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Russia's Putin Says World Conflicts 'Strengthen' Ties with China

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping during a ceremony to welcome the heads of delegation to the third Belt and Road Forum. **Sergei Savostyanov, TASS / kremlin.ru**

Russian leader Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that world conflicts "strengthen" his country's relations with China, after talks with Xi Jinping that celebrated their nations' deepening political and economic ties.

Putin, on his first trip to a major global power since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, met his "old friend" Xi in Beijing on the sidelines of a major forum in an event overshadowed by conflict in the Middle East.

At a press conference following the talks, Putin said that global turmoil served to bring China and Russia even closer together.

"All these outside factors are common threats and they strengthen Russian-Chinese

cooperation," he said.

The Russian leader also said he had "optimism" for the future of the relationship.

Xi, too, said that "political mutual trust between the two countries is continuously deepening," according to Xinhua news agency, hailing their "close and effective strategic coordination."

Xi noted that he had met with Putin 42 times in the past decade, saying they had "developed a good working relationship and a deep friendship."

Putin was the guest of honor at the summit hosted by Xi in Beijing this week to celebrate his Belt and Road Initiative, a vast trade and infrastructure project.

Hospital strike condemnation

International attention has been focused on the Israel-Gaza conflict, which has raged for more than 10 days, and both Russia and China condemned the Tuesday night strike on a Gaza hospital that killed hundreds.

Putin on Wednesday said the strike was a "tragedy" and showed the need to bring the conflict between Israel and Hamas to an end.

"This is a terrible event... I really hope that this will be a signal that this conflict needs to end as soon as possible," he said.

China's foreign ministry said it was "shocked by and strongly condemns" the strike, calling for an "immediate ceasefire."

Earlier, Xi called for joint efforts by China and Russia to "safeguard international fairness" and "justice," Xinhua reported.

China is Russia's largest trading partner, with exchange between the nations reaching a record $190 billion last year, Beijing customs data shows.

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And Xi said Wednesday it was progressing towards a goal of $200 billion set by the two countries in bilateral meetings this year.

Beijing has drawn criticism from Western countries for its stance on the Ukraine war, on which China insists it is neutral. It has refused to criticize Moscow's invasion.

Putin is on a mission to strengthen the already strong bond with his communist neighbor, though experts say Moscow is increasingly the junior partner in the relationship.

In his talks with Xi, he stressed the importance of "close coordination in foreign policy" in "the current difficult conditions."

'Oppose unilateral sanctions'

Representatives of 130 countries are in the Chinese capital for the two-day talking shop that wraps up on Wednesday.

Earlier, Xi said in a speech to the international delegates that his country rejected "economic coercion" and "bloc confrontation".

In an apparent reference to China's rivalry with the United States, Xi said Beijing would not engage in "ideological confrontation, geopolitical games or bloc confrontation".

"We oppose unilateral sanctions, economic coercion, decoupling and delinking," Xi told delegates.

"Viewing the development of others as a threat and economic interdependence as a risk will not make one's own life any better or one's own development any faster," he said.

Instead, Xi said, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would seek to "inject new impetus into the global economy."

He also pledged to inject more than $100 billion of new funding into BRI projects.

Putin then took to the stage, hailing the infrastructure initiative as a "success story."

The United States has asked China to use its influence to help de-escalate the Israel-Hamas conflict, which erupted after the Palestinian militant group launched an attack in Israel, killing 1,400 people.

Israel then launched a devastating air campaign against Gaza, which has seen more than a million people in the blockaded territory flee their homes. About 3,000 Gazans have been killed since Israel launched its air campaign, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

China, which brokered a detente between key Hamas backer Iran and its regional foe Saudi Arabia this year, said it would send its Middle East envoy Zhai Jun to the volatile region this week.

No details have been given about where or when exactly Zhai would travel, though CCTV has said he will push for a ceasefire and peace talks.

Russia, which has traditionally maintained good relations with both Israeli and Palestinian authorities, has called for an "immediate ceasefire" in the conflict.

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