

TOP NEWS

Proxy war: Smaller countries 'should not be forced to take sides'

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get dragged into conflicts and "make empty promises to small countries, turn small countries into their pawn and even use them to fight proxy wars".

"A NATO commitment of no eastward expansion could have easily ended the crisis and stopped the suffering. Instead, (they) chose to fan the flames at a safe distance," Le said at a symposium on March 19.

With regard to the refugee crisis, the G7 foreign ministers said in a joint statement on Thursday that "over 4.2 million crossed the border to other countries, almost all of them to the EU and the Republic of Moldova".

"Now that Ukraine has suffered as a proxy, the US and NATO will be even more deplorable and immoral if they continue offering weaponry to Ukraine and make the nation suffer at the forefront for any longer," said Wu Xinbo, dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Washington and NATO are the initiators of this crisis, and its resolution requires their engagement with Russia, not scorching Ukraine, Wu said.

Anatol Lieven, a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a US think tank, and a former foreign affairs correspondent, said he is "extremely worried" about the proxy war that disregards "the number of Ukrainian lives — like Afghan lives in the past — that were thrown away in the course of this struggle".

"It's quite clear that there are elements in both Washington and London who do want to use this as Afghanistan was used in order to weaken Russia eventually," he said in an MSNBC television broadcast on March 24.

In sharp contrast to the US, Chi-

na's consistent objection to waging proxy wars stems from its decades-old core diplomatic belief of "no intervention in other country's internal affairs", not to mention allowing other countries to meddle in China's domestic affairs, observers said.

"More than 30 years after the end of the Cold War, such a geopolitical tragedy taking place in Europe now deserves our profound reflection," Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, said at a UN Security Council briefing on Ukraine on Tuesday.

"Small and medium-sized countries should not be pushed to the forefront of confrontation between great powers. All countries have the right to decide their foreign policy independently, and should not be forced to take sides," he said.

China has never engaged in proxy wars nor has it sought so-called spheres of influence, and it opposes power politics and bloc confrontation, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Gambian Foreign Minister Mamadou Tangara in Islamabad, Pakistan, on March 23.

China stands for equality among all countries regardless of their size, and it advocates the democratization of international relations, Wang added.

"Another reason behind Beijing's high alert against Washington's frequent waging of proxy wars worldwide is that a potential proxy war is what some hawkish individuals and groups back in the US are expecting to take place in China's neighborhood," said Yuan Zheng, deputy director of the Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Choosing Ukraine as a proxy to receive massive military assistance and stoking conflict with another major country are not new tactics, as the US and some of its NATO allies have also been doing similar things in the Asia-Pacific region, Yuan said.

on a no-fly zone has ruined the country. It also made global nuclear nonproliferation more difficult because it happened shortly after Libya gave up its nuclear weapons program.

The same can be said of NATO's months of bombing in former Yugoslavia in 1999, which led to the deaths of many civilians, including the missile strike that hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese nationals.

NATO has not apologized or shown any remorse for its crimes in Libya and former Yugoslavia, despite the criticism by various rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Arab Organization for Human Rights.

It was not the first time that Stoltenberg has tried to find an excuse for NATO to extend its role to the Asia-Pacific region as part of the US effort to contain China. But his remarks on Thursday were futile, trying to confuse right and wrong.

The author is chief of China Daily's EU Bureau in Brussels. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Conflicts: NATO shows no remorse

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Stoltenberg said that "for the first time, it (NATO) must also take account of how China's growing influence and coercive policies affect our security".

But it was the US that has been constantly coercing countries to choose sides or face the consequences of its military, economic and financial bullying power.

China's track record in war and peace has been laudable, despite Stoltenberg's smearing and fear-mongering. China has not engaged in any war since the brief border war with Vietnam in 1979.

In sharp contrast, NATO is not at all a defense alliance as Stoltenberg claimed. The bombing and regime change in Libya conducted by NATO and several of its member states in 2011 by abusing a UN Security Council resolution



Water crisis

Villagers gather to draw water from a well being replenished on Saturday by a tank truck in Mumbai, India. Women along with their children have to hurry to draw water each day before the supply runs out. Many schoolchildren are unable to continue with classes because of the routine. A rise in temperature over the past few weeks has caused concern that the situation could worsen.

PRATIK CHORGE / GETTY IMAGES

Shanghai starts 3-zone epidemic control system

Dynamic zero-COVID strategy remains best option, experts say

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Shanghai began implementing a three-zone epidemic control system on Monday that categorizes communities based on the level of COVID-19 infections, which will allow some residents restricted movement.

The city, which has been under lockdown, released a list of more than 17,600 communities based on the latest citywide nucleic acid test results that were available on Monday morning. The list will continue to be updated in accordance with the categorized epidemic control system.

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Communities were categorized into three types of zones: lockdown (7,624 communities); controlled (2,460); and precautionary zones (7,565). District governments have begun releasing the status of communities via social media platforms such as WeChat.

Lockdown zones refer to neighborhoods that have reported new infections in the previous seven days, and residents are required to stay at home for a week under closed-loop management.

Controlled zones refer to neighborhoods where no infections were reported in the previous week. Residents are allowed to retrieve food deliveries or take a walk at designated spots at staggered hours within the compound.

Precautionary zones are communities that have not reported infections over the past 14 days. Residents can leave their neighborhood but must stay within their

"We've taken strict measures in order to think about the big picture of the entire country ... to get back to normal in the long term."

Liang Wannian, head of the National Health Commission's COVID-19 task force

subdistrict, and they are encouraged to limit their movement.

Gu Honghui, deputy secretary-general of the Shanghai municipal government, said the categorization list is subject to changes based on infection situations in communities, and the government will update and publish it regularly.

"Our principle, as always, is to strive to minimize the impact of the epidemic on residents' daily lives," he said at the daily briefing on the city's epidemic control situation.

As the spread of the virus through the city is still at a high level, residents in precautionary zones are also advised to avoid unnecessary activities outside their homes and to continue working remotely, Gu said.

Shanghai registered 26,087 COVID-19 local infections, including 914 confirmed cases, on Sunday. The daily number of newly reported infections in the city has surpassed 20,000 for four consecutive days.

Liang Wannian, head of the

National Health Commission's COVID-19 task force, said on Sunday that epidemic control measures such as lockdowns may cause temporary inconveniences, but they are necessary in the long term.

"Take Shanghai, for example. We've taken strict measures in order to think about the big picture of the entire country, including the municipality itself, to get back to normal in the long term," he said.

The city's health authority said that more than 3,000 people who tested positive for COVID-19 were released from medical observation on Sunday after recovering. It was the highest number of COVID-19 patients released in a single day, since the current outbreak started in March.

Jiang Rui, director of the Shanghai Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau, said transportation of recovered patients is adhering to strict closed-loop management protocols.

"Recovered individuals must undergo seven days of self-health monitoring at home, refrain from going out, stay in a well-ventilated room separate from their family members if possible, and avoid close contact with them," she said.

Hu Bijie, who is on the expert team for COVID-19 medical treatment in Shanghai, said there was no evidence showing that recovered patients were spreading the virus.

"Even though there are reports at home and abroad that recovered COVID-19 individuals showed varying degrees of testing positive again, we have found that they haven't caused infections in the surrounding population," said Hu, who is also director of Shanghai Zhongshan Hospital's department of infectious diseases.

Zhong Nanshan, a prominent respiratory expert and an academicien of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said on Friday that some countries have decided to coexist with the novel coronavirus due to the Omicron variant's relatively milder symptoms and lower fatality rate, but the strain can lead to many deaths if antiviral restrictions are entirely lifted in China.

"Completely opening up does not fit China's situation," he said. "In China, we should stick to the dynamic zero-COVID strategy and ease policies gradually in the future."

On Sunday, Liang, head of the National Health Commission's COVID-19 task force, also stressed that for now the full implementation of the dynamic zero-COVID strategy will bring the best outcomes at the lowest cost.

As the novel coronavirus will likely acquire more dangerous mutations in the future, adhering to the dynamic zero-COVID strategy remains the best option for China, including for Shanghai, Liang said.

Omicron unlike flu

"The recent round of outbreaks driven by the Omicron variant should not be handled as a flu epidemic," Liang said during an interview. "It spreads faster and in a more covert way than the flu virus, increasing the danger of causing a large-scale transmission."

The overall fatality rate of Omicron is higher than that of seasonal flu, he said. Among people age 80 and older, its mortality rate jumps to 10 times higher than that of the flu.

Zhang Wenhong, head of the infectious disease department at Fudan University's Huashan Hospital in Shanghai, also called for more attention to be given to protecting the most vulnerable groups during the epidemic.

Global data has shown that elderly people who have not been vaccinated are the group most vulnerable to COVID-19, he said in an article published by People's Daily on Saturday.

Wang Xiaoyu in Beijing contributed to this story.

Caoxian county's specialized coffins prove popular in Japan

Editor's Note: This series of stories looks at local enterprises in specialized sectors that have a share in global markets.

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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At a spacious workshop, a woman concentrates on carving a phoenix on a wooden side panel of a coffin to be shipped to Japan. In front of her are dozens of carving tools of different sizes and shapes.

The woman, who is in her 40s, has worked as a wood carver for more than 20 years at Yunlong Wood Carving Co in Caoxian county of Heze, a city in East China's Shandong province.

"Japanese people see the coffin as the last gift given to the deceased by the living. Our workers respect their goodwill, so they are careful when they make every part of the coffin," said Li Ruiqi, founder of the company.

The coffins, which weigh 25 kilograms, are made of paulownia



A worker packages a coffin for export at a wood craft company in Caoxian county, Shandong province, in June. GUO XULEI / XINHUA

wood, "which is light and easy to burn (during cremation). The Japanese people prefer paulownia wood for coffins, making our products popular in the country's market," he said.

Caoxian is among the major paulownia processing bases in China, as well as a major board processing base, which has helped the county to

become the biggest coffin producer in the Japanese market.

Li said that coffins produced in Caoxian account for 60 to 70 percent of all coffins sold in Japan.

The county, which is home to 1.38 million people, now has over 3,000 enterprises that work on wood processing — including board processing, wood artwork

and furniture — and provide jobs for one-fourth of its population, according to statistics from the county's commerce bureau.

Exports of wood products such as furniture and handicrafts account for 60 percent of the county's total exports and have been sold to more than 100 countries and regions, the bureau said.

Li's grandfather and father had been involved with wood processing, including making coffins, for years before they started to make wood panels in 1995 for Japanese traders, who in turn made them into coffins. Five years later, the company started to make complete coffins for the Japanese market.

"Due to the high labor costs in Japan, Japanese companies started to buy whole coffins from China," said Li.

The high-quality coffins have resulted in an increasing number of orders for Li's company, which sold more than 300,000 coffins last year, compared with the 10,000 sold in 2000, according to Li.

Given the slump in the traditional wood board processing industry, several wood processing companies

in Caoxian have turned to expanding their sales to Japan with coffin production. For example, Heze Dehong Woodwork Co sold 220,000 coffins to Japan in 2020, according to company figures.

Care is taken to avoid any defects, Li said. For example, the hinge on the small window on a coffin that is designed so people can pay respect to the deceased should not make a sound when the window is opened and closed, as any sound would be considered disrespectful to the deceased, Li said.

The businesses spend time conducting research on Japanese culture and habits.

Li had sent his son to study in Japan for four years. Now the young man oversees the artistic design of coffins for Li's company.

Companies offer a variety of choices, including carved coffins, leather-covered ones and coffins with lace.

Coffin manufacturing companies are also making renovations to meet customers' demands. They have developed unique themes, including coffins with a cherry blossom pattern.

