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War in Ukraine

# **Xi, please ask Putin to withdraw his troops**

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**Xi, please ask Putin to withdraw his troops...**

**And honour your promise of “respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations” – a promise first made by China in the 1955 Bandung Conference, where many former colonies in Africa and Asia made their collective voice heard across the world.**

Foreign Minister Wang Yi did mention this in his five points setting out China’s position on the Ukraine issue on the second day of Russia’s invasion. Yet China continues to refuse to recognise that Russia’s action in Ukraine is an invasion. Could this failure in defending both the Bandung and the UN principles be explained by Wang’s second point which reads “given NATO’s five consecutive rounds of eastward expansion, Russia’s legitimate security demands ought to be taken seriously and properly addressed”?

No, it can’t. NATO’s expansion in itself is unjust. It should have disbanded itself a long time ago after the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet Russia has no right to invade Ukraine in response to NATO’s failure. This is the language of imperialists, the doctrine of “might makes right”, not the language of the UN charter, not to mention “socialism” which until today the CCP claims to subscribe to.

And it is counterproductive even with regard to the long term interests of the Russian Empire. For an empire to sustain itself for any length of time, on top of military might it has to develop some kind of cultural hegemony, but this is the kind of resource that Putin could not provide. After his army was bogged down in Ukraine someone made an online picture showing a funny looking sword-waving warrior with the words “Putin’s fatal mistake was to send slaves to liberate free people”. This may be an overstatement but it does capture the feeling not only of Ukrainians but also people around the world. In spite of all the flaws of liberal democracy, it is still a lesser evil when compared to autocracy in general and to Putin’s version in particular. The EU has its own oligarchy but it has to tolerate a vibrant social movement which is a check on it. In contrast, Putin and his oligarchy are free of all restraints, hence his gangs could successfully plunder the country in an amazingly short period of time. But this comes with a price. Putin’s autocracy is invading a sovereign state, one which has repeatedly thrown out its autocrats through protests and elections. This contrast hugely de-legitimises his regime. And doubly so when it is a neighbour of Russia; one which has had such a long intertwining relation with the latter. No wonder his invasion not only triggers strong resistance from Ukraine but also among people across the world. The more the invasion is bogged down the higher risk for Russia.

Just less than a month from the Winter Olympics in Beijing when Xi and Putin met to forge their “partnership of no limits”, the Russian invasion proved that there is a limit for Beijing after all. Despite offering strong propaganda support Beijing until now has practically remained neutral with regard to Putin’s war, and has abstained from the UN’s vote criticising Russia. Its banks even follow the US sanctions on Russia.

If Beijing refrains from directly supporting its Russian partner’s war effort it is only because of its pragmatism – China has long ago integrated into global capitalism and hence has to take warnings from the West very seriously. In the longer term, this may change, however, because in terms of core values Beijing now shares Putin’s idea of nation-building and its arrogance towards smaller nations along their periphery as well. If NATO is evil then any partnership between the present governments of China and Russia would not be anything better.

In his [two speeches](#) (first in July 2021, and then in February 2022) Putin attacked Lenin and his Bolshevik party’s position of self-determination for minorities, including Ukraine, as betraying [the principle](#) that “Russians and

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Ukrainians were one people – a single whole”. In his second speech, he argued that for the Bolsheviks to allow Ukraine independence was “to transfer to newly formed, and often arbitrarily formed, administrative units – union republics – huge territories that often had nothing to do with them at all.”

We do not need to lecture our readers about the fact that all present nation-states have been recent human constructs and are hence “arbitrarily formed” in different degrees. Both the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China fall into this category as well – one after the other they shared the same semi-fictional idea of *zhonghuaminzu* (“the Chinese nation), where Han Chinese is dominant not only in numbers but also in all areas of the state and social power at the expense of the minorities. Where the CCP once differed from the KMT was in the fact that the former had adopted the Bolshevik program of self-determination for the minorities in its first two decades after it was founded in 1921, only abandoning it afterwards. When the PRC was founded in 1949 the party would only allow autonomy for Tibet and Xinjiang and many other minorities. The latter would soon find out that this version of “autonomy” was only meant to be “administrative autonomous”, not anything close to “political autonomy”. Since then circulating Lenin’s writings on self-determination has been a punishable crime. The founder of the Tibetan Communist Party, [Phuntsok Wangyal](#), was thrown into prison for twenty years because of this (and other charges).

For any thinking Chinese person, there could not be any “partnership of no limits” with the successor to Tsarist Russia – the Putin government. Even talking about this is a betrayal of the historic interest of the Chinese who were once victims of Russian imperialism. If the Chinese government has started talking about this, it is only because it also increasingly shares Putin’s idea of empire building, hence its hatred towards any mention of national self-determination.

The most recent example is the party media in Hong Kong [attacking](#) those college students who had launched a signature campaign in support of Ukraine, equating the latter’s support for national self-determination as “anti-China and stirring up trouble in Hong Kong”. Soon this attack was rebutted. A co-thinker of the signature campaign wrote in [an essay](#) that “the college students are neither anti-China nor anti-Russia. What the statement (of the campaign) said is that they stand with all those oppressed by those in power, no matter where the oppressed are – be they in China, or Russia, or the UK, or the US.” The article then goes on to remind the CCP how it once upheld the principle of national self-determinism and since then had betrayed it. No wonder the party has to revise its history on a regular basis so that it has continuous control over the future – precisely what George Orwell foretold.

Source: 20 Mar 2022 [Anti\\*capitalist Resistance](#).

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