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U.K. Says China Supplying Russia With 'Lethal Aid'

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Vladimir Putin with Xi Jinping during his visit to China earlier this month. **Alexander Ryumin, TASS / kremlin.ru**

Updated to add U.S. reaction.

Beijing is sending or preparing to send "lethal aid" to Russia for use in the war against Ukraine, British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps said Wednesday, a claim that comes just days after President Vladimir Putin visited China to meet with his counterpart Xi Jinping.

"Today I can reveal that we have evidence that Russia and China are collaborating on combat equipment for use in Ukraine," Shapps told a defense conference in London.

He added that U.S. and British intelligence services believe "lethal aid is now, or will be, flowing from China to Russia and into Ukraine," as quoted by Reuters.

"I think it is a significant development," Shapps said without providing evidence of the assertion other than the 64% growth in Russian-Chinese trade since the war broke out more

than two years ago.

But the U.S. later questioned Shapps' assertion, with White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan saying that Washington had not seen intelligence showing the direct supply of "combat equipment."

"We have not seen that to date. I look forward to speaking with the U.K. to make sure that we have a common operating picture," Sullivan said.

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Beijing has not condemned Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, instead positioning itself as a neutral party in the conflict and offering its own peace plan, which was largely dismissed by Kyiv and Western governments.

Last week, Putin made an official visit to China, where he and Xi pledged a "new era" of a strategic partnership and denounced the "hegemonic" United States for "extremely destabilizing steps, which pose a direct threat to the security of Russia and China."

U.S. President Joe Biden has previously raised the issue of China backing Russia's war effort in a phone call with Xi, Reuters reported last month, citing senior anonymous U.S. officials.

Beijing is thought to have already provided drone and missile technology, satellite imagery and machine tools to fill "critical gaps" in Russia's defense production cycle, according to that report.

Chinese-supplied goods are believed to be helping Moscow in its "most ambitious defense expansion since the Soviet era," which turned out to be "on a faster timeline than we believed possible early on in this conflict," the U.S. official was quoted as saying.

There was no immediate comment from China's embassy in London in response to Shapps' claims on Wednesday.

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