

# US Escalates Sanction Threats Over China's Balanced Position on Ukraine-Russia Crisis

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*US **Secretary of State Antony Blinken** announced on March 21 the imposition of visa restrictions on a group of Chinese officials accused of being involved in or responsible for human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities. The US official said he would use diplomatic and economic means to “promote accountability” for human rights abuses, such as alleged efforts by Chinese officials to “harass, intimidate, surveil and abduct” members of minority groups, including some individuals who had sought shelter in the US.*

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Wang Wenbin** said a day later that Beijing will reciprocate a response if the sanctions against Chinese officials are not lifted. The spokesperson expressed strong opposition to sanctions that seriously violate China's sovereignty and stressed that Washington needs to “stop slandering China for no reason,” pointing to “political prejudices and lies” in many of Washington's statements against China.

The US is essentially outraged at China for its clear and consistent stance on the Ukraine crisis, which has not changed despite sustained pressure. In fact, it shows more desperation on the part of Washington, especially as traditional allies like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have snubbed both Blinken and US President Joe Biden whilst maintaining close ties with Moscow.

Biden wants China to abandon its balanced policy towards Kiev and Moscow, even though Washington makes no such demand on Turkey, a NATO member that has not closed its airspace or sanctioned Russia as it too opts to balance its relations. What is more absurd is the belief that Washington thinks Beijing would abandon Moscow despite maintaining pressure on the country through the AUKUS and QUAD military formations.

Essentially, due to Biden's failure to even control traditional allies like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Turkey, he wants to somehow save face by trying to show his country that he will punish the Chinese for their defiance of not turning against Moscow. In this way, the visa restrictions are essentially meaningless for Chinese officials who never planned to travel to

the US to begin with, and therefore they just look all the more ridiculous.

Even if there was no political pretext to accuse Beijing of human rights violations, then another pretext would have been elevated as the current sanctions are motivated by nothing more than making Biden appear that he is punishing China. Beijing will undoubtedly commensurate countermeasures, but the question is whether they will be reciprocated in equal measure or escalate the situation further.

What is certain though is that China will continue to act consistently on the Ukraine issue despite US attempts to push China against Russia whilst simultaneously pressuring the Asian country through the two multilateral military blocs.

White House press secretary **Jen Psaki** said on March 21 that a “verbal condemnation” of Russia by China is “vital.”

“Our view is that verbal condemnation of the actions of President Putin and the actions of [the] Russian military is important and vital, and it’s about what side of history you want to stand on at in this point in time,” Psaki said, adding: “where [do] you want to be as the history books are written.”

However, as former US diplomat **Alberto M. Fernandez** wrote in his [MEMRI](#) column, “Rather than an appeal to history, or even to morality, American policymakers would have been better served by an appeal to Chinese national interests (the same applies, in different circumstances, to understanding Saudi or Indian national interests).” As he highlights, Chinese history does not write about the Americans favorably to begin with, which is why such an appeal to history is naïve.

In fact, a bigger concern for China than appealing to the US’ writing of history are the allegations of chemical weapon laboratories in Ukraine, especially after the White House accused Beijing of repeating “these conspiracy theories.”

Russia’s Defense Ministry claimed that it obtained evidence that the US spent more than \$200 million on biological laboratories in Ukraine. It can be assumed that Russian **Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov** presented their evidence to the Chinese Ambassador to Russia **Zhang Hanhui** during their meeting on March 21. China has repeatedly demanded that the US be fully transparent about the operation of biological laboratories abroad, yet the Americans continue to deny the charges.

None-the-less, the very fact that the US believes it can turn China against Russia whilst maintaining pressure via AUKUS and QUAD demonstrates a White House far removed from political realism. Despite snubbing’s from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, NATO member Turkey defying sanctions against Russia, and India open to ruble-rupee payments for oil, Washington is increasingly frustrated that it cannot completely isolate Moscow. In this way, a young country like the US appealing to the multi-millennia Chinese civilization to consider history is nothing more than a desperate, if not pathetic attempt to woo Beijing away from Moscow.

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