

Putin in China

Description

The talks on the second and final day of Vladimir Putin's visit to Beijing did not result in a big joint declaration with respect to either the ongoing hot conflict between Hamas and Israel nor with respect to the Ukraine war. Indeed, there was no joint press conference today. No doubt the Chinese President was busy in talks with the other twenty or more participants in the celebratory Forum dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Instead, Vladimir Putin had a press conference of his own, held outdoors on the lawn before his compound. There were numerous questions and some very important answers, including one with which I will begin: his confirmation that Russia is now permanently patrolling the neutral waters of the Black Sea with jets that are carrying its Kinzhal hypersonic missiles. They reportedly have a range of 1,500 km and fly at a speed of 9 Mach. If my arithmetic is correct, this means that from the southern coast of the Black Sea they could reach and destroy any part of the U.S carrier fleet parked in the Eastern Mediterranean for the protection of Israel, per the American administration. Mention of these patrols was given in an offhand manner, but one may well suppose that the Pentagon was listening closely.

The context for these remarks was a question about what response Russia will give to the ATACMS which Washington has delivered to Kiev and which Zelensky said were used against Russian air bases yesterday. Putin's direct answer to that is that ATACMS will only prolong the war while at the same time drawing the United States deeper into the Ukrainian conflict.

One wonders whether this kind of response will be applied to Germany should it deliver the TAURUS cruise missiles to Kiev and, as German politician Roderich Kiesewetter said yesterday to reporters, help the Ukrainians to destroy the Crimean bridge.

In his statement at the start of the press conference, Vladimir Putin said that he and Xi reiterated their call for all sides in the Hamas-Israeli war to enter into an immediate cease-fire and open direct talks. He noted that in his telephone calls with Benjamin Netanyahu and with leaders across the Gulf States two days ago he was certain that no one wants the conflict to spread further in the region.

Putin said that earlier in the day he had one-on-one talks with Xi that lasted almost two hours. He called them productive and substantive, but also confidential so that there was no more to be said about them. Then came a longer session when they were joined by their respective delegations. Putin had with him all of the key ministers in the Russian government as well as top business executives in the fields of greatest importance in Russian-Chinese trade development.

The early afternoon edition of *Sixty Minutes* interviewed several of these key Russian participants and reported on several points worth repeating here. One, by Finance Minister Siluanov, is that 90% of Russian-Chinese trade is now conducted in national currencies, of course with the greater part in yuan. Removal of the dollar from the exchanges means that Washington no longer has any usable intelligence on who is buying and selling what to whom. As we know otherwise from Putin himself, the

bilateral trade is expected to exceed 200 billion dollars in value by year's end.

Another valuable data point aired on *Sixty Minutes* was that grain sales to China are expected to reach 70 million tons, which would represent almost 50% of the entire Russian harvest this year. And Alexei Miller, head of Gazprom, said that China is on course to buy as much natural gas annually as Russia was previously exporting to Europe.

Quite apart from the television coverage of Putin's visit to China, *Sixty Minutes* had some commentary on other events that readers in Europe, and in Germany in particular, may be interested to hear. The most piquant pertain to Chancellor Scholz's brief trip to Tel Aviv yesterday. He was reported to say to his Israeli hosts that he came to reaffirm Germany's solidarity with Israel at this critical time and its concern to ensure Israeli security. This, he went on to explain, is a natural consequence of Germany's feelings of responsibility for the Holocaust.

As program host Yevgeny Popov asked rhetorically: and do the Germans not remember their responsibility for killing 27 million Soviet citizens in WWII? Do they not feel a responsibility to ensure Russia's security today?

The other remark pertaining to Scholz was shock that he arrived in Israel in a plane bearing the legend "Luftwaffe" and the iron cross symbol. This seemed to be tactless under the circumstances.

As for Biden's arrival in Israel and public statement to Netanyahu that he came to show America's support for Israel, the *Sixty Minutes* presenter said that Washington in one stroke, by its alignment with one side in the conflict, forfeited any role as a possible peacemaker in the region. This is in stark contrast with Russia, which has kept lines of communication open with all sides.

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