

# RAY McGOVERN: Russia & China — Two Against One

From Consortium News

*Xi Jinping's reception of Putin yesterday in Beijing sealed the increasingly formidable strategic relationship, fundamentally misunderstood in Washington.*



**Chinese President Xi Jinping's extremely warm reception of President Vladimir Putin yesterday in Beijing sealed the increasingly formidable Russia-China strategic relationship. It amounts to a tectonic shift in the world balance of power.**

The Russia-China entente also sounds the death knell for attempts by U.S. foreign policy neophytes to drive a wedge between the two countries. **The triangular relationship has become two-against-one, with serious implications, particularly for the war in Ukraine. If U.S. President Joe Biden's foreign policy geniuses remain in denial, escalation is almost certain.**

In a pre-visit interview with Xinhua, Putin noted the “unprecedented level of strategic partnership between our countries.” He and Xi have met more than 40 times in person or virtually. **In June 2018, Xi described Putin as “an old friend of the Chinese people” and, personally, his “best friend.”**

For his part, Putin noted Thursday that he and Xi are “in constant contact to keep personal control over all pressing issues on the Russian-Chinese and international agenda.” Putin brought along Defense Minister Andrey Belousov as well as veterans like Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and key business leaders.



Xi and Putin signed a strong joint statement Thursday, similar to the extraordinary one the two issued on Feb. 4, 2022, in Beijing. It portrayed their relationship as **“superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era. Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation ...”**

The full import of that statement did not hit home until Putin launched the Special Military Operation into the Donbass three weeks later. China’s muted reaction shocked most analysts, who had dismissed the possibility that Xi would give “best friend” Putin, in effect, a waiver on China’s bedrock policy of non-interference abroad.

In the following weeks, official Chinese statements made clear that the principles of Westphalia had taken a back seat **to “the need for every country to defend its core interests” and to judge each situation “on its own merits.”**

## **Nuclear War**

Thursday’s statement expressed concern over “increased strategic risks between nuclear powers” — referring to continued escalation of the war between NATO-supported Ukraine and Russia. It **condemns “the expansion of military alliances and creation of military bridgeheads close to the borders of other nuclear powers, particularly with the advanced deployment of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery, as well as other items.”**

Putin has undoubtedly briefed Xi on the U.S. missile sites already in Romania and Poland that can launch what Russians call “offensive strike missiles” with flight time to Moscow of less than 10 minutes. Putin surely has told Xi about the inconsistencies in U.S. statements regarding intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

For example, Xi is aware — just as surely as consumers of Western media are unaware — that during a Dec. 30, 2021, telephone conversation, Biden assured

Putin that “Washington had no intention of deploying offensive strike weapons in Ukraine.”

There was rejoicing in the Kremlin that New Years’ Eve, since Biden’s assurance was the first sign that Washington might acknowledge Russia’s security concerns. Indeed, Biden addressed a key issue in at least five of the eight articles of the Russian draft treaty given to the U.S. on Dec. 17, 2021. Russian rejoicing, however, was short-lived.

Foreign Minister Lavrov revealed last month that when he met Antony Blinken in Geneva in January 2022, the U.S. secretary of state pretended he’d not heard of Biden’s undertaking to Putin on Dec. 30, 2021. Rather, Blinken insisted that U.S. medium-range missiles could be deployed in Ukraine, and only that the U.S. might be willing to limit their number, Lavrov said.

### **The Mother of All Miscalculations**



**Biden and Putin meeting at the at the Villa La Grange in Geneva, June 16, 2021, flanked by Blinken on left, Lavrov on right. (White House/ Adam Schultz)**

**When Biden took office in 2021, his advisers assured him that he could play on Russia’s fear (sic) of China and drive a wedge between them. This became embarrassingly clear when Biden indicated what he had told Putin during their Geneva summit on June 16, 2021.**

**That meeting gave Putin confirmation that Biden and his advisers were stuck in a woefully outdated appraisal of Russia-China relations.**

Here is the bizarre way Biden described his approach to Putin on China:

“Without quoting him [Putin] — which I don’t think is appropriate — let me ask a rhetorical question: You got a multi-thousand-mile border with China. China is seeking to be the most powerful economy in the world and the largest and the most powerful military in the world.”

## The 'Squeeze'



Putin in video conference with Xi on Dec. 15, 2021. (Kremlin)

At the airport after the summit, Biden's aides did their best to whisk him onto the plane, but failed to stop him from sharing more wisdom on China:

"Russia is in a very, very difficult spot right now. They are being squeezed by China."

After these remarks Putin and Xi spent the rest of 2021 trying to disabuse Biden of the "China squeeze" on Russia: it was not a squeeze, but a fraternal embrace. This mutual effort culminated in a Xi-Putin virtual summit on Dec. 15 of that year.

The video of the first minute of their conversation was picked up by *The New York Times*, as well as others. Still, most commentators seemed to miss its significance:

Putin:

**"Dear friend, dear President Xi Jinping. Next February I expect we can finally meet in person in Beijing as we agreed. We will hold talks and then participate in the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games. I am grateful for your invitation to attend this landmark event."**

Xi:

**"Dear President Putin, my old friend. It's my pleasure to meet you at the end of this year by video, the second time this year, our 37th meeting since 2013. You have hailed ... China-Russia relations as a model in international collaboration in the 21st Century, strongly supporting China's position on safeguarding its core interests, and firmly opposed to attempts to drive a wedge between our two countries. I highly appreciate it."**

Is Biden still unaware of this? Have his advisers told him that Russia and China have never been closer, with what amounts to a virtual military alliance?

## **The Election**

Putin has said he is aware that Washington's policy toward Russia "is primarily impacted by domestic political processes." Russia and China certainly assess that Biden's policy on Ukraine will be influenced by the political imperative to be seen as facing Russia down.

**If NATO country hotheads send "trainers" to Ukraine, the prospect of a military dust-up is ever present. What Biden needs to know is that, if it comes to open hostilities between Russia and the West, he is likely to face more than just saber rattling in the South China Sea — and the specter of a two-front war.**

The Chinese know they are next in line for the ministrations of NATO/East. Indeed, it is no secret that the Pentagon sees China as enemy No. 1. According to the DOD's National Defense Strategy, "defense priorities are first, defending the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the People's Republic of China."

**The Pentagon will be the last to sing a requiem for the dearly departed unipolar world. May sanity prevail.**

**Ray McGovern's first portfolio as a C.I.A. analyst was Sino-Soviet relations. In 1963, their total trade was \$220 MILLION; in 2023, \$227 BILLION. Do the math.**