

US threatens China over Ukraine crisis

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The US used a meeting in Rome yesterday between National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and China's top foreign policy official Yang Jiechi to warn Beijing against assisting Russia as Washington ramps up the war in Ukraine.

Neither side provided any details of the talks, other than to confirm that there had been "substantial discussion of Russia's war against Ukraine." In the lead-up to the meeting, however, Sullivan appeared on US talk shows on Sunday and issued blunt threats.

The national security adviser told CNN that the US would not "allow there to be a lifeline to Russia from these economic sanctions from any country, anywhere in the world." He said Washington was "watching closely to see the extent to which China actually does provide any form of support, material support or economic support, to Russia."

While he refused to spell out the punitive measures that the US would take, Sullivan said: "We are communicating directly, privately to Beijing that there will absolutely be consequences for large-scale sanctions evasion efforts or support to Russia to backfill them."

Underscoring the threat, an unnamed senior White House official told the media that the US had "deep concerns about China's alignment with Russia," adding: "The national security adviser was direct about those concerns and the potential implications and consequences of certain actions."

Prior to the Rome meeting, the Biden administration upped the ante by circulating unsubstantiated allegations from unnamed US officials that Russia had approached China for military assistance. Official cables to European allies containing the accusation were widely leaked to the US and international media.

According to the *New York Times* report, American officials alleged that Moscow had asked Beijing for military equipment and support for the war in Ukraine

as well as additional economic assistance to counter the crippling economic sanctions imposed by the US and its allies.

The US officials provided no details of the weapons, military support or economic aid requested by Russia, saying they were determined to keep secret their means of collecting the intelligence.

A Reuters report went one step further. Citing comments from two anonymous US officials, it claimed that not only had Russia asked for military aid, but China "had signalled its willingness to provide military and economic aid to Russia to support its war." One of the officials told Reuters: "It's real, it's consequential, and it's really alarming."

The US claims have all the hallmarks of misinformation concocted by its intelligence agencies to heighten the pressure on China immediately before the talks between Sullivan and Yang. Even if the claims were true, the utter hypocrisy involved is staggering. While accusing China of preparing to assist Russia, the US and its NATO allies are pouring arms to the tune of billions of dollars into the Ukrainian military.

Yesterday Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov dismissed the allegations, saying: "Russia has an independent potential to continue the [military] operation." Pressed by journalists to confirm if Russia had made a request to China, he flatly declared: "No, there wasn't."

Liu Pengyu, a spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said he had never heard of the request from Russia. He reiterated China's call for a peaceful settlement, saying: "The high priority now is to prevent the tense situation from escalating or even getting out of control."

While China has not condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, neither has it endorsed Russian President Vladimir Putin's recognition of two pro-Russian separatist-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine as

independent. Beijing has insisted that the security interests of all sides in the conflict—both Ukraine and Russia—have to be respected.

The US has deliberately stoked the tensions that led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by refusing to rule out the inclusion of Ukraine as a member of the NATO military alliance. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US and NATO have not only advanced into Eastern Europe but incorporated former Soviet republics.

At the same time, the US over the past decade has escalated its confrontation with China, including through a huge military build-up and the strengthening of alliances across the Indo-Pacific. The intensifying US threats have increasingly driven China and Russia to put aside their differences and consolidate their relations.

Putin visited Beijing in early February at the opening of the Winter Olympics to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The two leaders issued a lengthy joint statement affirming that their friendship had “no limits” and outlining broad areas of cooperation.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, has cut across Chinese interests in the country, including its Belt and Road Initiative that involves massive infrastructure spending to link China to Europe both overland and by sea. Last June, China signed a major agreement with Ukraine for the construction and financing of transport infrastructure, potentially paving the way for alternate road and rail links between China and Europe.

The war also has undermined China’s efforts to strengthen relations with the major European powers as a means of warding off the United States. Last week President Xi held online talks with President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in a bid to establish the basis for negotiations to end the war.

The US threats against China are part of an escalating campaign to pressure Beijing to distance itself from Moscow. Australia has been among the most strident of Washington’s allies in denouncing China and demanding that it condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Earlier this month, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison branded Russia and China as an “arc of autocracy” threatening the “rules-based international order.”

In comments to the *Washington Post*, former adviser

to the US Indo-Pacific Command Eric Sayers pointed to the wider dangers of the Ukraine crisis. “If Beijing is offering any type of military assistance to aid Moscow’s war in Ukraine, the spill-over effects on US-China policy could be vast,” he said.

“It would abruptly end debate about pathways to working with Beijing. More importantly, it would push Washington to accelerate retaliatory and decoupling actions toward China, and create new pressure on companies now doing business in China,” Sayers warned.

The latest US threats against China are another warning of the enormous dangers involved in the conflict in Ukraine. Its implications go well beyond Eastern Europe and raise the danger of embroiling other powers in a far wider war.



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