

Russia-US Tensions at an Historic High: Biden Proposes an In-Person Meeting with Putin

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The American and Russian Presidents have a slew of issues to discuss in the event that they meet in person sometime in the coming future like Biden proposed doing during their last phone conversation, but the most important topics on the itinerary would arguably be strategic security and peacefully resolving the conflicts in Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Biden-Putin Summit Plans

Russian-American tensions are at an historic high for the post-1991 period so it's sensible that President Biden proposed to hold an in-person meeting with his Russian counterpart during their last phone conversation in order [“to discuss the full range of issues”](#) facing their countries. The most important topics on the itinerary would arguably be strategic security and peacefully resolving the long-running conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine, but other issues would of course also be brought up. What follows is a list of the most pressing problems between these two Great Powers in the order of their significance. Each point includes a summary of their respective positions and what a compromise might look like if one's realistically possible:

Strategic Security

The White House's readout of their call noted “the intent of the United States and Russia to pursue a strategic stability dialogue on a range of arms control and emerging security issues, building on the extension of the New START Treaty”, which was reflected by the Kremlin also referencing [“strategic stability and arms control”](#). Both countries therefore share the common desire to build upon the New START Treaty's last-minute extension in February, though it's unclear in what direction this might go. The prior US administration demanded that China join all such forthcoming talks while Russia respects Beijing's right not to do so. The ideal scenario would be if all relevant powers made proportionate cuts to their pertinent arsenals, but that might not be realistic.

Ukraine

This hot button issue concerns more than just politically resolving the Eastern European country's civil war in line with the Minsk Accords that US-backed Kiev has thus far refused to implement despite previously agreeing to them. It also involves NATO's aggressive forward posturing in the region and its support for Ukraine's anti-Russian activities, including against

Crimea. The situation is [so tense](#) at the moment that a war might even break out before the Russian and American leaders meet, with the subsequently feared brinksmanship potentially serving as the reason to expedite their summit plans. The best-case scenario would be if the US assesses the seriousness of the situation and finally pressures Kiev to implement the Minsk Accords.

Afghanistan

The Kremlin's readout reported "the situation in Afghanistan", which was missing from the White House's, but this issue will likely be at the fore of their discussions considering that the US plans to fully withdraw from that country by 9/11 this year. Both Great Powers have recently seen their positions [converge](#) insofar as supporting an inclusive transitional government in which the officially terrorist-designated Taliban participates as the only pragmatic political outcome of the conflict. The challenge is that the Taliban [reacted negatively](#) to the US' announcement that it'll miss its originally scheduled deadline for withdrawing by 1 May, so it remains to be seen whether the fragile ceasefire between those two holds long enough for the meeting to occur.

Syria

Syria didn't warrant a mention on either government's readout so it's unclear whether it was brought up during their last discussion, but it's nevertheless a major issue between them that can't be ignored. The US retains occupation forces in the northeast beyond the de facto "internal partition" line of the Euphrates River, and its widely reported support of terrorist forces in the country is a major impediment to the conflict's resolution. Moreover, the US' political proxies have hitherto obstructed the parallel peace processes, so something must be done in order to make progress on these tracks. The [only realistic compromise](#) would be "decentralization" and Damascus requesting Iran's dignified but phased withdrawal from the country, but the latter still seems unlikely.

China

The US is slowly realizing that it made a major mistake by triggering Russia's [historical siege mentality](#), pushing it [closer to China](#) in response, and provoking Moscow to actively seek [Washington's containment](#) all across the world. Even a simple thought exercise embracing the US' infamous zero-sum outlook on International Relations suggests that this works out to America's grand strategic disadvantage while being one of the best-ever scenarios for China. Accordingly, Biden's team might [attempt to court](#) Russia into reversing its recent American-provoked foreign policy pivot so as to restore Moscow's [traditional "balancing" act](#) between East and West, but this outcome is only possible in the event credible progress is made on a "New Detente".

Iran

The Islamic Republic's nuclear program is another major issue of disagreement between the US and Russia, but one which also attracts their interest more than ever after Iran recently clinched a [25-year strategic partnership deal](#) with China. That agreement stands the chance to revolutionize the greater region's geostrategic situation through the expansion of Beijing's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) to West Asia via [W-CPEC+](#), which was an unexpected game-changing development that seemingly caught both the US and Russia off guard. Not only will they seek to address the immediate nuclear-related issue, but they might also

discuss ways to manage this new regional geostrategic reality, perhaps in an indirectly joint way if they make progress on a “New Detente”.

Palestine

The so-called “Mideast Peace Process” (MEPP) is also an area of mutual concern for Russia and the US. Both Great Powers are also allied with “Israel” to different extents, with Russia’s largely under-discussed relationship being the result of skillful policymaking at the presidential level through Putin’s personal diplomacy with his close friend Prime Minister Netanyahu (background context [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Since Biden is attempting to balance the US’ regional relationships a bit more than Trump did, it’s possible that he’ll walk back his predecessor’s so-called “Deal of the Century” and thus help pave the way for his country and Russia to jointly herald at least the symbolic creation of a Palestinian state, though it’ll still take a while for this to occur.

Russiagate/Navalny/Climate

Biden will almost certainly bring up the discredited Russiagate conspiracy theory due to domestic pressure from his base. This speculative aspect of their discussion would be entirely symbolic since it’s what many have rightly called a “nothingburger”. It’ll only be talked about for appearance’s sake, the same as [Navalny](#)’s imprisonment might too if that’s even brought up that is. As for climate change, this is a “neutral” means through which the two could at least superficially cooperate more closely and result in a semi-tangibly positive outcome to their planned summit. Both of their leaders agree on the need to thwart this threat, but there really isn’t much that they can do together. Still, it could make for some good headlines if they release a joint statement about it.

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