



The Eurasia Center

Biden-Putin Summit in Geneva

June 2021



President Vladimir Putin and President Joe Biden Meet in Geneva Photo Credit: CNN

EURASIA NEWS
Thomas Ridenour
The Eurasia Center
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On June 16th, President Joe Biden met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva, Switzerland, at the end of Biden's inaugural foreign visit and a G7 Summit. The summit was not expected to produce groundbreaking changes in the Russo-American relationship nor any major changes in either nation's foreign policy, but instead to return to a more predictable and stable relationship.

With the bar set relatively low, the summit was a success. Both Putin and Biden stated that they were satisfied with the summit and the relationship that they established. Putin called the meeting constructive and Biden said that the tone of the meeting was good and positive. Both leaders avoided the question of whether trust in the same form as familiar trust is not possible "but there were flashes of it". Biden added to that by saying that trust is based on actions and that the "proof of the pudding is in the eating".

Photo from: CNN

One of the goals of the summit was for Biden to be quite different from Trump. Trump's summit with Putin in Helsinki was very controversial as he praised Putin and even sided with him on the issue of Russian intervention in the 2016 election over the findings of US intelligence. Biden proved to be quite different from President Trump and made sure to maintain rhetoric on certain issues and made sure that the summit was more publicized than Trump's meeting with Putin.

Critics of Biden and of Putin said that the summit made Putin and Russia seem equal to the United States and criticized Biden saying that the US and Russia were "two great powers". This is vastly different than former US Presidents who have avoided such rhetoric, even Obama only referred to Russia as a "regional power". Some say that this equalization helps to legitimize Putin more and make Russia appear more of a superpower. This was seen with great praise in Russian media and many Russian journalist praised Biden for addressing the interests of Russia. Many

Russian foreign policy analysts say that the US Democratic Party has been historically Russophobic in its policies and that Biden is the first president since the Cold War to acknowledge Russia as an equal.

Biden did remain firm on his rhetoric towards issues of cyber-attacks and said that certain “critical infrastructure” was completely off limits for attacks. He said that if Russia were to continue these attacks, there would be US retaliation. Putin denied responsibility for the attacks but agreed to work with the US on future “consultations” related to cybersecurity.

Ukraine was also addressed though without much success. Putin claimed that it was not an issue of the United States and that Russia has every right to conduct military exercises in their own territory. Putin said “Just like the United States carries out exercises on their territory, we are carrying out exercises. We did not carry out exercises bringing our equipment to the United States.



Photo from: Mikhail Metzel

Regrettably, the United States is doing that now,". Putin also ended the topic of Ukraine joining NATO, which Russia strongly opposes, by saying "there is nothing to discuss here". Many fear that the Biden Administration, by allowing the Ukraine issue to be so easily dismissed, is abandoning Ukraine and will turn a blind eye to Russian intervention. Others fear that the Putin Administration is only using the hopes of future dialogue as a ploy to keep US out of Ukraine.

The issue of Alexey Navalny was raised during the press conference when Putin was asked why so many of his political rivals end up imprisoned or dead. Putin deflected the question by referencing the US Capitol Riot in January of this year by saying that he "doesn't want the same thing to happen in Russia".

Positively, Putin and Biden agreed to send their ambassadors back to Washington and Moscow and Putin agreed to further talks on the release of US Marine veterans, Trevor Reed and Paul Whelan presently in prison in Russia. The main take away for this Summit is the return to stable and normal relations between the United States and Russia and that was seemingly achieved. Both Biden and Putin stated their hope for future dialogue between the two countries.

