

Weekly Commentary 18

An end to the Ukraine War?? Russia's terms spelt out.

I had reported midweek last week that there was a call between Shoigu, defence minister of the Russian Federation and LeCornu, his counterpart in France. France initiated the call, but they could not even agree on what they had talked about. There was a diplomatic storm over what the two countries published as read-outs. Shoigu said that the two talked about how the war in Ukraine could end, and what were Russia's terms. LeCornu said no, that's not what they discussed and the conversation was limited to how they can cooperate to eliminate terrorist incidents.

On the surface of it, I think that LeCornu was being disingenuous. As I had written before, terrorism prevention is none of his business; it would be the portfolio of the French Interior Minister. And if he not intended to negotiate the terms of peace, why would he request the conversation with Shoigu? I think what happened was that the Frenchman got rebuffed by the Russian, and he started to look for a way to save face.

It turns out that a few days later at the United Nations, the Russian ambassador to the UN, Nebenzra, plonked down the terms for an end of hostilities. The timing seems too coincidental. Here is one version of the speech by the Nebenzra, as reported by an online publication, also found on X:

RUSSIA MAKES DRAMATIC ANNOUNCEMENT AT UNITED NATIONS

Yesterday the Russian ambassador to the United Nations made a dramatic statement.

He basically delivered an ultimatum on Ukraine. Cessation of the war in Ukraine depends on

- 1. Ukraine never joining NATO**
- 2. The demilitarisation of Ukraine (no army in Ukraine but Russia will give security guarantees).**
- 3. The de-Nazification of Ukraine.**
- 4. The Russian speaking regions of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, Zaphorizhia as well as the Crimea remain in Russia.**

Plus other ancillary points like no foreign soldiers on Ukrainian soil ever, not even for training visits or military exercises.

Then the Russians dropped their bombshell. They said that if these terms are not accepted they will resolve the matter on the battlefield. The Russian ambassador said that Russian troops are now entrenched and can advance all across the 1,000 km frontline with Ukraine at will. And Russia can take Kyiv (the capital of Ukraine) in the next few months and then impose an unconditional surrender on Ukraine.

If Russia defeats Ukraine completely there may not be a Ukraine left. From the Russian read outs of the meeting between Lecornu and Shoigu, the above points were what was in fact discussed. No wonder Lecornu was looking for a face-shaving way out.

The Russians would have a clock ticking which is the US presidential elections on November 5th 2024. Donald Trump, who is Russia friendly, is expected to win.

If Trump becomes president and he adopts a friendly attitude towards Russia - which he did before - it may place President Putin in a difficult situation to say no to any peace proposals by Donald Trump. Trump has already said he will stop the war in Ukraine within 24 hours.

Russia is looking beyond the Ukraine war. Clearly, Putin wants the west to remove all the economic sanctions against his country, re-establish sales of Russian gas to Europe (and make Germany viable again) and resume normal trade links with the world. Putin will need close cooperation with Donald Trump to achieve this.

Folks, when the Ukraine war stops there may be cheer around the world again. Stock Markets will jump.

So if Ukraine does not accept Russia's terms, then Putin's army will try to take Kyiv and impose an unconditional surrender on Ukraine by November of 2024.

The West do not like what is happening, especially with Moscow winning. As usual they are planning more subterfuge. As everyone remembers, Boris Johnson, then prime minister of the UK, was the one who persuaded Zelenskyy to ditch what was already negotiated, and promised American and British support to Ukraine for as long as it takes to win. Both governments did not live up to their commitment to Kyiv and now the regime in Ukraine is being crushed, with millions already dead and wounded. These warmongers have blood on their hands. These two countries are callously responsible for reducing Ukraine to a broken rump state.

And the narrative coming out of the western countries is always changing. Because of their pledge to an idiotic Zelenskyy who was too stupid to know better, to provide the propaganda to convince their constituents that they needed to spend money to provide Ukraine all the weapons they needed to win the war, the western governments actually told lies about what was happening on the battlefield. Until late summer last year, they had claimed that Kyiv's forces were holding off the Russians, which astute military analysts had always known was impossible. They said that the Russian army was ineffective, second best to Ukraine's, and half Moscow's equipment and men have been destroyed by superior Ukrainian arms. If this were true, why would Kyiv need more men or ammo? They would be on a roll, without any danger of losing to the Russian army.

Then after the much touted but failed summer counteroffensive collapsed, the truth emerged. The Ukrainians' victories were just figments of the imagination of western media propanganda which desperately wanted Kyiv to win over the "evil" Putin.

When the lying got too complicated, the truth was bound to emerge. And when it did, the world realized that the bullshit was as deep as the black mud in Ukraine.

Now there is widespread acknowledgement that Ukraine has lost calamitously. Politico actually interviewed a number of Ukrainian generals who said that their country is on the brink of collapse. Obviously, these generals would be well placed to know what is going on at the frontline. They represent the horses' mouth. They are running out of *money* (held up at the US congress because the political mood there has changed from strong support for Ukraine to lukewarm at best), *munitions* (these incompetent fools in Kyiv did not know how to conserve ammunition, thinking that the gravy train would last forever and blew it all away with the industrial economy in Russia outstripping the productive capacity of the US and Europe combined); and *men* (all the soldiers in the initial line -up of troops at the beginning of the war are now dead or wounded.)

As a matter of fact, the greatest failing of the Kyiv regime is its inability to recognize or tell the truth. The positive news that are provided by the west cannot be believed anymore, whether you are an impartial observer or committed sponsor. Besides the tales of despair now published in western press, the narrative has gone over to the other side, where it is now suggested that instead of just losing the war, there is now the risk of NATO being demilitarised by the superior Russian armed forces. NATO has lost the war against Russia. Here is a typical account, published in an American journal, the National Interest:

April 4, 2024

The Looming Ukraine Debacle

There is indeed a serious risk that, rather than the West teaching Russia a lesson and putting Putin in his place, the opposite may occur.

*by **Matthew Blackburn** The National Interest*

With Ukraine's military situation deteriorating, NATO foreign ministers have gathered in Brussels to develop a long-term plan to deliver the necessary supplies to Kyiv. As NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg put it, "Ukrainians are not running out of courage, they are running out of ammunition." Distracted by other matters, America increasingly looks to Europe to coordinate the defense of Ukraine. But, other than scrambling for shells and money or unveiling a modest EU defense industry strategy, **European leaders do not appear to have the ideas or the means to intervene in a decisive or timely fashion.**

French president Emmanuel Macron's suggestion that NATO troops may enter Ukraine was supported by Poland and Czechia but caused some consternation in France itself. More importantly, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States still rule out boots on the ground. Instead of a new approach, the old pattern continues: NATO mulls over how to help Ukraine without provoking open war with Russia and fails, in the end, to deliver the kind of decisive assistance needed to turn the course of the war.

Another established pattern is the repetition of moralistic binary language. The West “cannot let Russia win.” The “rules-based order” could unravel. **Then there is the new domino theory: if Ukraine falls, Russian hordes will flood further west.** The personalization of the conflict onto one evil man, Vladimir Putin, continues with the death of Alexei Navalny. It is a Manichean struggle of good and evil, democracy and authoritarianism, civilization and darkness. There can be “no peace until the tyrant falls.” The Western alliance must not waver in its commitment to Ukraine.

What is lacking throughout the discourse is realism. (These clowns actually believe in their own propaganda.) What is the real balance of power between the warring nations, and what can be concluded from two years of Russia-NATO hard power competition? Unsurprisingly, **Western leaders are reluctant to admit that the dire situation facing Ukraine is related to their own fundamental miscalculations about Russia. Russia’s multiple blunders in this war are well-known but what of those made by the Western alliance?**

The West’s Plan A Failed; Russia’s Plan B is Slowly Succeeding.

About two years ago, it became clear that Russia’s Plan A in Ukraine failed. **(Even this was not true – the Russians were too trusting in the negotiation process and sent in an army too small to be serious and ended its campaign in Kyiv when France fooled Putin into pulling its forces out as a goodwill measure to hold truce talks early in the war.)** Putin’s initial approach was a sudden movement of troops into Ukraine that, in the best case, could topple Ukraine’s government or, at least, coerce Kyiv into signing a new and less favorable version of the Minsk II agreement. Russia’s Plan A was resisted by the Zelenskyy government, whose military forces held firm on the outskirts of Kyiv in March 2022. After the collapse of the Istanbul peace negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow in April, Russia shifted to **Plan B: waging a grinding war of attrition to exhaust Kyiv’s will and capacity to resist while testing the Western alliance’s collective ability to sustain Ukraine.**

Russia’s Plan B had mixed results in 2022. While Russia won important, if costly, victories in Mariupol and Severodonetsk, Ukraine exploited Russia’s lack of manpower to win back territory in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. However, following a partial military and economic mobilization, **Russia turned the corner, defeating Ukraine’s offensive in 2023 and taking the upper hand in 2024. (This version of events is also written by a western analyst, Mr Blackburn. As a matter of fact, independent analysts throughout non traditional media, which I have followed closely for the last 2.5 years, have never wavered in their insistence that Russia would win the war, and provided a different perspective of what was really going.)**

As the slow success of Russia’s Plan B becomes more apparent, the failure of the West’s own Plan A to deal with Russia is now clarified. This plan consisted of sanctions to derail the Russian economy, diplomacy to isolate the Putin regime,

and the use of NATO weapons and know-how to inflict serious damage on Russia on the battlefield. The optimal outcome would be Russia's humiliation and withdrawal from Ukraine. But experts assured us that whatever happened, Russia would be seriously weakened and put in its place. This, however, is not what has materialized.

Faulty Assumptions

Russia's economy was rated as weak and vulnerable to sanctions, given its energy dependency and relatively low GDP score, which is calculated by converting the value of its economy into U.S. dollars. This measure did not account for Russia's strategic industries, resource self-sufficiency, and access to alternative trading partners. Western sanctions on Russia's energy exports backfired, damaging some European economies more than Russia. They also caused a spike in energy prices, ensuring Russia received more than enough revenues to fund its war effort. (And in Feb 2024, Russia's GDP grew at 7.5 percent, far higher than most countries in the world.) The hope that most non-Western states would stop trading with Russia also proved unfounded; Russia has increased its trade flows with India, Turkey, and China, while many of Russia's neighbors quietly profit by reselling sanctioned goods to Moscow.

The assumption that Russia is a kleptocracy led to personal sanctions on wealthy Russians that were expected to have political side effects; losing access to their assets and luxuries in the West, Russia's kleptocrats would surely turn on Putin. Instead, the sanctions have largely incentivized them to invest money in their own country and give their loyalty to the regime. Western sanctions were thus a double failure: they did not wreck the Russian economy or destabilize the elite coalition around the regime.

The other set of assumptions was military in nature. Russia's failed use of hard power in the first two months of its "Special Military Operation" was taken as an indicator of gross military incompetence. Claims of high Russian casualties and equipment losses were linked to corruption, poor morale, and disorganization. Most commentators and reporters have accepted at face value the Ukrainian, U.S., and UK estimates of Russian losses, as well as the equipment loss count of the open-source intelligence unit "Oryx." The claims of astronomical Russian losses reinforced the long-standing assumption of NATO military superiority over Russia, (all hubris and western arrogance.) creating a remarkable war optimism in the West. Ukraine would now use higher caliber Western weapons, tactics, and training to defeat Russia comprehensively. NATO's game-changing wonder weapons were kept on the sidelines and could be introduced when Ukraine needed decisive assistance.

These military assumptions have now been proven incorrect. The drip-feeding of advanced weaponry, calibrated to avoid crossing Russian redlines too flagrantly, did not allow the Ukrainians to achieve decisive success in 2023. While access to NATO intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems has given Ukraine a

crucial advantage in battlefield targeting, NATO training, equipment, and planning proved unsuitable for Ukraine's 2023 offensive. NATO countries have not provided consistent types of weaponry or kept up with the basic needs of munitions production or procurement into 2024. Overall, NATO was not well prepared for the war in Ukraine; its military doctrines foresaw interventions in civil wars or conflict with weaker opponents, not a proxy war of attrition with a peer competitor.

In contrast, Russia was better prepared for the long haul of military production and has also successfully innovated in response to the military setbacks it has experienced. The Russian military has adapted to conditions of near total battlefield visibility, the mass use of drones, and the vastly reduced power of tanks and aircraft. This includes innovative infantry assault tactics, new methods of using and countering drones, and, more recently, the devastating use of glide bombs (large bombs retrofitted with wings) that allow Russian air power to be used while evading anti-aircraft fire. On the tactical and operational level, Russia is engaging many parts of the front simultaneously, forcing Ukraine into an exhausting and constant redeployment of troops. Presenting Russian military successes as "human wave" or "meat assaults" is clearly inaccurate. Russia's approach is gradual, attritional, and anything but mindless.

Given these dynamics, widespread talk of a Ukrainian victory has been replaced by the specter of defeat if the West cannot deliver the needed weapons and supplies. (Even if such aid arrives, Ukraine has already lost irrecoverably.) Yet, even if the shells arrive in time, Ukraine also has a manpower problem that is much harder to solve. The Ukrainian government's deep reluctance to issue another mobilization may reflect a fear of popular discontent and doubts over the state's capacity to deliver the required number of men.

Despite all the above indicators, many (lunatics) in the West want to continue Plan A: more sanctions on Russia, new weapons, and more training for Ukraine, all to somehow prepare Ukraine to launch another offensive in 2025. Yet it remains unclear how Ukraine can survive 2024 if Russia is outproducing the West by more than three-to-one in shells and has more troops at its disposal. Something has to give in the next phase of the war.

What Next?

The current rather desperate effort to scrape together munitions to ensure Ukraine's immediate survival does not constitute a Plan B for the West in Ukraine. A definition of "victory" is still lacking. It is unclear what prerequisites must be in place for "honorable" negotiations with Russia. (Hence the reluctance of Lecornu to even hint to Shoigu that the west would be willing to talk.) The Western alliance's Plan B must be a choice between rapidly developing an effective means of doubling down its support for Ukraine or starting to talk about a compromise with Russia.

Macron's variant of a Western "double-down" in Ukraine looks unconvincing. Talk of NATO troop deployment is not a serious threat to Russia's military dominance. (In the vastness of Eastern Europe, 2000 French troops would be too little too late.) More likely, it represents a signal of Western commitment intended to bolster Ukrainian morale at a crucial time, as well as ensure that, in case of a debacle, Macron himself cannot be accused of having been silent (more self serving bullshit.) But in real terms, what could 2,000 French troops do in Ukraine to change the military balance? (Yup, zip, nada, no effect.) Surely, it would be nothing more than a stopgap (for all of two days, as 1000 Ukrainians are killed or wounded every single day), but one with risks of further debacle, given that a NATO contingent in Ukraine would not be protected by Article 5 and would most likely be "fair game" for Russian missiles and drones. (they will, tragically, be wiped out.)

(This account of the war by Mr Blackburn is consistent with the military analysts I follow on non mainstream media who have always predicted the current outcome.

(The collective west, especially the Americans and the British, have too much hubris to admit they were wrong. It may even be racism, with regards to the false confidence that they thought would prevail in a fight with the Slavs in Russia. No, it can't be that the Russians are just better at warfare than NATO even though their track record in defeating western armies from Napoleonic times to WW2 makes for obvious rationale why they are winning.

(So the west must look for excuses and scapegoats to throw under the bus. The obvious ones are the fools in Kyiv but they cannot be pushed too hard in case they give up. If they do throw up their arms in despair, the war will end long before the Nov US elections and Biden will not win a second term which the Europeans fear will end up with a Trump presidency that may dismantle NATO, worsening the problem they face in a resurgent Russia. As such, we now see all kinds of bullshit that is now emerging to blame the North Koreans, Iranians and Chinese. The propaganda is now that "we, the west, did not lose to the Russians; the Russians won because they were assisted by a more powerful nation, China." This narrative is untrue of course, but if it were true, then the competition with China is taking on even more ominous tones than the Americans would want to deal with.

(Hence the Biden call to Xi Jinping in the week before Yellen's trip to China. Biden asked Xi to refrain from supporting Putin.

(There are several accounts of what transpired between Xi and Biden. Here is an account from the Wall Street Journal :

Biden Warns Xi on Aiding Russia's War in Ukraine

The call is the first between the U.S. and Chinese leaders since last year's summit

By

Michael R. Gordon and Andrew Duehren

Updated April 2, 2024 3:32 pm ET

In his first call with Chinese President Xi Jinping since their November summit, [President Biden](#) raised mounting concerns over Beijing's substantial support for Russia's defense industry, the White House said Tuesday.

China has refrained from sending lethal weapons for Russia's war in Ukraine following repeated U.S. warnings that such a move would present a major challenge for relations between Washington and Beijing. But China has found other ways to strengthen Russia's defense capability and indirectly help Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine, U.S. officials say.

"As time has gone on, we've really seen the PRC start to help to rebuild Russia's defense industrial base," a senior Biden administration official said using the acronym for the People's Republic of China.

China, the official added, has been helping to "provide the components that get slowly towards increasing Russia's capabilities in Ukraine. And that has, of course, longer term impacts on European security."

Biden raised an array of other issues in the Tuesday morning call, which lasted an hour and 45 minutes, including stepping up cooperation on counternarcotics, continuing military-to-military consultations to reduce the risk of inadvertent confrontation amid deep differences over Taiwan, and the importance of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea where China has used aggressive tactics against Philippine vessels.

Biden also discussed U.S. concerns over TikTok. The House has passed legislation that would ban TikTok or force its sale because of allegations that the social-media app provides its China-based ownership with a means of gathering information about the U.S. public and influencing American opinion.

"The president reiterated our concerns about the ownership of TikTok," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. "He made it clear to President Xi that this was not about a ban of the application, but rather our interest in divestiture so that the national security interest and the data security of the American people can be protected."

A statement on the call posted by China's Foreign Ministry on Tuesday briefly mentioned that Xi and Biden exchanged views on the Ukraine issue. The statement also said that Xi told Biden that the bottom line of the bilateral relationship this year is peace without any conflicts and rivalry.

The call comes ahead of visits by two senior administration officials to China. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is expected to travel to China in the next few days and Secretary of State Antony Blinken is planning to go to Beijing in coming weeks, the senior administration official said.

Chinese officials have embraced Yellen as an American official who appreciates the deep economic ties between the two countries; Yellen will be the first member of Biden's cabinet to travel to China twice.

Xi said China welcomes Yellen and Blinken to visit Beijing in the near future, the Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said.

But Yellen will carry a tough message for China. With domestic demand weak, Chinese officials have in recent months leaned into exports abroad to revive their slumping economy. That is creating a surge of Chinese goods on global markets, driving down prices and threatening U.S. industry. (Yellen's exhortations did not work.)

"We have raised overcapacity in previous discussions with China and I plan to make it a key issue in discussions during my next trip there," Yellen said last week.

In response to the Chinese export surge, the Biden administration is preparing to raise some Trump-era tariffs on Chinese goods, including electric vehicles.

Longer lists of sanctions against Chinese companies are not "derisking" but creating risks, Xi was cited as saying in the Chinese readout of the call. "If the U.S. side continues to crack down on the growth of China's high technology, taking away China's rights to develop, we won't sit back and do nothing," the Chinese statement cited Xi as saying.

The two leaders agreed to maintain regular communications when they met in Woodside, Calif., in November. The aim of that summit was to use a rare face-to-face meeting to better manage the deep tensions between the two sides and identify some areas for cooperation, including choking off chemicals to make fentanyl.

Biden and Xi also met in Bali in November 2022. Their last phone call was in July 2022.

On the Taiwan issue, Biden discussed the importance of maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait. Xi urged his U.S. counterpart to reflect in action Washington's stance of not supporting Taiwan independence, the Chinese statement said. The statement also said the two leaders discussed the situation on the Korean Peninsula, but gave no details.

U.S. officials say there have been some security gains in recent months, including fewer incidents in which Chinese warplanes flew dangerously close to American military aircraft in the western Pacific and the restoration of a dialogue between top military officials on each side.

But Ukraine remains a concern. Following Russia's February 2022 invasion, the U.S. urged Beijing to use its influence in Moscow to dissuade Russian President Vladimir Putin from considering the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

But the senior administration official contrasted those gains with Beijing's ongoing effort "to help Russia reconstitute its defense industrial base." and added that the U.S. and its Western allies were "quite concerned" about where China appeared to be heading on that issue.

Liyan Qi contributed to this article

(The CEO of the Atlantic Council has also written to join the chorus of complaints about losing the Ukraine war to Russia. It is never about the lack of capability on the part of Ukraine but always about how China has acted in bad faith. This kind of complaining is why the collective west is where it is, not recognizing where it is deficient against Moscow and failing to correct its plans/strategies, and intent on blaming it on someone else.

The Biden administration is sounding the alarm about Chinese support for Russia - Atlantic Council

The Biden administration has decided that it is time to share what it knows about China's significantly increased support for Russia in its war with Ukraine—including through declassifying intelligence—even as a Republican minority in Congress continues to delay weapons deliveries to Kyiv.

A senior administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, outlined for me the concerning scale of Beijing's growing support for Moscow's war effort. "China is dangerous," the official said, and the administration is determined to show allies evidence of Beijing's growing role in Russia's threats to Europeans' security.

The official said "90 percent of the reason" Russia has been able to sustain the war effort and reconstitute its economy, despite sanctions, is due to a "massive effort" by China that ranges from geospatial assistance for Russian targeting to dual-use optics and propellants used in everything from tanks to missiles. (Like on the war itself two years ago, this is all a duplicitous narrative; it is not true.)

China-Russia trade soared to \$240 billion last year from \$108 billion in 2020. Research from [my colleagues](#) at the Atlantic Council's GeoEconomics Center shows that China now exports more to Russia than the European Union did before the COVID-19 pandemic. With both consumer goods (which make up nearly half of the goods exports) and industrial supplies, China is helping keep Russia's economy afloat.

This alarm bell has been ringing at the highest levels of the US government over the past week: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sent the message to European allies in Brussels, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned officials in Beijing, and President Joe Biden raised the issue directly with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in a conversation last Tuesday.

European Union and NATO foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels, said Blinken delivered the message in striking, explicit terms. According to the *Financial Times*, they saw it as a significant shift, not dissimilar to the sharing of intelligence ahead of Russia's 2022 invasion.

For her part, Yellen said in China this weekend: "We've been clear with China that we see Russia as gaining support from goods that Chinese firms are supplying to Russia . . . They understand how serious an issue that is to us."

To drive her point home, the US Treasury followed Yellen's Friday and Saturday discussions by warning of "significant consequences" if Chinese companies provided "material support for Russia's war against Ukraine," an unusually sharp message.

Administration officials hope that forcefully and publicly pushing back on China, in concert with allies, will cause Beijing to think twice about continuing to aid Moscow, prompt allies to apply new pressures, and buy time for more Western arms to arrive to Ukraine. **The Biden administration is growing increasingly concerned that delayed US support for Ukraine—combined with increased support for Russia from China, Iran, and North Korea—could result in a Russian offensive this summer that endangers major cities, perhaps even Kyiv.**

Administration officials believe that Russia remains vulnerable if Kyiv gets the military and economic support it needs, but that the coming months will be increasingly perilous without that support. **(That's the problem with the Biden White House. It is never at fault, because if it admits to this, it will eliminate its chances of winning against Trump domestically.)**

The worst period could come just as NATO leaders convene in Washington in July for their seventy-fifth anniversary summit, just days ahead of the Republican and Democratic party conventions. Not much time remains to ensure that Russia, with the growing support of China, does not spoil the Alliance's celebration.

Frederick Kempe is president and chief executive officer of the Atlantic Council.

Here is the next one from Business Insider which covers some economic issues on the alleged China aid to Russia:

Biden warns Xi Jinping about China's ongoing support for Russia amid Ukraine war

Erin Snodgrass

Apr 3, 2024, 7:43 AM GMT+8

- ***US President Joe Biden and China's leader Xi Jinping spoke in a Tuesday phone call.***
- ***The leaders discussed global conflicts, including China's support for Russia amid the Ukraine war.***
- ***Russia has managed to maintain its economy thanks in part to its trade partnership with China.***

US President Joe Biden warned China's leader Xi Jinping about his government's ongoing support for Russia amid the war in Ukraine during a Tuesday phone call between the two world leaders.

Biden and Xi's conversation this week was the first time they had spoken since meeting for a summit in California last November. A senior administration

official told reporters in a background call that the discussion was a "check-in" as the two countries attempt to manage rising global tensions, according to media reports.

Over the course of an hour and 45 minutes, Biden and Xi hit on several hot-button issues, including mounting US concerns regarding China's trade partnership with Russia two years into the latter's war in Ukraine, according to a White House readout of the call.

More than two years after invading Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has managed to keep its economy alive, refocusing much of its trade from the West to the East and South, primarily in China and India.

Despite alienating itself from the majority of the world, Russia continues to maintain an economic ally in China, whose ongoing support has helped Russia rebuild its defense industry during a vital moment in the war.

Russia has successfully skirted Western sanctions with the help of China as Beijing becomes an alternative market for Russia's banned oil. Some Russian firms have even seen a boom in business since the war thanks to lucrative trade deals with Chinese companies who buy up Russian energy supplies and provide Russia with machinery and vehicles as payment, according to a recent Reuters story.

A report last month found the Central Bank of Russia is turning to the Chinese yuan for its reserves and to avoid Western sanctions. (It will be more than just Russia who will quit using the dollar and migrate to the Chinese Yuan. It will include the BRICS countries.)

Russian President Vladimir Putin even gave Beijing a shout-out soon after winning his reelection last month. Xi followed up by congratulating Putin, issuing a statement affirming the legitimacy of the carefully-engineered election.

Biden and Xi on Tuesday also discussed many of the potential triggers in the two superpower's tenuous relationship, including Taiwan, China's provocations in the South China Sea, and ongoing conflicts around the world, including the war in Israel and Gaza, according to media reports.

The two previously spoke over the phone in July 2022 and met later that year in Bali.

(China has consistently denied any tacit support of Moscow in the Ukraine war. And there is no evidence of the American allegations. China has a foreign policy of non interference with the affairs of other nations so I would take Beijing's word for it. Besides, more importantly, Russia does not need China's help. It can quite easily defeat NATO, as it has been showing on the battlefield over the last two years. The so called increased trade in things like machine tools and dual use goods, if the Americans want to restrict trade against China, it should just go ahead and do it without using excuses. And let the world see it for its duplicity.

(After Yellen wasted her one week of everybody's time in China, without achieving anything, now Russian foreign minister has gone to Beijing where Xi Jinping honoured him with a personal meeting.

(Finally, here is a political perspective on the talks between Xi and Biden from Voice of America:)

US: China strengthens Russian war machine with surging equipment sales

April 12, 2024 5:21 PM

WASHINGTON —

China has surged sales to Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow in turn is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine, according to a U.S. assessment.

Two senior Biden administration officials, who discussed the sensitive findings Friday on the condition of anonymity, said that in 2023 about 90% of Russia's microelectronics came from China. Russia has used those to make missiles, tanks and aircraft. Nearly 70% of Russia's approximately \$900 million in machine tool imports in the last quarter of 2023 came from China.

Chinese and Russian entities have also been working to jointly produce unmanned aerial vehicles inside Russia, and Chinese companies are likely providing Russia with the nitrocellulose used in the manufacture of ammunition, the officials said. China-based companies Wuhan Global Sensor Technology Company, Wuhan Tongsheng Technology Company and Hikvision are providing optical components for use in Russian tanks and armored vehicles.

The officials said that Russia has received military optics for use in tanks and armored vehicles manufactured by Chinese firms iRay Technology and North China Research Institute of Electro-Optics, and that China has been providing Russia with UAV engines and turbojet engines for cruise missiles.

Russia's semiconductor imports from China jumped from \$200 million in 2021 to over \$500 million in 2022, according to Russian customs data analyzed by the Free Russia Foundation, a group that advocates for civil society development.

Beijing is also working with Russia to improve its satellite and other space-based capabilities for use in Ukraine, a development the officials say could in the longer term increase the threat Russia poses across Europe. The officials, citing downgraded intelligence findings, said the U.S. has also determined that China is providing imagery to Russia for its war on Ukraine.

The officials discussed the findings as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to travel to China this month for talks. Blinken is scheduled to travel next week to the Group of 7 foreign ministers meeting in Capri, Italy, where he's expected to raise concerns about China's growing indirect support for Russia as Moscow revamps its military and looks to consolidate recent gains in Ukraine.

U.S. President Joe Biden has previously raised concerns directly with Chinese President Xi Jinping about Beijing indirectly supporting Russia's war effort.

While **China has not provided direct lethal military support for Russia**, it has backed it diplomatically in blaming the West for provoking Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to launch the war and refrained from calling it an invasion in deference to the Kremlin.

China has repeatedly said it isn't providing Russia with arms or military assistance, although it has maintained robust economic connections with Moscow, alongside India and other countries, amid sanctions from Washington and its allies.

"The normal trade between China and Russia should not be interfered or restricted," said Liu Pengyu, spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in Washington. **"We urge the U.S. side to refrain from disparaging and scapegoating the normal relationship between China and Russia."**

China, Russia talk of bolstering security cooperation in Lavrov visit

Russia's growing economic and diplomatic isolation has made it increasingly reliant on China, its former rival for leadership of the Communist bloc during the Cold War.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who returned to Washington this week from a visit to Beijing, said she warned Chinese officials that the Biden administration was prepared to sanction Chinese banks, companies and Beijing's leadership if they assist Russia's armed forces with its ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

Biden issued an executive order in December giving Yellen the authority to sanction financial institutions that aided Russia's military-industrial complex. **(Russia does not need such assistance, as it can on its own cut Ukraine and NATO to shreds with its own weapons and MIC.)**

"We continue to be concerned about the role that any firms, including those in the PRC, are playing in Russia's military procurement," Yellen told reporters, using the initials for the People's Republic of China. "I stressed that companies, including those in the PRC, must not provide material support for Russia's war and that they will face significant consequences if they do. And I reinforced that any banks that facilitate significant transactions that channel military or dual-use goods to Russia's defense industrial base expose themselves to the risk of U.S. sanctions."

The United States has frequently downgraded and unveiled intelligence findings about Russia's plans and operations over the course of the war with Ukraine, which has been fought for more than two years.

Such efforts have been focused on highlighting plans for Russian misinformation operations or to throw attention on Moscow's difficulties in prosecuting its war against Ukraine as well as its coordination with Iran and North Korea to supply it

with badly needed weaponry. Blinken last year spotlighted intelligence that showed China was considering providing arms and ammunition to Russia. (If this kind of intelligence is of any use, it would have detected that Kyiv was losing from more than a year ago.)

The White House believes that the public airing of the intelligence findings has led China, at least for now, to hold off on directly arming Russia. China's economy has also been slow to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Chinese officials could be sensitive to reaction from European capitals, which have maintained closer ties to Beijing even as the U.S.-China relationship has become more complicated.

(What can we make of all this? It is already clear that Kyiv has lost the war and more and more people in the west are recognizing the facts. Since NATO was fully behind the effort, western Europe has been demilitarised together with its client state. There are multiple implications from this outcome.

1. As the Russian ambassador to the UN has said, Kyiv will soon have to surrender unconditionally. In that event, Ukraine will become an dysfunctional rump state. The end will come before Nov 2024.
2. NATO has realised that their weapons systems are inferior to Russia's and that its MIC cannot produce even those inferior armaments to match current Russian strength. Qualitatively and quantitatively, it is far behind Moscow.
3. The panic that overcame France, and Macron, who suggested putting NATO troops on the ground in Ukraine, has been met with derision from its own people, the Germans, the British and most importantly the Americans. This has led to dissension in NATO. Instead of NATO gaining strength by picking up the membership of Sweden and Finland, the inability to agree on a joint plan of action makes it ineffective, and it is showing that it is an incohesive and outdated organization.
4. Time for change.

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Un-Influencer in a World full of Hubris