

War in Ukraine

China ready to 'play a role' in Ukraine ceasefire

Shift in Beijing's public position comes after call between Chinese and Ukrainian foreign ministers



China's foreign minister Wang Yi. Beijing said it was 'extremely concerned about the harm to civilians' © Michael Sohn/AP

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China signalled it was ready to play a role in finding a ceasefire in Ukraine as it “deplored” the outbreak of conflict in its strongest comments yet on [the war](#).

Beijing said it was “extremely concerned about the harm to civilians” in comments that came after a phone call between Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi and his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba.

“Ukraine is willing to strengthen communications with China and looks forward to China playing a role in realising a ceasefire,” the Chinese statement said on Tuesday.

It added that it respected “the territorial integrity of all countries”, without indicating whether Beijing accepted Russia’s claim to the Crimean peninsula or shared its recognition of separatists in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

The statement marked a change in tone from Beijing. Asked on February 24 if the invasion represented a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty, a spokesperson for Beijing’s foreign ministry characterised the situation as due to “a combination of factors” but did not describe it as a violation.

In the days before the fighting started, the spokesperson also described the US as the “culprit” in the Ukraine crisis, “heightening tensions, creating panic and even hyping up the possibility of warfare”.

Last Friday, China joined the United Arab Emirates and India in abstaining on a UN resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that was supported by 87 other countries. Moscow vetoed the resolution.

At last month’s [Winter Olympics](#), Russia’s president Vladimir Putin met Xi Jinping, his Chinese counterpart, and declared that the friendship between their countries had “no limits” and there were no forbidden areas of co-operation.

Some analysts say China is trying to position itself as a regional peacemaker, leveraging its close ties with the Kremlin.

On Tuesday Beijing repeated previous calls for both sides to find a solution through international negotiations, but it maintained its criticism of Nato, saying that “regional security cannot be achieved by expanding military blocs”.

In a statement, Kuleba said that he had “asked Wang Yi to use the level of relations between Beijing and Moscow to force Russia to stop its armed aggression against the Ukrainian people”.

Kuleba said his Chinese counterpart had assured him “of China’s readiness to make every effort to end the war on Ukrainian soil through diplomacy, including as a permanent member of the UN Security Council”.

Wang also “thanked” Ukraine for its role in facilitating the evacuation of Chinese citizens from the country, including students who were moved to Uzbekistan.