

China's Position on Ukraine Peace Plan

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Abstract

The Chinese twelve-point peace proposal regarding the Ukraine crisis has sparked significant global discourse and scrutiny regarding its potential efficacy in fostering peace in Ukraine and the region. This article seeks to analyze whether China's proposal reflects a latent pro-Russian inclination or a genuine endeavor for peace. In addition, the responses of the main stakeholders — Russia, Ukraine and the United States — to China's peace proposal on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the resulting consequences are examined. Additionally, it explores the motivations propelling China's initiative and the ensuing implications.

Keywords - Peace, Ukraine, Kremlin, Beijing and Conflict

Introduction

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China issued an official political statement regarding the Ukraine Crisis, presenting a comprehensive twelve-point document outlining a proposed framework for addressing the conflict. Emphasizing Beijing's stance on halting hostilities and recommencing peace talks, the statement condemns unilateral sanctions and calls for the abandonment of Cold war ideologies. On February 17, 2024, Wang Yi, a Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Foreign Minister, participated in the Munich Security Conference. During his attendance, Wang Yi reiterated China's commitment to facilitating peace negotiations. He emphasized that China neither instigated nor directly participated in the crisis, and has refrained from exploiting the situation for its own benefit.

As a form of Shuttle diplomacy, Wang Yi met with US Secretary Antony Blinken at the Munich conference and then visited Hungary and Russia. In parallel discussions, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba deliberated on the potential for peace in Kyiv with the Chinese counterpart, while Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov expressed skepticism regarding China's willingness to provide lethal assistance to Russia. Reznikov speculated that any aid from China would probably only include non-military goods such as clothing and not weapons. In the position paper, China positioned itself as a neutral party in the conflict, as evidenced by its decision to abstain from voting at three UN General Assembly sessions where resolutions condemning Russia's actions were introduced.

RESPONSE TO PEACE PROPOSAL

Ukraine

China's peace proposal is unlikely to significantly contribute to the peace process in Ukraine due to its ambiguity, lack of impartiality, and insufficient concerted efforts. While Ukraine refrained from outright rejecting China's initiatives, certain aspects were cautiously welcomed by President Zelenskyy.

However, the insistence on any settlement failing to ensure the withdrawal of Russian forces remained non-negotiable. President Zelenskyy urged China to assist by diplomatically isolating Russia and refraining from supplying weapons. Despite the potential geopolitical and economic benefits that might accrue to China from a weakened and isolated Russia, the enduring relationship between China and Russia weighs heavily against the advantages of isolating Russia. Ukraine sought to garner China's support for its 10-point peace initiative, primarily focusing on the withdrawal of Russian troops. However, China maintains a neutral position, showing no inclination to involve itself in the conflict resolution process deeply. Undoubtedly, Ukraine is keen on leveraging China as a potential deterrent against Russian aggression, aiming to dissuade Russia from engaging in further military hostilities. Additionally, Kyiv possibly views it as imperative to refrain from outright rejecting the Chinese proposal, recognizing the potential strategic benefits of open diplomatic channels.

Russia

Dmitry Peskov, spokesperson for President Putin, cautiously praised China's peace plan document, stating, *"Any attempt to develop a plan aimed at redirecting the conflict toward peace warrants attention. We are carefully reviewing the proposal put forth by our Chinese friends."* During the Russia-China Summit in March 2023, President Putin remarked, *"We can consider China's proposal as a template once the West and Kyiv are prepared to do so."* The Kremlin emphasized the importance of acknowledging the new territorial realities to reach a peace agreement, thereby dismissing President Zelenskyy's peace formula. On April 21, 2023, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a press release reiterating Crimea's status as *'an inseparable part of Russia'* and condemning the *'rhetoric and criminal actions'* of the Ukrainian government. The West's rhetorical inquiry into whether China is providing military assistance to Russia requires assessing its implications on China's relationship with the West. If China were to offer military assistance to Russia, it could enable Russia to regain momentum in the war, potentially altering China's geostrategic position and prompting a shift from neutrality to a pro-Russian stance.

USA

The United States has outrightly dismissed the Chinese peace proposal, citing its failure to acknowledge Russian aggression and violations of international law. The US argues that the proposal lacks provisions for the withdrawal of Russian forces and effectively justifies Russia's territorial gains in Ukraine. Given China's ongoing collaboration with Russia across various fronts, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has indicated that severe sanctions are under consideration. These sanctions, if imposed, would not only impact US-China relations but also influence China's ties with NATO nations. In a speech on March 28, Secretary of State Antony Blinken recognized the ostensibly well-intentioned nature of certain efforts but cautioned against potential cynicism, emphasizing the need for careful scrutiny to avoid falling into deceptive traps.

These responses benefit Beijing, positioning it favorably for future instances where it may be accused of inaction or tacitly supporting Russia's aggression. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine and countries like the US, France, and the UK supplying weapons, China's proposal positions itself as the sole permanent member of the UN Security Council actively engaged in peace efforts. Through this initiative, China not only presents a proposal that resonates with the international community as a proactive step towards

peace but also portrays itself as a mediator that has encouraged Russia to initiate discussions and maintain open negotiations.

CHINA'S POSITION

Since the onset of the conflict in 2014, China's stance has been characterized by ambiguity. While Beijing initially voiced support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, emphasizing the importance of conflict resolution, its subsequent peace plan lacked specificity, offering no clear answers or resolutions. The language employed in the document lacks explicit references to Russian troops and addresses the core issue in a generalized manner. This aspect of the document reflects China's cautious approach to the crisis. Furthermore, through a joint declaration by President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin in 2022, attributing the Ukraine crisis to NATO expansion and affirming an unrestricted partnership just prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China has consistently demonstrated its unwavering political, diplomatic, and economic support for Russia. This steadfast support underscores China's readiness to assist the Kremlin in addressing potential threats to the established system, owing to its strategic alliance with Russia and vested interests in the Indo-pacific region. The shift in focus and resources within the US administration from containing China to addressing the Ukraine crisis has inadvertently positioned China as a significant beneficiary of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, Chinese firms have capitalized on the opportunity created by the withdrawal of Western firms from Russia, stepping in to purchase natural resources from Russia at discounted rates and filling the resulting vacuum in the market. China's endeavors to dissuade European nations from adopting indiscriminate anti-China policies and to enhance bilateral relations are underscored by the significant number of visits made across Europe in recent years. Beijing's strategic partnership with Russia assumes considerable significance owing to their economies' complementarity and military collaboration, evidenced by joint ventures such as the acquisition of Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 surface-to-air missiles. The recent joint naval exercises conducted in the Gulf of Oman serve as a testament to their shared ambitions and long-term vision. The peace plan therefore serves as a strategic response to the criticisms leveled against China for maintaining a neutral stance in the conflict. It aims to counter Western accusations of China's perceived complicity or sympathetic stance towards Russia, thereby enhancing China's international reputation.

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