

As NATO escalates Ukraine war, Putin meets Xi for Russia-China summit

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On May 16-17, on his first trip abroad after being reelected in March as Russian president, Vladimir Putin visited Beijing and the strategic northeastern Chinese city of Harbin. The summit highlighted how threats from Washington and its imperialist allies in Europe and the Pacific are pushing Moscow and Beijing into an ever-closer alliance.

It was an unambiguous rebuke by Beijing to US-NATO pressure on China to cut its ties to Russia amid the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. Last month, US officials led by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken threatened to cut off access to the US dollar of any Chinese banks financing Chinese trade with Russia of “dual use” products with potential military uses. Nonetheless, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized Beijing’s intention to pursue trade and good relations with Russia.

“It was the unprecedentedly high level of the strategic partnership between our countries that determined my choice of China as the first state that I would visit after taking office as president,” Putin said as he arrived in Beijing. “We will try to establish closer co-operation in the fields of industry and high technology, space and peaceful nuclear energy, artificial intelligence, renewable energy sources and other innovative sectors.”

Xi called China and Russia “good neighbors, good friends, good partners,” as he and Putin signed an accord to develop inter-governmental and trade ties. “The China-Russia relationship today is hard-earned, and the two sides need to cherish and nurture it,” Xi said. “China is willing to ... jointly achieve the development and rejuvenation of our respective countries, and work together to uphold fairness and justice in the world.”

While Putin and Xi emphasized their friendly relations, they could not altogether escape the Ukraine war and the danger of catastrophic military escalation. Putin’s visit to China came as Russian troops launched an offensive towards the Ukrainian city of Kharkov, and US, British

and Ukrainian officials threatened to use long-range missiles given to Ukraine by NATO for strikes deep inside Russia. And so Putin and Xi were at pains to insist that they could manage the international tensions erupting over the Ukraine war.

Promising to brief Xi about “the situation in Ukraine,” Putin said he was “grateful for the initiative of our Chinese colleagues and friends to regulate the situation,” while Xi said: “China hopes for the early return of Europe to peace and stability and will continue to play a constructive role toward this.”

Putin insisted in particular that Russia seeks a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine war. “We have never refused to negotiate,” he told China’s Xinhua news agency. “We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means. We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours.”

Downplaying the conflict with the NATO powers, Putin claimed: “It is of crucial significance that relations between Russia and China are not opportunistic and are not directed against anyone.”

The summit’s organizers indeed worked to highlight Russian-Chinese, or, more precisely, Soviet-Chinese ties. They marked the 75th anniversary of the Soviet recognition of the People’s Republic of China during the 1949 Chinese revolution. In this revolution, the Red Army founded by Leon Trotsky played a key role—crushing Japanese occupation forces in China in 1945, then backing insurgent Chinese workers and peasants against the Chinese Nationalist regime. Harbin, which Putin visited, is located at the center of the region it held.

In Harbin, Putin visited an engineering school developing joint programs with Saint Petersburg State University. Russia-China partnership, Putin repeated there, “is not directed against anyone,” adding: “It is

aimed at one thing: creating better conditions for the development of our countries and improving the well-being of the people of China and the Russian Federation.” With the partnership, Putin claimed, an “emerging multipolar world ... is now taking shape before our eyes.”

It is however an absurd lie for Putin to claim that the current Russian-Chinese relationship is not aimed at anyone. Moscow and Beijing are moving closer in response to the NATO imperialist powers’ arming of Ukraine and Eastern Europe for war with Russia, and moves such as Washington’s integration of Japan into the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) alliance targeting China. That is, they are developing a largely defensive relationship aimed at imperialism’s campaign to threaten, attack, and potentially carve up Russia and China.

While the imperialist powers wage war overtly on Russia through Ukraine, they are waging economic war on China, blocking its imports of microchips and slapping massive tariffs on its electric vehicles and other key exports. This economic war now has become directly bound up with the NATO war in Ukraine.

Russian-Chinese trade has surged to over \$240 billion per year since the Ukraine war began—as Russia supplies energy and food to China, and China supplies manufactured goods that Russia previously imported from Europe but are now hit by NATO economic sanctions. However, this trade fell about 10 percent around the start of the year, as the US Treasury threatens to completely cut off Chinese banks financing trade with Russia with the use of the US dollar.

“Protecting the financial assets of big banks in China is the top crucial interest of China,” Professor Shi Yinhong of Beijing’s Renmin University told the *New York Times*. Shi added that one problem for China is that the room to diversify away from the US dollar is “limited.”

At the same time as Putin and Xi were meeting in China, US officials were escalating the military threats against Russia. Visiting the Ukrainian capital, Blinken signaled to the Ukrainian regime that it could potentially use US ATACMS missiles for strikes directly inside Russia, saying: “We have not encouraged or enabled strikes outside of Ukraine, but ultimately Ukraine has to make decisions for itself about how it’s going to conduct this war.”

This statement was staggeringly reckless, since Russian officials had previously tried to deter NATO from encouraging long-range missile strikes on Russia by warning that Moscow will retaliate militarily against a NATO country that gives a green light for such attacks.

However, Blinken went ahead, even though this risks a direct war between Russia and the United States.

This exposes the essential bankruptcy of the perspective underlying the policy of Moscow and Beijing in this current war, laid out in a February 2022 joint statement. The statement warned that “actors representing but the minority on the international scale continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force.”

It proposed to build a new world order, still based on the capitalist nation-state system, but featuring “multipolarity, economic globalization, the advent of information society, cultural diversity, transformation of the global governance architecture and world order.”

This counterrevolutionary, anti-socialist perspective of seeking a lasting coexistence with imperialism reflects the Stalinist origins of both the Russian and Chinese capitalist regimes. Stalin advanced the false theory of “socialism in one country” and the Soviet bureaucracy’s conception of “peaceful coexistence” with the imperialist powers against the perspective of international socialist revolution. Having restored capitalism and dissolved the Soviet Union in 1989-1991, the regimes in Moscow and Beijing now simply seek a limited refashioning of the world with imperialism.

But the imperialist powers, led by Washington, intend not to accommodate but to crush the interests of Moscow and Beijing. They pursue a relentless military and financial escalation. Against this, the perspective of building a “multipolar” capitalist world order, which offers nothing to the working class, is incapable of mobilizing the mass international opposition to war that has erupted in mass protests against the Gaza genocide around the globe. Instead, Moscow and Beijing simply intensify military threats that risk provoking global nuclear war.

The only progressive solution to this crisis of world capitalism is the building of an international socialist movement against imperialist war in the working class, based on a Trotskyist perspective of opposition both to capitalism and to Stalinism.



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