EK Strategic Communications Center

Kremlin FIMI Weekly November 2026

The Shenzhen Summit as Proof of Russia's Restored Global Standing

Format alone was framed as victory, whatever the outcome

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FIMI actors portrayed the Shenzhen summit as proof of Russia's restored great-power status, blamed Europe for its own absence from negotiations, and set Moscow's stable partnership with Beijing against Washington's political unreliability.

Key topics:

1. Shenzhen Presented as Russia's Return to Great-Power Diplomacy
2. Europe Blamed for Its Own Absence From the Negotiating Table
3. Russia and China Stand United as Washington's Reliability Is Questioned

Executive Summary

FIMI actors used the November 19 summit between Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Donald Trump in Shenzhen to portray Russia's participation as proof that Western isolation had failed. Across English-, French-, Italian-, German-, and Spanish-language sources, they sought to legitimize Moscow's great-power status and security demands, as well as Europe's absence from negotiations.

The summit's format was presented as a victory regardless of its outcome. InfoBRICS, a geopolitical website linked to InfoRos, a Russian disinformation network that the US Treasury has identified as operated by GRU, portrayed the summit as evidence that Washington could no longer dictate the international agenda and had to negotiate with Russia and China as independent centers of power.

> Ukraine Watch, an English-language FIMI channel, amplified ultraconservative Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev's call for a "New Yalta," a reference to the 1945 conference at which the US, UK, and Soviet leaders negotiated the postwar European order and the division of spheres of influence.

InfoDefense, a multilingual FIMI network run by pro-war military blogger Yuri Podolyaka, instead amplified Chinese state-media commentary that rejected the division of the world into spheres of influence while emphasizing China's leadership in a multipolar order.

Europe's absence from negotiations over the future international order was presented as the consequence of its opposition to Moscow's terms for ending the war in Ukraine. InfoDefense used statements by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas to portray European security demands as obstacles to negotiations. The Italian FIMI outlet L'Antidiplomatico called Europe's marginalization "the bitter fruit of the choices made by the European ruling classes themselves."

> Former Sputnik correspondent Clara Statello went further, alleging that Western intelligence had helped Ukraine attack the Crimean Bridge to undermine US-Russian negotiations: "Moscow has fallen into the West's trap."

The narrative of Washington's unreliability reinforced the portrayal of Russian-Chinese stability. The Rybar FIMI network, led by Russian military blogger Mikhail Zvinchuk, described Putin and Xi as having "synchronized their watches" before meeting Trump.

> Italian pro-Kremlin commentator Laura Ruggeri, who has contributed to the Russian intelligence-linked Strategic Culture Foundation, described the summit as a meeting between "two leaders and a lame duck."

Former Russian lawmaker Elena Panina, whose commentary was amplified across Italian- and English-language FIMI channels, questioned whether Trump could guarantee American compliance with any agreement. This framing presented either outcome as favorable to Moscow: a successful agreement would demonstrate Russia's diplomatic influence, while failure could be blamed on Trump's inability to overcome opposition within the US political establishment rather than on Russia's negotiating position.

President Putin himself echoed the same narrative at a press conference following the trilateral meeting on November 19th. Asked whether the White House could now guarantee that any commitments would be honored, Putin contrasted what he described as President Trump's sincere desire to resolve conflicts with the constraints imposed by the complex US political system.

Shenzhen Presented as Russia's Return to Great-Power Diplomacy

FIMI actors portrayed the November 19 trilateral summit between Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Donald Trump, held on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Shenzhen, China, as recognition of Russia's restored status as a global power and as evidence that Western attempts to isolate Moscow had failed. This interpretation preceded the talks and spread across Russian-, English-, French-, and Italian-language outlets, which presented the trilateral format itself as a diplomatic achievement for the Kremlin, regardless of whether it produced substantive agreements.

On November 17, InfoBRICS, a platform linked to the Russian InfoRos information network, published[1] commentary arguing that Washington could no longer determine international outcomes unilaterally. The article described Shenzhen as evidence of "a redistribution of diplomatic centrality" in which the United States had to negotiate with independent centers of power.

The Italian FIMI outlet L'Antidiplomatico reinforced this interpretation[2] by reproducing Spanish-language reporting from the Russian state-controlled broadcaster RT, arguing that "beyond whatever agreements may be reached, Shenzhen therefore represents a significant step in the construction of new international balances." RT's French-language service similarly amplified[3] Putin's November 18 address to business representatives at the summit, emphasizing his assertion that Western attempts to isolate Russia had failed.

In a November 18 RT English article,[4] three Russian institutional experts offered differing assessments of the emerging international order.

> Dmitry Suslov, deputy director of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, argued that the summit would demonstrate that "the three leading powers in the world are indeed the United States, China, and Russia."

Alexander Bobrov, an international relations scholar at RUDN University in Moscow, maintained that Washington's attempts to separate Moscow from Beijing had failed. Vasily Kashin, a researcher at the Higher School of Economics specializing in China and international security, cautioned against reducing the diplomatic situation to a distinction between cooperative Americans and hostile Europeans.

Ukraine Watch, an English-language FIMI Telegram channel, amplified[5] comments by Konstantin Malofeev, the sanctioned Russian ultraconservative oligarch and founder of the Kremlin-aligned broadcaster Tsargrad TV.

> Malofeev explicitly welcomed a possible "New Yalta," a reference to the 1945 conference at which the Allied leaders negotiated the postwar European order. He argued that "the right to a voice will belong to civilization-states" and that "Ukraine has no place at this table. Neither do 'Little Britain' and France."

The English-language FIMI channel Grandmasters of Geopolitics advanced a similar interpretation[6] on November 17 and, during the summit on November 19, circulated[7] a speculative map dividing the world into American, Russian, and Chinese spheres of influence.

These interpretations were not uniform. Italian pro-Kremlin commentator Laura Ruggeri,[8] who has collaborated with the Russian intelligence-linked Strategic Culture Foundation, rejected[9] European comparisons with a new Yalta as "fearmongering propaganda," while describing the summit as a meeting between "two leaders and a lame duck."

The English-language branch of InfoDefense, a multilingual FIMI network run by Russian pro-war blogger Yuri Podolyaka, amplified[10] commentary from the Chinese state-affiliated newspaper Global Times that rejected a division into spheres of influence in favor of coordination among major powers and suggested that China would play the leading role in the new global order:

> "Essentially, China is shifting the focus from the struggle for undisputed global leadership to the struggle over the rules of a multipolar world – and intends to become its principal architect."

The French-language branch of the Rybar FIMI network, founded by Russian military blogger Mikhail Zvinchuk, rejected[11] suggestions that Beijing had given Trump preferential treatment over Putin. Explaining the leaders' positions in the official photograph, it argued that "Putin standing next to Xi's wife does not mean he is 'further away,' but rather that he is standing next to the hosts."

It also emphasized that Putin had been welcomed at the airport by Cai Qi, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, describing this as "the highest possible level of representation in the Chinese leadership."

However, Xi Jinping personally greeted only Donald Trump on his arrival. Ukraine Watch interpreted[12] Putin's interactions with foreign leaders as further evidence of his diplomatic rehabilitation:

> "A line formed to see Putin instead. The leaders of the states participating in the APEC summit wanted to personally exchange a few words with him." It concluded that "the line for a handshake became the best answer to those who still believe that Russia is isolated from the world."

Following the trilateral meeting, Ostashko News,[13] a Russian-language pro-Kremlin Telegram channel whose commentary was reproduced by the multilingual Pravda (Portal Kombat) FIMI

network, selectively invoked Western reporting to declare that "the summit in China marked the end of the unipolar world and demonstrated that attempts to isolate Russia had failed."

DD Geopolitics, an English-language FIMI outlet linked to Russian fascist ideologue Alexander Dugin, amplified[14] Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov's assertion that "Ukraine was NOT the main topic" of the trilateral talks, reinforcing the portrayal of the talks as a forum addressing the wider international order.

The FIMI narratives defined Russia's participation as a political achievement in its own right.

> The competing interpretations of a new Yalta, Chinese-led multipolarity, and great-power coordination did not require agreement on the future international order.

The summit's format itself served as evidence that Russia's participation in global decision-making had become unavoidable.

Europe Blamed for Its Own Absence From the Negotiating Table

FIMI actors portrayed Europe's absence from the Shenzhen summit as the consequence of its refusal to negotiate on Russia's terms.

On November 9, Scott Ritter, a former US intelligence officer and paid RT contributor since 2020, argued on his YouTube channel[15] that Washington was returning to Russia's December 2021 proposals for restrictions on NATO enlargement and Western military deployments:

> "Much of what's being put on the table is exactly what Russia had put on the table back in December of 2021." He described the EU as "a dictatorship that's trying to dictate solutions to sovereign nations."

On November 18, the Dugin-linked FIMI channel Eurasia & Multipolarity amplified[16] Ritter's statement at a press conference held by the Russian state news agency TASS that Russia had repeatedly offered "a realistic path to peace" while Ukraine and its Western allies rejected it.

InfoDefense English used[17] November 16 remarks by Kaja Kallas, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to accuse Europe of demanding participation while rejecting Moscow's negotiating conditions.

> Responding to Kallas's demands for Russian withdrawal from Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, the channel argued that "the EU demands a full seat at the negotiating table, yet at the same time narrows the range of topics it is prepared to discuss."

It contrasted these statements with Russian proposals concerning Ukraine, NATO infrastructure, and European security. RT similarly portrayed[18] European military assistance to Kyiv as incompatible with demands for a role in peace negotiations.

Laura Ruggeri argued[19] that "a new security framework is therefore a non-negotiable precondition for ending the war," while accusing the American defense industry of profiting from continued hostilities. The English-language FIMI channel Geopolitics Prime instead portrayed[20] European rearmament under the EU's Readiness 2030 defense initiative as economically dependent on confrontation with Russia, warning that "a Ukraine peace deal or a lasting European security framework could undermine this momentum."

On November 17, Elena Panina, a former United Russia lawmaker and director of the Russian Institute for International Political and Economic Strategies, interpreted a Ukrainian strike on the Crimean Bridge as an attempt to disrupt the summit. Her commentary circulated through the Italian-language FIMI channel Geopolitica Russia,[21] Rokot/Frastuono, the Italian branch of the Surf Noise network,[22] and InfoDefense English.[23]

> Panina stated that Ukraine's future could be determined through broader agreements "without [Kyiv's and Europe's] direct participation."

In L'Antidiplomatico, former Sputnik correspondent Clara Statello alleged[24] that Western intelligence had helped Ukraine attack the Crimean Bridge to undermine negotiations between Moscow and Washington, stating: "Moscow has fallen into the West's trap."

The French FIMI outlet Géopolitique Profonde also interpreted[25] Ukrainian and Russian attacks on infrastructure as attempts to gain

leverage before "the great powers decide among themselves," contrasting Europe's absence with its financial commitments:

> "Europe, committed to a €90 billion loan to Kyiv, pays without being invited."

InfoDefense Italy selectively amplified[26] a Newsweek opinion article to argue that Europe had "largely created this situation itself through political disunity, insufficient investment in security and excessive dependence on the United States," omitting the author's criticism of Trump's treatment of European allies.

During the summit, the German-language FIMI channel Meine D-News mocked[27] Europe's absence even from the "Katzentisch" (children's table), while, according to the channel, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz continued "committing billions to Ukraine."

L'Antidiplomatico, drawing on Spanish-language RT and commentary from Russian defense analyst Prokhor Tebin, a member of Russia's Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, described[28] Europe's absence as "the bitter fruit of the choices made by the European ruling classes themselves." It attributed Europe's decline to the loss of Russian energy supplies, dependence on American security guarantees, and economic competition with China.

Ostashko News used Western reporting to argue[13] that "the future of Ukraine is being decided without Kyiv and Brussels, but Europe will have to pay for the entire banquet." Irish RT commentator Chay Bowes, sanctioned by the EU on November 16 for involvement in Russian information manipulation operations, ridiculed[29] a Euronews headline asking whether Europe was "on the menu" if excluded from negotiations:

> "Please, Europe isn't on the menu. It's the thing at the back of the fridge that's been rotting for God knows how long."

The narratives converted Europe's absence from a diplomatic circumstance into an argument for denying it influence over future security arrangements. By treating Russia's security demands as the starting point for legitimate negotiations, FIMI narratives reversed the burden of responsibility: European governments were blamed not only for obstructing a settlement but also for their own absence from decisions affecting European security.

Russia and China Stand United as Washington's Reliability Is Questioned

FIMI actors portrayed Russia and China as strategically coordinated powers entering the Shenzhen summit with a shared position, while questioning whether Donald Trump could deliver lasting agreements.

On November 18, the French-language branch of Rybar republished[30] analysis from Rybar Pacific describing Putin and Xi's bilateral meeting as confirmation that the two countries had already "synchronized their watches" and that their relations "would not be revised under external pressure."

The French-language FIMI channel Le Grand Rééquilibrage amplified[31] commentary by Indian geopolitical analyst Hriday Sarma, a recurring contributor to Russian state media, who argued that Moscow and Beijing should strengthen cooperation and "lead and advance the trend toward a multipolar world," while insisting that this "should not, however, be interpreted as an anti-American alliance."

RT's November 18 interviews with Russian institutional experts reflected[4] similar concerns about Washington's intentions.

> Alexander Bobrov argued that "the US has all this time been trying to pursue a strategy aimed at pulling Russia away from China. And that has clearly failed."

Vasily Kashin cautioned that "it would now be an oversimplification to shift to the formula 'the Americans are good, the Europeans are bad.'"

RT also provided a platform for more explicit skepticism. In a November 3 episode of "East Meets West with Olga and Tara,"[32] Radhika Desai, a Canadian political economist, recurring RT

contributor, and expert at the Kremlin-linked Valdai Discussion Club, cautioned[33] Moscow against trusting Trump's intentions:

> "I would basically urge a lot of caution on the part of Russia from hoping for too much."

She suggested that any American rapprochement might be motivated by Washington's strategic competition with Beijing and argued that "President Putin and President Xi are far more serious figures than Donald Trump is." The interview was subsequently circulated by the English-language FIMI channel Fearless John – European Dissident.[34]

The German-language alternative news website Uncut-News amplified[35] a discussion featuring Brazilian commentator Pepe Escobar, a contributor to RT, Sputnik, and the Russian intelligence-linked Strategic Culture Foundation. Escobar suggested that Putin and Xi could persuade Trump to change course, but claimed that "Trump does not make the crucial decisions himself" and that more powerful figures in Washington wanted a return to war.

The FIMI channels Geopolitica Russia,[21] Rokot/Frastuono,[22] and InfoDefense English[23] distributed Elena Panina's commentary on Ukrainian attacks on the Crimean Bridge shortly before the summit. Panina argued:

> "What is the point of concluding a strategic agreement with Trump if he cannot guarantee that the entire American political system will comply with its terms?" InfoDefense English reinforced the argument: "Russia and the U.S. might agree on ending the war, but can Washington secure compliance from Kiev and its allies?"

This framing made the summit's outcome secondary to the perceived asymmetry between the three participants.

> Russia and China were presented as capable of maintaining a consistent strategic partnership, while Washington's willingness to negotiate was separated from its ability to deliver.

Any failure could therefore be attributed to American political constraints without challenging the claimed strength of the Russia-China relationship.

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