

Nato

Xi backs Putin's opposition to Nato expansion at summit that underlines closer ties

Russian and Chinese leaders rebuke US and present united front in talks at Beijing Winter Olympics



Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in Beijing on Friday © AP

Edward White in Seoul and **Kathrin Hille** in Taipei and **Nastassia Astrasheuskaya** in Moscow 10 HOURS AGO

China has joined Russia in opposing further expansion of Nato, a significant step up in Beijing's backing for Moscow as the leaders of the two countries agreed to deepen co-operation across a range of security, political and economic areas.

Presidents Xi Jinping of China and Vladimir Putin of Russia said they "oppose further enlargement of Nato", in a joint statement released by the Kremlin after the two leaders' meeting in Beijing on Friday.

With the west opposing Russia's military build-up on the Ukraine border and China's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, Putin and Xi presented a united front in talks just hours before the opening ceremony of the [Beijing Winter Olympics](#). They also cemented bilateral ties with a smattering of agreements including a new gas supply deal.

While China had signalled backing for Russia in its [stand-off with the US and Nato](#) in recent days, the joint statement goes much further. "This is the first time Beijing has explicitly opposed Nato enlargement," said Alexander Gabuev, an expert in Russia-China relations at the Carnegie Moscow Center, an offshoot of the US think-tank.

Xi said China and Russia would support each other's sovereignty and interests, while also dealing with external interferences and regional security threats, according to Chinese state media. Looking out against the US, the more than 7,000 word

reached between Australia, the UK and US last year. They also pledged to “increase co-operation” to counter attempts by external forces to undermine security and interfere “under any pretext”.

Putin and Xi discussed what Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov called “tensions intentionally forced by the west around Russia and China”.

Xi reaffirmed his support for Moscow’s proposals to develop legally binding security guarantees in Europe, Lavrov told reporters in Beijing on Friday.

“The Putin-Xi joint statement from Beijing takes Sino-Russian entente to the level of a common front to push back against US pressure on Russia and China in Europe, Asia and globally. An important evolution of the already close relationship,” Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, wrote on Twitter.

Russia’s Gazprom also signed a deal with China’s CNPC to supply gas via a new route with deliveries of 10bn cubic metres a year over 25 years.

The affirmation of stronger Sino-Russian ties comes against a backdrop of [international alarm](#) over Ukraine. Russia has moved more than 100,000 troops to the Ukraine border in what the US has said was a [prelude to an invasion](#).

Despite the demonstration of unity, Putin and Xi carefully sidestepped areas where their interests are not fully aligned. The two leaders’ statement made no mention of Ukraine, the South China Sea or China’s border with India.

Ukraine is a difficult issue for China because territorial integrity is one of the key principles of Beijing’s foreign policy. For Russia, backing China’s contested claims in the South China Sea would put Moscow’s ties with other Asian nations such as Vietnam at risk. China’s border dispute with India is problematic because Moscow is seeking to strengthen its relations with New Delhi as well.

The US and many western countries have [refused to send officials](#) to the Games over China’s human rights abuses in Xinjiang, where more than 1mn Uyghurs have been interned, and Beijing’s crackdown in Hong Kong.

Putin, however, is among a group of [foreign leaders attending](#) the opening ceremony of the Games, which includes Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Pakistan’s

[frayed ties](#) between the west and China and disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Ahead of the talks, Putin condemned criticism of China's hosting of the Winter Games and praised the "stabilising role" played by the two countries internationally.

Chinese state media touted the "close friendship" between the two leaders, quoting Putin's view of Xi: "He's approachable and sincere. He's also a partner that you can rely on."

Additional reporting by William Langley in Hong Kong

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