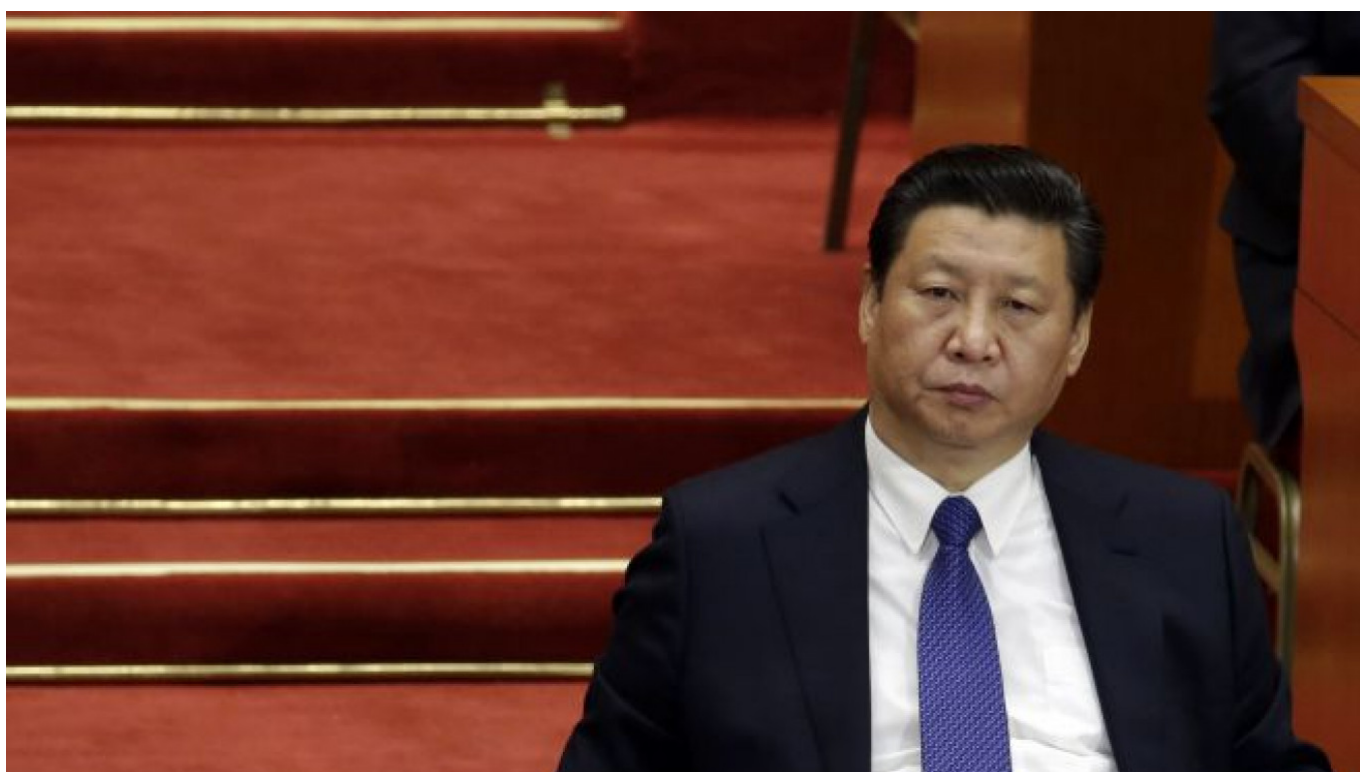


# Putin to Meet Chinese President's Top Aide in Moscow

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President Vladimir Putin will meet a close aide to Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday, the Kremlin said, underlining Russia's increased effort to establish closer ties with Beijing as its relations with the West have deteriorated.

The meeting with Li Zhanshu, head of the General Office of the Communist Party of China, will take place with relations between Moscow and the West at their worst since the Cold War. The European Union and United States have imposed sanctions on Russia over its role in the Ukraine separatist conflict.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said this week the Chinese president had confirmed he would visit Moscow on May 9 to join in commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the end of the World War II in Europe. Other leaders, mainly from Asia, former Soviet republics and Latin America, will also be on hand.

China has yet to confirm Xi's visit in May.

Xi has made a big public show of underscoring the importance of ties with Russia,

and Moscow was the first capital he visited after assuming the presidency in 2013. Xi also attended the Winter Olympics in Sochi at Putin's invitation.

But, while the two see eye to eye on many international diplomatic issues, including the conflict in Syria, and generally vote as one on the United Nations Security Council, China has not proved so willing to support Russia on Ukraine.

China has said it would like to develop "friendly cooperation" with Ukraine, and repeatedly said it respects the ex-Soviet state's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Nonetheless, Chinese officials have said that Western powers should take into consideration Russia's legitimate security concerns over Ukraine.

China is also looking to Russia for help in diversifying its energy supplies. Last year, the two non-Western world powers signed a multi-year deal gas supply that Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom estimated at \$400 billion.

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