



HOW A WARRANT FOR PUTIN PUTS NEW SPIN ON XI VISIT TO RUSSIA - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Posted on March 18, 2023 by MATTHEW LEE | ASSOCIATED PRESS



Chinese President Xi Jinping's plans to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow next week highlighted China's aspirations for a greater role on the world stage. But they also revealed the perils of global diplomacy: Hours after Friday's announcement of the trip, an international arrest warrant was issued for Putin on war crimes charges, taking at least some wind out of the sails of China's big reveal.

The flurry of developments — which followed China's brokering of an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran to resume diplomatic relations and its release of what it calls a "peace plan" for Ukraine — came as the Biden administration watches warily Beijing's moves to assert itself more forcefully in international affairs.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Friday he believes the decision by the International Criminal Court in The Hague to charge Putin was "justified." Speaking to reporters as he left the White House for his Delaware home, he said Putin "clearly committed war crimes."

While the U.S. does not recognize the court, Biden said it "makes a very strong point" to call out the Russian leader for his actions in ordering the invasion of Ukraine.

Other U.S. officials privately expressed satisfaction that an international body had agreed with Washington's assessment that Russia has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

Asked about the Xi-Putin meeting, Biden said, "Well, we'll see when that meeting takes place."

The Biden administration believes China's desire to be seen as a broker for peace between Russia and Ukraine may be viewed more critically now that Putin is officially a war crime suspect, according to two U.S. officials. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the matter publicly, said the administration hopes the warrants will help mobilize heretofore neutral countries to weigh in on the conflict.

A look at the Xi-Putin meeting and how it may be affected by the warrant.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF XI MEETING WITH PUTIN?

The visit to Russia will be Xi's first foreign trip since being elected to an unprecedented third term as China's president. It comes as Beijing and Moscow have intensified ties in steps that began shortly before Russia's invasion of Ukraine with a meeting between the two

leaders in Beijing during last year's Winter Olympics at which they declared a "no limits" partnership.

Since then, China has repeatedly sided with Russia in blocking international action against Moscow for the Ukraine conflict and, U.S. officials say, is considering supplying Russia with weapons to support the war. But it has also tried to cast itself in a more neutral role, offering a peace plan that was essentially ignored.



The meeting in Moscow is likely to see the two sides recommit to their partnership, which both see as critical to countering what they consider undue and undeserved influence exerted by the U.S. and its Western allies.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ICC ARREST WARRANT ISSUED FOR PUTIN?

In the immediate term, the ICC's warrant for Putin and one of his aides is unlikely to have a major impact on the meeting or China's position toward Russia. Neither China nor Russia — nor the United States or Ukraine — has ratified the ICC's founding treaty. The U.S., beginning with the Clinton administration, has refused to join the court, fearing that its broad mandate could result in the prosecution of American troops or officials.

That means that none of the four countries formally recognizes the court's jurisdiction or is bound by its orders, although Ukraine has consented to allowing some ICC probes of crimes on its territory and the U.S. has cooperated with ICC investigations.

In addition, it is highly unlikely that Putin would travel to a country that would be bound by obligations to the ICC. If he did, it is questionable whether that country would actually arrest him. There is precedent for those previously indicted, notably former Sudanese President Omar Bashir, to have visited ICC members without being detained.

However, the stain of the arrest warrant could well work against China and Russia in the court of public opinion and Putin's international status may take a hit unless the charges are withdrawn or he is acquitted.

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON?

U.S. officials have not minced words when it comes to Xi's planned visit to Moscow. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby called Beijing's push for an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine a "ratification of Russian conquest" and warned that Russians could use a cease-fire to regroup their positions "so that they can restart attacks on Ukraine at a time of their choosing."

"We do not believe that this is a step towards a just, durable peace," he said. Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan this week called on Xi to also speak with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian leader has also expressed interest in talks with Xi.

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM KYIV?

Speaking before the ICC warrant was unveiled, Ukrainian analysts cautioned against falling into a potential trap ahead of the Xi-Putin meeting. "We need to be aware that such peace talks are a trap for Ukraine and its diplomatic corps," said Yurii Poita, who heads the Asia section at the Kyiv-based New Geopolitics Research Network.

"Under such conditions, these peace talks won't be directed toward peace," said Nataliia Butyrska, a Ukrainian analyst on politics related to Eastern Asia. She said the visit reflects not so much China's desire for peace but its desire to play a major role in whatever post-conflict settlement may be reached.

"China does not clearly distinguish between who is the aggressor and who is the victim. And when a country begins its peacekeeping activities or at least seeks to help the parties, not distinguishing this will affect objectivity," Butyrska said. "From my perspective, China seeks to freeze the conflict."

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM MOSCOW?



Even if China stops short of providing military assistance to Russia as the U.S. and its allies fear, Moscow sees Xi's visit as a powerful signal of Chinese backing that challenges Western efforts to isolate Russia and deal crippling blows to its economy.

Kremlin spokesman Yuri Ushakov noted that Putin and Xi have "very special friendly and trusting personal ties" and hailed Beijing's peace plan. "We highly appreciate the restrained, well-balanced position of the Chinese leadership on this issue," Ushakov said.

Observers say that despite China's posturing as a mediator, its refusal to condemn the Russian action leaves no doubt about where Beijing's sympathy lies.

"The Chinese peace plan is a fig leaf to push back against some Western criticism on support for Russia," said Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The optics that it creates is that China has a peace plan, both parties of war endorsed it and were ready to explore the opportunities and then it was killed by the hostile West."

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM BEIJING?

Chinese officials have been boasting about their new-found clout in the international arena as their country's foreign policy has become increasingly assertive under Xi.

In announcing the Xi visit, China's foreign ministry said Beijing's ties with Moscow are a significant world force. "As the world enters a new period of turbulence and change, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and an important power, the significance and influence of China-Russia relations go far beyond the bilateral scope," it said.

It called the visit "a journey of friendship, further deepening mutual trust and understanding between China and Russia, and consolidating the political foundation and public opinion foundation of friendship between the two peoples for generations."

Associated Press writers Amer Madhani in Washington and Hanna Arhirova in Kyiv contributed to this report.