi Jinping’s narrative of “[the East rising and the West declining](#)” (東升西降). At the same time, under the Trump administration, Washington has continued to pressure its traditional allies on tariffs and defense spending, while paradoxically softening its stance toward Beijing following another 90-day delay in the U.S.-China trade negotiations. The alleged cancellation of Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te’s transit visit and the refusal to host Taiwan’s defense minister in Washington earlier this year (attributed to ongoing U.S. military operations in Iran) have only reinforced perceptions that Taiwan risks being reduced to a bargaining chip in broader U.S.-China dealings.



This pattern — tough on allies yet lenient toward China — risks weakening the U.S.’ influence in the Indo-Pacific and heightening uncertainty across the region. By contrast, despite fiscal strain rumors, Beijing projected magnanimity toward partners, cultivating the image of a “big brother” ready to lead. Such a contrast could win China additional support, especially among countries in the Global South, reinforcing the broader atmosphere of “the East rising.” Yet, uncertainty remains under the Trump administration, and the regional outlook will become clearer once the U.S.-China trade talks conclude.

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