



Biden's foreign policy makes Putin a pariah — sometimes

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President Joe Biden is touting his tough economic sanctions against Russia, but on Iran nuclear talks and other thorny issues, Russian President Vladimir Putin is not as isolated as advertised.

The Russia-Ukraine war exposes "the fallacy" that Putin is isolated, according to Foundation for Defense of Democracies senior adviser Rich Goldberg.

"It reveals all the ways this administration has been cozying up to Russia until this conflict emerged," he told the *Washington Examiner*.

The U.S.-Russia relationship was reset without using that word during Biden's first month as president, when the administration extended the countries' nuclear arms reduction treaty, Goldberg said. And since then, Biden's posture toward Putin has created difficulties for him as he seeks to impose devastating sanctions on the autocrat for his deadly war with Ukraine.

Goldberg, a Vandenberg Coalition advisory board member, also cited Biden waiving sanctions on the Russia-German Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which facilitated Europe's continued Russian energy dependence, and the president's siding with Putin to negotiate a new Iran nuclear deal as his aides implore the Iranian, Saudi Arabian, and Venezuelan regimes to ease record-high gas prices by flooding the market with more oil.

"As commander in chief, you cannot start pumping billions of dollars into the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and claim that will be beneficial to America's national security interest," Goldberg said of Iran, proposing that Biden introduce escrow accounts for Russian energy imports instead.

Nile Gardiner, director of the Heritage Foundation's Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, described Biden staff negotiations with Russia over Iran as "staggeringly naive and dangerous." The president is demonstrating "a real lack of moral compass," he contended.

"You can't treat Russia like some kind of partner on other foreign policy issues while the Russians are committing mass murder," he said. "It helps Russia's energy relationship with Iran.

It provides an avenue for arms exports to the Iranian regime. Russia is Iran's biggest supporter basically on the world stage. Why on earth would the United States want to help Russia vis-a-vis Iran?"

Cato Institute senior fellow Justin Logan agreed that the Russia-Ukraine war had made an Iran nuclear deal "more appealing" for Biden. But while Logan conceded it was "inconceivable" that the conflict has not been mentioned during negotiations, he disagreed that the violence and talks were "interlocking Rubik's Cubes."

The White House has indicated it is "close" on an Iran nuclear deal, though press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters, "It's always final details that you have to work through."

"Even as we have significant, serious concerns about the horrific and barbaric invasion that President Putin is leading, we believe we do share a desire to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon," she said Tuesday.

For Goldberg, of Foundation for Defense of Democracies, boundaries for the U.S.-Russia relationship need to be redefined. The Ukraine conflict is poised to become part of "a prolonged new Cold War," he said.

Anthony Cordesman, the Center for Strategic and International Studies's emeritus chairman in strategy, emphasized the same time frame since Putin's motives are susceptible to change. More broadly, he underscored the calculus that countries, including China, are making regarding the United States and Russia. Simultaneously, Putin is assessing other nations, such as India and the Baltic states, even Moldova.

"We still face problems like North Korea and Iran as conventional threats," he said. "We still face COVID and the economic impact of inflation, the domestic budget problems, and differences within the U.S."

"One of the key problems that may emerge here is what will increased military spending do at a time when you may still have to have a major debate over domestic spending," he added.

Biden announced Tuesday that he was banning new purchases of Russian crude oil and certain petroleum products, liquefied natural gas, and coal, as well as U.S. investment in Russia's energy sector. He is also winding down the delivery of existing contracts as the country notches gas prices higher than \$4.17 per gallon.

"The decision today is not without cost here at home. Putin's war is already hurting American families at the gas pump," he said, before defending his U.S. oil policies. "I'm going to do everything I can to minimize Putin's price hike here at home."

"Transforming our economy to run on electric vehicles powered by clean energy with tax credits to help American families winterize their homes and use less energy ... that will help," he added.