



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

China's peace proposal - justification of Russian aggression against Ukraine



Nobody should be misled about China's abstention in the UN General Assembly's vote regarding the condemnation of the Russian aggression against Ukraine on its anniversary.

Outside the UN, China has not been restrained regarding the war in Ukraine, and particularly about its initiator from Moscow. It unquestionably has a patronising attitude towards him.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' document, entitled China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis, has been the high point of the current Chinese offensive approach to this crisis.

Regardless of its 12-point content, the fact that Beijing has taken a proactive move regarding Russian aggression against Ukraine differs from China's traditional restraint on global issues where it has no direct interest.

With this document, China has shown a clear desire to position itself as participating in the resolution of the crisis in Ukraine. This also means that it wants dividends from the future outcome.

Visit to Moscow as an addition to the document

Despite hints that Chinese leader Xi Jinping might make an announcement on the anniversary of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, nothing has materialised.

However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs paper, from the first to the 12th point, bears the signature of Xi's offensive foreign policy orientation, with which he seeks to reshape the global order.

In order to read this document properly, it is necessary to view the context in which it was published. It followed the visit of the chief Chinese diplomat, Wang Yi, to Moscow, and his meeting with Vladimir Putin last Wednesday.

This visit was a typical example of Chinese gesture politics. It came on the anniversary of the start of the Russian aggression, and for that reason alone, it has been a sign of Chinese favour, or at least non-opposition, to what Moscow has been doing in the past year.

The visit should also be interpreted as a counterweight to US President Joe Biden's visit to Kyiv on the occasion of the anniversary of the Russian attack.

Wang Li's visit, and in particular the peace initiative presented in the Chinese document, came at a time of new tensions between Beijing and Washington.

For Beijing, the source of the crisis is in the West

Chinese-US relations, which were on an upward trajectory since the meeting between Biden and Xi at the G-20 summit in Indonesia last November, took a downward turn with the appearance of Chinese spy balloons over the US.

Although both sides, particularly the USA, initially tried not to make it a reason for a new cooling of relations, it happened anyway. It deepened further with China's views on the Ukrainian crisis on the anniversary of its start.

By tone and intent, the paper from Beijing presents itself as an effort and an initiative to move towards peace. That genuinely is its real meaning.

However, the document very clearly pins the sources of the crisis on the West rather than on Russia, and above all, it asks the West (including Ukraine) to make efforts and changes in order to bring peace.

In none of the 12 points does it ask Russia to change its strategy, unless this is concealed in general formulations such as "Conflict and war benefit no one" (item 3).

"Beijing claims to support Ukraine's

sovereignty, but it has not criticised Russia's annexations of Ukrainian territory", Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the US-based German Marshall Fund told The Guardian.

Reacting to the Chinese document, Jake Sullivan, the US National security advisor, expressed a similar assessment. "My first reaction to it is that it could stop at point one, which is to respect the sovereignty of all nations", Sullivan told CNN.

The West has been targeted as the party responsible for the escalation on at least two grounds.

One is very explicitly addressed to NATO. It states that the security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs.

The second, also in the form of criticism, was aimed at the sanctions applied by the West against Russia. The entire content of item 10 consists of a request for the suspension of sanctions. "Unilateral sanctions and maximum pressure cannot solve the issue; they only create new problems".

Supporting the Russian war narrative

The Chinese document strongly supports the Russian war narrative. It places the root of the crisis not in Russian aggression against an independent state, but in Western expansionism, particularly through the enlargement of NATO.

It also supports Russia's insistence that the West be labelled as a direct participant in the war in Ukraine.

Ukraine has been disqualified as an important actor in any future peace initiatives. Everything should be left to Russia and the West, which is what Moscow wants. But also to China, which, with this document, displays a clear ambition to play an important role in the process, expecting benefits from that

participation.

"It's a content-free diplomatic position to take. It says everything and commits to nothing", Michael Auslin, a historian at Stanford University's Hoover Institution told the Wall Street Journal.