

WEBINAR ON THE UKRAINIAN PLATFORM FOR CONTEMPORARY CHINA: "RUSSIAN INVASION AND THE FUTURE OF UKRAINIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS".

On June 23, 2022, the first webinar on the Ukrainian platform for Contemporary China took place, organized by the National Institute of Strategic Studies of Ukraine, A. Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists. The Russian invasion and the future of Ukrainian-Chinese relations were discussed with an emphasis on the following questions:

- What is pursuing China based on its neutral position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine?
- What could be the strategic gains and losses for China from this conflict?
- Does the Taiwan factor influence China's position towards Ukraine?
- How will China's foreign policy towards European countries change after the war?
- How does China see its future relations with Ukraine?
- What is the role of US-China relations in the ongoing conflict?

Leading scientists and experts from Europe, the USA, China, and Ukraine participated in the discussion:

- Thomas Fingar, Professor at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University;
- Viking Bohman, an analyst at the Swedish State Center for China Studies;
- Una Alexandra Berzyna-Cherenkova, director of the Center for Chinese Studies of the Rīga Stradiņš University;
- Liu Yawei, director of the Carter Center's China Program;
- Ivan Us, chief consultant of the foreign economic relations sector of the foreign economic policy department of the National Institute for Strategic Studies;
- Dmytro Yefremov, a board member of the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists, a researcher at the Borys Kurtz Institute of Modern China Studies.

The event was chaired by **Isabel Hilton**, the founder of the "China Dialogue" platform, who emphasized the relevance of the topic due to the "friendship without borders" declared by China and Russia on February 6 of this year and Russia's war against Ukraine two weeks later, as well as China's constant rhetoric - to speak mediator in facilitating peace negotiations.

All participants in the discussion expressed solidarity with the people of Ukraine in the struggle for their freedom and sovereignty and exchanged opinions on the above-mentioned issues.

Thomas Fingar emphasized that China's neutral position regarding the Russian attack on Ukraine stems from its security, economic and political goals. By declaring neutrality, Beijing sought to 1) support its reputation, "save face" and ensure political advantage, taking into account the previously declared close relations with Russia and acting against real and pretended threats from the United States. The declaration of neutrality also explained why China did nothing to protect Ukrainian sovereignty and strategic partnership with Ukraine. 2) Distance

yourself from involvement in the conflict and loss of freedom of maneuver and at the same time call for restraint on both sides. 3) To legitimize his refusal to provide direct assistance to Moscow and avoid possible sanctions against the Chinese economy.

Since China is driven by economic and strategic goals, Beijing will not help Putin save the economy under the threat of Western sanctions, according to the expert. The need to demonstrate an unequivocal position leads China to a loss in the economic and strategic development of relations with the EU and several other partners. Chinese influence in Europe was declining even before the invasion of Ukraine, and it will continue to decline due to the rhetoric of support for Russia. Beijing expected NATO and the EU to distance themselves from the US, but this did not happen, and China's behavior also contributed to this.

According to T. Fingar, the Taiwan factor did not play any role in the formation of China's position towards Ukraine. Beijing's position was based on the fact that Taiwan has always been part of China and has never supported Putin's encroachments on the territory of Ukraine. The development of events in Ukraine reduces the likelihood of a military seizure of Taiwan. China hopes to soften the impact of its pro-Russian rhetoric with its neutral stance and modest humanitarian aid.

China's economic power and considerable experience in infrastructure projects can play a key role in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. China, as well as Russia, are making efforts to build a counterbalance to the US, and for this they are increasing the importance of their friendship, pointing to the threat to their political regimes and national interests. China is insisting that Washington and Europe make concessions and continue to support Chinese development, and in return, they promise to loosen ties with Russia. In other words, China tried to shape its position on Ukraine by blackmailing Western countries with its ties to Moscow. The scientist emphasized that NATO's participation in this conflict, as China has repeatedly pointed out, is aimed at protecting values, not territories. T. Fingar expressed the opinion that Russia does not depend on Beijing and does not coordinate its actions with Beijing. Currently, China is most concerned about the cohesion of the West, which will result in increased regional cooperation without China's participation. The scientist suggested that the successful defense of Ukraine and Russia's military incapacity will stimulate China to rethink its approach to the return of Taiwan in the future.

Ivan Us expressed concern that the war in Ukraine will have a significant impact on global trade and weaken the role of international organizations. According to the expert, China does not receive any bonuses from the conflict in Ukraine, as the main promoter of globalization. Therefore, the position of the People's Republic of China concerning Ukraine may change by distancing itself from Russia. During the discussion, I. Us mentioned the statement of the President of Kazakhstan regarding the non-recognition of the self-proclaimed proxy republics DPR and LPR in the presence of Putin, as an unofficial position of China, which has considerable influence in Kazakhstan. The expert noted that the war in Ukraine brought Europe and the USA closer, but distanced them from China, although the EU is China's largest trading partner.

Dmytro Yefremov emphasized that over thirty years of diplomatic relations, Ukraine and the People's Republic of China have developed agreements in the form of high-level agreements, such as those on strategic partnership and friendship, and cooperation. The expert noted that the USA and the EU influenced Ukrainian-Chinese relations indirectly through industrial standards and the nature of investments. Russian influence on the nature of relations between Ukraine and China was direct, as the annexation of Crimea negatively affected Ukraine's key participation in China's One Belt, One Road initiative, and the occupation of Donbas reduced Ukraine's attractiveness for Chinese investment. According to the expert, "friendship without borders" between China, which is the biggest globalist, and Russia, which has failed to integrate with the liberal world and which is destroying the world order with its aggression, is hopeless and contradictory. China is in a state of struggle for world leadership under the pressure of American sanctions and cannot accept the Ukrainian side in the conflict, as such a position would be considered pro-American. D. Yefremov reminded that there has been no active political dialogue between Ukraine and China for a long time due to the lack of interest from the Chinese side. On the contrary, Russian-Chinese interaction has intensified, which includes joint military exercises.

The scientist noted that China is in no way a beneficiary of this war, because the world's demand for security is increasing, and not for economic development, which is the basis of the Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road". D. Yefremov reminded that Ukraine was considered by China as a country in the zone of influence of Russia. Now China's rhetoric has changed, and Ukraine is characterized by it as an object of US influence. The expert predicts that China's position on Ukraine will be fundamentally revised after Ukraine's victory and its clearer European future. But we should not expect a rapid intensification of bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and China.

In his speech, **Liu Yawei** noted that according to opinion polls, 70% of the Chinese population supports China's official position on the war in Ukraine. The scholar expressed concern that China does not contribute to the defense of Ukraine's sovereignty, although the issue of territorial integrity has always been a fundamental value for China. Liu Yawei disagrees with the view that the war in Ukraine is making Russia dependent on China and predicts that if Putin loses, Russia will try hard to restore ties with the West. The expert emphasizes that China's political system is not autocratic, but one that has managed to overcome poverty and lead to economic prosperity. The Chinese authorities and scholars understand all the possible losses from the war in Ukraine, but there is no reason to change the Chinese position: even after the invasion, the United States continues to point to economic, diplomatic, and technological threats from China. Liu Yawei suggested that the war in Ukraine could unite American and Chinese efforts to end the war, but the United States is not taking the necessary steps to do so. The scholar noted that China will not support the separatists, just as it did not recognize the annexation of Crimea. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated the issue of Taiwan. China is closely watching the actions of the West and NATO toward Russia and believes that this reduces the likelihood of a military attack on Taiwan. The Ukrainian example has inspired the Taiwanese to strengthen their defense strategy. The expert suggested that the United States and possibly other countries are pushing China to invade Taiwan to weaken China, similar to the weakening of Russia. Liu Yawei also emphasized

that the US policy towards China is irrational, because everything Chinese, even Confucius institutions, is seen as a threat.

Una Alexandra Berzina-Cherenkova expressed her view on China's neutral status, which is more anti-American than pro-Russian, but definitely not pro-Ukrainian. The expert emphasized the growing dependence of Russia on China and the building of closer security relations between China and ASEAN. Una believes that China is using the war in Europe to promote its new Global Security Initiative (the so-called Belt and Road), which was discussed by Xi Jinping at the recent BRICS summit, in contrast to the US security architecture. The expert shared the results of her observation that China will be ready to play its role in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Regarding China's relations with Europe, Una noted that China's reputation has only deteriorated since the war, and the Chinese 16+1 initiative is not actually working today. The Lithuanian factor has only added to the negativity in China's relations with Europe.

Viking Bohman examined China's position on the war in Ukraine through the prism of NATO. Since February 24, 2022, the number of critical assessments of NATO's activities has increased significantly in the Chinese media, highlighting the leading role of the United States in NATO and the powerful influence of the United States on further NATO expansion, which causes instability in Europe. The dangerous expansion of NATO into territories adjacent to China could lead to a similar conflict in Asia, as Chinese officials have already stated. The dominant influence of the United States on European countries, according to Chinese experts, has a negative effect and threatens their national security if NATO fails to ensure peace. According to the Chinese side, NATO is only a tool for political influence and enrichment of the United States, as well as a factor in changing the balance of power in Europe, and NATO expansion is a provocation against Russia. This Chinese narrative is completely consistent with the Russian one. The expert suggested that China's position towards Ukraine should not be considered neutral. China did not support Russia's invasion and does not provide military assistance to Russia, but it blames the United States, not Russia, for the conflict. China values its relationship with Russia as an ally in the fight against the United States. Viking believes that the so-called Chinese alliance with Russia only harms China's image in the world. China has now taken the position of an observer. The scholar predicts a deterioration in Sino-European relations and notes that China blames the United States for this.

As a result of the webinar, the participants came to the following conclusions:

1. The Russian-Ukrainian war is harmful to Beijing's interests, which, through its "neutral position," is trying to minimize its losses; China will continue to remain detached and not provide support to Russia, except for diplomatic support, and will try to maintain freedom for political maneuver and demonstrate its strategic sovereignty.
2. China can increase its influence on "third world countries" by blaming the United States for the Russian-Ukrainian war and global instability. China could potentially damage its reputation in the "first world" by supporting Russia, whose position is destructive. The image in

the international arena in the struggle for global leadership is the flip side of China's neutrality and at the same time the point of its greatest vulnerability.

3. The outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war will determine China's policy toward Taiwan in the short term. The likelihood of a successful military scenario for the "return" of Taiwan is objectively decreasing. Beijing will most likely demonstrate its determination to protect its interests in Taiwan by any means necessary to create a reversed vision of the prospects of other players.

4. In the European space, China was attracted by large markets and a solvent population, and the EU's structural and political weakness helped it promote its interests. The restoration of the United States' leadership in the region as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war will weaken China's capabilities and encourage it to seek ways to compensate for its global influence at the expense of other regions of Asia and Africa.

5. The dynamics of European-Chinese relations after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war will have an increased impact on Ukrainian-Chinese relations. China will not unequivocally support Ukraine in the war, as it believes that Ukraine is under unfriendly American influence. Despite its business interest and technical capabilities to participate in postwar reconstruction, Beijing will limit the activity of its representatives in Ukraine, which will be caused by a decline in its interest in the region.

6. China has a neutral position in the Russian-Ukrainian war, which should be considered not pro-Russian, but anti-American. Avoidance of direct support for Russia and the search for ways to maintain friendly relations with Europe indicate that China is not ready for an open confrontation with the United States and continues its previous strategic line of modernization, self-empowerment, and development.