

China offers to mediate talks between Russia and Ukraine

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On the sidelines of China's annual National People's Congress, Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a lengthy press conference on Monday urging a negotiated end to the war in Ukraine while reaffirming the "iron clad" friendship between China and Russia. His comments come amid mounting pressure from the US and its allies demanding that Beijing condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Wang suggested that China could mediate peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv, saying: "China is prepared to continue playing a constructive role to facilitate dialogue for peace and work alongside the international community when needed to carry out necessary mediation."

The foreign minister also outlined a six-point plan to address the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine as fighting continues and intensifies. No doubt reacting to the deluge of Western media propaganda seizing on the plight of Ukrainian civilians, he said that the provision of aid should "abide by the principles of neutrality and impartiality, and avoid politicising humanitarian issues." He called for the United Nations to be in charge of coordinating relief efforts.

Wang said the Red Cross Society of China would provide Ukraine "with a tranche of emergency humanitarian supplies as soon as possible." The Chinese foreign ministry announced on Wednesday that China would supply a batch of nearly \$800,000 worth of aid, including food and daily necessities. The first shipments had already been sent.

Ahead of an EU-China summit in April, Wang also made a thinly veiled appeal for European powers to distance themselves from Washington and to strengthen ties with Beijing that "are not directed at, dependent on, or subject to third parties." He declared that there were "some forces" that did not want stable China-EU

relations, "so they fabricate the 'China threat,' hype up competition with China, advocate 'systemic rivalry' and even provoke sanctions and confrontation."

China is engaged in a precarious balancing act in the Ukraine crisis. It has refused to line up with the US-NATO war drive by condemning or imposing sanctions on Russia but neither has it fully endorsed Moscow's actions. Beijing has not supported Russian President Vladimir Putin's decree last month recognising the independence of two regions in eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists. It fears that Putin's move sets a dangerous precedent for US intervention to break up China.

At the same time, Beijing has blamed the conflict on the encroachment of the US and NATO into eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, and their refusal to acknowledge Russian national security concerns or guarantee that Ukraine will not become part of NATO. It has called for the international recognition of the national security concerns of all parties—both Russia and Ukraine.

Wang's appeal for closer EU ties with China is directed at marshalling support in Europe for negotiations to end the Ukrainian conflict, in opposition to Washington's determination to escalate the war as a means of weakening and breaking up Russia. While NATO has lined up with the US war drive, there are undoubtedly fears in European capitals, as well as the broader population, about the dangers of a far wider war enveloping Europe.

In an interview on Saturday, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said China had to be the one to mediate, but acknowledged that the EU had yet to ask Beijing to do so. "There is no alternative... it must be China, I am sure of that," he said.

On Tuesday, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a

virtual meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in which he declared he was “pained to see the flames of war reignited in Europe” and called for “maximum restraint” in the Ukraine crisis.

While a statement released after the meeting declared that all three leaders supported “negotiations aimed at a diplomatic solution to the conflict,” it announced no concrete proposal for talks or any agreement for a solution. Germany and France have both delivered weapons to Ukraine and supported EU sanctions on Russia. France has also increased the number of its nuclear-armed submarines on active patrol.

President Xi told the National People’s Congress (NPC) on Sunday: “The world has entered a new era of turbulence and change which makes domestic reform and development a challenging task.” Xi is well aware that China is also facing the mounting threat of war as the US seeks to prevent any challenge to its global dominance as well as a worsening economic crisis as the world economy is plunged into turmoil.

In his report Premier Li Keqiang forecast an economic growth rate of just 5.5 percent for China in the coming year—the lowest in decades and well below the government’s benchmark of 8 percent to ensure high employment and prevent social turmoil. Even this figure is optimistic given the uncertainties posed by the conflict in Ukraine.

The US is already ratcheting up pressure on China. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday accused Beijing of hypocrisy, claiming that it was failing to speak up against Russia. “China speaks often about the sanctity of this principle of sovereignty... [Yet] you have one of its permanent members [Russia] violating that very principle.”

The US, of course, has routinely flouted the national sovereignty of countries through coups and invasions. Its unilateral sanctions against Russia in the Ukraine crisis not only ban American corporations from doing business with Russia, but apply to companies around the world including in China.

On Tuesday, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo warned that the US would take “devastating” action against Chinese companies that defied Russian sanctions. In an interview with the *New York Times*, she declared that the Biden administration could “essentially shut” Chinese enterprises that sold

goods to Russia that were subject to US bans, by cutting them off from American equipment and software needed to manufacture their products.

Even more ominously, the US and its allies have been deliberately intensifying tensions with China over Taiwan. In a manner similar to the stream of propaganda accusing Russia of preparing to invade Ukraine, there has been a steady drum beat of warnings and allegations in the Western media that China could invade Taiwan. At the same time, Washington has strengthened its ties with Taipei even while acknowledging the “One China” policy, under which Taiwan is part of China.

In his media conference, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang lashed out at the US for sowing instability in the region by supporting Taiwan. “The real goal of the US Indo-Pacific strategy is to establish an Indo-Pacific NATO,” he said, referring to Washington’s strengthening of military ties with regional allies and strategic partners. “The US is going to great lengths to engage in zero-sum competition with China and keeps provoking China on issues concerning our core interests.”

Wang also drew a distinction between Ukraine and Taiwan. “Some people, while being vocal about the principle of sovereignty on the Ukraine issue, have kept undermining China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity on the Taiwan question,” he said. “This is a blatant double standard.”

The continuing US threats and provocations against China, despite its current focus on Russia, underscore the very real danger that the rapidly escalating conflict in Europe will quickly spill over into Asia and potentially engulf the world in a war between nuclear-armed powers.



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