

US seeks to ease tensions at Biden-Putin summit, as anti-China drive escalates

Andrea Peters
16 June 2021

Summit talks between US President Joseph Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded on Wednesday with declarations by the heads of state that the dialogue had been “good,” “positive,” and “quite constructive.” Against the backdrop of the intensifying US-led war drive against China, Washington appears to be trying to ease tensions with the Kremlin.

The ultimate aim of such an effort—over which huge question marks hang—is to disrupt Moscow’s deepening economic, political and military ties with Beijing in order to isolate China in preparation for war. The discussions were held just after the conclusion of G7 and NATO meetings at which China was identified as the primary target of world imperialism.

Speaking at separate press conferences on Wednesday, Biden and Putin said that their more than two-hour long discussion covered a range of topics, including nuclear agreements, the conflict in Ukraine, competition over of the Arctic, cybersecurity, human rights and economic ties. While providing few details, each indicated that further high-level discussions would take place in an effort to restore “strategic stability.” Ambassadorial relations, which had been broken off in March after Biden called Putin a “killer,” will be restored. The New START treaty is to be extended to 2024. There will be bilateral working groups created to address arms control and ransomware attacks.

With regards to Ukraine, no mention was made of Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that the US and Europe accuse Russia of having illegally seized. In addition, the two sides stated their commitment to the implementation of the Minsk Protocol, accords signed in 2014 and 2015 that lay the basis for a negotiated settlement over the status of the Donbass—a region in eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists who came to power after the staging of a far-right, US-backed coup in Kiev.

The Ukrainian government, which has recently been

moving troops and military equipment to the contested area and said it intends to retake Crimea by force, has repeatedly expressed its opposition to implementing the Minsk agreements. Wednesday’s endorsement of Minsk follows on the heels of Biden’s pre-summit statement that Kiev was “not ready” for membership in NATO, to which the country has been hysterically appealing for admission. After years of Washington’s strident anti-Russian rhetoric over Moscow’s “violations” of Ukrainian sovereignty, it appears that the country and its extreme nationalist leaders have been sidelined—at least temporarily—in the interests of the US pursuit of larger geopolitical aims.

Despite being repeatedly pressed by reporters to make hostile declarations against his Russian counterpart and state that the US had threatened “military consequences” over further alleged cyberattacks, the American president stated that “no threats” were made and that the Kremlin leader offered “to help” on issues related to Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria. Relatively little was said about Alexei Navalny, the much-fawned-over “pro-democracy” oppositionist, although Biden did indicate it would be bad if he died.

The US press corps at Biden’s event seemed genuinely disappointed that there was less braying for blood. Many in the American media and ruling establishment had anticipated that Trump’s replacement by Biden would signal a harsher policy toward Moscow.

A tactical shift in Washington’s relationship with Russia will provoke both internal and foreign conflicts. A glimpse of this was on display on Wednesday. Just as Putin finished his press conference, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters, “We believe that a renewed partnership allowing us to realise the full potential of a close cooperation with Russia is a distant prospect.” He said the EU anticipates a “further downturn of our relations” with Moscow.

Whatever tactical maneuver Washington may be

attempting to carry out, its readiness to strike at Moscow was also made clear. Biden warned Putin that, should he not abide by “international norms,” his “credibility worldwide” would diminish and there would be “consequences.” The US has an immense capacity to unleash cyberwarfare, observed the US leader, noting, in particular, the vulnerability of Russia’s oil industry.

Putin pointed to US support for “democracy”-building organizations in Russia, which he observed were little more than puppets of US foreign policy. While downplaying Biden’s previous description of him as a murderer and violator of human rights, the Russian president pointed to police killings in the US, the deaths of innocent civilians in drone strikes, the existence of CIA black sites and the continued operation of Guantanamo Bay as examples of American hypocrisy on human rights questions.

Beneath the surface appearance of cordiality that both leaders tried to project on Wednesday lie explosive tensions. As the summit took place, NATO was conducting its largest-ever military exercises, explicitly directed at Russia. The US has been beefing up its military presence in Ukraine, the Black Sea and the Arctic, and in May the Biden administration released a military budget proposal that would bring US arms spending to record levels. Russia recently declared the creation of 20 new anti-NATO military divisions, to be stationed on its western borders. This summer it has been reviewing the fighting capacity and readiness of its ground, air, and naval forces nationwide.

In his remarks Wednesday, the US President stated that some expected to hear that “Biden said he would invade Russia,” a remark that unintentionally revealed the very real threats of war surrounding the summit. Whether through a direct military conflict, the use of ethnic and national differences to break up the country, or the promotion of internal conflict—or all three—Russia remains in the gunsights of American imperialism, which views its domination of a large portion of the Eurasian landmass as an intolerable limit on US imperialism’s appetites.

But what is increasingly coming to the fore, as was demonstrated at the G7 summit, is a sentiment that China must be the first target in America’s buildup to war. The Wuhan lab theory, which over the last two months has been placed at the center of US and European foreign policy, is laying the groundwork for the argument that Beijing is responsible for the death of millions. This follows on the heels of endless accusations that China is manipulating its currency, violating international trade

conventions, pursuing control over East Asia’s sea lanes, abrogating human rights conventions, and on and on.

There are significant concerns in Washington that the US cannot maintain a two-front war. Inasmuch as the anti-Russia campaign has encouraged closer ties between Moscow and Beijing, this has raised worries that American imperialism may be biting off more than it can chew.

For its part, the Russian ruling class has been in a deepening state of disarray over what to do about the inter-imperialist conflict in which it finds itself ensnared. There are divisions both inside and outside the Kremlin over the country’s relationships with China and the US. Russia is dwarfed in all respects by its much larger neighbor. For years, Putin sought a more amiable relationship with the United States, constantly referring to his “friends” across the Atlantic even as the tensions with Washington grew.

Biden himself identified the crisis facing Moscow when he was asked whether a new “cold war” was emerging in US-Russia relations. In reply, he observed that Russia has “a multi-thousand mile border with China. China’s moving ahead...seeking to be the most powerful economy in the world,” but Russia’s “economy is struggling.” “I don’t think [Putin] is looking for a cold war with the United States,” Biden said.

Regardless of what anyone is “looking for,” war has a logic of its own. Tactical twists and turns aside, it is clear that the drive by the American ruling class to defend its waning global hegemony threatens the world with a massive military conflagration.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact