

Chinese foreign minister signals support for Russia over Ukraine crisis

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In China's most forthright yet comments on the mounting US confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned Washington and its allies not to "hype the crisis." He called on all parties to "remain calm and refrain from doing things that stimulate tension."

Wang made the remarks in a virtual meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken last Thursday. The Biden administration and American media have deliberately manufactured extreme tensions over Ukraine by repeatedly declaring that Russia is on the point of invasion—a claim that even the Ukrainian president has publicly denied.

Wang clearly signalled Beijing's support for Moscow, declaring that Russia's "reasonable security concerns should be taken seriously and resolved." Russia has repeatedly called on the US and its European allies to guarantee that Ukraine will not be inducted as a NATO member—a move that would bring the US-led military alliance to the Russian border.

Indirectly referring to NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe since the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, Wang pointedly told Blinken that European security could not be guaranteed by "strengthening or even expanding military blocs."

China's opposition to aggressive US moves in Ukraine is connected to concerns about Washington's warnings of a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan—claims, which like those directed against Russia, have been manufactured out of thin air. The Biden administration has exploited these unsubstantiated allegations of "Chinese aggression" as the pretext for strengthening ties with Taiwan, breaching longstanding US diplomatic protocols on the status of the island.

Wang declared that the US attitude toward China had

not substantially changed since President Biden met his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in November. The Chinese foreign minister accused the US of continuing to make mistakes in relation to China, "causing new shocks to the relationship between the two countries." He warned the US against playing with fire over Taiwan, which China regards as a renegade province, and against "interference" in the Beijing Winter Olympics, due to start on Friday.

Later this week, Xi is due to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is flying to Beijing to attend the Olympics in part to demonstrate his opposition to the US-led diplomatic boycott of the event. It will be Xi's first in-person meeting with a foreign head of state since March 2020 when he met with Pakistan's president.

As tensions mounted over Ukraine, Putin and Xi held an online meeting in mid-December in which the Russian president reportedly called Xi his "dear friend" and said relations between the two countries had reached "an unprecedented high level."

Xi called for greater joint efforts to effectively safeguard the security interests of both countries as "certain international forces" were interfering in the internal affairs of China and Russia and "trampling on international law" under the guise of human rights.

A steady stream of commentary in the US and European media speculates on the growing strength of relations between Moscow and Beijing, the consequences for a US-led conflict with Russia, and the prospect of China "taking advantage" of the Ukraine crisis to invade Taiwan.

A *Financial Times* article today along these lines is entitled "Ukraine conflict shines light on deepening ties between Beijing and Moscow." Its "evidence" for China's intentions is the rantings of a right-wing

Chinese nationalist blogger who declares that the Ukraine crisis “will be a historic opportunity for us to solve the Taiwan problem.”

The flimsy character of the argument reflects the topsy-turvy world of US propaganda in which concocted threats of Russian and Chinese invasions are used to justify US military provocations against both countries. As the US and its allies put troops on alert and provided arms to Ukraine, the US Navy mounted a series of major military drills in the South China Sea and waters off Taiwan.

As the *Financial Times* itself acknowledged, the 2014 Ukraine crisis, “ruptured Russia’s relations with the west and drove Moscow into China’s arms.” Or to put it more accurately, mounting US threats and provocations against both Russia and China, aimed ultimately at their break-up and subordination, has driven the two countries into a quasi-alliance.

China’s backing for Russia is in contrast to its equivocal response to the 2014 conflict, which was provoked by a US-backed far-right coup in Kiev that ousted a pro-Russian Ukrainian government. China blamed Western “foreign interference for causing the crisis,” but did not back Russia’s annexation of Crimea or its support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

In 2014, China abstained on UN resolutions regarding the Russian annexation of Crimea and still does not recognise Crimea as part of Russian territory. At the same time, while it rejected US and European sanctions on Russia, China tacitly allowed Chinese corporations, including its huge state-owned banks, to abide by the sanctions, to avoid being cut off from US financial markets and the international banking system.

Since 2014, however, Russia and China have steadily strengthened their diplomatic, economic and strategic relations. According to the *Financial Times*, between 2013 and 2021, China’s share of Russia external trade doubled from 10 to 20 percent. At their meeting in December, Xi and Putin noted that bilateral trade in the first three quarters of 2021 exceeded \$US100 billion for the first time, and was expected to hit a new record for the full year.

Russia and China have strengthened their military ties through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, established in 2001. Starting on January 21, China, Russia and Iran held their third joint naval exercises in the Gulf of Oman to “strengthen security” and

“multilateral cooperation.” This followed naval drills by Russia and China off the Russian coast in the Far East in October and joint military exercises in northwestern China in August, involving some 13,000 troops and hundreds of aircraft as well as artillery, anti-aircraft batteries and armoured vehicles.

Alexander Korolev, an analyst based at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, told the *Financial Times* that more frequent and substantive joint exercises, collaboration on weapons development, regular consultations on military and security issues and long-running military personnel exchanges were enabling the Russian and Chinese militaries to jointly operate in real wars in the future.

At his press briefing last Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian declared that China and Russia see their relations as a priority. “There is no ceiling to China-Russia mutual trust, no forbidden zone in our strategic cooperation and no limit on how far our longstanding friendship can go,” he said.

Zhao Mingwen, a former Chinese diplomat, made a similar point to the *Financial Times*, even though Russia and China are not formal allies. “You could say we are even more allies than allies,” he said. The two countries would support each other in conflicts if provoked by external powers. “If China were forced to unify Taiwan by force and the US intervened, I believe Russia would not sit by idly,” Zhao said.

The strengthening military ties between China and Russia in the face of US threats highlights the utter recklessness of US foreign policy. Having driven China, now the world’s second largest economy, and Russia, with its huge nuclear arsenal, into each other’s arms, the US is deliberately stoking a conflict over Ukraine. Any war in Ukraine, far from being a local affair, would threaten to rapidly escalate into a catastrophic war on a global scale.



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