

China's Position on Russo-Ukrainian War in a Multipolar World Order 2.0

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on China's position on the Russo-Ukrainian war, the number one security issue in a Multipolar World Order 2.0. In Section 1, the Author introduces and analyses the main reasons for this war's eruption and the importance of China's involvement in problem-solving. In Section 2, Author explores China's political and economic interests in Russia and Ukraine and the negative impact of the war on implementing the Belt and Road initiative. Section 3 argues that for this reason, China entered the diplomatic stage and actively promoted the importance of political solution. This section critically examines *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* document. Upon analyzing the document, it has been concluded that the recommendations provided have the potential to enhance security in Eurasia. Nevertheless, at this stage, it is not feasible for the complete document from China to serve as the primary basis for a lasting peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Section 4 focuses on China's position on NATO's involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian war. It argues that China and Russia are interested in stopping NATO's expansion towards Post-Soviet Eurasia and are trying to implement a Balance-of-threat. In conclusion, China is not interested in Ukraine's standing as a member of the Western Pole. However, as Beijing is not interested in the escalation of the war, China prefers Ukraine to become a neutral state. In this way, China can engage Ukraine in its Belt and Road Initiative and contribute to its reconstruction. This chapter also offers three Scenarios going forward.

Introduction

The Russo-Ukrainian war resulted from deteriorating relations between Russia and the West during the last decade because of the geopolitical struggle for Post-Soviet Eurasia. The problem was that Russia was planning to integrate Ukraine into the EAEU, and the West was trying to involve Ukraine in its camp, if not as a NATO or EU member, but as a junior security partner. Because of this struggle, there was a revolution in Ukraine in 2014. As a result, pro-Western political parties toppled President Viktor Yanukovich, who failed to keep the balance between the West and Russia. As a response, Moscow, with the help of pro-Russian political parties in Crimea, organised a referendum and announced the integration of a peninsula within Russian territory, securing Russia's strategically important military navy bases in the Black Sea. For this, Russia got sanctions from the EU and US. In turn, China also did not recognise Crimea as a part of Russia, just as it did not acknowledge the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the Russo-Georgian War. In Eastern Ukraine, military conflict erupted between the Russian-speaking population, which did not accept the results of the revolution in Kiyv, and the establishment of the Ukrainian revolutionary government. In 2014 and 2015, in Minsk, Ukraine, Russia, OSCE and the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic and

Donetsk People's Republic, within the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group, agreed on a ceasefire and signed Minsk agreements. German Prime Minister Angela Merkel, Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President François Hollande also approved negotiated terms. The UNSC adopted Resolution 2202, endorsing the implementation of the Minsk II agreement. China's representative Liu Jieyi said that Beijing welcomed negotiated agreements and mentioned the importance of political, balanced settlement of the Ukrainian crisis (UN, 2015). Nevertheless, because of the failure of the implementation of the Minsk II agreement and the escalation of the confrontation between Russia and the West in the era of changing world order (Sahakyan, 2021, p.78) on February 24, 2022, clashes between pro-Russian militia and Ukrainian forces which were going on in internal level starting from 2014, escalated into Russo-Ukrainian direct, total war. This ongoing war is the number one security issue in Eurasian international relations and announced the establishment of Multipolar World Order 2.0. It creates nuclear challenges, as, in Ukraine, NATO and Russia clash indirectly. Angela Stent (2023, p.544) compared current situation even with Cuban Missiles Crisis. In turn, Dmitri Trenin (2023, p.508) described Russia-US relations as "in the first stage of the Cold War" and Russia-EU relations as "probably unbridgeable". Consequently, a tense situation can lead to a direct conflict, leading to nuclear war creating direct security problems for the entire Eurasian continent and the World. Additionally the biggest nuclear plant in the territory of Europe, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station, is being bombarded. China has expressed concerns about nuclear security and emphasised that a nuclear war would be catastrophic for humanity. China called on the conflicting sides to respect *Convention on Nuclear Safety* and work closely with the IAEA to safeguard World from nuclear disaster (MFA, PRC, 2023a, MFA, PRC, 2023e).

The Russo-Ukrainian war has generated serious transportation security issues for implementing the BRI's NEALB economic corridor, which traverses through Russia, mainly utilising the Trans-Siberian railway. Western sanctions on Russian transportation, financial, goods insurance companies, as well as Russian countersanctions imposed on Western countries and business organisations, play crucial roles. Transportation between China and Europe through NEALB declined by 40% (Sahakyan, 2023a). These all directly harm the main aims of China's BRI, which connects the Chinese economy with Eurasian economies and allows Beijing to try to project the main part of the continental economy. Considering above mentioned facts, China is interested in the political settlement of the Russo-Ukrainian war. It will provide an opportunity to continue without obstacles the implementation of Chinese BRI, which David Arase (2022, p.260-261) calls as "China's geostrategy" in the Eurasian continent for creating China-centred world order by 2049, even without going to wars.

In this context, Superpower China's position on the Russo-Ukrainian war becomes important and can be decisive if it chooses any side. Therefore, this chapter aims to analyse China's stance on the Russo-Ukrainian War. The research questions of this study are: What kind of interests China has in Russia and Ukraine? What is China's position on this war in a Multipolar World Order 2.0? Why is China attempting to maintain neutrality while ensuring neither Russia is defeated nor their economy destabilised, all while maintaining normal relations with Ukraine? Why is it against NATO's expansion towards the East, and how do concepts like Realism's balance-of-powers, balance-of-threat, and offensive Realism play a role in this issue? Why does China strive to find a political settlement to this war by mediating between conflicting sides?

The impact of the war on China's interests in Russia and Ukraine

Russia

China has a comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia; as both sides mention, these relations have no limits. The Sino-Russian tandem has shaken the unipolar world order and collapsed the US-Centric system establishing Multipolar World Order 2.0. Moscow recognizes Taiwan as a part of China in the framework of the One China policy. China and Russia are working closely on the UNSC and international stage. They have established international organisations like the SCO, BRICS and RIC. They also agreed to conjunct the EAEU and the BRI. President Putin attended in person and delivered speech during 2017 and 2019 BRFs in Beijing. As China's President Xi mentioned during his meeting with Russian Prime Minister Mishustin: "China will work with Russia to continue to firmly support each other on issues concerning respective core interests..." (MFA, PRC, 2023b).

China needs Russia for its energy resources, advanced weapons, transportation routes, and as a lucrative market for Chinese products and technologies due to its population of over 143 million. As Anahit Parzyan (2023, p.184) noted: "The war in Ukraine drastically changed the conception of shared international supra national products because sanctioned Russia was cut off from many digital products that are used on a regular and general basis. Now diversification from US technology giants has become a national security issue for both Moscow and Beijing; thus, strategic cooperation on technologies would fill that gap". China and Russia signed an agreement before the war to grow China's imports of Russian energy resources, as Russian decision-makers could foresee that because of the war, the West and its allies could cut energy imports from Moscow and impose sanctions on the Russian energy sector. This prediction has proved to be accurate, Russian main gas conduit to the Western European market, Nord Stream gas pipelines, has been blown. Russia has increased its exports to China's vast energy market. This helps to stabilise the Russian economy in wartime. It means that the Russian *Pivot towards East* policy, which Moscow announced after 2014 because of the conflict with the West on the Ukrainian crisis, brings results. Considering the abovementioned facts Sino-Russian trade is growing. The total trade value was US\$146.8 billion in 2021 (GAC, PRC, 2021) and increased to US\$190.2 billion in 2022 (GAC, PRC, 2022).

According to Natasha Kuhrt (2023, p.574): "China and Russia hold a deep-rooted opprobrium for the Western liberal order and view the West's internal troubles (such as Brexit) as further legitimating their own regimes". Nevertheless, in the Russo-Ukrainian war, China is not fully backing Russia at political and military-technical levels like the Western Pole is doing for Ukraine. Concretely since 2014, China has not recognised Crimea and Donbas as parts of Russia, nor the results of pro-Russian referendums in Eastern Ukraine in 2022. China has also not sent weapons and ammunition for Russian troops in Ukraine. These moments raise concerns about an "unlimited" comprehensive strategic partnership among Russian scholars and politicians (Lukonin, 2023, p.72).

On the other hand, even under the heavy pressure of the West, China is not joining anti-Russian sanctions and statements. Nevertheless, for this, Beijing is paying a price. As Xuetong Yan (2022) mentioned: "Refusing to condemn Russia has strained China's relations with some of its neighbors and distanced Beijing from many developing nations that have lined up against Russia's war in Ukraine...the conflict has given Washington an excuse to approve another US\$95 million in military aid to Taiwan... the war in Ukraine has deepened political polarization within China itself".

In sum, China is trying to implement a balancing act, but it is standing harder as the Russian side wants to get from its comprehensive strategic partner support without limits, and the West is pressuring to China to denounce Russia and reduce economic cooperation. Therefore China is interested in a political settlement, which will bring it an opportunity to keep relations with all sides without challenges to implementation of its national interests.

Ukraine

China has a strategic partnership with Ukraine. Kyiv acknowledges and respects the One China policy. In 2023, sides mark the 10th anniversary of the signature of *the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Ukraine and the People's Republic of China* (Embassy of Ukraine in PRC, 2022). Beijing also acquired military technologies from Ukraine and the Chinese first aircraft carrier (Liaoning) in an unfinished state. Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe after Russia in terms of territory. Ukraine's location is a crucial intersection that serves as a strategic link between East and West Eurasia. As Gina Panagopoulou (2023, p.29) emphasises, Ukraine's territory is of utmost significance when it comes to managing energy and food supply chains, thereby leading to fierce competition among major powers. Therefore, China has its interests in Ukraine as well for implementing BRI's NEALB and CCAWAEC. Ukraine is also interested in BRI. For this reason, Kiyv sent delegations to Beijing for participation in BRF in 2017 and 2019. The Russo-Ukrainian war is also nulling the possibility of China Railway Express to transport goods through the Ukrainian railway infrastructure, which was not in good technical condition even before the war (Ma, 2021, p.66). Another transit route between the EU and China through the Ukrainian Territory-Black Sea-South Caucasus-Central Asia has been stopped because the Russian military navy has concurred or blocked Ukrainian ports (Sahakyan, 2023b). In 2021 China stood as the second-largest importer of Ukrainian corn (CNBC, 2022). Thus, Ukraine has a significant role in China's food security. China sees Ukraine as a valuable trade partner due to its population of over 43 million, making it a large market for Chinese products. Because of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Sino-Ukrainian trade dropped, as if in 2021, it totalled US\$19,3 billion; in 2022, it was only US\$7,6 billion (GAS, PRC, *op. cit.*). Therefore, because of this war, China loses money, economic and transportation interconnectivity with Europe's second-largest Post-Soviet Eurasian state.

China's ad-hoc diplomacy for political settlement of Russo-Ukrainian war

On March 9, 2022, when 13 days passed after the beginning of the war, during a virtual summit with French President Emanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Xi proposed "four key things" for resolving the Ukraine crisis. These proposals included: "respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, fully observing the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously, and supporting all efforts that promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis" (CGTN, 2022). On November 14, 2022, during his meeting with the US president Joe Biden, discussing Ukrainian issue with him, President Xi mentioned: "first, conflicts and wars produce no winner; second, there is no simple solution to a complex issue; and third, the confrontation between major countries must be avoided. China has all along stood on the side of peace and will continue to encourage peace talks". I believe that through these statements, Xi tried to push forward direct negotiations between the West and Russia. He attempted to demonstrate that decision-makers in Beijing believe that the problem stems from the indirect conflict between NATO and Russia. Therefore, they need to start negotiations directly to find a political settlement.

On February 21, 2023, China released *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*. In the "Priorities of Cooperation" section, Beijing stated its willingness to assist conflicting parties in reaching a political resolution to the Ukraine crisis through dialogue and negotiations (MFA, PRC, 2023k). Offering support and including the Ukrainian crisis in its main security initiative Beijing has shown that it is ready to play an active role on the international stage and that resolving this problem is also important for China. Three days later, this prelude was followed by the release of *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* by China's MFA. The document aims to contribute to the peace process. I have found and examined clauses that can be interpreted as either closer to

Moscow's or Kyiv's positions and neutral clauses that offer recommendations for resolving security issues. Finally, I conducted a comparative analysis and tallied the total number of each type of clause.

Comprehensive analyses of China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis document

Clauses that can be interpreted as closer to Moscow's position

The second clause of *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* document is entitled "Abandoning the Cold War mentality" (MFA, PRC, *op. cit.*). It criticises "bloc confrontation", "strengthening or expanding military blocs", and calls for "work together for peace and stability on the Eurasian Continent". Considering that previously China's high-level officials mentioned about "Cold War mentality" having in their mind the US (MFA, PRC, 2022), it means that this clause supports Russia's position on non-enlargement of NATO towards East. In fact, this aligns with the joint statement made by President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin on February 4, 2022, in Moscow. They stated that Russia and China are against further expansion of NATO and urged that it "abandon Cold War-era thinking and respect the sovereignty, security, and interests of other nations" (President of Russia, 2022).

The tenth clause is entitled "Stopping unilateral sanctions". It is in line with Russian criticism towards Western unilateral sanctions. In fact, China's several sectors, such as the high-technology sector, have also appeared under heavy sanctions from the US and its allies in recent years. Therefore, Moscow and Beijing diplomatically support each other on sanctions issues. They mention that only UNSC, where they are permanent members and have veto power, has the legitimate right to impose sanctions against any state. For this reason, in *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* document, there is mentioned that "China opposes unilateral sanctions unauthorised by the UN Security Council. Relevant countries should stop abusing unilateral sanctions and 'long-arm jurisdiction' against other countries, so as to do their share in deescalating the Ukraine crisis and create conditions for developing countries to grow their economies and better the lives of their people".

Clauses that can be interpreted as closer to Kyiv's position

In the first clause of *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, Beijing mentioned about "Respecting the sovereignty of all countries". In the Russo-Ukrainian war, for now, only Russian troops are advancing in the sovereign territory of Ukraine; Russia also announced the inclusion of non-recognised Luhansk and Donetsk (People's Republics) in its administrative territory. The abovementioned clause means that China does not recognise these territories, as it has not recognised Crimea before as part of Russia (MFA, PRC, *op. cit.*). The logic of China's position towards territorial integrity I explain with Beijing's concerns on Taiwan's issue. For instance, in an article for the Washington Post on March 15, 2022, Qin Gang (2022), who was then China's ambassador to the US (now Minister of Foreign Affairs), made a statement: "It does not make sense for people to emphasise the principle of sovereignty on Ukraine while hurting China's sovereignty and territorial integrity on Taiwan".

Clauses that can be interpreted as Neutral

Several clauses (3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12) suggest considering and addressing solutions for a range of security situations, including humanitarian crises, prisoners of war, nuclear issues, industrial and supply chains, and stable and post-conflict reconstruction.

China suggests that Russia and Ukraine negotiate peacefully to resolve their conflict. They emphasise the importance of diplomacy to avoid war escalation, especially since it could lead to a direct nuclear conflict between Russia and NATO.

Based on the calculations, my analysis indicates that two clauses are closer to the Russian position, one with the Ukrainian position, and nine neutral. Upon analysis of this document, it was found that, in general, the recommendations provided are constructive and can potentially enhance the security situation in the Eurasian continent. For now, it is impossible to believe that the full document of *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* can be the main fundament for a final peace between Russia and Ukraine as it is hard to believe that at this stage Russia will withdraw from Crimea and Donbas only for implementing China's suggestion to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine or that Kiyv will recognise these territories as Russia's. It is also hard to imagine that the US will stop "unilateral sanctions" on Russia or will stop to expand NATO towards the East. Actually, in 2023 Finland became a NATO member, and Sweden is the next.

China's meditation role

It is worth to discuss what were Ukraine's, Russia's and NATO's positions on China's *Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*? On February 24, 2023, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy commenting about this document, mentioned: "It seems to me that it was not China's peace plan, not a resolution, not a declaration... I believe China has shown its thoughts on this." He added: "I believe that there is respect for territorial integrity there. It does not indicate which country, but the territorial integrity of our state has been violated. It is about nuclear safety. I think it is very important. It coincides with the interests of the World and our state. There are some points that I understand. There are thoughts with which I do not agree" (President of Ukraine, 2023a).

In turn, on the same day, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg mentioned that "China doesn't have much credibility because they have not been able to condemn the illegal invasion of Ukraine, and they also signed that just days before the invasion, an agreement between President Xi and President Putin on limitless partnership with Russia". He added: "We are monitoring closely what China is doing. And we have seen signs they may be considering and planning to send lethal aid to Russia. This will be a very big mistake" (NATO, 2023a). In turn, on March 20, 2023, in Moscow, during his meeting with President Xi, Russian President Putin mentioned: "Russia has carefully studied *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* and is open to talks for peace. Russia welcomes China to play a constructive role in this regard" (MFA, PRC, 2023c). In April 2023, Xi discussed the Ukrainian issue with visiting French President Macron. He even proposed to prepare a joint Sino-French statement on the peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian war (MFA, PRC, 2023g).

In sum, if Russia and Ukraine sent messages to China to start to mediate their conflict and show a willingness to cooperate. NATO - who is involved through Ukraine in a proxy war against Russia - has expressed scepticism about China's ability to remain neutral as a mediator and has taken a negative stance.

As a result of Ukrainian and Russian positive remarks, on April 26, 2023, there was a phone call between China's President Xi and Ukrainian President Zelenskyy. As Xi noted: "Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is the political foundation of China-Ukraine relations. As a

permanent member of the UN Security Council and a major responsible country, China would not sit idly by, nor would it add oil to the fire, still less exploit the situation for self-gains. There is no winner in nuclear wars. China will send the Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs to Ukraine and other countries to have in-depth communication with all parties on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis” (MFA, PRC, 2023d). In turn, Volodymyr Zelenskyy reconfirmed Ukraine’s position on One China policy, he thanked China’s President for the support “for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity” and humanitarian assistance (President of Ukraine, 2023b). The main outcome of this phone call was the agreement between the two sides that China would play the role of the mediator, and Zelenskyy agreed to meet with Li Hui, a Chinese representative on Eurasian Affairs.

Further, on May 16, 2023, Li Hui visited Kiyv and met with President Zelenskyy, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak and Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba and other officials. During these meetings, the Ukrainian side informed about the front-line situation and Kyiv’s position on restoring its territorial integrity. Li Hui introduced *China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*. As he mentioned: “There is no panacea for defusing the crisis. It requires all parties to do their share, build up mutual trust, and create enabling conditions for a ceasefire and peace talks” (MFA, PRC, 2023h). After meetings in Kiyv, Li Hui headed to Warsaw and, on May 19, 2023, met with the Polish Undersecretary of State Wojciech Gerwel. The last one mentioned that Poland supports Zelenskyy’s plan and preconditions for solving the conflict based on restoring Ukrainian territorial integrity. Gerwel also hoped that China would not recognise Ukrainian territories that appeared under Russian troops’ control.

In turn, Li Hui introduced *China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* for achieving peace between Russia and Ukraine (MFA, Poland, 2023). On May 23, 2023, in Paris, Li Hui met with the Director General of Political and Security Affairs (MEAE, France 2023), M. Frédéric Mondoloni. The last one emphasised that “France was convinced China could play a constructive role with a view to the return of a just and lasting peace in Europe in accordance with international law, in particular [on] Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”. The next day, in Berlin, Li Hui met with the State Secretary of the German Foreign Ministry, Andreas Michaelis. During their meeting, Michaelis emphasised the importance of strengthening dialogue between Germany and China on the situation in Ukraine (MFA, PRC, 2023i). On May 25, 2023, in Brussels, Li Hui negotiated with Deputy Secretary-General Enrique Mora. The last one mentioned: “The EU expects China, as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, to play a constructive role and to use every occasion to uphold and promote the UN Charter and international law, and to recall the necessity to respect the principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity....” (EU External Action, 2023). In sum, during the negotiations with Ukraine and its primary allies, Li Hui presented China’s approach to resolving the Ukrainian issue. After receiving their feedback and offers, he proceeded to Moscow. On May 26, 2023, he met with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, vice Ministers Mikhail Galuzin and Andrey Rudenkno. During the meeting, Lavrov thanked China for taking a balanced stance on the Ukrainian crisis and emphasised Moscow’s dedication to resolving the conflict through political and diplomatic means (MFA, Russia, 2023). In turn, Li Hui mentioned that “China will strengthen exchanges and dialogue with Russia and all other parties on the basis of *China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* and make concrete efforts to the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis” (MFA, PRC, 2023j). After his diplomatic tour, on June 2, 2023, in Beijing, Li Hui met with international journalists. As he mentioned, China is not directly involved in the Ukrainian crisis and has not had any conflict with Ukraine, the EU, or Russia. China’s position is acceptable to the international community, as it is about restarting negotiations for a political settlement. As he mentioned, there is a need to halt the export of weapons to conflicting

parties if the international community really wants to stop the war (CGTN, 2023). With this statement, China's side tried to reconfirm Xi's statements that the only way is negotiations if conflicting sides want to find political settlement.

In sum, China entered the diplomatic stage and actively promoted the importance of political settlement. It made clear that it will not join the conflict from the Russian side nor provide weapons to Russia. On the other hand, it will not join with the West against Russia and will not support anti-Russian sanctions. China, as the World's young Superpower, has stated that it is opposed to the use of nuclear weapons and believes that political solutions are the best way to resolve crises. China also raised the importance of transportation security as it is crucial for China's own BRI economic corridors and Eurasian interconnectivity.

China, NATO, and the Russo-Ukrainian War

At the diplomatic level, China stated that it is against NATO's expansion towards the East and criticised NATO for supplying armaments to Ukraine, arguing that it would not contribute to resolving the conflict and could potentially exacerbate it (MFA, PRC, *op. cit.*). It was also an answer that if China condemns NATO for supplying armaments to Ukraine, it will not supply itself to Russia at this stage. China connected the eruption of the Russo-Ukrainian war to the failure to implement the Minsk agreements. On February 17, 2023, the UN Ambassador Zhang Jun, at the UNSC Briefing on Ukraine, mentioned: "if all provisions in the Minsk Agreement could be effectively implemented, the Ukraine crisis might not have developed to what it is today. The Ukraine crisis is, in essence, the culmination of security conflicts in Europe closely related to NATO's constant eastern expansion since the Cold War" (MFA, PRC, 2023f). In turn, the Chinese Consul-General in Brisbane, Dr Ruan Zongze (2023), wrote an op-ed article for *The Australian newspaper*, mentioning that "As the World's largest military bloc, NATO can't live without an enemy. The Ukrainian crisis provides the oxygen it needs for life extension". He also noted, "that sending weapons will not bring peace".

The following question arises: Why does China criticise NATO?

It is because, in general, China sees NATO as the main war machine of the West, which can be used against it in a possible conflict with the US. In turn, NATO recognises China as a systemic challenge in a Multipolar World Order 2.0. In Madrid Summit, 29-30 June 2022, NATO (2022, p.5) adopted *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, which states that China "challenge our interests, security and values". For this reason, China understands that if NATO defeats Russia in Ukraine and organises power change in Moscow, Beijing will remain against the collective West alone.

Actually, China is already under huge pressure from the US-led Quad and AUKUS in the Asia-Pacific region. For this reason, During President Xi's visit to Moscow on March 21, 2023, China and Russia issued the *Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era* where they criticised NATO, mentioning: "The Sides express great concern over the continuing strengthening of NATO ties with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region on military and security issues and the undermining of regional peace and stability by the Organization" (President of Russia, 2023). In turn, on April 5, 2023, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated: "China refuses to condemn Russia's aggression. It echoes Russian propaganda. And it props up Russia's economy. China and Russia are also stepping up their joint military activities in the Indo-Pacific region" (NATO, 2023b). To analyse, according to Offensive realists' theory, in the Multipolar World Order 2.0, NATO (West) and China see in each other competitors and security challenges. Therefore, they try to limit each other's advancement in the Eurasian continent and power increase. China and Russia have a common interest in stopping NATO's expansion towards Post-Soviet Eurasia; they are trying to implement a

Balance-of-threat. In turn, NATO's indirect involvement from the Ukrainian side in the war with Russia is fully in correspondence with Realism's balance-of-powers theory, as the West and its allies support Ukraine that it accumulates enough power to struggle against Russia and that Moscow loses its capabilities to threaten them.

In the Russo-Ukrainian war, China seeks a peaceful resolution in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict to protect its national interests and establish itself as a peacemaker in Eurasian international relations.

Conclusion

Russo-Ukrainian war "paralyses" relations between Russia and the West (Korolev, 2023, p.22). As a result, there have been no remarkable negotiations for political settlement yet. According to Dmitri Trenin (2023, p.505), Russian President Putin chose Ukraine to stop NATO's advancement towards Russian territory. This war fully correspondent with the logic of the Multipolar World Order 2.0 Concept (Sahakyan, 2023c, pp.1-4), as Russia and the West try to take Ukraine under their control. According to Heinz Gärtner (2023, p.xxiv), Kyiv attempts to bandwagon with NATO to obtain protection. It means that it tries to choose the Western bloc for which it is paying a very high price, as in the place of getting protection, it is losing the lives of its citizens, and the infrastructure of the entire country is being damaged (Sahakyan, 2023d, p.230). Therefore, President Zelenskyy's steps on non-implementation of the Minsk agreements (Powirska, 2022) and aspiration to stand NATO member fully controversies with the realist's argument that "the statement's main goal is the survival of his country" (Donnelly, 2008, p.155). Because of the abovementioned steps, stronger Russia attacked Ukraine and Zelenskyy could not escape the war. As a result, Ukraine stood a battleground for the indirect war between Russia and NATO. As of the writing of this chapter, Ukraine is not a member of either NATO or the EU. According to German scholar Alexander Rar (2016, p.144), not all EU member nations want to see Ukraine as a member of their organization. Eastern European nations see Ukraine as a possible "buffer zone" with Russia, whom they see as a security threat. In turn, the French, and Germans, who are interested in trade with Russia, see Ukraine as a trade partner and believe that Russia and Ukraine can jointly cooperate with the EU.

Historically China could achieve development during peacetime by developing production and trade. Therefore, the war is not a comfort zone for China, as it is for Russia. For this reason, China is not interested in the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war or direct clashes between NATO and Russia. For this, China can act to bring back peace which is helping it to achieve its national interests through BRI in international level. Does it have capabilities? Yes, as China is a young superpower, a UNSC member, and the World's second-largest economy, its President Xi has authority in Eurasian international relations. He has friendly relations with Russian President Putin and normal relations with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy. Therefore, I also cannot agree with Bonny Lin's (2023) statement that China cannot be resultative as a mediator as it has "little experience" in the arena. For instance, in March 2023, Beijing successfully mediated the restart of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as they were also interested in. Therefore, China can play a constructive role in solving the problem.

Actually, taking into consideration the abovementioned facts, I proposed recommendation on China's involvement as a mediator in Russo-Ukrainian conflict 20 days before the war in my article "The Ukrainian Crisis in the Multipolar World Order: NATO, Russia and China", published by the Asia Global Institute of the University of Hong Kong. I mentioned: "China, for its part, can take the initiative and offer to be a mediator between Ukraine and Russia. Once the Winter Olympiad is over, Beijing could refocus the message of peace (the Olympic tradition of the 'truce') and take a leading role in resolving the crisis. This could be a defining moment for China on the international stage" (Sahakyan, 2022). It is encouraging to see that the recommendation is gaining popularity as numerous

scholars and politicians continue to endorse it. On the other hand, there is no need to exaggerate the role of China and put all responsibility on Beijing's shoulders, as in this conflict, the main decision-makers are Russia and Ukraine-NATO tandem.

In my opinion, China is not interested in Ukraine's standing as a member of the Western Pole, which would lead to NATO's expansion towards the East of the Eurasian continent. However, as Beijing is not interested in the escalation of the war, China prefers Ukraine to become as a neutral state. In this way, China will have an opportunity to engage Ukraine in its BRI and contribute to the country's reconstruction. In turn, Ukraine can stand a non-regional member of the AIIB for getting additional investments for the modernization of its transportation infrastructure. With their expertise in construction and production potential, Chinese companies will likely secure contracts worth billions of dollars. In the framework of the BRI China can also make direct investments in Ukraine. This will also lead to increased economic influence, which can translate to political influence in the long run.

Scenarios going forward

Russo-Ukrainian truce and negotiations by the mediation of China

After the Ukrainian counterattack and unsuccessful military coup in Moscow by the Wagner group, exhausted Russia and Ukraine by the mediation of China can sign truce and restart negotiations, having on the table also *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* document. It will bring stabilisation to the Eurasian continent and raise China's authority as a responsible power.

The Third World War and China

Suppose NATO is directly involved in a war from the side of Ukraine, which can stand as the reason for the Third World War with the threat of usage of tactical nuclear weapons. In this case, the Eurasian continent and the entire World will stand battlefield. In this case, it is possible, that Beijing will support Russia sending ammunition to Russian troops in Ukraine. As if Russia is defeated, the West will put in Moscow pro-Western regime, which will stand as a headache for China. Therefore, President Putin is acceptable to China. I remember that in 2019 when I was attending Primakov Readings in Moscow, there were discussions that Russia declined the US proposal on jointly deterring China. As Angela Stent (*op. cit.*, p.550) wrote in 2023, when Joe Biden was elected as a President of the US in 2021, he tried to find an understanding with Russia on the China issue, that the US concentrates on "its major political challenge-dealing with China", but Russia did not agree to play a secondary or any other role.

Taiwan issue and Russo-Ukrainian War

There are also voices that President Xi Jinping plans to return Taiwan to China's control in the coming 4-9 years (Asia Society Hong Kong, 2022). If it is true and China starts military operations against Taiwan, the West will impose sanctions and isolate China. It is possible that in the framework of Quad and AUKUS, the US will try to stop China. It will bring the final alignment of China and Russia, and they will fully support each other in Taiwan and Ukraine. China will open its military arsenal's stockpiles for Russia. It will provide its missile systems and high-tech unmanned aerial vehicles to Russian troops, on which they have shortcuts. It will fully change balance-of-powers on the Ukrainian front and the entire Eurasian security architecture.

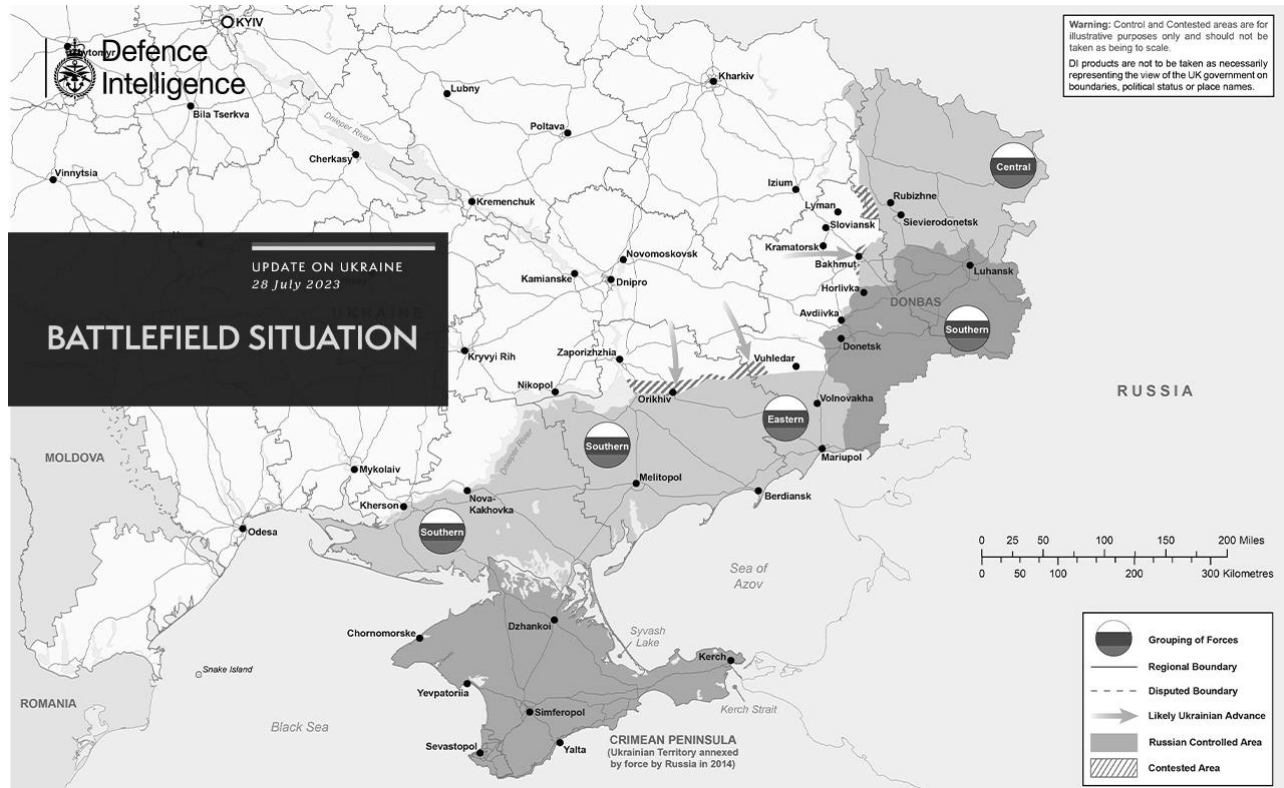


Figure 1.1 Battlefield situation

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