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Xi and Putin Blast Western 'Protectionism,' Sanctions as Trump Lands in China

By Reuters

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Sputnik/Sergei Bobylyov/Pool via REUTERS

China's President Xi Jinping on Wednesday pledged to stand up against trade protectionism, while his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin criticized Western sanctions as the two set the stage for a high-stakes trilateral meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump.

They delivered their speeches at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in the southern Chinese tech hub of Shenzhen, hours before Trump landed in China after meeting key regional allies in Manila this week.

Xi greeted Trump at the airport, the first time he had done so with any visiting leader since becoming president, reciprocating his counterpart's gesture at Joint Base Andrews in September when they last met. They briefly hugged and exchanged words before walking to

their motorcades.

"China is a country of etiquette and has a tradition of reciprocating courtesy," Xi was quoted as saying by state news agency Xinhua. He added he was looking forward to discussing China-U.S. relations, Asia-Pacific cooperation and the global landscape.

Trump said every meeting with Xi has been "very pleasant," Xinhua reported.

The two will participate in an APEC group photo and attend a banquet with other leaders.

They will meet with Putin on the sidelines on Thursday and potentially discuss Russia's war with Ukraine and the U.S. war in Iran, as well as other flashpoints such as trade, AI and nuclear weapons.

The meeting has drawn comparisons with the 1945 Yalta Conference between the U.S., Britain and the Soviet Union that formalized spheres of influence, set the stage for the post-World War Two order and became shorthand for great-power deals imposed on smaller countries.

It has also unnerved some European and Asian capitals, which fear the world's greatest military powers will disregard their interests.

In his opening address, Xi urged support for what he called "free and open trade," trying to portray his country as a stable partner on the global stage, in contrast with the U.S., which has raised tariffs and adopted a more muscular foreign policy under Trump.

Message resonates with Global South

Xi's remarks came after Washington announced further restrictions on China's access to advanced AI chips from companies such as Nvidia, which could further complicate a fragile trade truce with Beijing. China has pledged to retaliate.

"We must firmly uphold the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core, support free and open trade and investment," Xi told an audience of business executives.

Western trade partners have criticized China for running annual trade surpluses exceeding $1 trillion through policies that support its manufacturing sector at the expense of its consumers.

Beijing says its growth model is appropriate for an economy still catching up with the world's richest, but Washington, Brussels and others are concerned about China's supply chain dominance providing the country with geopolitical leverage and say its policies threaten their industries and jobs.

Xi said China will continue to invest in its industrial complex and new technologies. The world's second-largest economy will lower tariffs and further open up its markets, while standing up against protectionism and unilateralism, he added.

His "message is likely to resonate with many Global South countries and reinforces Beijing's effort to contrast its technology strategy with that of Washington," said George Chen, partner

and chair of digital practice at The Asia Group.

Trump's trip to Asia is his first since his Republican Party's defeat in midterm elections, while allegations involving Nvidia founder Jensen Huang and a suspected Chinese spy add to the tension.

Cold reception for Takaichi

Leaders from Australia, Canada, South Korea and others were met by dancers and soldiers hoisting rifles.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi was instead shown to a car after landing without any welcoming ceremony. Her visit to China comes amid a rift between Beijing and Tokyo that began a year ago after she said Japan could deploy its military if a Chinese move on Taiwan also threatened its territory.

On Tuesday, Taiwan and Japan flagged incursions by Russian aircraft into their airspace.

Putin, who was speaking after Ukraine crippled the vital Kerch road bridge linking Crimea to Russia in a major blow to his four-year-old war, followed Xi on stage with a speech that described Western powers as "former hegemons."

He said Europe was in a "humiliating decline" and that anti-Russian sanctions imposed after his invasion of Ukraine had backfired.

"Experience has shown that the traditional tools of economic dominance and de facto coercion have largely run their course, having lost much of their intimidating power," Putin said.

"While sanctions, tariffs, and export restrictions may still exert a certain deterrent effect, they are incapable of halting growth—let alone crushing the economies of competitors."

In Manila, Trump vowed to deepen defense cooperation with the Philippines, amid its growing friction with Beijing over disputed features in the South China Sea. Earlier, he floated the possibility of meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in China, but that has not been confirmed.

The Kremlin this week dismissed comparisons with the Yalta Conference as "games of political scientists," but said the meeting will have a major impact on global affairs. Beijing said the trilateral will promote world peace.

Putin described the world as "turbulent" but said disagreements can be addressed by "sitting at the table."

"I therefore expect big potential benefit from the upcoming trilateral meeting," he said.

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