

Russian ambassador to US returns to Moscow as diplomatic crisis continues

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Russian ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov arrived in Moscow on Sunday morning, having been called back to the capital in response to American President Joseph Biden's affirmation on Wednesday, March 17, in an interview with ABC News, that Russian President Vladimir Putin is "a killer."

The diplomatic crisis coincides with new allegations by the American intelligence agencies that Russia interfered in the 2020 elections by attempting to undermine popular support for Biden. Despite the fact that no evidence has been published to substantiate these claims, Washington and leading press outlets in the US have seized on them to ratchet up anti-Russia hysteria and imply that Vladimir Putin is somehow responsible for the diseased state of America's political system.

As Antonov returned to Moscow, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) warned that the White House is risking "an irreversible deterioration of relations." It added, however, that the Kremlin is committed to "open lines of communication" and "rectifying Russia-US relations." Russia's envoy will remain at home for an undetermined period, during which time officials say he will hold discussions with different branches of government.

The day following Biden's provocative statement, President Putin responded to the charge of being a murderer with a quip from a children's story, "The one who is name calling, is the one who is called by that name"—in other words, "It takes one to know one," "A case of the pot calling the kettle black." Putin went on to list a handful of bloody episodes in American history, beginning with the extermination of the native population.

The Kremlin leader also wished Biden "good health," playing on the idea, which has been widely circulated

in the Russian press, that the American president's accusation was a sign of his deteriorating mental faculties. Putin invited his counterpart to a live, open-air discussion of relations between the two countries, an invitation which the White House publicly declined on March 22.

That same day, Russian Minister of Foreign Relations Sergei Lavrov met with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, in the first high-level diplomatic exchange since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The press reports that the conversation between the government representatives focused on their respective countries' worsening relationships with the United States and the need to strengthen ties between Moscow and Beijing.

A theme that emerged was the prospect of increasingly using Russia and China's national currencies in bilateral trade. Currently, while dollar-denominated exchange has fallen to less than 50 percent of overall trade between the two countries, much of this has been made up by the euro, not the ruble or the yuan.

As coverage of Lavrov and Yi's meeting was appearing in news outlets, Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov issued a statement warning that the United States may intensify economic sanctions directed against Russia, including cutting off the country from the international financial exchange system SWIFT, through which 33.6 million banking transactions a day happen around the globe. The intense financial isolation caused by such a move, which has thus far only been taken against Iran, could be worsened by an attack on the ruble, which would send its value falling and drastically increase the size of Russia's ruble-denominated state debt. The Ministry of Finance commented that in the event of such a development, its only option would be to "turn on the printing presses."

Tensions between Russia and the United States penetrate every sphere. Earlier this week, the US-allied regime in Ukraine announced plans to retake the now Russian-controlled territory of Crimea by force. In mid-March the US conducted joint training exercises with nuclear-capable B-12 Lancer and B-2 Spirit bombers in territorial waters near the shores of Iceland, Greenland, and Great Britain where Russian warships are known to surface. By its own admission, the United States pressured Brazil—which is confronting an out-of-control COVID-19 surge—to not make purchases of Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine, despite the fact that it has now been determined safe and effective by both Russian and European medical researchers.

As manifested in Lavrov’s and Yi’s recent visit, the ceaseless geopolitical and economic pressure being exerted on Russia by the United States and leading powers in Europe is driving sections of the country’s elite to look toward China as a counterweight.

Speaking recently to *Russia in Global Affairs*, a leading think tank journal, political scientist Sergei Karganov emphasized the importance of Russia deepening its “turn to the east” under conditions of what is now and will continue to be an extremely “unpredictable” international environment:

“Thirty years ago when Russia ceased to be the Soviet Union we tried to form a strategic union with the West, above all with Europe. The project failed. ... And now we are a strategic, in the military-political sense, support for China. And they are our support. And it was precisely because of Siberian resources that we became a great European power, and then a great world power.

“We, of course, need to act carefully, to develop ties with other Asian countries, engage more actively with India, more actively with the countries of ASEAN, and not fall into too great a dependence on the PRC [People’s Republic of China].”

The Russian ruling class’ search right and left, for alliances and new arrangements that will rescue it from the geopolitical and economic crisis it is facing, is fraught with contradictions. The idea that Russia, as part of a Russo-Chinese anti-American bloc, will come to some sort of lasting, mutually-acceptable agreement over control of the Siberian landmass with its Chinese neighbor—with 10 times the population, 8.5 times the size of the economy, and triple the annual military spending—is implausible. The oligarchs of each country

wish to have the unreserved right to exploit the resources and people of Eurasia. And the United States, driven to insane attempts to dominate the globe because of the diseased state of American capitalism, will not rest in its efforts to gain control of the region.

The working class of Russia, like its counterpart in China, can only defend itself against the predatory interests of American capitalism and its own capitalist class in a common struggle with the workers of the United States and the world.



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