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'BRIEF REVIEW OF THE RECENT XI-PUTIN SUMMIT'

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The tension building on Ukraine's border, where approximately 130,000 Russian troops are poised for a possible military offensive and the US and West are arrayed against Russia, provided an ideal setting for the Russian and Chinese Presidents to display their close ties. It ensured that world attention would be focussed on their first meeting in person in slightly over 2 years. The Beijing Winter Olympics, which the US, UK, Australia and many European nations boycotted to protest the human rights violations of Uyghurs in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region thereby putting China under pressure, provided the perfect opportunity.

2. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, both nurtured within the apparatus of the respective communist parties, not only emphasised the close Sino-Russian economic and strategic ties but also introduced an ideological dimension.

3. Before he left for Beijing, Putin gave a written interview to Shen Haixiong, Director and Editor-in-Chief of China Central Radio and Television and Vice Minister in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC)'s Propaganda Department. Shen Haixiong is an Alternate Member of the 19th CC of the CCP. The interview was publicised by the CCP's official mouthpiece 'People's Daily' (February 04, 2022). While the interview focussed mainly on sports, Putin said that China ranks first among Russia's trading partners with preliminary figures showing that bilateral trade had reached a record high of \$140 billion last year. He emphasised that "China is our strategic partner on the international stage. On most issues on the global agenda, we are aligned or very close" and that the two coordinate closely in major multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, G20, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the East Asia Summit, which has "a stabilizing effect on the current complex world situation". He said "the Russia-China Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation have brought the partnership between our two countries to an unprecedented high level".

4. Probably the event that attracted the most international attention was the Summit meeting between Putin and Xi Jinping on February 4. The meeting was prominently covered by Xinhua and the state-run China Central Television (CCTV) as well as China's other official media. Xinhua and CCTV (February 4) both reported (February 4) that Chinese President Xi Jinping had an "in-depth and full exchange of views on Sino-Russian relations and a series of major issues concerning international strategic security and stability in a warm and friendly atmosphere" with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in

Beijing. Incidentally, Putin was one of only three visiting dignitaries who stayed at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse. The other two were Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan while other foreign dignitaries were accommodated in hotels.

5. Xinhua quoted Xi Jinping as saying that "the world has entered a new period of turbulence and change, and human society has encountered many challenges and crises". He added that "China and Russia have adhered to their original aspirations and have always maintained their bilateral relations to move forward steadily. The two sides firmly support each other in safeguarding their core interests. Political and strategic mutual trust is increasingly consolidated, and bilateral trade volume has hit a new record high". He asserted that "China and Russia are committed to deepening back-to-back strategic cooperation and safeguarding international fairness and justice side by side. This is a strategic decision that has far-reaching influence on China, Russia and the world, and will not be shaken in the past, present and future". Xi Jinping said they should continue to maintain close high-level exchanges, "strongly support each other in safeguarding sovereignty, security and development interests, effectively respond to external interference and regional security threats, and maintain international strategic stability".

6. Putin replied: "Russia-China relations are a model of international relations in the 21st century. The joint statement we issued today reflects the highly unanimous position of Russia and China on major international issues. The strategic nature of Russia-China relations is unprecedentedly prominent and has attracted worldwide attention. The deepening of comprehensive strategic coordination between Russia and China is conducive to the realization of the respective development of the two countries and the maintenance of the common interests of the two countries. It is also of great significance to safeguarding world strategic security and stability. The Russian side is willing to further intensify strategic communication and coordination with the Chinese side, firmly support each other in safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, firmly uphold the core coordination role of the United Nations, firmly uphold international law and international fairness and justice, and promote the building of a more just and reasonable international order".

7. Xinhua said that the two heads of state had an in-depth exchange of views on the current international and regional situation and major hotspot issues of mutual concern.

8. After the talks, Xi Jinping hosted a banquet for Putin. The two sides thereafter issued the "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on International Relations and Global Sustainable Development in the New Era" and signed a series of documents for cooperation in key areas. A day earlier Russia's Gazprom agreed to a 30-year contract to supply China's CNPC with natural gas from a new pipeline connecting Russia's Far East with China's northeast. An agreement was separately concluded for Russia to supply 100 million tons of oil to China over 5 years. Ding Xuexiang, Director of the CCP CC General Office, Politburo member and senior Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Head of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) He Lifeng, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng also attended the Xi-Putin meeting.

9. While the People's Daily (February 5) published a commentary titled 'Inject more vitality into the development of Sino-Russian relations', CCTV (February 4) reported on the 'China and Russia joint statement on international relations and global sustainable development in the new era' issued in Beijing the same day. CCTV said: The statement pointed out that at present, the world is going through great changes, and the international community has a stronger voice for peace and sustainable development. A few international forces continue to stubbornly pursue unilateralism and harm the legitimate rights and interests of other countries. The international community will never accept this". It listed the main points of the Joint Statement as:

- The two sides call on all countries to safeguard the common values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom for all mankind, defend the international system with the United Nations at the core and the international order based on international law, practice genuine multilateralism, and achieve world peace and stability and sustainable development.
- The two sides agreed that the people of all countries have the right to choose the form and method of democratic practice that suits their national conditions. Whether a country is democratic or not can only be judged by its people.
- The two sides believe that development is the key to realizing the well-being of the people, and are willing to continue relevant work on advancing the global development initiative proposed by China.
- The two sides reiterated that they firmly support each other's core interests and oppose external forces interfering in the internal affairs of the two countries and undermining the security and stability of the common surrounding areas of the two countries.
- As world powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council, the two sides will uphold responsibility and morality, promote world multi-polarization and democratization of international relations, and work together to build a new type of international relations.
- The Russian side spoke positively of China's concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, believing that this concept will help strengthen the solidarity of the international community and work together to tackle common challenges.
- Russia supports China in successfully hosting the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

10. The language in the joint statement appears to be centred on the Chinese sphere of interests, namely the Indo-Pacific, Taiwan, the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. The coordination between the CEE and BRI, for example, is of concern to China and much less so to Russia. Ukraine is neither explicitly mentioned and nor does the joint statement make any mention of mutual support in Russia's tensions over Ukraine. This would point to the limits of the growing Sino-Russian partnership. The joint statement neither mentions this with respect to China's with Taiwan, but it does state: "The Russian side reaffirms its support for the One-China principle, confirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and opposes any forms of independence of Taiwan". The following paragraph asserts "Russia and China stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, intend to counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, oppose colour revolutions, and will increase cooperation in the aforementioned areas". The specific mention of 'colour revolutions' reflects the concerns shared by Russia and China and signals China's unease over the developments in Ukraine.

11. An interesting article was published on China's popular web-portal Weixin on February 6. This described the Sino-Russian joint statement more as an anti-hegemonic struggle, saying "China and Russia still have not formed a military alliance, but a strategic alliance has been established in fact". Titled 'China-Russia strategic alliance has reached a new level—Comment on the Sino-Russian Joint Statement for a New Era', the author, Zhang Zhikun, observed that the "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on International Relations and Global Sustainable Development in the New Era" was issued at a critical moment in the global strategy and that it is "a major strategic measure jointly adopted by China and Russia". The article said the joint statement marks a new level of strategic cooperation between China and Russia". Stating that the "Joint Statement made a clear statement on a series of major international strategic and political issues, directly naming the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and other relevant countries", it claimed the document "comprehensively criticizes and denies the dominance of hegemony" and can, therefore "be called a joint declaration against hegemony". The article added that "the joint targeting of third parties by China and Russia is an important sign that the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination has reached a new level" and that after this joint statement, "the military alliance between China and Russia will also be further strengthened". It points out though that they have still "not formed a military alliance, but a strategic alliance has been established".

12. The article claimed the joint statement demonstrates China and Russia's common views on democracy, civilization, development, history and security to the world and sounds "a new clarion call for the struggle against hegemony in human society, which will definitely impact the world order dominated by hegemon countries and the Western Cold War bloc". It said the US and West had argued that the outbreak of a war between Russia and Ukraine would not benefit China and would have a huge impact on the global economy and energy supply and that China should exert influence in "some constructive way" on Russia and advise it not to resort to force. Instead, it said "China and Russia are leaning even more closely". It claimed that "China and Russia have formed a firm strategic core and political backbone" to a number of countries in the middle zone, including in the BRICS, SCO etc. and given them other options for development thus laying the basis for "a worldwide peaceful united front" that will surely grow. Asserting that "the Sino-Russian Joint Statement for a New Era has a solid strategic foundation", it cautioned that a lot of work has still to be done such as "adjustment and follow-up of domestic and foreign policies, including currency settlement, technical exchanges, trade and investment and other specific issues".

13. The article underscored that it is important for Russia and China to jointly oppose "all kinds of sabotage and interference" in particular from the "huge pro-American and pro-Western forces in both China and Russia", which are "deeply rooted and powerful, and penetrates into all aspects of society, especially in the media and academic circles". It said these forces will resist Russia-China cooperation and "when it comes to specific projects, they will do everything they can to interfere and destroy". The author emphasized that the domestic struggle against hegemony is closely related to the international struggle against hegemony. In conclusion, the article claimed China-Russia "strategic cooperation has reached a new level and will provide a reliable guarantee and support for global strategic stability and balance, and will promote the arrival of a new era of global strategy".

14. The Putin-Xi meeting was as much for promoting bilateral economic cooperation as to project solidarity between the two countries, both of which are being subjected to pressure by the United States. They also share the apprehension that the US may resort to imposing tough economic sanctions, which will also adversely impact China since many Chinese companies are engaged with Russia. This could, in turn, adversely impact China's BRI. The omission in the joint statement of any reference to Ukraine is an indicator of this apprehension.

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