

Chinese President Xi Awards Putin Friendship Medal, Pledges Support

By [Reuters](#)

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Chinese President Xi Jinping gave visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin China's first friendship medal on Friday, calling him his best friend, underscoring the close ties between the two despite deep reservations many Western nations have of Putin.

Putin is in China for a weekend summit of the Chinese and Russian-led security bloc the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in the port city of Qingdao, but dropped by Beijing first for talks with Xi.

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Meeting in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Xi lauded their relationship.

"No matter what fluctuations there are in the international situation, China and Russia have

always firmly taken the development of relations as a priority," Xi told Putin at the start of their formal talks.

Xi then awarded Putin China's first ever friendship medal, on a large gold coloured chain, an event carried live on state television.

Xi, speaking just before he put the medal on Putin, called him a "good and old friend of the Chinese people".

"President Putin is the leader of a great country who is influential around the world," Xi said. "He is my best, most intimate friend."

The two oversaw the signing of several agreements, including a joint \$1 billion industrial investment fund.

Xi promised the two would continue to deepen their coordination on the world stage.

"China and Russia are permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and are both great responsible countries," Xi said.

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"Myself and President Putin agreed, in the face of a complex international situation, that China and Russia will increase mutual support and coordination in international affairs, and deepen strategic cooperation."

Putin offered his thanks for the medal.

"I see this as an acknowledgement and an evaluation of Russia's efforts to develop a comprehensive strategic partnership with China," he said.

"This is an indication of the special attention and respect on which our mutual national interests are based, the interests of our peoples, and, of course, our personal friendship."

The warm welcome stands in contrast to the general view of Putin in most Western capitals.

Washington's relations with Moscow have been particularly strained in the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, which U.S. intelligence agencies said was targeted by Russia.

Moscow has denied any interference, and U.S. President Donald Trump has denied any collusion.

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