

**China on Peacekeeping: I hate you...I tolerate you...I embrace you**

by

Scott J. Henderson

November 2011

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) assesses regional military and security issues through open-source media and direct engagement with foreign military and security specialists to advise army leadership on issues of policy and planning critical to the U.S. Army and the wider military community.

## China on Peacekeeping: I hate you...I tolerate you...I embrace you

*Peacekeeping is a way to help countries torn by conflict to create conditions for sustainable peace. UN peacekeepers—soldiers and military officers, police and civilian personnel from many countries—monitor and observe peace processes that emerge in post-conflict situations and assist conflicting parties to implement the peace agreement they have signed. Such assistance comes in many forms, including promoting human security, confidence-building measures, power-sharing arrangements, electoral support, strengthening the rule of law, and economic and social development.*

### ...I hate you

The boxed statement seen above was taken from the United Nations' definition on peacekeeping operations and seeks to explain its operational goals and missions to restore peace in war-torn areas of the world.<sup>1</sup> On its face, the declaration is admirable and it is difficult to find a sinister side to these lofty ambitions. However, some nations see ulterior motives and hidden agendas underlying this seemingly innocuous statement. Initially, China was one such nation that felt compelled to resist what it viewed as the potential for interference from a foreign entity. China's history of being overrun and divided by outside forces does not make this an unreasonable attitude. The evolution from complete disdain to embracing peacekeeping operations would be protracted and it could be argued that "embracing" is far too strong a term.

Prior to joining the United Nations (UN) in 1971, China regarded the entire UN body as a hostile organization, especially peacekeeping operations. Much of China's animosity toward the UN can be traced to the General Assembly's 1951 condemnation of China as an aggressor nation in the Korean War. This UN condemnation of China would lead to nearly twenty years of opposition and distrust of all operations sponsored by the UN to include peacekeeping. Officials in China's capital were vociferous in their misgivings about joining an organization they considered antagonistic to their nation. The United Nations' reluctance to recognize the Chinese Communist Party as the legitimate government of mainland China until 1971 further deepened this divide.

The depth of this feeling was illustrated in 1956 when the First UN Emergency Force was sent to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities, including the withdrawal of the armed forces of France, Israel and the United Kingdom from Egyptian territory. The international force would also serve as a buffer between the Egyptian and Israeli forces. Chinese officials saw it as something more than an international gesture of goodwill and referred to it as "just British and French Imperialism replaced by US neo-

---

<sup>1</sup> Definition taken from the UN Peacekeeping website <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/faq/q1.htm>

colonialism.”<sup>2</sup> In 1965, the *People’s Daily* carried an editorial that excoriated the UN as nothing more than an organization controlled by a few big powers and the Special Committee for Peacekeeping Operations as a US police force whose function was to thwart the revolutionary struggle of people around the world. Beijing viewed any interference in internal affairs as an infringement of sovereignty and a crime it would not support.<sup>3</sup>

Author Yin He’s excellent work on *China’s Changing Policy on UN Peacekeeping Operations*, describes the 1970s as a period of inactivity. During this time, China refused any involvement in United Nation Peacekeeping Operations due to ideological differences on national sovereignty and a policy of non-interference; coupled with lingering doubts about the true interests of the US and Russia. The peacekeeping organization also dredged up historical memories of a time period when China was considered the “weak man of Asia” and Western nations carved out interests inside and along its national periphery. Furthermore, in the early ‘70s, China had little experience with the UN and due to the effects of the Cultural Revolution, even fewer resources to contribute to peacekeeping missions. China also declined its right to veto UN Security Council Resolutions on peacekeeping operations in order to avoid furthering the interests of either superpower or to appear as an obstructionist.<sup>4</sup>

### **...I tolerate you**

Yin He calls the period from 1981-87, a “change in attitude.” The year 1981 would mark the first time China voted in favor of a UN resolution extending peacekeeping forces in Cyprus. The paper correctly points out that the change in governmental attitude was fostered by Deng Xiaoping’s new focus on economic policies and implementation of “Free Economic Zones.” With expanding trade and a policy of opening up to the outside world now on the table, along with a heightened feeling of security, participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations provided the PRC with a golden opportunity to make a positive impact on the world stage and to further its political agenda. However, some barriers still remained, preventing China’s full participation. While the relationship with the West improved during this time, PRC analysts surmised that this was only a temporary alliance to impede the Soviet Union and that China would be next on the chopping block. Old allegiances to the policy of non-interference still remained and the Taiwan issue was far from being resolved. Even with the monumental switch to economics as the driving force of the nation, there were still few resources available to spend on peacekeeping.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Hsiu, C, “The PLA and China’s Policy toward United Nations Peacekeeping Operation,” *All Academic*, 26 Mar 08, Paper presented at the ISA’s 49th annual convention

[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php)

<sup>3</sup> Gary D. Rawnsley, “May you live in interesting times: China, Japan and Peacekeeping,” *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, 2006, pp.1-13

<sup>4</sup> Yin He, “China’s Changing Policy on UN Peacekeeping Operations,” *Institute for Security and Development Policy (Sweden)*, 2007, pp 16-20

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* pp 20-24

The year 1988 ushered in the period of “A Rising Profile and Challenges.” Only five months after joining the UN Special Peacekeeping Committee, China would call on the international community to support UN Peacekeeping Operations. The following year, China would provide 20 civilian officials to participate in the United Nations Transition Assistance Group.<sup>6</sup> This new attitude would be immediately tested during the Gulf War crisis of 1990, when UN Resolution 678 called for authorization of military action against Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

The pending Gulf War and the UN resolution for hostile action presented China with competing problems. On the one hand, it had historically maintained a solid relationship with Kuwait and opposed Iraq’s invasion of the country but on the other, it also distrusted US intentions and the resolution ran counter to its own policy on the use of force. China voiced strong concerns about the tendency to use force in regional conflicts. At the General Assembly’s 59<sup>th</sup> Session, China’s Deputy Permanent Representative said that, “peacekeeping must adhere to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and carried out under the guidance of the Security Council. They should fully respect the views of the parties concerned, be strictly neutral and adhere to the principle of using force only when it’s necessary. Experience has shown that only by so doing can the Peacekeeping Operation contribute to long-term regional peace and stability and achieve broad support and success.” Although resolution 678 would pass, China made its opposition known through the now established practice of abstaining.<sup>8</sup> Qian Qichen, the foreign minister at that time, cited the UN Charter as its reason for abstention. Minister Qian noted that peacekeeping required the consent and cooperation of the parties and an impartial arbitrator with an unbiased attitude.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout this period of toleration, for either principled or strategic reasons, China maintained a fairly consistent position against operations it perceived as overstepping the United Nations’ mandate. Their arguments often mirrored the provisions of Chapters I and VI of the UN Charter that opposes the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state and requiring impartiality from peacekeeping forces, consent of the parties involved in the dispute, the use of means other than force to keep the peace, and the prior agreement to a ceasefire between the parties concerned. Leadership at the highest levels in China used the charter to keep a restraining hand on any resolution that would increase the power given to the UN peacekeeping body. China’s standard positions can be summed up as follows:

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Gary D. Rawnsley, “May you live in interesting times: China, Japan and Peacekeeping,” *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, 2006, pp.1-13

<sup>8</sup> Hsiu, C, “The PLA and China’s Policy toward United Nations Peacekeeping Operation,” *All Academic*, 26 Mar 08, Paper presented at the ISA’s 49th annual convention

[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php)

<sup>9</sup> Gary D. Rawnsley, “May you live in interesting times: China, Japan and Peacekeeping,” *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, 2006, pp.1-13

- 1) It would define peacekeeping as an operation involving military personnel without enforcement powers, used to help maintain or restore peace in areas of conflict<sup>10</sup>
- 2) The core concept of peacekeeping would be predicated on the non-violent use of a military force to preserve peace<sup>11</sup>
- 3) UN Peacekeeping Operations, in the eyes of the Chinese, would adhere to three primary principles of: consent, impartiality and the non-use of force<sup>12</sup>
- 4) China was adamant in their position that consent was an essential element to legitimize any international force within a sovereign state's boundaries. Chinese authorities pointed out that external interference has been challenged during several peacekeeping deployments, particularly when the international community demands that “something” must be done.<sup>13</sup>
- 5) Beijing felt that in order to be a credible arbitrator of the conflict, the UN would need to be an impartial judge in settling disputes between all parties.<sup>14</sup>
- 6) Finally, peacekeepers would only use force in self-defense. They would act as “soldiers without enemies” and “not there to win.”<sup>15</sup>

### **...I embrace you**

China’s views have clearly undergone a reevaluation and transformation from the early stages of hostility and mere tolerance, to one focused on determining what part it would play on the world stage and how it would participate in peacekeeping operations. In March of 2007, speaking at the *Multidimensional and Integrated Peace Operations Conference* held in cooperation with the *Geneva Centre for Security Policy*, Senior Colonel Zhang Ping provided a historic timeline for the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations. Senior Colonel Zhang gave a detailed breakdown of the dates deployed, the number of military personnel involved, training, external exchange and principles.<sup>16</sup>

Senior Colonel Zhang noted that the PLA’s first involvement was in April of 1990, when five military observers were sent to the United Nations Truce Supervision

---

<sup>10</sup> Hsiu, C, “ The PLA and China's Policy toward United Nations Peacekeeping Operation,” *All Academic*, 26 Mar 08, Paper presented at the ISA's 49th annual convention  
[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> From remarks given by Sr. Col. Zhang Ping, Chinese Deputy Director-General of the Peacekeeping Affairs Office, at the conference on Multidimensional and Integrated Peace Operations: Trends and Challenges, held in Beijing from 26-27 March 2007, as downloaded on 1 Nov 2008, from <http://tinyurl.com/5ova4p>

Organization.<sup>17</sup> At the end of 2001, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense set up a Peacekeeping Affairs office to oversee management and coordination of the military's participation in peacekeeping operations. Only two months later, China officially became a part of the Class 1 UN Standby Arrangements System with:<sup>18</sup>

- 1) One engineer battalion
- 2) One level II hospital
- 3) Two transport companies

Senior Colonel Zhang explained that the tour of duty for PLA military observers and staff officers assigned to UN missions was one year, while those assigned to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations was two years. Peacekeeping contingents served for an eight month period.

### **Timeline**

- 1) From 1990 to March 2007: A total of 981 observers and staff officers had been deployed
- 2) From 1992 to 1993: Two batches of 800 engineers were deployed to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia
- 3) From April 2003 to March 2007: Six batches of 1,308 engineers and medical troops deployed to the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- 4) From December 2003 to March 2007: Five batches of 2,790 engineers, transport and medical troops were deployed to the UN Mission in Liberia
- 5) From April 2006 to March 2007: A total of 517 personnel from two batches of engineers and one batch of medical troops were deployed to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon
- 6) By February 2007: A total of 7,266 military personnel had been deployed to 17 UN peacekeeping missions

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> The United Nations Stand-by Arrangements System (UNSAS) is based on conditional commitments by Member States of specified resources within the agreed response times for UN peacekeeping operations. These resources can be military formations, specialized personnel (civilian and military), services as well as material and equipment. The resources agreed-upon remain on "stand-by" in their home country, where necessary preparation, including training, is conducted to prepare them to fulfill specified tasks or functions in accordance with United Nations guidelines. Stand-by resources are used exclusively for peacekeeping operations mandated by the Security Council. When specific needs arise, stand-by resources are requested by the Secretary-General and, if approved by participating Member States, are rapidly deployed to set up new peacekeeping missions or to reinforce existing ones.  
[http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/milad/fgs2/unsas\\_files/sba.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/milad/fgs2/unsas_files/sba.htm)

7) From May 2006 to March 2007: Two batches of 870 engineers, transport and medical troops deployed to the UN Mission in Sudan

8) As of March 2007: Three military observers and five soldiers from the PLA had given their lives to peacekeeping duties

9) As of March 2007: A total of 1,642 military peacekeeping personnel were working in ten UN mission areas and at the UN Headquarters

### **Training for Staff Officers and Military Observers**

The PLA selects staff officers and military observers through a staged process of unit recommendation, professional training and examinations; qualified officers are then put into a reserve pool for deployment. The first UN military observers' course was established in 1990 and held one to two times each year. Classes consist of approximately 50 students and can last three to four months long. As of March 2007, 19 courses were completed, graduating over 900 students. The core requirements follow UN guidelines, with adjustments made depending on the specific situations of each mission. Specific training:<sup>19</sup>

- 1) Training in skills such as language, driving, communications, map reading, weapons identification and mine awareness
- 2) Physical, psychological and field survival training
- 3) Specialized training in report-writing, liaisons and negotiation techniques
- 4) Knowledge on the history, basic principles and mandate of peacekeeping operations, to include background on the local security situation, conflict, traditions, customs and epidemic diseases in the area

### **Training for Contingents**

The PLA selects candidates for inclusion in its contingent force from an existing unit that is supplemented with specialized personnel from other organizations. Successful candidates for the program undergo three months of training in: knowledge of peacekeeping operations, guiding principles, organization and command, basic military skills, physical fitness, English, diplomatic protocol, laws, rules, regulations and customs of host countries.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> From remarks given by Sr. Col. Zhang Ping, Chinese Deputy Director-General of the Peacekeeping Affairs Office, at the conference on Multidimensional and Integrated Peace Operations: Trends and Challenges, held in Beijing from 26-27 March 2007, as downloaded on 1 Nov 2008, from <http://tinyurl.com/5ova4p>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

Core elements of the peacekeeping contingent will receive additional training from the PLA's Peacekeeping Affairs Office on: force security, rules of engagement, code of conduct for UN peacekeepers, cross-culture communications, situational awareness of the mission area and mental and psychological health. To enhance the course, specialists from both inside and outside the country are invited to lecture.<sup>21</sup>

### **External Exchanges**

As with the training of contingent units, China's Ministry of National Defense has set up a program with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to expand its knowledge through external exchanges. The program is divided into three parts:<sup>22</sup>

- 1) Going Out to Learn: Over 100 officers have taken part in training exchanges with the UK, India, Thailand, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Ireland, Canada, and Australia. Peacekeeping officers have also taken part in activities run by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in South Africa, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Hungary, Italy, Estonia and Sri Lanka.
- 2) Invite Others to Help: Over 19 specialists from abroad have been invited to China for pre-deployment lectures. Additionally, 18 specialists from the British military have provided pre-deployment training.
- 3) Co-hosting and Participating in International Seminars: Three Sino-UK seminars on peacekeeping operations were held in Beijing. In 2004, China and the Bernard College of Sweden co-hosted a seminar in Beijing dealing with the challenges of peacekeeping that focused on training and education. Chinese representatives have been sent to Nigeria, the UK, Japan, Canada, ASEAN regional forums and the Council on Security and Cooperation in Asia and Pacific to attend discussions on peacekeeping operations.

### **China's Principles for Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations**

Senior Colonel Zhang outlined China's principles for current and continued participation in UN peacekeeping operations:<sup>23</sup>

“China always attaches importance to and supports implementation of peacekeeping operations in line with the spirit of UN Charter. China always holds that UN peacekeeping operations should strictly abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, especially those basic principles which have been proved to be effective in peacekeeping practices. The leading role of the Security

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> From remarks given by Sr. Col. Zhang Ping, Chinese Deputy Director-General of the Peacekeeping Affairs Office, at the conference on Multidimensional and Integrated Peace Operations: Trends and Challenges, held in Beijing from 26-27 March 2007, as downloaded on 1 Nov 2008, from <http://tinyurl.com/5ova4p>

Council should be enhanced. Premature peacekeeping operations should not be deployed. It is contrary to the basic point of peacekeeping to making the UN one of the conflicting parties. Double standards should not be employed in planning and deployment of peacekeeping operations. As an important measure for the UN to maintain peace and security, peacekeeping is not the only means. Attention should be paid to eradication of root causes of conflict and strengthening of comprehensive management.”

As can be seen from Senior Colonel Zhang’s closing remarks, Chinese traditional thoughts on involvement in peacekeeping operations still linger and he is not alone in this thinking. On 9 October 2007, at the conference on *UN Peacekeeping operations: Chinese and Western Perspectives*, held by the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies, Senior Colonel Wei Ouyang, a professor at the National Defense University, addressed the issues of challenges and opportunities from a military perspective. Senior Colonel Wei explained that one of the challenges China faces is the contradictory nature peacekeeping plays in its stated policy of non-interference.<sup>24</sup>

Speaking at the same conference, Senior Colonel Xu Weidi, a senior research fellow at the National Defense University, elaborated on this dilemma. Senior Colonel Xu felt the world was more complex in the aftermath of the Cold War and “countries demonstrating military muscles are making more trouble than peace.” He was afraid that the UN was being used to clean up “after failed campaigns by great powers.” Xu further responded that the scope of peacekeeping operations was expanding and resources might become overstretched due to “the second generation of peacekeeping.”<sup>25</sup>

*Second generation peacekeeping: Employs large military and civilian personnel. The first examples of multifunctional missions in which political, military, humanitarian, and electoral components were coordinated and fully integrated. Operations in the former Yugoslavia and in Somalia were authorized by the Security Council under chapter VII, to use force in the implementation of their humanitarian mandate.*

Sticking with the topic of challenges, Colonel Xu asked the question, “Is the UN now more involved in peace enforcement, rather than peacekeeping?” While he acknowledged the positive role of UN peacekeeping operations, he suggested that they may just be a “tranquilizer” and that perhaps “not all patients can be cured.” Going even farther, he brought up the fact that the UN is not a world government which led to some ambiguity in its role as arbitrator and while China fully supported peacekeeping operations, it would not be at the “cost of her vital interests.” Following his presentation, Senior Colonel Xu was asked where Beijing draws the line on sovereignty and intervention. He confessed that though China was “more pragmatic and reasonable than

---

<sup>24</sup> Senior Colonel Wei Ouyang, “UN Peacekeeping operations: Chinese and Western Perspectives,” *Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies*, 9 Oct 07, [http://www.mil.no/felles/ifs/start/arrangementer\\_ifs/seminar\\_07/article.jhtml?articleID=147464](http://www.mil.no/felles/ifs/start/arrangementer_ifs/seminar_07/article.jhtml?articleID=147464)

<sup>25</sup> Senior Colonel Xu Weidi, “UN Peacekeeping operations: Chinese and Western Perspectives,” *Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies*, 9 Oct 07, [http://www.mil.no/felles/ifs/start/arrangementer\\_ifs/seminar\\_07/article.jhtml?articleID=147464](http://www.mil.no/felles/ifs/start/arrangementer_ifs/seminar_07/article.jhtml?articleID=147464)

in the past,” it had yet to define the policy on when peacekeeping became positive or negative.<sup>26</sup>

In December of 2007, Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun echoed many of these findings during his remarks at the opening ceremony of the *China-ASEAN Peacekeeping Seminar*. In the first half of Minister Zhai’s talk, he outlined the changes China’s view on the changing role of UN peacekeeping operations:

“Traditional peacekeeping operations were mainly about monitoring ceasefire, troop withdrawal and separation of warring parties and periodic reports of the situation on the ground. But in the 21st century, most UN peacekeeping missions are multi-functional and integrated missions with a mandate that has extended rapidly beyond ‘peacekeeping’ to include ‘conflict prevention’ and ‘post-conflict peace-building.’ According to available statistics, the current UN peacekeeping operations have dozens of functions, including organizing and supervising elections, assisting in the implementation of constitution or judicial reform, disarming illegal armed forces, restructuring the security department and providing humanitarian relief.”<sup>27</sup>

At this point, it is perhaps important to note that military involvement in foreign affairs has itself gone through a period of transition and evolution. Historically, the PLA has maintained a limited role in foreign affairs and this was certainly true during the eras of Mao and Deng. This period, prior to the passing of the old guard, saw top military leaders confined to an internal role, seldom with international exposure. In the latter half of Deng’s rule, as the People’s Republic of China began to open to the outside world and following the transition of power, the PLA began to find new venues such as peacekeeping that provided greater impact outside the country.<sup>28</sup>

By November of 2008, it could be said that the transformation from tolerance to full acceptance was complete. Although clearly having strong reservations, the PLA was fully engaged in UN peacekeeping operations with 2,159 personnel deployed. Only 12 countries, out of the 120 participants, would have more troops and police than China involved in peacekeeping operations. Of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, it would be second only to France.<sup>29</sup> Regarding issues of finance, while still far behind the US, China made the top-10 list of contributors to the UN peacekeeping budget.<sup>30</sup> To date, China has also lost eight peacekeepers in six different UN missions around the world.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun, *China-ASEAN Peacekeeping Seminar*, 1 Dec 07, as downloaded from <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t387698.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Hsiu, C, “The PLA and China’s Policy toward United Nations Peacekeeping Operation,” *All Academic*, 26 Mar 08, Paper presented at the ISA’s 49th annual convention [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php)

<sup>29</sup> UN Peacekeeping statistic websites [http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/2008/nov08\\_2.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/2008/nov08_2.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> UN Peacekeeping statistic website <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/financing.html>

## CONCLUSIONS

Observing the evolution of China's changing attitudes towards peacekeeping over an extended period of time gives us an opportunity to weigh the strategic choices that influenced those decisions. Borrowing from Winston Churchill's famous saying that "a nation has no permanent enemies and no permanent friends, only permanent interests" we can surmise that these choices were not all altruistic in nature. Neither born out of animosity nor friendship, simply based on the interests of the state. So then, what does China gain from this complete reversal in its policy of avoiding immersion in UN Peacekeeping Operations?

China's growing prominence as a world power clearly clashes with its historic nature of appearing less than what it is, or fighting below its weight as referred to in some circles. Participation in peacekeeping operations softens the perception that China is a rising dragon bent on world domination. Beijing is particularly sensitive to accusations of the "China Threat," which it views as a tool for containment. Strategically, China must walk a fine line in its involvement in security operations in order to maintain this perception of a peaceful rise. While it enhances China's image as major power, it also provokes backlash. Too much participation in the international arena and it is viewed as military expansion; not enough and it is seen as ignoring the responsibilities of a world power. Managing worldwide expectations and opinions of China's military and economic might is both a blessing and a curse. Peacekeeping, if handled correctly, offsets the fear of an aggressive nation seeking to redefine the world system by integrating smoothly into the current fold.

This view of maintaining the status quo was reflected in a paper written by Tang Yongsheng, the Deputy Director of the Strategy Institute, University of National Defense, in which he gave his recommendations for China's future geo-strategic policy. The paper was published in the *Beijing International Affairs Journal* of the State Council's *Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations* which focuses on international relations in the Asia Pacific Region. In the essay, Deputy Director Tang said, "China should circuitously adopt an indirect line, avoid direct geo-strategic confrontation with the dominant countries in the international system, actively participate in extensive security cooperation mechanisms, and form a consolidated strategic prop, so as to seek to establish ourselves in an unassailable position."<sup>31</sup>

Still another set of benefits can be compared to the Chinese game of "Go," which has been described as a game of competition for real estate. The game seldom ends in complete victory or utter failure, just an advantage for one side or the other. Using stones to outflank a competitor, the end results may only differ by a few stones for either player. Peacekeeping operations may be one of those few stones China sees as an advantage. A component of soft power, peacekeeping allows China to regionally balance power against the US and Japan and spread influence to areas beyond its reach. The relationships built

---

<sup>31</sup> Tang Yongsheng, "PRC Scholar Sets Out Blueprint for China's Geostrategy," *Beijing Modern International Affairs*, 20 May 08, pp. 20-21, OSC reference number CPP20080724508002 The reference to "prop" is unclear.

through assistance abroad, such as in Africa and South America, gives it access to badly needed resources that it otherwise might not be able to attain.

Deputy Director Tang also envisioned participation in security organizations as a method for realizing China's geo-strategy. Writing on strategic directions, he noted that in the Central Asia direction, through the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, China should further stabilize the Central Asian situation in order to boost support for China's internal strategic hinterland.<sup>32</sup> And in the South Asia direction, China should also actively take part in building South Asian regional integration, and spur the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* to play a still greater role in regional cooperation. In addition, China should play a greater role in regional security through various ways such as peacekeeping and humanitarian aid and even maintain necessary ties and contacts with NATO, so as to strengthen mutual understanding, and engage in cooperation when necessary.<sup>33</sup>

Security contributions in the "Europe direction," were seen as the cure to a host of issues. "If we also consider improving and giving play to the role of other multilateral security mechanisms, basic security and stability on the Eurasian continent will have a more reliable basis and guarantee. In fact, the China-Russia-Europe triangular relationship has the conditions to increase interaction intensity and appear as an embryo as the ties within it increase, and to expand the space for playing its role; energy source demand, Central Asian stability, and economic interests can increase interaction between the three sides. The recent rash criticisms of China by certain forces in Europe over the Tibet issue cannot withstand the settling of the sediment of time, and it will be very difficult for them to affect the long-term development of Sino-European relations."<sup>34</sup>

China also has a stake in maintaining international stability for its long-term strategic goals. Preservation of the global economy is paramount if China is to continue its upward momentum; a faltering economic engine could spell disaster internally and spark unrest. Deng Xiaoping, credited as the architect of China's modern economic policy, understood that international peace was a key ingredient to China's rise. Not only did the nation need to keep a low profile and avoid confrontation, it had to actively advocate world peace. Disruptions in the global economy are detrimental to China's prosperity and even small-scale eruptions can cause ripples throughout the economic pond.

Through external exchanges, China's military is given greater exposure to the international community. In 2005, the PLA deployed more than 100 officers from all branches of the service to study abroad. These exchanges provided the Chinese military

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

The *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)* was established when its Charter was formally adopted on December 8, 1985 by the Heads of State or Government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAARC provides a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. It aims to accelerate the process of economic and social development in Member States.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

with insight into high-tech equipment and management techniques of foreign militaries. Furthermore, it was useful in observing joint operations, a high priority in China's modernization reforms.<sup>35</sup> These lessons apply equally to participation in peacekeeping operations. Specifically, experience in peacekeeping operations has had a profound affect on the thinking of officers inside the military. While still leery of foreign intentions, peacekeeping operations are seen as a method for strengthening China's security and gaining much needed practical experience. It has been decades since China's last military confrontation and the opportunity to provide their leadership with realistic operations, including combat, greatly enhance the military's capability.<sup>36</sup>

Just as there are benefits to China's increased support for UN Peacekeeping Operations, there are also pitfalls. Active involvement, from a Chinese perspective, risks setting a dangerous precedent for involvement in internal affairs and runs converse to their stated principles of non-interference in foreign disputes. Furthermore, it raises China's international profile and ignores Deng's advice of "never taking the lead." Raising one's head above the parapet invites criticism, regardless of intent. When China sent engineers to Darfur, elements within the population accused them of having no interest in human rights and that their true intentions were to gain access to Sudan's resources.<sup>37</sup>

Haiti is another example of Beijing's participation in certain UN peacekeeping missions causing controversy. In 2004, China sent People's Armed Police officers to Haiti with the specified objective of training local police and restoring order to areas affected by flooding. However, Haiti's formal relations with Taiwan aroused suspicions that Beijing might have an ulterior motive in sending the peacekeepers. Taiwanese officials accused them of leveraging the peacekeepers as a means to pry away support from Taiwan's few remaining allies in Central and South America. Depending on how one chooses to view this situation, it could be seen as both as an advantage and a potential pitfall.

Deputy Director Chou of the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry's Department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs said that, "if Taiwan's 23 mostly small developing countries did not give China the nod, it becomes more difficult for them to achieve their objectives in the UN." He said that top officials in Haiti had expressed their concern over Beijing's influence in the UN Security Council and its ability to veto ongoing missions in Haiti. Haitian officials also noted that the Chinese contingent made up a large percentage of the troops stationed in their country. According to Chou, mainland China also used the specter of the People's Armed Police to persuade Guatemala to side with them.<sup>38</sup> The controversy over the deployment to Haiti did not end with Taiwan and Guatemala.

---

<sup>35</sup> Hsiu, C, "The PLA and China's Policy toward United Nations Peacekeeping Operation," *All Academic*, 26 Mar 08, Paper presented at the ISA's 49th annual convention

[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Max Hirsch, "China Uses Peacekeeping To Thwart U.N. Role for Taipei," *Kyodo World Service*, 4 Sep 08, OSC reference number JPP20080904969049

Reports appearing in the Western media emphasized Chinese presence in the “US backyard” and speculation on a Chinese strategy to “supplant US influence” in the hemisphere.<sup>39</sup>

As to future peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, China may soon find itself engaged in fighting Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden. China’s foreign ministry released a statement on its website saying, “We are making preparations and arrangements to deploy naval ships to the Gulf of Aden for escorting operations.” This followed several attempts by pirates in the area to hijack Chinese merchant vessels. Military sources called attention to the fact that this was the first time that the People’s Liberation Navy had undertaken escort duties outside of its home waters. It was also noted that this was in line with UN resolutions on fighting piracy off Somalia.<sup>40</sup>

China has a vested interest in protecting its sea lanes, as some 1,000 Chinese commercial ships pass the area each year. In 2008, it was estimated that 20% of Chinese ships that passed through Somalia waters were attacked by pirates. China’s spokesman for the foreign ministry said, “China welcomes international cooperation in the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia, and support the efforts of other countries to send warships to the region to crack down on pirates in pursuit of international law and UN Security Council resolutions.”<sup>41</sup>

Tang’s geo-strategic outlook also seemed to take situations like this into account. “In the direction of the Indian Ocean to the south, China should step up strategic input and intensify the development of relations with the countries concerned, including getting a deeper understanding of the strategic status of countries such as Burma and Pakistan. If communications conditions with these countries can be improved, China can ease excessive dependence on navigation routes such as the Malacca Strait. Burma in fact has favorable conditions for becoming a geo-strategic hub and will play an increasingly important role in future regional security and development.”<sup>42</sup>

In summation, China has transitioned from an openly hostile position on peacekeeping operations, to what can be described as a wary acceptance. In measuring the cost to benefit ratio, they have determined it is better to accept the risks of a higher profile than to be outside the system. While incorporating extra agendas into its role as a major provider of peacekeeping forces, this does not appear to be the main driver. Temporarily putting aside geo-strategy, the hunt for resources and strong-arm tactics, China perhaps has more at stake than most in maintaining a stable global environment. Economic upheavals and regional hot-spots are serious threats to the viability of the government and stabilization must take precedence over secondary considerations.

---

<sup>39</sup> Hsiu, C, “The PLA and China's Policy toward United Nations Peacekeeping Operation,” *All Academic*, 26 Mar 08, Paper presented at the ISA's 49th annual convention  
[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/0/7/1/pages250718/p250718-1.php)

<sup>40</sup> Wang Cong, “China to send Navy to fight Somali pirates,” *China View*, 18 Dec 08, as downloaded from  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/18/content\\_10525310.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/18/content_10525310.htm)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid