

Understanding Evolution of China's Peacekeeping Policy in the 21st Century

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In recent years, China has enhanced its personnel and financial contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs). According to UN statistics, China is the largest personnel contributor among the five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and 11th largest contributor among UN member states. In terms of financial contribution, China is the 2nd largest contributor, next to the USA, to the UNPKOs in 2018 (Gebrehiwot & Demissie, 2018).

The normative posture on state sovereignty and non-intervention hindered Chinese participation in UNPKOs during the 1970s. However, Chinese attitude towards UN peacekeeping witnessed gradual adjustment from the 1980s to the 1990s. The shift in Beijing's attitude was witnessed so that its economic development-oriented reform and opening up strategy could benefit by having a favorable international environment. During the 1990s, China fielded only 532 personnel and its financial contribution constituted a mere one percent of the UN peacekeeping budget.

In the 21st century, cultivating an image of being a responsive power, reinforcing the United Nations, and sharing shared apprehensions for peace and security are the major objectives which have contributed in enhancing Chinese participation in UNPKOs. Changes in Chinese national identity have been identified by Yin He as the main driving force behind changing the attitude of China towards UNPKOs (He, 2018).

At the start of the millennium, China contributed the least number of personnel among P5. From the early 2000s, China has evolved its peacekeeping policy by increasing its personnel and financial contributions. In 2013, China was only contributing roughly three percent to the total financial contributions for UN peacekeeping. But since then, it has upped its contribution which now constitutes 10.25 percent of the total UN peacekeeping budget (Pauley, 2018).

Coupled with financial support, China has dispatched 2,519 personnel as of June 2018. Apart from personnel and financial contributions, China has also contributed in improving the overall capacity of peacekeeping personnel training by opening China Peacekeeping Police Training Center in 2000 for police personnel training and the Ministry of Defense Peacekeeping Center in 2009 for the exercise of military personnel.

Apart from participating and learning through various peacekeeping-related international activities, China has emerged as an active organizer of UN peacekeeping training by hosting academic exchange activities and international training courses at its police and military peacekeeping training institutions. It now maintains

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peacekeeping reserve force consisting of 8,000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops for UNPKOs. Consequently, UN Secretary General António Guterres remarked that China has become a "bridge-builder" and "honest broker" in global conflicts (Zhihao, 2018).

The emergence of China's leading role in peacekeeping missions' aims to foster favorable relations especially in Africa, the continent which hosts the most UNPKO missions. Over the past 15 years, China deployed more than 30,000 personnel to the continent as part of various UNPKOs (Gebrehiwot & Demissie, 2018). The underlying principle behind Chinese involvement in Africa-based UNPKOs is the aspiration to become a great power in international affairs is seen as the underlying principle behind Chinese involvement in Africa-based UNPKOs.

Strengthening of the Chinese military is another objective of China's leading role in peacekeeping missions. PLA is able to improve its "military operations other than war" (MOOTW) and modernize its security forces through the deployment of troops abroad. The peacekeeping missions help PLA by improving its mobility and supportability, gaining operational experience, assisting the purchase of progressive weapon systems and expertise and access to practices, operational doctrine and training methods of foreign militaries. These engagements also offer PLA with opportunities to improve their capabilities in counter terrorism, mobility operations, and logistics (Annual report to Congress, 2018).

Similarly, Logan Pauley argues that China can play a greater role in peacekeeping missions by supplying its own defense equipment to other states (Pauley, 2018). UNPKOs is a great forum through which China can modernize its military capacity by gaining benefit in the form of joint collaboration and knowledge transfer with other states. China burnishes its image as a concerned international stakeholder by appearing as more interested in the peace and reconstruction of fragile states.

Apart from strengthening the military, China's enhanced role in peacekeeping missions is viewed as a national image building mechanism which strives to improve its reputation abroad. Coupled with its increased efforts and diminishing leadership role of the USA, China is projecting its image to the international community as a "teacher of peace, civilization, and might" by assuming the leadership role in UN peacekeeping. Chinese state media also remains abuzz with Beijing's achievements in UNPKOs by attributing success to "China's quality" and "China's standard".

A number of factors have been identified which helps in understanding when and why China decides to deploy its troops for peacekeeping missions. While studying 18 cases of China's participation/non-participations in UKPKO from 2003-2017, Sunghee Cho concluded that the significance of host states as export markets proved to be a better predictor to understand whether China will or will not participate in a peacekeeping mission (Cho, 2018). For example, Sudan ranked as the sixth largest importer of Chinese goods in Africa before the start of the United Nations Mission in Sudan in March 2005. Prior to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire in April 2004, the country ranked as Africa's 11th largest importer of Chinese goods.

Contrary to prevalent assumptions, the significance of host states as exporters of resource-related materials did not factor as good predictor to understand pattern of China's involvement in UNPKOs. A case in point is Chad, which hosted

the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, which ranked 45th largest importer of Chinese goods in Africa but ranked as Africa's 15th largest exporter to China.

Sovereignty-related concerns constitute another key factor which helps in understanding China's participation/non-participation. In the 18 UNPKOs from 2003 to 2017, concerns regarding sovereignty issues factored in two-thirds of the total peacekeeping missions during this period. Over the years, China has shown openness regarding UNPKOs by making its understanding more flexible to "use of force" and "impartiality" conditions but still firmly stick to obtaining consent from host states. For example, China sent its personnel to Lebanon in March 2006 for UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which operated since March 1978, after UN Security Council resolution 1655 mentioned that Lebanese government undertook actions to reinforce connection amongst its armed forces and UNIFIL.

While studying non-participation of China in some UNPKOs, Marisa Mori compared China's participation in United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and its non-participation in United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). She concluded that an important motivating factor to send Chinese personnel to Mali and to not participate in MINUSCA was the state's aspiration to be perceived as an equivalent to France, UK and US.

In Mali, all four countries faced a collective security concern of violent Islamist groups. However, further research needs to be done to strengthen this argument (Mori, 2018).

Like its national identity, China's peacekeeping guidelines have also evolved in the 21st century. China believes that the core doctrines of UN peacekeeping; impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence, consent and in defence of mandate are the keys to win the confidence and support for UNPKOs and ensure the smooth conduct of these operations. Although, China still believes in the upholding of these principles, its approach to and application of these principles have evolved. According to China, the approval of the host country is required for the establishment of any peacekeeping operation (PKO). However, it also acknowledges that sometimes efforts of the international community are needed for achieving consent. In recent years, China joined the global community in urging Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria to approve the UN peacekeeping and collaborate with the international body.

Despite insisting on non-interference of external forces in internal affairs of a state, China's practice of "impartiality" principle has evolved to accommodate the involvement of the international community in peace efforts for conflict-affected countries. Over the years, Chinese officials have met opposition parties of Libya, Syria and Afghanistan to actively participate in the peace processes of disputed countries (He, 2018).

Beijing, which still expresses concerns regarding the coercive actions, now engages in such actions in PKO provided that the peacekeeping operation is authorized by UNSC and the ground situation reasons it as indispensable to use force. In recent years, China refrained its long held attitude of not contributing security troops to PKOs by deploying a security company for the first time to MINUSMA in December 2013. In 2015, 700-person infantry battalion was also contributed to UN Mission in South Sudan.

Despite continued support to UN peacekeeping missions and international security governance, China faces certain challenges with respect to its part in UN peacekeeping regime. The two main challenges China currently faces are lack of leadership roles for China in UN peacekeeping regime and a dearth of Chinese input in the formulation of agendas and ideas about UNPKO activities.

Despite having significant influence in UN peacekeeping affairs, China remains under-represented in UN peacekeeping regime. Beijing ranks 14th in the ranking of most civilian employees by any country in the UN Secretariat. Only 11 Chinese nationals are posted on D1 or above senior level posts in the UN Secretariat. China was invited in two out of six UN-nominated important expert panels to analyze and advice on UN peacekeeping activities since 2000.

To some extent, China itself is to be blamed for its under-representation by not having enough experienced personnel to staff high-level positions in UNPKOs. But the trend is changing. Four Chinese officers have commanded UNPKOs since 2007. On the other hand, China has failed to present its perceptive with respect to post-conflict reconstruction or peacebuilding. The waning presence of Washington due to cutbacks to personnel and financial contributions to UN peacekeeping engagement has provided Beijing with the opportunity to assume leadership role in UNPKOs. If China is to assume the leadership role in UN peacekeeping, it has to address the challenges discussed above.

The capacity building of its military and civilian personnel needs to be enhanced so that they can be considered for top level positions at United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Similarly, it needs to train its peacekeepers by imparting them with necessary skills to interact with local communities, NGOs and gather intelligence to safeguard peacekeepers and workers. By doing so, this will help China to present an alternative perspective of promoting reconciliation and development in post-conflict societies. China also needs to work with regional organizations like African Union by enhancing their financial and training support and to intervene in humanitarian cases in accordance with the mandates of regional organizations. This will help China in resolving the dilemma between its non-interference policy and the UN mandate of protecting civilians.

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