China rejects EU calls to cut ties with Russia over Ukraine war

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Hostile EU remarks after yesterday's virtual European Union (EU)-China summit point to the rising global tensions provoked by NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine. EU officials sought but did not obtain Chinese guarantees that Beijing will honor sanctions Washington and the EU powers have unilaterally imposed on Russia.

The run-up to the summit was dominated by EU and US threats against China, as they poured billions of dollars of arms into Ukraine for use against Russian troops. Beyond threats of sanctions, there were mounting denunciations of China's Zero-COVID policy in the European media, while US Indo-Pacific Command head Admiral John Aquilino called on Washington and its allies to be "prepared at all times" for war with China over Taiwan.

On March 25, an unnamed senior EU official told *Politico* the EU has "very reliable evidence that China is considering providing military aid to Russia. … We're concerned about the fact that China is flirting with the Russians." The official said the EU would "impose trade barriers against China" if China helped Russia militarily or financially, as "this is the only language Beijing understands."

US officials had already claimed Russia had asked China for military aid. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan demanded China not "bail out" Russia from US-EU sanctions: "We will ensure that neither China, nor anyone else, can compensate Russia for these losses. In terms of the specific means of doing that, again, I'm not going to lay all of that out in public, but we will communicate that privately to China …"

Chinese Ambassador to the United States Qin Gang rejected Sullivan's claims, calling for a diplomatic settlement to the war and denying that China is arming Russia. "What China is doing is sending foods, medicine, sleeping bags and baby formula, not weapons and ammunition to any party," Qin said, adding: "We are against wars, as I said. … China's trusted relation with Russia is not a liability. It's an asset in the international efforts to solve the crisis in a peaceful way."

Chinese officials also briefly expressed hopes that the EU-China summit could revive the EU-China trade deal negotiated with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron in December 2020, shortly before Merkel left office. The deal's ratification was suspended, however, after the EU echoed unsubstantiated and false US assertions that China is carrying out a "genocide" of the Uighur ethnic minority in its western Xinjiang province, which borders Russia.

Another item in the EU-China summit was China's freezing of trade with Lithuania, a former Soviet Baltic republic, after Lithuania opened formal trade representation for Taiwan in its capital, Vilnius. Chinese officials have said they view this as a European threat to repudiate the "One China" policy and encourage Taiwan to declare itself a fully independent state. Sections of the European foreign policy establishment have advocated using this policy to encourage parts of mainland China like Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia or Tibet also to declare independence, dividing China.

Lithuanian Deputy Prime Minister Mantas Adom?nas explained that this policy is driven by hostility to communism and to the Chinese government. "We see the threats and dangers which arise out of the expansionist policies of Communist China," Adom?nas told CBC. "We wanted to curtail this … and support democracy in Taiwan."

Margarita Šešelgyt?, director of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University, said Lithuania's anti-China policy aims to obtain US military aid against Russia. She said, "For us, being a small country in the vicinity of Russia is a very bad scenario. So how do we become more attractive to the United States? Broaden our foreign policy and also be part of US policy in the Asian region."

With these explosive conflicts, it came as little surprise that brief official statements on yesterday's EU-China summit indicated that no agreements had been reached.

After meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen criticized China's position on Ukraine: "We exchanged very clearly opposing views. This is not a

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conflict. This is a war." She demanded, "China should, if not support, at least not interfere with our sanctions [on Russia] … equidistance is not enough."

"We will also remain vigilant on any attempts to aid Russia," EU Council President Charles Michel said at the press conference with von der Leyen, adding: "We raised our concerns about China's treatment of minorities in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, and of the people of Tibet."

Chinese officials told the *South China Morning Post* that Xi supported "the EU playing a leading role" in talks on Ukraine and asked EU officials to address the security concerns of all powers, including Russia. "The root cause of the Ukrainian crisis lies in the regional security conflicts that have accumulated in Europe for a long time. The fundamental solution is to accommodate the legitimate security concerns of all parties concerned."

The imperialist powers have no intention of giving security guarantees to Russia, however, or to any other country in their gun sights. Russian President Vladimir Putin undoubtedly launched a bloody war in Ukraine, which is reactionary and divides Russian and Ukrainian workers. However, while Putin launched the war and bears political responsibility for it, Russia is neither the more powerful nor ultimately the more aggressive party to the conflict.

As Ukrainian troops and far-right militias fight Russia to a draw, it is clear Putin's invasion was a desperate, preemptive move as NATO turned Ukraine into an heavily-armed base directly on Russian borders.

Since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, the NATO powers and, above all, the United States have sought to counterbalance growing economic weakness with military force. Washington led decades of NATO wars that shattered Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria and cost millions of lives. In 2018, the US National Security Strategy declared, moreover, that US military objectives were to wage "great power conflict" with countries like Russia and China.

These conflicts underlie Xi's refusal to cut off ties with Moscow, for now at least. As US officials demand regime change in Russia, Putin's ouster, and Russia's return of regions such as Crimea to Ukraine, it is increasingly clear that the NATO powers aim to break up and crush Russia and China. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov bluntly said Washington aims "to destroy, break, exterminate, strangle the Russian economy and Russia as a whole."

Chris Johnson, a former CIA agent working on China, told the *Financial Times* that Beijing fears US-led regime change in Russia. He said, "if they even are considering providing assistance [to Russia], that speaks volumes about … Chinese fears that Putin could fall, unleashing chaos on their northern border unseen since the collapse of the Soviet Union."

The only progressive solution to the reckless, aggressive policies of the imperialist powers is the mobilization of the working class in an international anti-war movement. While Russia and China can use their military and nuclear arsenals to try to threaten NATO, it is apparent that the mounting danger of war does not deter the NATO powers. Rather, they are risking a global military clash that could escalate into nuclear war, betting that this opens up unprecedented opportunities for plunder.

In a *Washington Post* column titled "The West is winning the economic battles in Putin's war against Ukraine," US Council on Foreign Relations fellow Sebastian Mallaby gloated: "China's economy is far larger and more sophisticated than Russia's, but it looks newly vulnerable." Mallaby speculated Washington could seize the trillions of dollars China has earned over decades of exporting goods to US and European markets, just like it is threatening to seize Russian dollar reserves that Moscow earned exporting oil and gas to world markets.

He wrote, "Beijing's $3 trillion-plus stockpile of foreign-currency assets looks less potent. If Russia's reserves could be frozen, so could China's. Likewise, if Russia can't generate leverage from its highly concentrated exports—until its invasion of Ukraine, it supplied more than half of Germany's imported natural gas—it appears unlikely that China will be able to fight sanctions by threatening to cut exports of consumer electronics." This would undoubtedly be one of the largest acts of imperialist theft in history.

Averting such an explosion of conflict requires the unification of workers in China, Russia, Europe, the United States and around the world in a movement in opposition to the reckless war policies of the major capitalist powers and for socialism.

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