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CHINA ECONOMIC CONFLICT  
INDO-PACIFIC AUSTRALIA WAR TRADE MIDDLE EAST JAPAN  
SUKSES ISRAEL

- ASIAN GEOPOLITICS
- RUSSIAN INVASION
- UKRAINIAN FACTOR



## ASIA

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# ASIAN NEUTRALISM, SECURITY, AND THE UKRAINIAN FACTOR

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*Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Envoy  
of Ukraine of the First Class*

*This article deals with the phenomenon of political neutralism in the Asia-Pacific. It focuses on the concepts of fighting for peace, international cooperation, and struggles against the threat of war. It is designed to ensure mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations; non-aggression; non-interference in others' internal affairs; equality and mutual benefits; and peaceful coexistence. The Western presence and the Cold War confrontation persuaded the SEA states to pursue a policy of sub-regional integration, non-alignment, and neutralism. The organisational configuration of this subregional consolidation is to be found in ASEAN. The attitude of the countries of SEA, India and China to Russia's aggression against Ukraine is considered. The position of these countries corresponds to the principles of neutrality.*

## **The Asia-Pacific as the Homeland of Foreign Policy Concepts of “Neutralism” and “Non-alignment”**

Neutralism and non-alignment are associated with the name of the first prime minister of independent India, J. Nehru (1889-1964). He introduced the “geopolitical code” of India, which descended from the ancient traditions of the Indo-Buddhist civilisation. This code included a policy of “positive neutrality”, aimed at fighting for peace, international cooperation, and against the threat of war. It suggested five main principles of international relations: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. On the basis of these principles, following India's initiative, a broad international “Non-Aligned Movement” was established. In Delhi, international conferences were held in 1947 and 1949, with the aim of creating a united front of Asian states, including former

colonies, in countering the dominance in international politics of the countries of the West and the USSR. However, already at this stage, serious disagreements arose on a number of issues. Several countries took a “neutral” position or were more aligned with the communist bloc, – while others were more pro-Western. Thus, already in the early 1950s, the united front of neutral Asian states began to fall apart.

By 1955, the leaders of the Asian states still supported the initiative to create the Non-Aligned Movement, and develop a common international position for Asian and African countries. The same year, an international conference was held in Indonesia, declaring the creation of the “Non-Aligned Movement” and the “Asian and African Solidarity Movement”. At the Conference, a new term was born, “third world”, in relation to countries that declared that they were “not for capitalism and not for communism.” The ideas of non-alignment and neutralism outlived Nehru, but after his death, India lost

its leading role in this movement<sup>1</sup>. The ideas of neutralism and non-alignment continued to exist, finding full implementation mainly in the countries of the “third world” in Asia and Africa. In Europe, these ideas were not implemented due to the clear division between the two opposite camps of the Cold War. The traditional neutrality of Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland is not relevant here, and can be considered as an exception to the rule.

### Non-Alignment Shifts to Southeast Asia

The wide political and military presence of Western countries in the Asia-Pacific, the expansionist policies of China and the USSR, as well as manifestations of confrontation between the two Cold War blocs in the region, persuaded the states of Southeast Asia (SEA) to adopt a policy of integration, non-alignment, and neutralism. That was marked by the creation in 1967 of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which initially included five countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines). The main ideological core was the idea of “Asian neutralism” and anti-communism. At the same time, neutralism did not exclude individual defence agreements with external states, or the modernisation and build-up of their own armed forces; however, it was directed against the active military-political interference of external states, primarily the US, USSR and PRC, as well as attempts by the latter to involve SEA countries in

their conflicts. Although the results in the military-political dimensions of ASEAN were still quite modest, the merits in this area were mainly in the creation of a political community to promote the concept of neutralism<sup>2</sup>, as well as the creation of a “security community” in SEA<sup>3</sup>.

The initiative of sub-regional consolidation and neutralism came from Malaysia, which was aware of pressure from the great powers, primarily from China, which supported the communist resistance within the country, as well as from former metropolis): Great Britain and the US. While the first prime minister of independent Malaysia A. Rahman (1957-1969) pursued a clear pro-Western anti-communist policy and rejected the idea of “non-alignment” (until 1965 Singapore was part of the Federation of Malaysia), the second prime minister, A. Razak (1970-1976) put emphasis on regionalism and “non-alignment”. In 1970, the country became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, calling for the neutrality of SEA for the first time<sup>4</sup>.

After the end of the Vietnam War and the withdrawal of American troops from the region, there was a need to rethink the security strategy and create a neutral SEA. In November, 1971, at the ASEAN Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, a new non-military approach to regional security was proclaimed, the concept of the *Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZPFN)*<sup>5</sup>. Its implementation was intended to fill the security vacuum in the subregion. After five more countries joined

1 R. Mukhaev, Геополитика (*Geopolitics*), Unity Dana, 2007, p. 623.

2 V. Kulagin, Современная международная безопасность (*Modern International Security*), KnoRus, 2012, p. 432.

3 A. Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order*, Routledge, 2009, p. 322.

4 I. Lossovskiy, *Международная политика стран АСЕАН второй половины 20-го – 1-го десятилетия 21-го столетий (International Politics of the ASEAN countries of the second half of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century)*, “Исторична панорама (Historical Panorama)”, # 13, 2011, pp.93-122. And A. Baginda, *Malaysia's Defence & Security since 1957*, Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, 2009, p. 226.

5 1971 *Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration*, 27 November 1971 [https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Transnational\_zone.pdf]

ASEAN by the end of the 1990s, the zone expanded to the size of the entire subregion (with the exception of East Timor, which applied in 2011 to join the Association, and Papua New Guinea, which is an observer in ASEAN). Most of the ASEAN countries at that time adhered to a pro-Western policy, and only Burma (Myanmar) was completely neutral<sup>6</sup>. This “partial” neutrality limited the potential for implementing the *concept of zonal neutrality* in SEA. For its full implementation, it was necessary to obtain security guarantees from the US, China, and the USSR, which in a situation of complex intertwining of national interests and conflicts was a difficult task.


This U-turn in security policy changed the attitude of the non-communist countries of the subregion towards the war in Vietnam, communist China, the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR. The policy of peaceful coexistence began to be openly professed. Diplomatic relations were gradually established with the USSR, China and other socialist countries. Such a change was the reaction of the countries of SEA to the Nixon Doctrine, proclaimed in July, 1969. According to this, the US gradually withdrew its troops from Vietnam and shifted the responsibility for the defence of its allies to the countries themselves, continuing to offer help, but not fighting.

The fall of the Saigon regime in 1975 and the Cambodian crisis of 1978-1981 caused flows of refugees to other regional countries, but also caused the threat of intervention from Vietnam into the territory of Thailand, hence forced states of the subregion to look for new ways of enhancing their security. In search of a new formula, the ASEAN countries concluded that it was necessary to expand cooperation in this area and involve

the extra-regional great powers, primarily China and the USSR, which contributed to the strengthening of regional security<sup>7</sup>.

The end of the Cold War created a security vacuum. Under these conditions, considering the trend of active growth of China, the countries of SEA formulated concepts of deepening regional integration and neutralism, the full implementation of which was aimed at the ASEAN strategy. In 1995, within the framework of the Association, the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty was signed.

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Today, confrontation between the great powers for dominance in SEA continues to be observed. On the one hand, there is the US-Japan strategic tandem, seeking to maintain its position, and limit the expansion of China. On the other, there is China, which seeks to bind the adherence of the countries of SEA more tightly to it, ensuring its dominance and ousting competitors. At the same time, the voice of a third force, the ASEAN countries themselves, is becoming louder. Huge efforts are being made by the most developed ASEAN countries – Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, seeking to integrate the subregional bloc, maintain

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6 A. Baginda, *Malaysia's Defence & Security since 1957*, Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, 2009, p. 226.

7 A. Baginda, *Malaysia's Defence & Security since 1957*, Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, 2009, p. 226.

a multi-vector balance of interests, and keep mutually beneficial relations with the US, Japan and China. Within the framework of such a policy of equidistance, the political elites of the leading ASEAN countries, sensing a threat from China, are increasingly in favour of restoring the balance of power and developing economic ties with Japan, as well as intensifying the American presence in SEA. The latter contributes to security and stability in the subregion, given the challenges posed by the rise of China, Islamic radicalism in the Philippines, Indonesia, and southern Thailand, and energy security concerns. Such a strategy contrasts with the policy of the SEA countries 10-20 years ago, when “Asian unity” and the displacement of the US by creating a single sub-regional market were pursued. Thus, as the expansionist pressure of one of the great powers increases, the countries of the subregion, trying to maintain a strategic balance, create certain advantages for the other side of the regional balance of power. The US has been such a side for the last decade, given the growing distrust of China, which is proportional to the growth of its presence in the subregion<sup>8</sup>.

The model of containment in Europe, which prevented a war, could not prevent armed conflicts in the Asia-Pacific. That is why the political and military elites of the countries of the region put emphasis on strength and individual protection of national interests. This explains the difficulties in shaping collective security structures in the region, as well as in duplicating the European experience. During the Cold War, attempts by the USSR and US to create regional security structures similar to the European

architecture of bloc confrontation failed in the Asia-Pacific. Both great powers built up relations with the countries of the region on a bilateral level<sup>9</sup>.

Difficulties in enhancing security promote the build-up of armaments in the countries of SEA, despite the intensification of subregional integration. Significant work was carried out to ensure the defence of each country individually after the end of the Cold War. The purchase of new modern weapons and military equipment continues to guarantee a high level of security in accordance with regional threats. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)<sup>10</sup>, the last two decades have seen a steady increase in military spending in SEA. In 2010, about USD 30 billion were spent on defence in the states of the subregion, which is 60% more than in 2001. Over the past decades, SEA has experienced the highest growth in military spending among all regions. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, arms imports in the period of 2000-2004 increased by almost 150%, and in 2005-2009 – by more than 720%. Singapore has become the first ASEAN country included in the list of top 10 arms importers since the Vietnam War. Based on 2021 data, SEA countries imported arms worth USD 45.5 billion US dollars, which is 5.2% more than in the previous year.<sup>11</sup>.

This is in line with the global arms race trend, triggered by the growing destabilisation of international relations. Regional conflicts demonstrate the vanity of hopes for international security guarantees, as the Ukrainian case has proved. The best

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8 D. Mosiakov, ЮВА в поисках консолидации и внешнеполитического равновесия (*SEA in search of consolidation of international political balance*), “Азия и Африка сегодня (Asia and Africa Today)”, #8, 2008, pp. 33-36.

9 V. Kulagin, Современная международная безопасность (*Modern International Security*), KnoRus, 2012, p.432.

10 SIPRI-2011, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [[www.sipri.org/yearbook](http://www.sipri.org/yearbook)]

11 SIPRI-2021, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [[www.sipri.org/yearbook](http://www.sipri.org/yearbook)]



protection of sovereignty is strengthening of armed forces. Another geopolitical factor forcing the transition to a self-reliance strategy is the “winding down of the nuclear umbrellas” of the great powers after the end of the Cold War. SEA countries for the most part have a limited military industry of their own and, therefore, increase the import of weapons “just in case”<sup>12</sup>. A country may solve the problem of the security vacuum either by creating (joining an existing) a military-political organisation for collective security, or by possessing its own nuclear weapons. Both are unlikely to be applicable to the countries of SEA.



***ASEAN countries have closer and more developed relations with Russia than with Ukraine.***

***Russia for them is a great power with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, rich in raw materials, and an important supplier of weapons***

The key ASEAN norms and principles are as follows: non-use of force and the peaceful settlement of disputes; regional autonomy (minimising outside intervention in SEA), and collective self-reliance; the doctrine of non-interference in internal affairs; rejection of an ASEAN military pact and the preference for bilateral defence cooperation<sup>13</sup>.

## **The Ukrainian Factor in Asian Neutrality**

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, and especially the full-scale military invasion in 2022, revealed obvious differences and special approaches among ASEAN countries to the largest war in Europe after World War II. ASEAN countries have closer and more developed relations with Russia than with Ukraine. Russia for them is a great power with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, rich in raw materials, and an important supplier of weapons. In November 2018, at the ASEAN-Russia summit, a statement was signed on the establishment of a strategic partnership between the parties. In October 2021, the Comprehensive Action Plan for the implementation of the strategic partnership for 2021-2025 was adopted<sup>14</sup>. Such a level of relations and a significant trade turnover, including in the military-technical sphere, prevented the countries of the subregion from outright condemnation of Russia’s aggression. However, on 3 March 2022, ASEAN foreign ministers expressed their deep concern over the military actions and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine, and called for a ceasefire and continued political dialogue<sup>15</sup>.

On 12-13 May 2022, the US-ASEAN summit was hosted in Washington, D.C., following which the US President and the leaders of the Association countries issued a

12 S. Kortunov, Дialeктика национальной и международной безопасности: некоторые методологические проблемы (*Dialectic of National and International Security: Some Methodological Problems*), “Полит. Политические исследования (Polis. Political Studies)”, #1, 2009, pp. 7-28.

13 A. Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order*, Routledge, 2009, p. 322.

14 *The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) is aimed at implementing mutually beneficial cooperation for the period 2021-2025 between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Russian Federation*, ASEAN, 28 October 2021 [<https://asean.org/comprehensive-plan-of-action-cpa-to-implement-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-and-the-russian-federation-strategic-partnership-2021-2025/>]

15 *ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Statement Calling For A Ceasefire In Ukraine*, ASEAN, 3 March 2022 [<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ASEAN-Foreign-Ministers-Statement-calling-for-Ceasefire-in-Ukraine-EN.pdf>]

joint statement on the importance of an immediate end to the conflict in Ukraine. The statement notes that the countries supported the efforts of the UN Secretary General aimed at finding “a peaceful way out of the situation and creating conditions that allow the conflict to be resolved ... Called for peace and noted the importance of practical steps to achieve it”<sup>16</sup>.

Singapore made the toughest statement against Russia, strongly condemning the “unprovoked invasion”, and stating the need to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine<sup>17</sup>. Singapore and Cambodia, which chairs the Association in 2022, co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Singapore also imposed unilateral sanctions against Russia, which had previously been applied by this country only once, in 1978, after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. In addition to the suspension of flights and restrictions on financial transactions with a number of Russian banks and organisations, Singapore has introduced export controls on items that can be used as weapons.

A similar position was expressed by the key US ally in the subregion – the Philippines. During the emergency session of the UNGA on 28 February 2022, Manila

openly condemned the invasion of Ukraine. President R. Duterte declared full support and readiness, within the framework of allied obligations, to provide the military infrastructure of the Philippines for the deployment of US troops if the armed conflict spreads to Asia.<sup>18</sup>

Indonesia, which chairs the G-20 this year, has not considered the request of Western leaders to cancel the invitation to President Putin for the November summit of the G-20 in Bali, even under the threat of a boycott. The invitation to the Ukrainian President to take part in the summit, and the visit of the president of Indonesia J. Widodo to Kyiv and Moscow on 29-30 June 2022, became an obvious manifestation of the traditional neutrality and balanced approach professed by this country and, to one degree or another, by all ASEAN countries<sup>19</sup>.

Other ASEAN countries have shown greater restraint, confining themselves only to words of concern and the importance of respecting territorial integrity. At the same time, only Vietnam and Laos abstained from voting on UNGA Resolution ES-11/1 on 2 March 2022 “Aggression against Ukraine”, condemning Russia. Eight other ASEAN countries supported the resolution. The same two countries voted against suspension of Russia’s membership of

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16 A. Murphy, *The 2022 U.S.-ASEAN Summit. A New Era in Relations?* The National Bureau of Asian Research, 23 May 2022 [<https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-2022-u-s-asean-summit-a-new-era-in-relations/>]

17 *MFA Press Release: Remarks by Minister for Foreign Affairs K Shanmugam, 2nd Minister for Foreign Affairs Grace Fu, SMS for Foreign Affairs Masagos Zulkifli and SPS for Foreign Affairs Sam Tan in Parliament during the Committee of Supply Debate on 5 March*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, 5 March 2022 [<https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2014/03/MFA-Press-Release-Remarks-by-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs-K-Shanmugam-2nd-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs>]

18 The reaction of individual countries of SEA to the war in Ukraine is shown in more detail in: F. Kudrin, *Як українсько-російська війна випробує єдність Південно-Східної Азії (How the Ukrainian-Russian war tests the unity of Southeast Asia)*, “Український ТИЖДЕНЬ (Ukrainian WEEK)”, 11 May 2022 [<https://tyzhden.ua/World/254927>]

19 T. Matiash, Президент Індонезії запросив Зеленського особисто взяти участь у саміті G20 (*The President of Indonesia invited Zelensky to personally participate in the G20 summit*), “LB.UA”, 29 June 2022 [[https://lb.ua/news/2022/06/29/521624\\_prezident\\_indonezii\\_zaprosiv.html](https://lb.ua/news/2022/06/29/521624_prezident_indonezii_zaprosiv.html)]

the UN Human Rights Council, while the Philippines and Myanmar voted in favour, and the other six countries of the association abstained. This discrepancy between the countries of the subregion is explained by the different levels of trade, economic and military cooperation (Russian weapons import) with Russia, as well as by the communist ideology of the regimes in Vietnam and Laos.<sup>20</sup>



***Singapore made the toughest statement against Russia, strongly condemning the “unprovoked invasion”, and stating the need to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine***

However, none of the countries of the subregion provided Ukraine with the much-needed weapons they now have in sufficient quantities<sup>21</sup>. In addition, in mid-July, the US Department of the Treasury named Singapore among 18 countries through which the export of sanctioned goods to Russia and Belarus continues<sup>22</sup>.

India’s position on the war in Ukraine is based on its traditional principles of neutrality. The Russian-Ukrainian war negatively affects the balance of power in the region. India cannot

unequivocally support the West, because this would lead to a confrontation with China, for which New Delhi does not feel ready. The similarity of views on the future of the world (a multipolar world with spheres of influence) determines New Delhi’s desire to maintain relations with Russia, while it does not actually support Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. India would not benefit from the weakening of Russia to the status of a junior partner of China, since this would change the already asymmetric balance of power in the region in favour of the latter. It wants to preserve its strategic autonomy, and prevent the US or China from monopolising their global influence. The support of one of the parties would mean undermining the balance of power, so a change in New Delhi’s neutral position towards the Russia-Ukraine war is unlikely.

Although India has become noticeably closer to the US in the last decade, it is nevertheless not ready to give up close relations with Russia. At the same time, it will not openly support Russia, inter alia due to the rapprochement of Moscow with Pakistan and China. India’s neutral position does not imply support for the Kremlin’s actions in Ukraine, as it constantly emphasises the need to comply with international law. However, India has not joined Western sanctions against Russia. Favourable neutrality in relation to Russia has put India in a fairly advantageous position: each of the great powers (the US,

20 Y. Pрурик, *Позиція держав-членів АСЕАН щодо російської агресії в Україні та її економічні наслідки для країн регіону (Position of the ASEAN member-states on Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and its economic consequences for countries of the region)*, Інститут всесвітньої історії НАНУ (The World History Institute of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine), 2022 [https://ivinas.gov.ua/viina-rf-proty-ukrainy/pozytsiia-derzhavchleniv-asean-shchodo-rosiiskoi-ahresii-v-ukraini-ta-ii-ekonomichni-naslidky-dlia-krain-rehionu.html]

21 *Indonesia president to visit Ukraine, Russia on peace-building mission*, “REUTERS”, 26 June 2022 [https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesia-president-visit-ukraine-russia-peace-building-mission-2022-06-26]

22 US Department of the Treasury, 28 June 2022 [https://www.fincen.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/FinCEN%20and%20Bis%20Joint%20Alert%20FINAL.pdf]

Russia, and China) is trying to win it over to its side. Maintaining strategic autonomy in foreign policy allows the country to manoeuvre between different poles. The neutrality that India has adopted in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war is based on the calculation that strong ties with Russia will help balance China and contain Pakistan. In Indian politics, the historical parallels of traditional friendship with the USSR are also still alive, from which Russia inherited not only political and psychological associations, but also the role (albeit weakening) of an important supplier of weapons<sup>23</sup>.

As relations with the West are worsening due to the aggression against Ukraine, the Russian regime seeks to deepen its strong relations with China in an attempt to reduce the impact of Western sanctions. Russia hoped to get an ally which would approve its policy, “turning a blind eye” to its military aggression, and which would provide military and financial support. However, the reality was not so rosy for Moscow. Even at the beginning of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, China declared that it supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and suggested a plan for resolving the conflict, expressing its readiness to become a mediator. However, the Chinese initiative was not followed up.

In early March of 2022, as a result of significant military defeats, the Russian side turned to China with a request for military assistance<sup>24</sup>. On 1 April 2022 the EU-China summit was held, during which the European side initiated a discussion of China’s position regarding the war in Ukraine. As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China published a press release in which the position of Beijing was presented. Regret was expressed about the situation in Ukraine, and assurances were made that China always stands on the side of peace<sup>25</sup>. The international community was called upon to satisfy the legitimate security interests of all parties, create favourable conditions for peace negotiations, and not add fuel to the fire. As a result of the work done by the EU and the USA, Russia did not receive a positive response from China to its request for the provision of weapons<sup>26</sup>. Although China has not declared its support for Western sanctions against Russia, a number of its steps testify to the fact that they share the concerns of the West regarding the threats caused by the Russian aggression. However, Beijing abstained from voting on the UNGA Resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and voted against the exclusion of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. Such duplicitous behaviour of China may indicate its neutrality in relation to the war in Ukraine<sup>27</sup>.

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23 N. Butyrskya, *Дешева нафта кров'ю не пахне (Cheap oil does not smell like blood)*, “Дзеркало Тижня (Mirror of the Week)”, 24 June 2022 [<https://zn.ua/ukr/international/desheva-nafta-krovju-ne-pakhne.html>]

24 *Russia Asked China for Military and Economic Aid for Ukraine War, U.S. Officials Say*, “New York Times”, 13 March 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/13/us/politics/russia-china-ukraine.html>]

25 *China on the right side of history over Ukraine war, foreign minister says*, “Reuters”, 20 March 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-right-side-history-over-ukraine-war-foreign-minister-2022-03-20/>]

26 *Beijing chafes at Moscow's requests for support, Chinese officials say*, “Washington Post”, 02 June 2022, [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/06/02/china-support-russia-ukraine/>]

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According to Chinese experts<sup>28</sup>, neutrality is crucial for China not only from the point of view of protecting national interests, but also for ensuring stability in the world. China's neutrality in the Ukraine issue, which the Chinese side defines as "objective and impartial"<sup>29</sup>, is quite evident due to the fact that both Russia<sup>30</sup> and Ukraine<sup>31</sup> are its strategic partners. This neutrality is fundamental to ensure a balanced and durable security for all parties. A recent study in China showed that 30% of respondents support Russia's "special military operation", 20% are on the side of Ukraine, and 40% remain neutral<sup>32</sup>. China's principled neutrality can be considered quite favourable for Ukraine, since Beijing is seen in Russia as the main factor in the question of its survival in the confrontation with the West.

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