



CNBC – Worldwide Exchange

Corporate advisor Robert Kuhn

on China's role in the crisis in Ukraine

Robert Lawrence Kuhn – March 21, 2022





CNBC ANCHOR BRIAN SULLIVAN:
Robert,
[regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine], what is China's role? What is China's responsibility here?

ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN: China sees itself as a peacemaker. It really didn't want any part of this fight, but it has seen that it cannot avoid being involved.



KUHN: We have to start with China's relationship with Russia because China believes that it needs Russia to counterbalance the US, which China believes seeks to contain its rise; thwart its sovereignty claims, particularly over Taiwan and in the South China Sea; and perhaps even change its party-ruling political system, which President Biden's administration has clearly said that it is not on its agenda. But putting it all together, China has the so-called "no limits" strategic partnership with Russia.



KUHN: Now, that said, China has to deal with two sets of contradictory positions. First, supporting Russia while maintaining its long-term inviolate position on the sanctity of international borders and sovereignty, which has been the core of its foreign policy for decades. Second, supporting Russia while not overtly alienating the US and Europe, which are by far the vast majority of its international trade. But China has been trying to show a neutral position, yet skewing pro-Russian. You can see in the media, repeating some of Russia's disinformation, etc.



KUHN: But in recent days, after the call between Biden and Xi, you see a subtle shift, a course correction, in the narrative. So, China is now talking more about peace, more that its role can be with both sides, that it can help facilitate some sort of peaceful solution.

CNBC ANCHOR: Because, Robert, neutrality right now is the tantamount to acceptance. Is it good? I mean, Russia invaded a peaceful neighboring nation under the guise of, quote, "liberation", 1939 all over again.



KUHN: There's no doubt that China's position has this contradiction built into it. But it is now saying that maintaining its relationship with Russia can actually put China in a position to facilitate some sort of ceasefire, if not a full peace arrangement. Whether that's true and how that works, we'll have to see.



KUHN: But I don't think we will see China backing off its position in terms of its relationship with Russia. It's not just that it needs Russian energy and gas and the long-term commitments that it's made. It really positioned as a bulwark against what it perceives as the US long-term interest in containing China, influencing its sovereignty, human rights criticisms and, in fact, challenging the whole party-led political system. So, China is not going to



CNBC ANCHOR: Robert, sorry to interrupt. As China watches the world's reaction — near universal condemnation of Putin, of course, except for inside of China itself — does it alter their calculus on how they may ultimately perceive Taiwan?

KUHN: It certainly alters their calculus in a nuanced way in recent days, particularly after Biden's phone call with Xi. China has been a great supporter of the UN, and we see overtly 141 nations voting to condemn Russia, 30-some odd nations to abstain, and only three or four other nations to oppose it.



KUHN: So, China was on the vast minority side of that vote in the UN — and China does not like to be in that position because the UN is so important to China's diplomatic affairs going forward on all issues.

Regarding Taiwan, China has been vociferous in trying to distinguish Ukraine from Taiwan and it does that by admitting and stating overtly that Ukraine is a sovereign country, whereas Taiwan, in China's perception, is an internal problem because Taiwan is part of China. So they try to make a distinction, but it is a strain.



<https://www.cnbc.com/video/2022/03/21/corporate-advisor-robot-kuhn-on-chinas-role-in-the-crisis-in-ukraine.html>