

From Strategic Adjustment to Normative Learning? Understanding China's Peacekeeping Efforts in Africa

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, Chinese armed forces have been increasingly exposed to the global norms of UN peacekeeping, not least through expanded participation in international peacekeeping operations. As the largest Security Council permanent member troop contributor, more than four fifths of Chinese troops in UN peacekeeping operations are deployed in Africa. As such, China is increasingly in a position to strengthen peacekeeping operations, contribute to stability, security, and security sector reform in Africa, and expand its regional multilateral military cooperation, all of which raises the prospects for China to become more integrated in the international community and a responsible, and responsive, major power. Given these important developments and their implications for the future of peacekeeping in Africa, this paper seeks to: identify the key determinants that undergird China's evolving foreign policy approach toward peacekeeping principles and praxis in Africa; ascertain the degree and trace the process in which increasing interactions between China, the African Union, and the broader international community have led Chinese policy elites to consider greater flexibility in their views toward sovereignty and the changing nature of peacekeeping; assess how a rising China may exert its influence through its expanding role in peacekeeping; and analyze the strategic implications of these security developments for Africa.

Keywords

China; African Union; peacekeeping; conflict resolution; socialization; strategic adaptation

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Introduction

Relations between China and its African partners have become increasingly institutionalized, encompassing a wide range of political, economic, socio-cultural and military ties. In the words of Chinese and African leaders, both sides are working to ‘further deepen a new type of strategic partnership.’¹ To be sure, China’s expansive engagement in the African continent has drawn much commentary and international interest in recent years. It has raised the prospects across Africa that China will contribute to new opportunities and greater stability in the continent, strengthen African capacities to combat poverty and development issues, and help integrate Africa more deeply into the global economy. At the same time, China’s policy in Africa has also presented nettlesome policy issues and complex implementing challenges that it will increasingly confront in the future.

China’s presence in Africa thus raises an interesting puzzle in international relations: its uncritical embrace of rogue regimes and problem states in Africa poses serious security challenges, yet China is also increasingly invested in Africa’s peace and stability, deploying troops to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations across the continent and contributing to the African Union’s Standby Force. To date, China is the largest contributor of UN peacekeeping troops among the permanent members of the Security Council, and four fifths of its current deployments are supporting peacekeeping operations and playing a critical role in conflict resolution in Africa. In other words, how do we make sense of this dichotomy and seemingly contradictory behavior and change in China’s foreign and security policy toward Africa?²

This paper is an attempt to address the aforementioned puzzle and draws from socialization theory to provide an explanation for how and why Chinese foreign policy behavior and preferences in Africa, particularly on its peacekeeping efforts, have evolved from Realpolitik to Idealpolitik terms. The change and continuity in China’s peacekeeping policies are

¹ From the ‘Declaration of the Sharm-el-Sheikh Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)’, 4th Ministerial FOCAC Conference, November 9, 2009, available at <http://www.focac.org/eng/dsjbjzjhy/hywj/t626388.htm>.

² David Shinn, ‘Military and Security Relations: China, Africa, and the Rest of the World’, in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *China into Africa: Aid, Trade, and Influence* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), pp. 162–163; Ian Taylor, *China’s New Role in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Christopher Alden and Dan Large, ‘China’s Exceptionalism and the Challenges of Delivering Difference in Africa’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 20, no. 68, 2011, pp. 21–38.

inevitably tied to China's broader political, economic, security interests in Africa and globally, which are increasingly complex and variegated. One key observation put forward in this article is that where China has decided to uphold global norms or is perceived to be constrained by certain normative structures, there are instances of a more cooperative behavior on China's part. However, there are limitations. On such important issues as human rights and arms sales in Africa, China can and should do more to live up to international expectations and adhere more closely to international norms. As such, given China's emerging role in the international community and its increasingly socialized behavior, it has yet to consistently demonstrate how far and for what purposes a rising China will exert its influence in the conduct of international affairs. Moreover, whether these changes in its normative behavior will reverse is still unclear. The socialization process is therefore continuously at work as China deepens its peacekeeping engagement in Africa in the coming years. The persistence of Realpolitik considerations and concerns about preserving state sovereignty has been moderated in certain instances, and this is seen in the changes in its definitions of interest or by linking Realpolitik interests to other values such as image, reputation, and status.³ China has quickly realized that its peacekeeping efforts in Africa will become an important stage where its image as a responsible global actor is forged.⁴ At this early and uncertain stage of the debate, however, its definitive role in Africa's security remains largely indeterminate and would thus merit continued and more nuanced observation.

A Brief Survey of the Theoretical Debate

The current literature on peacekeeping, sovereignty, and intervention's significance in international politics contains contrasting arguments in

³ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) and Shogo Suzuki, 'Seeking Legitimate Great Power Status in Post-Cold War International Society: China's and Japan's Participation in UNPKO', *International Relations*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp. 45–63.

⁴ See Stefan Staehle, 'China's Shifting Attitude Towards UN Peacekeeping Operations', *The China Quarterly*, no. 195, 2008, pp. 631–55; Chin-Hao Huang, 'Peacekeeping, Sovereignty, and Intervention: China' in Emilian Kavalski (ed.), *Chinese Foreign Policy* (London: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 337–349; Bates Gill and Chin-Hao Huang, *China's Expanding Role in Peacekeeping*, Stockholm: SIPRI, 2009; International Crisis Group, 'China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping', Brussels, 2009.

explaining state variances in behavior on peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. The broader realist paradigm posits that there are unchanging and determinative realities about the international system that constrain state behavior. Because of the anarchic environment, there is a constant Realpolitik struggle among self-interested, power maximizing, zero-sum and relative-power concerned states. States with growing capabilities and military assets will thus be more likely to expand their national self-interest and take part in peacekeeping operations to demonstrate their power-projection capacity. This may help explain China's limited participation in peacekeeping operations in the 1980s, however, structural realist arguments cover only half the story and do not fully explain the complexity and dynamic shifts, particularly its expanding participation in peacekeeping operations in both quantitative and qualitative terms in the last two decades.

These variations seem to indicate that there are factors beyond material power at stake, such as ideational variables and the role of cultural contingency of power and interests. Realism assumes that Realpolitik impulses driving state behavior are innate, not learned. Equally problematic is its underlying assumption that states can only be homogenized or socialized toward Realpolitik norms of behavior, and that non-Realpolitik behavior (e.g., cooperative behavior) is by and large ruled out.⁵ The variations in Chinese peacekeeping behavior since the 1990s, however, seem to indicate that China's self-image and identity is changing. As such, in its quest for legitimate great power status, Chinese policymakers can be socialized into or out of perceptions of the world as competition for power and influence in an anarchic environment.

Rational choice theorists posit that variations in any state's stance can be largely attributed to shifts in the manner in which national leaders attempt to realize fairly static interests. When decision-makers are confronted with clearly articulated material incentives to compromise sovereignty's role in international politics, they tend to adjust their preferences accordingly.⁶ Similarly, neo-liberal institutionalists see institutions as important information-gathering venues that help filter preferences and alter cost-benefit calculations that lead to different types of policy outcomes.⁷ These explanations,

⁵ See Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).

⁶ Stephen Krasner, 'Compromising Westphalia', *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1995, pp. 611-637.

⁷ Andrew Moravcsik, 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics', *International Organization*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1997, pp. 513-553.

to a certain degree, account for China's varying positions on the sovereignty-intervention dynamic, but they tend to downplay or even ignore the social origins, content, and construction of state preferences. Where exactly do these preferences come from and how do state leaders capitalize on them in policy debates? The absence of a careful process-tracing exercise in which state preferences change provides a half-baked assessment of how and why states might change their policy preferences and behavior.

A more encompassing assessment of and explanation for China's changing behavior on peacekeeping operations can be attributed to the increasing salience of new boundary-transgressing normative structures and transnational identity constructs that have been redefining the way in which decision-makers think about the balance between sovereignty and intervention.⁸ In other words, ideational factors matter in the sense that sovereignty's foundational role in international relations was created and sustained over time through the processes of increasing social interaction and influence between states within the system. More recently, the emerging international norms behind humanitarian intervention have also gained increasing acceptance among Chinese decision-makers – a process Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink have termed norms diffusion and social learning – and have led to more flexible interpretations of sovereignty's role in international politics and by extension participation in peacekeeping operations.⁹

The process of socialization and constructivist ontology thus hold that continuous social interaction between states and international institutions can, over time, lead to changing social structural contexts that in turn influence and shape states' identity and interest.¹⁰ Preferences and state behavior can thus change and vary – from cooperative to disengagement – and depend largely on the normative social context and the strategic culture to which the state is socialized to achieve security.¹¹

⁸ Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, 'Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State', *International Organization*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1995, pp. 689–721.

⁹ Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, 'The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Politics: Introduction', in Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–38.

¹⁰ Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter Katzenstein, 'Norms, Identity, Culture in National Security' in Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 33–75.

¹¹ G. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', *International Organization*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1990, pp. 283–315.

China's attempts to identify more closely with the developing world, particularly in Africa where most of its peacekeepers are deployed, and to seek external confirmation of its status as a responsible, major power in the last two decades, have been important considerations behind the socialization process and more active engagement in peacekeeping. This quest for legitimacy is arguably one of the most important types of status. Located within the perception of those who interact with authority, legitimacy is belief that some leadership, norm, or institution should and ought to be obeyed. Seen in this light, the interesting question is no longer 'how can A make B do this', but rather 'where does B's willingness to defer to A come from'?

Status, authority and legitimacy are thus all social because actors grant each other these things – they are inherently relations; none can be achieved in isolation nor demanded. Rising powers like China seeking status can only attain such legitimacy when they are recognized by other peers to have certain privileges, rights, and obligations that play a determining role in affecting peace and security of the international system.¹² Most important, in exchange for being provided with these special rights, great powers are expected to 'uphold the core norms of international society and play an active part in reinforcing them.'¹³ The consent bestowed upon great powers by smaller states provide a sense of legitimacy, and to maintain their privileges, great powers are expected to act with a degree of moderation and caution. This means that great powers are expected to be status quo powers that do not attempt to radically change the balance of power or seek to overturn the established norms and institutions at the expense of other members.

As will be discussed in this chapter, there are tactical and practical motivations for China's participation in such operations, but it is equally important to observe the trend that its troops and decision-makers are also increasingly exposed to the normative values associated with peacekeeping operations. Such concepts as the responsibility to protect and good governance are thus entering (albeit slowly) the Chinese foreign policy calculus. Its status concerns and aspirations to seek legitimacy as a responsible stakeholder in international affairs are important ideational factors behind the socialization process. In short, these non-material forces and considerations extend beyond instrumental and cost-benefit assessments to

¹² Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), p. 196.

¹³ *Ibid.*

provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the important changes and variations in Chinese foreign policy.

China's Evolving Peacekeeping Policies and Socialization Processes

Domestic and International Factors

China's evolving role in peacekeeping activities demonstrates just how far its foreign policy in this regard has shifted and changed in a relatively short period of time. Throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the first two decades after it joined the UN in 1971, China viewed UN peacekeeping missions with a degree of skepticism, maintained a low profile and refrained from taking any substantive actions in the Security Council debates on peacekeeping.¹⁴ The cautious approach reflects a traditional understanding and interpretation of positive international law, an important norm that has underpinned the development of the modern international system. Inter-state relations were primarily governed by the view that each sovereign government has the right and authority to rule within its own territory as it deems fit and without interference from external actors. The normative sanctity of state sovereignty is also enshrined in the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of military force except in self-defense or when authorized by the Security Council to address certain threats to international peace and security. China upheld the inviolable principle of state sovereignty and often questioned the necessity of external interventionism in areas of conflict, even if a particular operation was sanctioned by the Security Council and was operating under the auspices of international peacekeeping forces. China's caution has in no small part been colored by its earlier experiences and encounters, particularly during the 1950–53 Korean War where the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fought UN forces under the US-led Command. It thus harbors concerns about the nature and legitimacy of such interventionist operations, particularly those that are Western-led.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Samuel Kim, 'China's International Organization Behavior', in Thomas Robinson and David Shambaugh (eds.), *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 420–22; Yin He, 'China's Changing Policy on UN Peacekeeping Operations', Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2007.

¹⁵ Chin-Hao Huang, 'Principles and Praxis in Chinese Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 259–272.

Towards the late 1980s, however, China's position on international affairs and on peacekeeping operations began to shift towards one of greater interest and participation. In 1988, it became a member of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (also known as C34), paving the way for increased engagement in multilateral peacekeeping activities. As one senior Chinese official put it at the time, all states should lend "powerful support" to peacekeeping, setting a new tone for Chinese pronouncements in support of the UN peacekeeping regime. A year later, it deployed 20 military observers to the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) to help monitor elections in Namibia. This was followed by the deployment of five military observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East. The most significant break with past practices came with the decision to deploy 400 engineering troops and 49 military observers to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992. In spite of its relative underdeveloped power projection capability at the time, Chinese peacekeepers were largely deployed on factors beyond realist assumptions. Chinese decision-makers were more concerned with its image and reputation, particularly after the Tiananmen crisis in 1989, and sought regional confirmation of its status as a peaceful neighbor.¹⁶

Since the early- to mid-1990s, China's interest in peacekeeping activities began to steadily expand, and can be attributed in a large part to its increasing engagement and socialization in international institutions. The more active participation in the UN came when there were growing debates on how the international community should reconcile the imperatives of global stability and justice and strike the right balance between state sovereignty and human rights concerns. A normative consensus emerged from the debates that there is political and moral (albeit not legal) currency for the international community to take exceptional measures at times of need in addressing human rights concerns, especially when the state does not fulfill its responsibility to protect its citizens.¹⁷ Although China was a

¹⁶ See Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and Bates Gill, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Taylor Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also, Gareth Evans, 'Responding to Atrocities: The New Geopolitics of Intervention', *SIPRI Yearbook 2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

relatively new- and late-comer to these debates, the issue gained much traction within China as well, with a number of international law scholars and foreign policy elites pointing to the changing nature of peacekeeping and the circumstances that warrant a more flexible interpretation and understanding of the normative principle of sovereignty.¹⁸

In October 1998, at a conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the former Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen indicated there was a global recognition of the ‘universality of human rights’ and all nations ‘observe the same international norms on human rights.’¹⁹ Moreover, Qian added: ‘We all recognize that no country’s human rights situation is perfect, and that all countries are confronted with a weighty task of further promoting and protecting human rights.’ This important acknowledgement underlines the emergence and growing relevance of human rights values in the Chinese foreign policy lexicon.

Of particular interest is the *Zhongguo Faxue* [Chinese Legal Studies] journal, which has featured an increasing number of articles discussing state obligations to its citizens and that a failure to uphold these responsibilities warrants the international community to intervene to protect individuals. Other similar journals such as *Xibu Faxue Pinglun* [Western Law Review]; *Fazhi yu Shehui* [Legal System and Society]; and *Wuda Guojifa Pinglun* [International Law Review of Wuhan University] have also argued that human rights are moral issues increasingly shaped by the ‘international community’ and that all states have a right to monitor these concerns.²⁰ Allen Carlson’s research has led him to conclude that an increasing number of Chinese researchers, scholars, experts and policy-makers have adopted more flexible views of sovereignty and intervention.²¹

¹⁸ Allen Carlson, ‘China’s Approach to Sovereignty and Intervention’, in A.I. Johnston and R. Ross (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy*, pp. 217–41.

¹⁹ ‘QianQichen Urges Further Promotion of International Human Rights’, *Xinhua News* (Beijing), 20 October 2008 [trans. by BBC Monitoring Service, International Reports].

²⁰ See Yan Haiyan, ‘Baohu de ZherenJiesi’ (An Analysis on the Responsibility to Protect), *Xibu Faxue Pinglun* (Western Law Review), no. 1, 2010, pp. 125–129; Xu Guojin, ‘Guojia luxing guoji renquan yiwu de xiandu’ (The Limits on State Performance of Human Rights Obligations), *Zhongguo faxue* (Chinese Legal Studies of Law), no. 2, 1992, pp.13–20; Zeng Lingliang, ‘Lun lengzhan hou shidai de guojia zhuquan’ (A Discussion of State Sovereignty in the Post-Cold War Era), *Zhongguo faxue* (Chinese Legal Studies), no. 1, 1998, pp.109–20.

²¹ Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). Also see Liu Jie, *Renquan yu Guojia Zhuquan* (Human Rights and State Sovereignty) (Shanghai: Shanghai

More important, Carlson finds that some of these policy elites have also gained important access to key policymakers and top leaders within the Chinese foreign and security policy apparatus and that they were shaping and influencing the foreign policy discourse on peacekeeping.²² In 2005, for example, the former President Hu Jintao announced that China would endorse a ‘comprehensive strategy featuring prevention, peace restoration, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction.’²³ Understanding the increasing complexity and evolving nature of peacekeeping, Hu further noted: ‘[i]n areas emerging from conflict, ensuring the rule of law and justice should become an integral part of the overall effort to achieve peace and stability, protecting the fundamental interests of local populations and serving the overall interests of social stability.’²⁴

It is perhaps too early to gauge the degree to which China has internalized and accepted these global norms. However, with the atrocious human rights violations in Rwanda in 1994 in the background of many of these debates, and with a growing number of states, particularly developing countries, adhering to and upholding this declaratory norm, Chinese official policy and rhetoric with regards to sovereignty, intervention and peacekeeping have reflected this trend and become more flexible. China increasingly understands the value and importance of aligning its national interests with these emerging global conventions, because active participation in peacekeeping also helps to burnish China’s image, standing and reputation. More importantly, China does not want to be seen as a global outlier and wants to be recognized as a contributor to, or at least not an inhibitor of, global stability.

Africa’s Influence on China’s Peacekeeping

China’s stronger commitment toward UN peacekeeping can be seen in its increasing levels of interactions with African leaders. Four fifths of China’s

Renmin Chubanshe, 2004); Cheng Shuaihua, ‘Guojia zhuquan yu guoji renquan de ruogan wenti’ (Issues Involving International Human Rights and State Sovereignty), *Ouzhou* (Europe), no. 1, 2000, pp. 32–35; Shi Yinhong, ‘Lun ershi shiji guoji guifan tixi’ (A Discussion of the System of International Norms in the Twentieth Century), *Guoji luntan* (International Forum), no. 6, 2000, pp. 8–10.

²² Carlson, ‘China’s Approach to Sovereignty and Intervention’, pp. 217–241. See also his book, *Unifying China...*

²³ UN doc., S/PV.5261, 14 September 2005.

²⁴ UN doc., S/PV.5225, 12 July 2005.

total contributions are currently based in Africa, and specifically South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Western Sahara. Since 2000, the two sides have agreed to hold a major summit – the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) – every three years. With each successive FOCAC summitry, the substantive content, deliberations, and action plan on peace and security issues have taken a turn with a sharper focus on African leaders' concerns and priorities. This need-based approach reflects African leaders' emphasis on developing a more comprehensive and balanced partnership, and identifies the key areas where China can play a contributing role. The fourth FOCAC meeting, which was held in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, in November 2009, was attended by former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and a delegation of more than 50 Chinese officials, including half a dozen ministers. The Chinese leadership took exceptional effort to demonstrate its political commitment to see that the summit was a success.²⁵ The major document that came out of the event, the FOCAC Sharm-el-Sheikh Action Plan (2010–2012), laid out broad plans for cooperation in a wide array of areas.²⁶ Among some of the key highlights focusing on deepening political and security cooperation include: increasing the number of high-level visits between the two sides to foster mutual trust and understanding; establishing a regularized China-African Union (AU) Strategic Dialogue Mechanism as a formal channel for greater political consultation; and China's support for increasing African voice and representation in the Security Council. The establishment of the Strategic Dialogue Mechanism was critical in regularizing and institutionalizing a platform for joint discussion on security issues. This effort further complements the multilateral process at the UN where Chinese and African foreign ministers jointly decided to launch a political consultation mechanism at the UN headquarters in September 2007 to ensure a more calibrated approach in addressing regional security issues. Such mechanisms have increased regular exchanges, opening the door to greater consultation on areas of convergence and divergence. More important, these interactive processes have introduced Chinese foreign policymakers to regional and global norms that are pertinent to bringing peace and stability to Africa.

²⁵ See 'The Fourth Ministerial Conference', Forum on China and Africa Cooperation, 8 November, 2009, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/dsjbjzjhy/>.

²⁶ 'FOCAC Sharm-el-Sheikh Action Plan 2010–2012', Forum on China and Africa Cooperation, 8 November, 2009, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/dsjbjzjhy/hywj/t626387.htm>.

China is thus identifying more closely with the developing world, particularly in Africa as it seeks external confirmation of its status as a responsible, major power.

More recently, the fifth FOCAC meeting in Beijing in July 2012 spelled out more specifically the context and areas in which China-Africa cooperation would take place. Under the newly announced 'Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security',²⁷ for example, the 2013-2015 action plan calls for Beijing to contribute more financial, technical, and capacity-building support to the AU for its peacekeeping operations in the continent.²⁸ Closer policy coordination on preventive diplomacy would also be strengthened between the two sides. Additionally, the next three years would also expand the quality of contact through increased personnel exchanges and training on peacekeeping, conflict prevention and management, as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development.

As both a permanent member of the Security Council and a developing country, China's growing participation in peacekeeping in Africa also lends important credibility to UN missions in the continent, many of which have robust mandates allowing them to use force. Senior AU and UN officials believe that China's participation in peacekeeping operations in sensitive areas such as Darfur, South Sudan, and the DRC all help to temper the host governments' suspicions that the missions are really Western-led military interventions.²⁹

Becoming a Responsible, Major Power in Africa and Beyond

China's expanding participation and evolving role in UN peacekeeping activities in Africa and globally also helps to project a positive and constructive side to its rising prominence and power on the global stage. The Chinese leadership is acutely aware that several countries are still uncertain about the PLA's military capabilities and intentions and that a rising China would pursue a more assertive, aggressive and potentially disruptive foreign policy. Hence, concerned with its image and global reputation, it is

²⁷ 'The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan 2013-2015', Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 23 July, 2012, available at <http://www.focac.org/eng/ltda/dwjbzjjhys/hywj/t954620.htm>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interviews with AU and UN officials, Addis Ababa and New York, 2010-2013. These interviews include one-on-one meetings as well as in a larger, focus-group setting.

understood in Beijing that China needs to be more responsive to international expectations, minimize tensions and conflict, and make tangible contributions to international peace and security. Peacekeeping has thus become an important priority, and helps to put into action the call by senior Chinese officials for the country to demonstrate its ‘peaceful development’ and commitment to a ‘harmonious world.’³⁰ Its increased peacekeeping activity provides an opportunity to display a more positive side of the PLA’s military capabilities, reassuring neighbors about its peaceful intentions, and at the same time signaling that China is further integrating into the international community and acting as a responsible power.³¹

As China becomes increasingly engaged and socialized within the international peacekeeping regime, a widening array of voices within the Chinese academy and policymaking realms are also calling for Chinese foreign and security policy to be defined beyond material power interests. An editorial in the widely-read Chinese Communist Party domestic and foreign affairs journal, *Liaowang*, pointed out:

Compared with past practices, China’s diplomacy has indeed displayed a new face. If China’s diplomacy before the 1980s stressed safeguarding of national security and its emphasis from the 1980s to early this century is on the creation of excellent environment for economic development, then the focus at present is to take a more active part in international affairs and play a role that a responsible power should on the basis of satisfying the security and development interests.³²

At the 2007 Munich Conference on Security Policy, former Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui explained that China’s increasing involvement in UN peacekeeping missions reflected China’s commitment to global security given the country’s important role within the international system and the fact that its security and development are closely linked to that of the rest of the world.³³ There is a growing recognition that as China’s international role evolves and expands, its interests will likewise become more

³⁰ ‘Hu Jintao Says China Pursues Peaceful Development’, *People’s Daily* (Beijing, 3 Sept. 2005 [trans. by BBC Monitoring Service, International Reports]).

³¹ Jing-Dong Yuan, ‘Multilateral Intervention and State Sovereignty: Chinese Views on UN Peacekeeping Operations’, *Political Science*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1998, pp. 275–95.

³² ‘PRC’s new diplomacy’ stress on more active international role’, *Liaowang* (Beijing), 11 July 2005 [trans. by World News Connection].

³³ John Hill, ‘China Bolsters Peacekeeping Commitment’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 14 February 2007.

global in nature. Its national security is thus becoming intrinsically linked to a stable and peaceful international environment, and this in turn is an important factor in China taking a more cooperative stance and supportive role in UN peacekeeping operations.

In Africa, the Chinese government is increasingly willing to have its peacekeepers undertake more assignments in difficult terrains. Its peacekeeping presence in the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), for example, is responsible for the timely and efficient transport of personnel and critical supplies such as fuel and water around the country. The unit has proved reliable even though it frequently has to travel through unstable areas and despite the country having only roughly 1,000 kilometers of paved roads. Chinese peacekeeping contingents are also responding to requests from local and national governments to help in infrastructure development projects such as building hospitals and paved roads, thus helping to improve local perceptions of the mission. In the DRC, Chinese engineering units have been tasked to take on such projects as repairing vital infrastructural linkages to Kaumu Airport and the Ruzizi power plant in the volatile South Kivu province, and constructing helipads, container grounds at Kavumu, and training sites and facilities for the DRC's armed and police forces.

Practical Considerations for China's Globalizing Security Forces

More broadly, peacekeeping, anti-piracy missions, rescue-and-relief operations, counterterrorism exercises, and post-conflict reconstruction have all become major components of China's increasingly complex and dynamic international and foreign policy strategy.³⁴ These activities are broadly defined as non-traditional security issues, and their growing importance parallel the PLA's interest in mobilizing its resources and preparing for Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) both at home and abroad. This reflects former President Hu Jintao's call for the security forces to more adequately perform and engage in MOOTW as part of the PLA's "new historic mission."³⁵ Doing so would help safeguard national interests as well as contribute to regional and global peace, security and development. In May

³⁴ Zhongying Pang, 'China's Changing Attitude to UN Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2005, pp. 87–104.

³⁵ James Mulvenon, 'Chairman Hu and the PLA's 'New Historic Missions'', *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 27, 2009, pp. 1–11; Cynthia Watson, 'The Chinese Armed Forces and Non-Traditional Missions: A Growing Tool of Statecraft', *China Brief*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2009, pp. 9–12.

2009, the PLA General Staff Department announced that it would strengthen the PLA's emergency response system and rapid deployment capacity to respond to the various MOOTW, including peacekeeping activities.³⁶ In June 2009 the Central Military Commission, the PLA, and five of the seven military area commands met in Beijing to strengthen and improve the PLA's peacekeeping role, discussing ways to streamline the selection, organization, training and rotation of Chinese peacekeepers.³⁷

The deployment of Chinese troops abroad to take part in international peacekeeping missions carries inherent practical benefits for the Chinese security forces. Training and operating alongside other troop contributing countries' forces provides an invaluable experience that will allow the Chinese troops to improve their responsiveness, riot control capabilities, coordination of emergency command systems and ability to carry out MOOTW more effectively. Over time, participation in peacekeeping missions abroad will also help to modernize and professionalize the security forces. For example, a sustained effort to deploy troops in Africa has meant that PLA forces are gaining greater operational knowledge of different operating environments, an advantage that few counterparts in other countries have. According to Philip Rogers, it also provides them with 'more knowledge about logistics, ports of debarkation, lines of communication, lines of operation, operational intelligence, local "atmospherics" and modus operandi and means of sustaining forces in Africa over prolonged periods.'³⁸ All these measures allow the Chinese security forces to display its professionalism and operational competence on the one hand, while also demonstrating its growing deterrent capability on the other.

China's evolving approach towards UN peacekeeping is thus supported by a combination of factors. Through increasing socialization and interaction with the international community, China has become more willing to accept global norms and to contribute to peace and stability. At the same time, participation in peacekeeping also allows China to professionalize its armed forces, to test its power projection capabilities through MOOTW, and to help attain its status as a major global power. In light of the

³⁶ 'PLA Constructs MOOTW Arms Force System', *People's Liberation Army Daily* (Beijing), 14 May 2009 [trans. by BBC Monitoring Service, International Reports].

³⁷ 'PLA Peacekeeping Work Conference Held in Beijing', *People's Liberation Army Daily*, 26 June 2009, [trans. by BBC Monitoring Service, International Reports].

³⁸ Philip Rogers, 'China and UN Peacekeeping Operations in Africa', *Naval War College Review*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2007, p. 89.

constructivist ontology, socialization process has broadly integrated China more closely in the UN peacekeeping regime and increasingly exposed it to related global norms. It should be noted, however, that the socialization process remains incomplete. The degree to which China has internalized these norms remains an unforced debate, as will be seen in the following section discussing the limitations to Chinese contributions to peacekeeping, as well as its resistance and obstructive behavior at times, especially in Africa. In particular, the episodic reversals in Chinese normative behavior tend to occur when China displays a more confident and assertive self-image, complemented with strained relations abroad, that tracks closely with Realpolitik ideology. The next section assesses the activities, contributions and limitations of Chinese peacekeeping behavior in Africa in recent years.

China's Balancing Act on Peacekeeping, Sovereignty, and Intervention

As the China-Africa relationship deepens, China's expanding military, political and economic ties in Africa will need to be managed to complement China's contributions to peacekeeping in Africa. UN officials report some frustration at their lack of access to details of extensive bilateral military ties between China and African countries where their peacekeepers are also deployed (such as the DRC, Liberia and Sudan).³⁹ It is therefore unclear whether those arrangements complement China's peacekeeping activities and UN efforts to provide greater security and stability in Africa. Since 2008 UN officials have been exploring with the Chinese Mission ways of supporting security sector reform and issues related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in African states. The Chinese delegation has reportedly not been obstructive; but nor has it taken any major initiatives in this regard.⁴⁰

Likewise, as China's diplomatic and business interests deepen in Africa, crafting appropriate policies to balance them is likely to become more complicated. The goodwill earned by Chinese peacekeeping contingents repairing roads, improving state infrastructure and offering medical assistance could be undermined by other bilateral activities of the Chinese government, state-owned companies, entrepreneurs and *émigrés* across the

³⁹) Interviews with UN officials, Kinshasa and New York, 2009 and 2012.

⁴⁰) *Ibid.*

continent. As African states emerge from protracted internal conflicts, China wants to be recognized as a partner in African development. The challenge then will be to improve oversight and coordination to ensure that bilateral military engagements and a widening array of commercial links in the continent not only complement the Chinese peacekeeping presence, but also contribute to development and stability in Africa.

The problem of sovereignty, peacekeeping, and intervention becomes particularly acute for China's broader security and foreign policy in Africa and beyond. When confronted with important questions related to foreign policy and international security, Chinese policymakers tend to take on a case-by-case approach. As such, although rhetoric and government policies seem to have supported UN peacekeeping, traditional ideas about state sovereignty persist. There are instances when China has supported intervention on humanitarian grounds, including in East Timor in 1999, though a non-UN force led by Australia. China also contributed a civilian police contingent to support the subsequent UN mission. In 2003, in response to growing instability in the DRC and Liberia, the former Chinese Ambassador to the UN, Zhang Yishan, argued that the UN should intervene in such conflict areas earlier, faster and more forcefully.⁴¹ A similar view was expressed by some observers reflecting on the tragedy that unfolded in Rwanda as well.⁴²

Continued Concerns over State Sovereignty

Traditionally, China has objected to authorizing or extending the mandates of UN peacekeeping missions in countries that recognized Taiwan. In January 1997, China vetoed a proposed mission to Guatemala until the Guatemalan government gave assurances that it would no longer support a General Assembly vote on admitting Taiwan to the UN. The Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) could then proceed.⁴³ In 1999, China vetoed the continuation of the UN Preventive Deployment in Macedonia

⁴¹ 'China Takes on Major Peacekeeping Role', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 November 2003.

⁴² Gill and Huang, *China's Expanding Role in Peacekeeping*.

⁴³ 'Security Council Authorizes Deployment of UN Military Observers to Verify Implementation of Cease-Fire Agreement in Guatemala', press release, UN Department of Public Information, 20 January 1997 (available at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/1997/19970120.sc6314.html); International Security and Institutions Research Group, *Vetoed Draft Resolutions in the UN Security Council 1946–2009*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, Aug. 2009.

(UNPREDEP) two weeks after suspending diplomatic ties with the country over its recognition of Taiwan, bringing an end to that experiment in conflict prevention. Some Chinese peacekeeping specialists later acknowledged that this was a difficult lesson for China and that the government should have considered Macedonia's interests more than its own national interests.⁴⁴

In 1999, at the height of the crisis in the Balkans, China was adamantly opposed to authorizing a peacekeeping force for Kosovo. Chinese opposition was in a large part accentuated with the US-led NATO air raids mistakenly hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Chinese objections turned to indignant outrage as the Chinese general public as well as the regime insisted that the NATO bombing was deliberate and intended to contain China.⁴⁵

In the case of Haiti, notwithstanding the lack of full diplomatic relations with Beijing, China supported the UN from 2004 to 2010 with deployments of Formed Police Units (FPUs). However, China apparently used the threat of curtailing the mission to warn Haiti against any high-profile diplomatic exchanges in support of Taiwan. Some observers contend that Haiti's continued recognition of Taiwan was a reason for the withdrawal in 2010, while others have indicated that China was uncomfortable with the overwhelming US civilian and military presence following the earthquake.⁴⁶ The Haiti case indicates that there are still gaps in and limitations to China's overall commitment to peacekeeping. As in Kosovo, the resurgence of Realpolitik ideology seemed to have trumped the broader underlying trend of more active engagement and participation in peacekeeping operations.

Darfur and Libya as a Test Case for Greater Chinese Flexibility?

Perhaps, most important, Beijing's position on the Darfur question, however, provides a prominent example of constructive engagement where China has yielded to widespread regional and international pressure. Responding in a large part to mounting criticism of its relations with the Sudanese government, in 2006 China began exerting pressure on Sudan to

⁴⁴ Pang, 'China's Changing Attitude to UN Peacekeeping', pp. 87-104.

⁴⁵ Gill, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy*.

⁴⁶ Interviews with Chinese scholars and officials, Beijing, 2010 and 2013; 'Analysis: UN Refocuses Haiti Mission', United Press International, 16 Feb. 2007.

follow allow UN and AU peacekeepers into Darfur.⁴⁷ In November 2006, with the humanitarian situation worsening, the former Chinese Ambassador to the UN, Wang Guangya, was widely credited in gaining Sudanese acceptance of the UN/AU hybrid peacekeeping force of 20,000 troops in Darfur. Subsequently, China also became the first permanent member of the UN Security Council to commit and deploy more than 300 troops there and was widely applauded by African leaders.⁴⁸ In February 2007, President Hu Jintao visited Sudan and met President Omar al-Bashir. The visit drew widespread criticism internationally, particularly from the United States, since China was seen as abetting alleged genocidal acts committed in Darfur. However, Hu reportedly intervened to press al-Bashir to abide by international commitments.⁴⁹ While this could be interpreted as mere rhetoric, that is about as close as a Chinese leader has come to publicly warning and chiding a foreign leader. What the senior-level leadership says on these sensitive issues is important because it reflects in a large part its changing behavior and understanding of peacekeeping and non-interventionism. Its quest to play a leadership position in the developing world, particularly in Africa, means that it needs to be more attuned and attentive to African public opinion and concerns. As seen here with its peacekeeping contributions to Darfur, ideational factors thus altered China's foreign policy calculus and its own identity and interests so that they are more consistent, or at least not at odds, with regional and global norms.

More recently, in the wake of the political demonstrations and uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, China's approach has been cautious, and its policy demonstrated a degree of flexibility as well as limitations on compromising the principle of sovereignty and interventionism. There were economic interests at stake, with more than 30,000 Chinese citizens and 75 Chinese firms in Libya. China also relies on Libyan oil for roughly three per cent of its domestic energy consumption. But more important, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was carefully assessing and monitoring the Libyan situation at every turn. As expected, it initially voiced support for

⁴⁷ Dan Large, 'China's Sudan engagement: changing Northern and Southern political trajectories in peace and war', *The China Quarterly*, no. 199, September 2009, pp. 610–626; Chin-Hao Huang, 'US–China Relations and Darfur', *Fordham International Law Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2008, pp. 827–42.

⁴⁸ Edward Cody, 'China Given Credit for Darfur Role', *Washington Post*, 13 January 2007 (available at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/12/AR2007011201924.html).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the Gaddafi regime as China's overall concern was the political stability and unity of Libya as a whole. As developments unfolded and when it became apparent that the rebel forces gained increasing legitimacy and support throughout Libya and the international community, China and the National Transitional Council began to open up communication channels. With divergent views between the AU and the Arab League on how to best manage the conflict in Libya, China preferred a multilateral, diplomatic approach that would bring the major stakeholders to the negotiation table. According to interviews with senior Chinese officials monitoring the Libyan situation, Beijing's primary concern throughout the Libyan case was what it saw as the excessive involvement and the especially prominent role the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) played from the inception of the Libyan crisis. Given the historic sensitivity in NATO-China relations during the Kosovo crisis of 1998-1999 and the subsequent US bombing, under NATO's purview, of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, China had misgivings and serious concerns about NATO's expanding role in interventions into Northern Africa. The historical analogy dictated Chinese officials to take a critical stance on the Libyan situation as it associated NATO's involvement with malign intent and belligerent hegemony.⁵⁰

The Libyan case provides a mixed picture at best on where China stands on humanitarian intervention and sovereignty. It supported the UN Security Council Resolution 1970 (2011), placing arms embargo on Libya, a freezing of Libyan funds and assets, and referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate crimes against humanity. At the same time, it was also wary to what it perceived as excessive NATO involvement in Libya. These developments point to the fact that China is in a steep learning curve in managing and responding to calls for humanitarian interventions. China's traditional defense of the notion of sovereignty will not always necessarily stand in the way of achieving its overall national security interests. In particular, at times of need to support intervention, especially where there is consensus among the relevant parties at stake to do so, China tends to be supportive.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

What then can be said about China's future engagement in international peacekeeping operations in Africa? First, China's attempts to identify more

⁵⁰ Gill, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy*.

closely with the developing world and to seek external confirmation of its status as a legitimate great power are increasingly important considerations behind its decision-makers' willingness to accept cooperative security and to uphold the established global norms and institutions that contribute to international peace and stability. China's status concerns and aspirations to seek legitimacy as a responsible stakeholder in international affairs are important ideational factors behind the socialization process. These non-material forces and considerations extend beyond instrumental and cost-benefit assessments to provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the important changes and variations in Chinese foreign policy.

At the same time, one has to acknowledge that there will certainly be constraints going forward, in a large part because the socialization process remains incomplete. China will most likely be cautious and selective, indicating that its stance on peacekeeping, sovereignty, and intervention does not follow a linear, pre-determined path. It is increasingly clear that China's political, economic, security interests in Africa are complex and variegated. Where China has decided to uphold global norms or is perceived to be constrained by certain normative structures, there are instances of a more cooperative behavior on China's part. However, there are limitations in each of these cases. One could argue that on such important issues as peacekeeping support, development assistance, human rights, and arms sales, China can and should do more to live up to international expectations and adhere more closely to international norms. Given China's emerging role in the international community and its increasingly socialized behavior, it has yet to consistently demonstrate how far and for what purposes a rising China will exert its influence in the conduct of international affairs. Moreover, whether these changes in its normative behavior will reverse is still unclear.

The socialization process is thus continuously at work as China deepens its engagement in Africa in the coming years. Over the last decade, for example, China's engagement with international institutions, particularly those in the developing South like the AU, has exposed it to normative values concerning human rights and conflict resolution that are gaining traction and being factored into its foreign policy discourse. It is still at an early stage to determine how far China has accepted these norms; what is clear, however, is that China's options will be shaped and influenced by measures taken by other actors, particularly Africa (as well as other developing states) and Western actors. When there has been broad international consensus

regarding a specific intervention, as most recently seen in Darfur, China has tended to lend its support, rather than be viewed as obstructionist. These measures thus alter China's foreign policy calculus so that, for example, concerns about preserving state sovereignty has been moderated in certain instances, and this is evidenced in changes to China's definitions of interest or by linking its interests to image, reputation, and status.

However, the epistemic community currently addressing peacekeeping remains small in China. There are few practitioners and scholars who have relevant expertise. There is growing awareness, however, that peacekeeping is fast emerging as an important issue, and more is likely to be done on the semi- and non-governmental levels, to help build and expand this epistemic community. Regularized international delegation visits and exchanges can foster this process. There are precedents in other areas such as arms control and non-proliferation, pandemics, and international trade where increasing interaction with external actors have over time sustained a more cooperative relationship with China where the latter begins to value multilateralism in achieving state security.⁵¹

In spite of these uncertainties, China, African leaders, as well as key members of the international community should consider policy options aimed at reinforcing some of the encouraging developments related to China's involvement in African peacekeeping and security affairs. The expansion of China's engagement in peacekeeping has important implications for African partners. As discussed earlier, the FOCAC summitry in recent years has opened the door for enhanced dialogue and exchanges on peace and security issues in Africa. China has pledged to provide more assistance and to enhance cooperation with the AU and other regional organizations in the continent in the prevention, management, and resolution of regional conflicts in Africa. The fifth FOCAC meeting in July 2012 indicated strong and clear potential to increase China-African cooperation on peacekeeping affairs. There is also potential to strengthen African peacekeeping and peace building capacities by means of greater bilateral cooperation between China and AU member states. The AU and individual African countries can take several measures to sustain the constructive socialization process and help deepen this trend. Collectively, the AU member states can encourage the Chinese government to establish a

⁵¹ Quansheng Zhao, 'Policymaking Processes of Chinese Foreign Policy: The Role of Policy Communities and Think Tanks', in Shaun Breslin (ed.), *A Handbook of Chinese International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 22–34.

formal interagency working group or similar mechanism to better promote and coordinate China's approach to peacekeeping and security affairs in Africa. This would help urge Beijing to devote additional financial and human resources to the Ministry of Defense Office of Peacekeeping Affairs, the PLA General Staff Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, peacekeeping training facilities and other relevant entities in order to expand and enhance China's contribution toward building the AU and its member states' capacity in peacekeeping activities.

Likewise, key African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Rwanda, Kenya, and Ethiopia with robust and active roles in AU troop deployments should solicit greater Chinese support for the AU Mission in Somalia, the African Standby Force and the Continental Early Warning System. Personnel training, troop contributions, and financial support are all important assets China can provide. The provision of other force enablers such as light helicopters, ground transport, armored personnel carriers, and mine-clearing and sweeping technology could also help strengthen African troop contributing countries. The AU, to date, still relies largely on its traditional donors and partners, such as the European Union and the United States, for support. As Africa expands its interactions with other regional partners in Asia and the Middle East, China will become an important actor and can also make important contributions toward peacekeeping in Africa.

On the political level, African states and the AU could also request to have more targeted and smaller workshops alongside the FOCAC summit on peace and security issues. Such a dialogue would involve the PLA, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant Chinese entities in more exchanges, dialogues, and joint exercises and simulations with Western and African counterparts aimed at strengthening Chinese understanding of the evolving security situation in the various conflict regions in Africa.

There is also much room for increasing two-way exchanges and field research at the non-official and/or semi-official level between Chinese and African universities, think-tanks, and defense academies to carry out joint policy research and recommendations concerning China's future contributions to peacekeeping, security, and development issues in Africa. This would help strengthen and deepen the level of Chinese scholarly and policy understanding of contemporary Africa, particularly in the areas of grass-roots elections, public health, and other civil society activity related to good governance, accountability, and transparency and their linkages to

security and development across the continent. Such an interactive process would promote further debates and discussions among Chinese policy elites about its future role and contributions in security, particularly in the context of peacekeeping, in Africa. China has quickly realized that Africa will become an important stage where its image as a responsible global actor is forged. As such, increasing such interactions will help provide an important context for continued Chinese involvement in peacekeeping that will help shape outcomes in Africa that are beneficial for greater peace and stability in the continent.