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## THE POSITION AND ACTIONS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA REGARDING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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### Abstract

The article reveals the position and actions of the People's Republic of China (PRC) regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war after February 24, 2022. The main leitmotifs of the PRC leadership's statements on the international arena also look dualistic. On the one hand, the leader of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, attests to the need to stop the war as soon as possible; together with French President F. Macron calls to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine and resolve the conflict through negotiations. But on the other hand, Beijing votes in favor of Russia in the UN, and Chinese state media supports Moscow's position.

Currently, the Russian-Ukrainian war, which is a global geopolitical conflict, is viewed by China as a "window of opportunity". Beijing longs to create its own economic macro-region in East Asia, while competing for global leadership with the United States, whose focus is currently more concentrated on the security of Europe as a whole in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine caused the general spectrum of the "Taiwan problem" to play with new "colors". The next aggravation of relations between the US and the PRC regarding the "Taiwan issue" took place in the spring of 2022. However, an open armed confrontation between the US and the PRC regarding the resolution of the "Taiwan issue" currently seems unlikely, and sharp political statements by the leaders of both the PRC and the US is an illustration to both the citizens of their countries and to their allies that they have the situation under control and are ready to use any means necessary to achieve their long-term national interests.

Suffering losses nowadays as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, China is quite logically advocating an end to this armed confrontation, at the same time, this crisis has opened up certain strategic opportunities for the PRC that Beijing can take advantage of in the long term.

**Keywords:** Russian-Ukrainian war, PRC, USA, "Taiwan problem", settlement

## ПОЗИЦІЯ ТА ДІЇ КНР ЩОДО РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

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### Анотація

У статті розкриваються позиція та дії КНР щодо російсько-української війни після 24 лютого 2022 року. Дуалістичними виглядають і основні лейтмотиви заяв керівництва КНР на міжнародній арені. З одного боку, лідер КНР Сі Цзіньпін засвідчує необхідність якнайшвидшого припинення війни; разом із президентом Франції Ф. Макроном закликає поважати територіальну цілісність України та вирішити конфлікт шляхом переговорів. Але з іншого боку, Пекін голосує за Росію в ООН, а китайські державні ЗМІ підтримують позицію Москви.

На разі російсько-українську війну, яка є глобальним геополітичним конфліктом, Китай розглядає як «вікно можливостей». Пекін прагне створити власний економічний макрорегіон у Східній Азії, конкуруючи за світове лідерство зі Сполученими Штатами, чия увага зараз більше зосереджена на безпеці Європи в контексті російської агресії проти України.

Агресія Росії проти України призвела до того, що загальний спектр «тайванської проблеми» заграв новими «фарбами». Чергове загострення відносин між США та КНР щодо «тайванського питання» відбулося навесні 2022 року. Проте відкрите збройне протистояння між США та КНР щодо вирішення «тайванського питання» наразі виглядає малоімовірним. Різкі політичні заяви лідерів як КНР, так і США є ілюстрацією як для громадян їхніх країн, так і для їхніх союзників, що вони тримають ситуацію під контролем і готові використовувати будь-які засоби для досягнення своїх довгострокових національних інтереси.

Зазначаючи нині втрат внаслідок війни Росії проти України, Китай цілком логічно виступає за припинення цього збройного протистояння, водночас ця криза відкрила перед КНР певні стратегічні можливості, якими Пекін може скористатися в довгостроковій перспективі.

**Ключові слова:** російсько-українська війна, КНР, США, «тайванська проблема», врегулювання

**Problem statement.** Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, China has repeatedly declared its neutral position. But the further this neutrality goes, the more it is perceived as Moscow's support. This is especially noticeable in the theses of the peace plan, which the PRC offers as a way to end the war unleashed by Russia. Beijing declares its neutrality and even suggests that it can act as a mediator in peace talks. At the same time, at every step, it deepens relations with Moscow and throws it an economic «lifeline», increasing trade. The long-announced telephone conversation between Xi Jinping and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi which would have reinforced claims of Chinese neutrality, has not yet taken place. The position, and most

importantly, the actions of the People's Republic of China, is an important aspect in the Russian-Ukrainian war. This is what makes our research relevant.

**Analysis of previous research and publications.** The position and actions of the Chinese government after the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine is the subject of analysis by a lot of scientists and journalists. However, in our case, the works of foreign researchers deserve special attention. In particular, it is worth highlighting the works of such authors as J. Whalen (Whalen, 2022), S. Holland, T. Hunnicutt, D. Brunnstrom (Holland, Hunnicutt & Brunnstrom, 2022) where the authors, through the prism of the US influence on China, examine the policy of Beijing regarding cooperation with Russia and providing it with weapons.

**The purpose of the study** is to analyze the position and actions of the PRC regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war after February 24, 2022.

**Research methods and techniques.** The study of the position and actions of the People's Republic of China in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war was carried out using the methods of analysis, synthesis and generalization, analytical, institutional, structural-functional and comparative analyses. To achieve the goal, the authors used a complex of general scientific (analysis and synthesis, collection, processing and analysis of materials on this topic, generalization method) and special methods (problematic-chronological, content analysis) research. Thus, the problem-chronological method made it possible to trace the actions and statements of the Chinese government regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war after February 24, 2022.

**Theoretical background.** With the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, official Beijing has clearly defined its position in five points, which were presented by the member of the State Council and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Wang Yi during a telephone conversation with the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Elizabeth Truss, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, and the diplomatic adviser to the President of France Emmanuel Bonne:

1. China steadfastly supports respects and guarantees the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, and strictly adheres to the goals and principles of the UN Charter. This position is consistent and clear, and it applies to Ukraine as well.

2. China stands for a unified, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable concept of security. We believe that the security of one country cannot be guaranteed at the cost of violating the security of other countries, and regional security cannot be guaranteed either by the strengthening or by the expansion of military groupings. It is necessary to respect the interest of each state in ensuring its own security. In the context of five waves of NATO eastward expansion, Russia's legitimate security demands should be taken seriously and properly.

3. The Chinese side is closely following the development of the Ukrainian issue, and the current situation is not what it would like to see. Firstly, in order to prevent the situation on the territory of Ukraine from worsening or getting out of control, all parties must maintain restraint. And in order to prevent the emergence of a large-scale humanitarian crisis, it is necessary to properly guarantee the safety of the lives and property of the civilian population.

4. China supports and encourages all diplomatic efforts that will contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian crisis, as well as the earliest possible organization of direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. The development of the Ukrainian issue has a complex historical background. Ukraine was supposed to become a bridge between the East and the West, and not the forefront of the confrontation between the great powers. China also supports an equal dialogue between the EU and Russia on European security issues, as a result of which a balanced, effective and stable European security mechanism will be formed.

5. The Chinese side believes that the UN Security Council should play a constructive role in solving the Ukrainian issue, focusing on the stability of regional peace and the

general security of all countries. Actions by the Security Council should reduce tension, not increase it, and should promote a diplomatic solution, and not further escalation. In this regard, China has never approved of the decisions of the Security Council, adopted on the basis of the seventh chapter of the UN Charter, which gives the right to use weapons or to impose sanctions (Wáng Yì..., 2022).

With the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the diplomatic rhetoric of the PRC can be defined as “neutral” to a certain extent. On the one hand, the PRC supported Russia in increasing the volume of energy imports (in the first 100 days of the war, China became the main importer of Russian oil and gas outside the European Union – 12.6 billion euros), not supporting the anti-Russian sanctions policy of the countries of the collective West (Finansuvannia Yevropoiu viiny Putina..., 2022).

On the other hand, according to the notification of the US Secretary of Commerce G. Raimondo, in March 2022, official Beijing halved the supply of technological goods to Russia compared to February figures. According to G. Raimondo, this indicates China’s caution towards anti-Russian sanctions. Thus, the US Department of Commerce reported, citing data on China’s trade that shipments of laptops from China to the Russian Federation fell by 40% in March compared to February, and exports of smartphones fell by two-thirds. In addition, G. Raimondo emphasized that the volume of exports of Chinese telecommunications equipment fell by 98% (Whalen, 2022).

The main leitmotifs of the statements of the PRC leadership on the international arena also look dualistic. On the one hand, the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, testifies to the need to stop the war as soon as possible; and on the other hand, together with French President F. Macron, he calls to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine and resolve the conflict through negotiations. But on the other hand, Beijing votes in favor of Russia in the UN, and Chinese state media support Moscow’s position (Holland, Hunnicutt & Brunnstrom, 2022).

Behind these seemingly rather inconsistent steps, a clear foreign policy strategy of the PRC regarding the purposeful promotion of its long-term interests on the international arena against the background of geostrategic competition can be traced, if not a struggle with the USA.

Currently, the Russian-Ukrainian war, which is a global geopolitical conflict, is viewed by China as a “window of opportunity”. Beijing longs to create its own economic macro-region in East Asia, while competing for global leadership with the United States, whose focus is currently more concentrated on the security of Europe as a whole in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

At the current stage, the format of relations between Beijing and Washington is characterized by rather tough competition in East Asia, while China considers the Russian Federation to be its strategic rear. Based on this, the PRC is concentrating on three priority areas: 1) Taiwan; 2) the South China Sea, through which a third of the global commodity traffic passes; 3) the East China Sea, where the Diaoyu (Senkaku) islands disputed with Japan are located.

In this scale of priorities, the “Taiwan issue” comes first, which, apart from everything else, also has a moral and political dimension for Beijing since, for the PRC, positioning itself as a country with global geopolitical influence is a kind of compensation for more than a century of history, when China was the object of foreign aggression, unequal agreements and the creation of colonial enclaves on its territory.

The period of turbulence in the global system of international relations caused by Russian aggression against Ukraine can potentially stir up “canned” territorial conflicts in such a conflict-prone region as the APR. In addition, the situation is complicated by the fact that the Russian Federation, which is a member of the UN Security Council, simultaneously violates all possible principles of international law regarding the relationships between sovereign states and the principles of territorial integrity.

The “Taiwan issue” has a more complex structure than the aggressive imperial policy of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine, but it is quite possible that China will use the situation that has developed in order to solve the issue of Taiwan.

The issue of Taiwan, namely the unresolved issue of the reunification of the two separated parts of China, is considered by official Beijing as the “greatest” and “extremely painful” obstacle capable of destabilizing the process of achieving this goal. From the point of view of the military and political leadership of the PRC, Taiwanese separatism is a significant threat to “China’s internal and external security and the psychological normal state of the nation” (Moskalev, 2005: 27). According to one of the Chinese military analysts “Taiwan has long been a thorn for us” (Rumyancev, 2005: 8).

And with corresponding frequency, official Beijing demonstrates its readiness to “pull out this thorn” by conducting large-scale military exercises off the coast of Taiwan with an imitation of amphibious landings. The reasons for this before the current situation on the international arena were usually: the elections of the head (president) of the Taiwanese administration, statements by the leaders of Taiwan regarding the need to hold a referendum on the island on the issue of sovereign status, visits to the Republic of China in Taiwan by representatives of the US political or state establishment, etc.

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine led to the fact that the general spectrum of the “Taiwan issue” began to play with new “colors”.

Another aggravation of relations between the USA and the PRC regarding the “Taiwan issue” occurred in the spring of 2022 and was associated with the visit of a delegation of two out of the six US congressmen headed by the chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Robert Menendez (from the Democratic Party) and Senator Lindsey Graham (from the Republican Party) in April 2022 to the island.

An official representative of the Chinese Embassy in the USA made a speech on the visit of American congressmen to Taiwan, saying that China strongly opposes this visit and demands that the US side immediately stop all official contacts with Taiwan in any form. The entry of 30 Chinese Air Force fighters into Taiwan’s airspace was also the evidence of the severity of the problem. According to the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense, this is the largest invasion since January 2022 (Ministry of National Defense, 2022).

The next such incident occurred on June 21, 2022, when 29 aircraft of the Chinese Air Force entered Taiwan’s air defense recognition zone without warning. The Taiwan Air Force was put into the air on the alert (China made third-largest).

It should be noted that such a significant demonstration of the power of the PRC in the Taiwan Strait occurs periodically. Such measures pursue several purposes: firstly, it is a signal to the Taiwanese administration to refrain from declaring the island’s independence; secondly, the message to the USA that the “Taiwan issue” is an internal political affair of the PRC.

In an effort to maintain a balance between the Russian energy sources and the threat of secondary sanctions of the collective West, Xi Jinping refrained from condemning Russia’s ultra-tough actions in Ukraine and did not recognize its full-scale invasion. He called for «solving the problem through negotiations». From his part, the Russian president, trying to draw parallels regarding his own aggression against Ukraine and the “Taiwan issues” and to maintain the principle of strategic partnership in relations with the PRC, offered China support in the Taiwan issue and stated that Russia opposes any interference in the affairs of the PRC (In call with Putin..., 2022).

The visit of the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan on August 2-3, 2022 was a response to the open demonstration of China’s power in relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. The visit was in fact a demonstration of US power in the region and a testament to Washington’s commitment to its allied obligations. This was confirmed by the words of the US President J. Biden in an interview with CBS that the US Armed Forces would defend Taiwan in the event of a possible invasion from China (Biden tells 60 Minutes U.S. troops). It should be noted that in early September 2022, the US State Department approved the potential sale of military equipment to Taiwan worth \$1.1 billion, including 60 anti-ship missiles and 100 air-to-air missiles (Zengerle & Martina, 2022).

At the same time, the Taiwan administration is trying to use the current situation,

which is characterized by a rather severe polarization between the PRC's partner Russia and the Western world, in order to establish the status of the island as an effective subject of international relations. Thus, being in the global trend of supporting Ukraine. Thus, certifying their solidarity with the position of the leading Western countries and positioning themselves as part of the civilized world.

Since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Taiwan administration has joined in blocking the access of some Russian banks to the international payment system SWIFT, and also sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Prime Minister of the Republic of China in Taiwan, Su Tseng-chang, emphasized that Taiwan "keeps pace with its democratic partners" around the world regarding its decision on sanctions. According to him, the government will "cooperate" with what Western countries have decided on the issue of disconnecting from SWIFT. This decision by the Taiwan administration is to some extent symbolic, since Taiwan's trade with Russia is minimal. The Taiwan Financial Supervisory Commission said on Monday that any transfers to Russia are made through the SWIFT system, but through intermediary banks. Taiwan is a major semiconductor manufacturer, and Taipei claims that chipmakers will comply with export control regulations to Russia. Aid to Ukraine in the form of 27 tons of medicines was noted as a separate line in the speeches of the representatives of the island (Taiwan to follow SWIFT..., 2022).

Based on this, it can be argued that the period of Russia's destructive transformation of the system of international relations is already having devastating consequences for the principles of systemic relations in Europe. Given the consolidation of the position of Western countries regarding the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, this will quite logically have a global projection.

The next step regarding Ukraine was the decision of Taiwan at the end of May 2022 to allocate \$6 million for the recovery of Ukrainian cities from the consequences of the Russian invasion. This was stated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan Joseph Wu in a telephone conversation with the mayor of Kharkiv I. Terekhov (Russia-Ukraine news, May 31, 2022).

It should be noted that such financial support from Taiwan to Ukraine is of a systematic nature. Thus, back in mid-April, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan, Joseph Wu, declared the aid for Kyiv in the amount of \$8 million. He informed about the allocation of funds during a conversation with the mayor of Kyiv V. Klitschko. According to the statement, \$3 million will be sent directly to the Kyiv administration and additional \$5 million will be divided between six local hospitals. According to Joseph Wu, Taiwan and Ukraine are partners that share democratic ideology and are at the forefront of the fight against the spread of totalitarianism (Russia-Ukraine news, April 22, 2022).

Therefore, an open armed confrontation between the USA and the PRC regarding the solution of the "Taiwan issue" currently seems unlikely, and the sharp political statements of the leaders of both the PRC and the USA are an illustration both for the citizens of their countries and for the allies that they are keeping the situation under control and are ready to take all necessary means to achieve their long-term national interests.

The perimeter of the foreign policy actions of the PRC has both certain limitations and certain stimulators. Firstly, China's economic power is currently weaker than that of the USA and its allies. At the present stage, a fairly significant part of the American foreign policy potential is reoriented towards the confrontation with Russia in Europe, in particular in Ukraine, which diverts attention from the mechanism of China's containment in the Asian region. And this, in turn, can be used by Beijing to expand its sphere of influence in the APR. Secondly, the global systemic crisis is likely to create a favorable foreign policy and foreign economic environment for China.

Today's conflict, taking into account the role of the USA in supporting Ukraine, creates the basis for China's dynamic implementation of its "soft power" policy (creating a culturally and economically attractive image of China thanks to the integration of the

countries of the region into a single economic complex with the dominant role of the PRC). An example of this can be the signing of the agreement on the free trade zone (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) on November 15, 2020, opening its capacious market to the countries of the world, thus making the development of their economies dependent on relations with the PRC. Beijing has also stepped up its activities within the RIC (Russia, India, and China) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) integration associations. Beijing is also systematically working to implement the idea of the EU's strategic autonomy from the USA.

Thirdly, the “narrowing” of sales markets in the context of the global crisis will stimulate the policy of the PRC government aimed at the development of the domestic market. Considering the current “Russian experience” with sanctions, the PRC will strive to develop a model of economic sovereignty in case of a collision with the USA and the application of sanctions against it.

Fourthly, China will try to prolong the existence of the Putin's regime. In Russia, which is under sanctions, the number of foreign trade partners in the West has sharply narrowed, which situationally pushes Moscow into the “embrace” of Beijing. On the part of the PRC, the Russian Federation weakened by the sanctions policy will be considered exclusively as a raw material appendage. And this, in turn, will allow Beijing to determine the models and frameworks of bilateral cooperation, thereby making the significant percentage of the filling of the Russian budget dependent on the dynamics of cooperation between the PRC and the Russian Federation. Beijing will gradually and carefully include Russia in its economic orbit: calculations in yuan, promotion to the markets from which Western countries have left. Thus, China's influence on the economy and, accordingly, on the foreign policy course of the Russian Federation will grow.

Fifthly, there is also a potential possibility of an open conflict over the territories of the Russian Far East, which Beijing claimed to be its back in the 19th century. Analyzing the possibility of such a scenario the American political scientist, president and founder of Eurasia Group Ian Bremmer noted the PRC would theoretically attack a weakened Russian Federation with the tacit consent of the USA. But obviously Beijing and Moscow have reached a consensus on this issue and put it in a drawer (Moroney, 2007).

According to the expert, the state of relations between the countries of the world and the PRC is characterized by opportunistic use aimed primarily at economic profit. Although, the role of the Russian Federation in bilateral relations with the PRC is a “secondary one”, since “...the Russian Federation has become a natural junior partner of the PRC, given the fact that both countries are in a geopolitical conflict with the USA” (Moroney, 2007). Beijing is currently getting ample opportunities to use the energy and resource potential of Russia in general, while receiving discounts on raw materials vital to the Chinese economy.

Sixthly, a direct confrontation between the PRC and the USA regarding the resolution of the Taiwan issue is extremely disadvantageous for Ukraine, since it will lead to a shift in the focus of the world community's attention from Ukraine to the APR. In addition, the USA, which has security obligations to the Republic of China in Taiwan, will react quite radically to such development of events, and consequently, it will divert the attention of our state's strategic partner from Russian aggression.

One of the most recent examples of US compliance with the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 is the approval by the US State Department in February 2022 of providing Taiwan with services and sales of equipment for the technical “support, maintenance and improvement” of anti-aircraft missile systems. The agreement is planned to be implemented as part of the maintenance program for the Patriot anti-aircraft missile systems. “The anticipated sale serves the national and economic and security interests of the USA as it contributes to the recipient's ongoing efforts to modernize its armed forces and maintain a credible defense capability. The proposed sale can enhance the recipient's security and will contribute to political stability, military balance, economy and progress in the region”, the US Department of Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in a statement (Taipei economic and cultural representative..., 2022).

The amount of the agreement is \$100 million. And as a result, the deployment of military hostilities between the USA and the PRC will mark the beginning of the Third World War with difficult to predict consequences and results, also taking into account the fact that both countries belong to the nuclear club.

Suffering losses nowadays as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, China is quite logically advocating an end to this armed confrontation, at the same time, this crisis has opened up certain strategic opportunities for the PRC that Beijing can take advantage of in the long term.

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