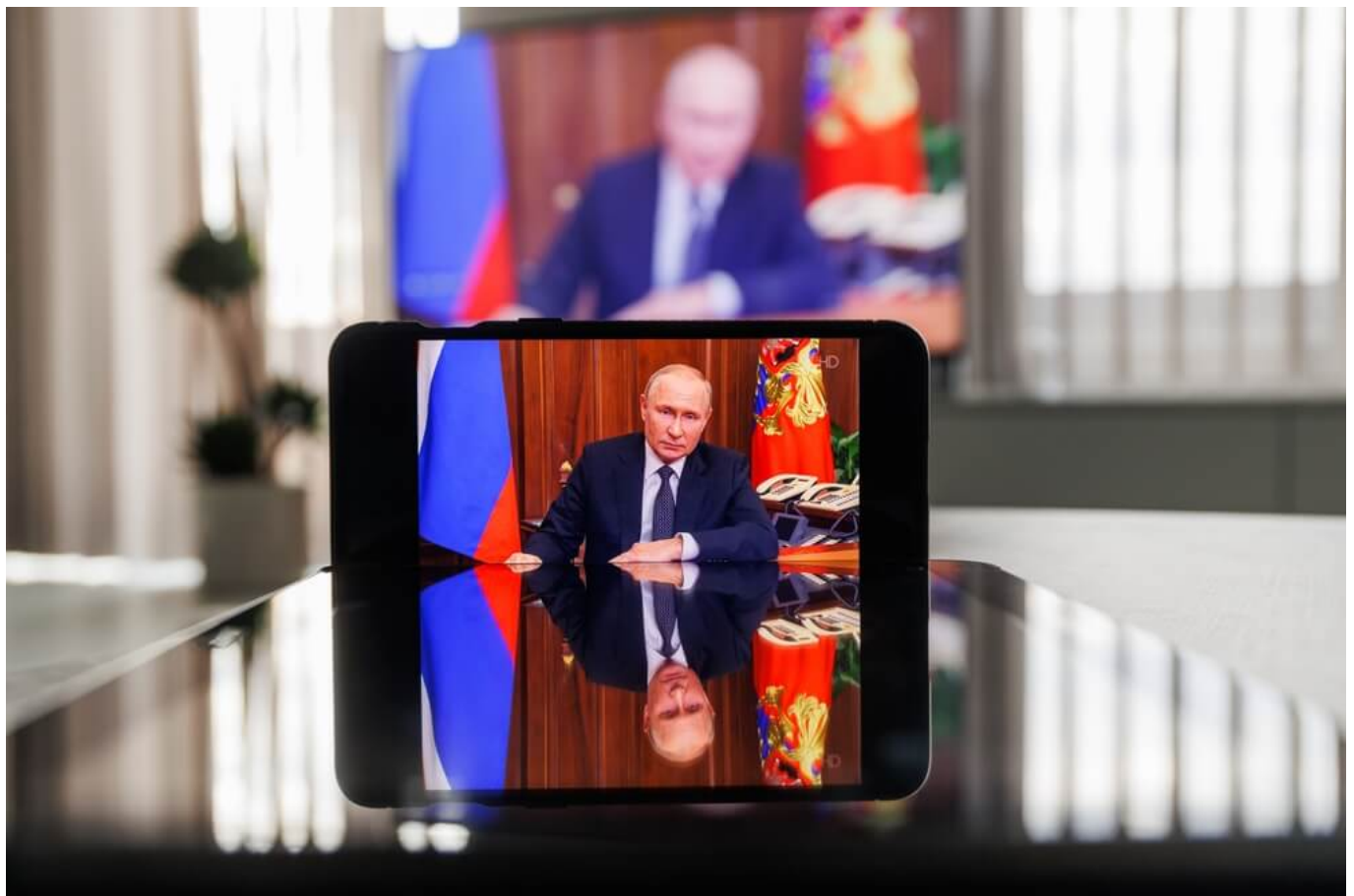




By: *Sergei Stepancev, TA Moscow*

# China boycotted Putin in virtual space, but the Kremlin fears a real-life boycott



The Kremlin first planned Putin's attendance at the virtual G20 summit last week as an opportunity to embarrass Western leaders. It later transformed into an online appeal to India, China and Africa to unite against the West. It turned out to be a slap in Putin's face by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

After Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin became a pariah, and was not allowed to attend any respected global summit regularly organised for world leaders.

Putin received invitations to events before the war even though neither he nor his government had much to contribute to the international community apart from helping to resolve the numerous global issues that Russia had sparked and encouraged.

There were not many reasonable justifications for why India offered Vladimir Putin a platform during the time Russia waged war on Ukraine. **Putin did not participate** at the in-person G20 summit in New Delhi last September. Instead, Russia sent Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

At the time of war, Putin had less to offer and contribute to the global community than before, apart from his deviant and outdated worldview, shared only with a few other authoritarians.

## A missed opportunity at last September's G20 summit

The second blow to Putin was when both American and Chinese presidents ignored his cynical speech during his online appearance.

Putin wanted to attend the G20 summit in India last September in person, not only to spread his view on global issues and the war Russia has been waging in Ukraine.

**Putin's inability to appear at the G20 summit in person was a significant blow to his self-esteem**

Putin had the means to guard himself in India. He was prepared to come through Chinese airspace asking for reassurances and guarantees from the Indian government to attend the G20 summit in person. However, he apparently had not received those guarantees from India because the world leaders objected.

Putin's inability to appear at the G20 summit in person was a significant blow to his self-esteem. It also severely influenced domestic fake news, which convinced the Russian people that a president of his calibre exceeded that of any world leader.

## Biden's boycott was expected, but not Xi's

To get even for the humiliating inability to communicate with world leaders as other respected and invited attendees at the G20 summit 2 months ago, Putin decided to participate **in a virtual G20 summit**.

He did it in the usual cynical format. He regularly shapes his speeches domestically to brainwash the Russian population further, indoctrinate them with a false worldview and convince them of their greatness and superiority.

Putin probably expected Joe Biden to skip his speech because it was full of accusations against the US and the West.

The Russian leader hoped and expected President Xi to show some respect and stay in the audience during his angry and cynical speech regarding the West.

Putin's hopes did not come true. President Xi joined President Biden in boycotting his angry speech.



, The Kremlin made it unclear to the people in Russia that President Xi had ignored Putin's speech

As always, Russian propaganda glorified Putin's speech and his online appearance at the G20 summit. However, the Kremlin made it unclear to the people in Russia and anyone following Russian-speaking news that President Xi had ignored Putin's attempt to appeal to India, China and African countries to unite against America and the West.

An alliance with China is significant to Putin because China was supposed to fill a technological gap in Russia after most Western companies abandoned it in protest since it attacked Ukraine.

The fact that President Xi spared himself from listening to Putin's speech demonstrated to the Russian establishment and Putin's inner circle that they could lie to the Russian people that everything was fine and that China would join Russia against the West. However, the Russian establishment and Putin's inner circle could not lie to themselves. The impression remained that China was not on their side.

## Will there be compensation from Beijing?

From the Russian establishment's standpoint, no one should underestimate the significance that President Xi and President Biden intentionally skipped Putin's online speech.

By the Russian establishment's standards, it was a public slap in Putin's face. Putin himself and the Russian establishment have perceived

it as not only President Xi ignoring Putin but President Xi ignoring Putin in solidarity with President Biden.

**Even Putin himself did not expect that President Xi would turn his back on him and ignore his appeal at the G20 summit**

No wonder Russian propaganda tried to erase this humiliating and discouraging episode. Few Russian news portals have mentioned it indirectly as something insignificant.

But knowing how Russia treats such episodes when they are in Russia's favour, one could be sure that even Putin himself did not expect that President Xi would turn his back on him and ignore his appeal at the G20 summit.

Unlike the uninformed Russian public, the Kremlin inner circle will no doubt link Xi and Biden's joint boycott of Putin's speech to their recent meeting in San Francisco, which was quite cordial.

While their leader expects compensation from Beijing for the inconvenience he experienced at the virtual G20 summit, the Kremlin will remain concerned about its status with the Chinese leadership. Perhaps what they expect will never reach Moscow.