

From Condemnation to Cooperation: The Evolution of China's Position toward UN Peacekeeping Operations


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ABSTRACT

In its capacity as a great power, China has assumed greater responsibilities regarding the provision of global public goods. Therefore, it has become the UN Security Council's permanent member which contributes the largest amount of troops to peacekeeping operations. Consequently, China has steadily increased its financial contributions and registered an 8.000 peacekeeping stand-by force. Nonetheless, China's current leadership in the field of peacekeeping operations differs radically from its initial rejection for missions which it regarded as imperialist instruments destined to undermine the progress of revolutionary movements and weaken the principle of sovereignty. Therefore, in this article, I will explain the evolution of China's stance toward UN PKOs from an outright rejection to a moderate opposition, and from a limited support to an active participation. Furthermore, I will explain how PKOs enable China to protect its national interests in conflict zones and upgrade its military capabilities through military operations other than war. (MOOTW). Finally, I will explain that this stance is the reflection of evolving national conception roles and of a more ambitious Chinese foreign policy; through which Beijing seeks to strengthen international cooperation, safeguard its interests and nationals overseas, redefine international norms and global governance schemes and reaffirm its great power status.

Keywords: UN Peacekeeping Operations, China, International Security, Chinese Foreign Policy.

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De la condena a la cooperación: la evolución de la posición de China hacia las operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz de la ONU

RESUMEN

En su calidad de gran potencia, China ha asumido mayores responsabilidades en la provisión de bienes públicos globales. Por ello, es el miembro permanente del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU que contribuye con más tropas a las operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz de dicha organización, habiendo incrementado sus contribuciones financieras sostenidamente y registrado una fuerza de reserva consistente en 8000 efectivos. Sin embargo, el actual liderazgo de China en las OMPs difiere radicalmente de su rechazo inicial por misiones que consideraba como instrumentos imperialistas destinados a cortar el avance de movimientos revolucionarios y debilitar el principio de soberanía. En el presente artículo explicaré la evolución de la posición china en relación a las OPMs de una condena férrea a una oposición moderada, y de un apoyo limitado a una participación activa. Asimismo, señalaré como las OMPs permiten a China proteger sus intereses nacionales en zonas de conflicto y desarrollar sus capacidades a través de operaciones militares diferentes a la guerra (MOOTW). Finalmente señalaré que esta posición es reflejo de concepciones de roles nacionales que han variado y de una política exterior china más ambiciosa que busca fortalecer la cooperación internacional, cautelar sus intereses fundamentales, redefinir normas internacionales y esquemas de gobernanza global y reafirmar su estatus de gran potencia.

Palabras clave: Operaciones de Paz de la ONU, China, Seguridad Internacional, Política Exterior China

INTRODUCTION

China has turned into the world's second economy, a technological champion and into a growing military power. Hence the status of major power has radically broadened the foreign policy instruments at the country's disposal to safeguard its national interests. Nevertheless, China's current status also carries the responsibility of providing public global goods and leading within the framework of international organizations. Since their inception, UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) have been mechanisms to guarantee international peace and security. Nevertheless, over the course of the last three decades, these missions have acquired a greater complexity in depth and scope.

In this paper, I intend to illustrate the evolution of China's stance toward UN PKOs and explain the drivers behind Beijing's shift from condemning to actively engaging in said operations. I will argue that China's changing stance and engagement toward PKOs attitude and participation respond to an evolution in its national role conceptions, its increased material capabilities, its broadened security imperatives and its willingness to contribute to and redefine global governance in line with its great power status. Henceforth, in the first place I will explain the concept of PKOs and

explain how they have evolved over time. Secondly, I will delve into China's historical approach to sovereignty and how it has shaped its understanding of PKOs. In the third place, I intend to analyze China's transition from outright rejection to active participation in UN PKOs. Furthermore, I will illustrate how supporting peace-keeping operations has led China to wrestle with complex dilemmas. Nevertheless, Beijing has recognized that several security issues, including terrorism and maritime security, are too large and complex for single states to address. Consequently, China's views on current multilateral interventions are that such operations are best undertaken via the United Nations and within the boundaries of international law.

Furthermore, I will explain how China's current involvement in UN PKOs fit into the spectrum of China's ambition to reshape global governance along the lines of its political values and principles, to protect its economic interests and citizens overseas and to develop military capabilities through military operations other than war. Finally, I will argue how China's current strategy toward UN PKO's is intertwined with China's foreign and security policy imperatives and the global initiatives Beijing has launched.

Throughout this piece, I will refer to the notion of national role conceptions to frame China's stance toward UN PKOs. For Holsti (1970), national role conceptions are the policymakers' own definitions of the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in a subordinate regional system. Hence, they reflect their perspective about the appropriate orientation and function of its State, toward or in a foreign environment (Holsti, 1970). Therefore, they serve as a source of standards and norms which inform the government's foreign policy principles, stance and actions.

Nevertheless, foreign policy analysis responds to multiple causes and factors at different levels of analysis. Therefore, major changes in the international system might lead certain national role conceptions to gain prominence and popular support, while the pressure of domestic actors play an important role. Nonetheless, the conception of the leaders toward the role or roles the country should play in its external action creates an array of possibilities of action which should be analyzed. Hence, I will posit that national role conceptions, the increase of China's capabilities, the protection of its overseas interests and its global governance agenda have deeply influenced China's stance toward UN PKOs.

THE EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

After the failed attempt of the Society of Nations to create an international architecture devoted to preventing the scourge of war, the United Nations emerged after II World War with the purpose of safeguarding international peace and security, reducing the likelihood of armed conflict. Hence, according to Chapters 6 and 7 of the UN Charter, the Security Council is charged with the obligation to pursue the pacific settlement of disputes and act with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression (UN, 1945). Consequently, the concept of PKO's was not explicitly mentioned in the UN Charter. Therefore, the creation of these operations derived from these general obligations to uphold international peace and security.

Furthermore, at the time of its inception, peacekeeping operations were expected to observe a strict set of principles such as consent, impartiality/neutrality, and the minimum use of force. Hence, UN PKOs needed to count with the consent of the host state to operate on its soil, UN forces were requested to remain impartial in their relations with the conflict parties, and were only authorized to make use of military force in self-defense (Bellamy y Williams, 2013). Thus, the rationale behind PKO's in its initial years was to control hostilities and insulate regional conflicts, precluding them from expanding their geographical outreach and creating further destabilization.

Nonetheless, the geopolitical and security imperatives of the Cold War conditioned the progress of PKOs both in number and scope. Hence, the end of the cold war marked UN peacekeeping endeavors' entrance into terra incognita, since this period saw a dramatic increase of intra-state conflicts and in the deployment of UN PKOs. Bellamy and Williams note that during the Cold War, peacekeepers were deployed within five years of a conflict onset in 24 percent of all cases. (2013) Nevertheless, the proportion of PKO deployments increased to a 51 percent in the post-Cold War period, with progressive increases in the 1990s (41%), 2000s (64%), and 2010s (83%) (Bellamy and Williams, 2013). Hence, PKOs were increasingly regarded as effective mechanisms to manage conflicts, de-escalating violence and enabling settlements.

Nevertheless, PKOs did not merely grow in terms of quantity, there was also a process by which they were redimensioned and broadened in reach and scope. A crucial milestone to redefine the conceptual lines of peacekeeping operations can be traced to 1992, when Boutros Boutros-Galli, the then UN's Secretary General, issued a report called an «Agenda for Peace». This document marked a stark departure from the way in which PKOs had been understood until then. According to this report, PKOs

should not be constrained to guard borders but to «address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice and political oppression».(Boutros-Galli, 1992:)Furthermore, it stated that by way of preventive deployment, post-conflict peace building and more heavily armed units which would respond to outright aggression, imminent or actual. Hence, in line with this broader understanding, the decade of 1990s saw a significant increase of PKOs. Aligned with the vision articulated by the aforementioned UN Secretary General and counting with the resolute support of a more cooperative Security Council, a growing number of PKOs adopted a multidimensional approach, aiming to accompany the implementation of peace processes (Bellamy and Williams, 2013).

Furthermore, as Foot posits, the imperative of human protection responds to universalist and cosmopolitan values which call into question the notion of state sovereignty as absolute (2020). Barnett, on the other hand, linked the UN with the concept of Liberal Humanitarianism, a post-Cold War construct which construed the UN as the depository of political legitimization of the expanded liberal world order, by defining what was to be regarded as acceptable and proper state behaviour (2011). Moreover, Barnett observed that Liberal peacekeeping has a highly invasive nature; since there is a broader list of factors associated with a stable peace.(2011) In other words, nearly all of the features of state and society have become objects of intervention. The establishment of a democracy could be regarded as first step, yet democratization cannot exist without a wide array of other elements, such as a free press, an independent judiciary, an educated population, a strong middle class, markets, the rule of law, and basic respect for human rights (Barnet, 2011).

Therefore, after the hard-learned lessons during the 90s, the then Secretary General of the United Nations commissioned a high-level panel to review all aspects related to PKOs, which was chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria. The so-called Brahimi Report contained four main recommendations. Firstly, peacekeepers should have the specific mandate to use force to defend themselves, their freedom of movement, their mission and civilians under imminent threat of attack. Secondly, the United Nations should not mandate a mission if it lacks the necessary resources to fulfill it, which in practical terms meant that the forces of pivotal states could be deployed first, and then be followed by UN forces. Third, the report recommended a better consultation between the UN Security Council and the troop-contributing countries. Finally, the document considered the United Nations should adopt a multidimensional approach in peacebuilding as an integral part of PKOs. This last recommendation included tasks such as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, training of police forces, supervision of elections, and strengthening of the rule of law and the protection of

human rights (Stahle, 2008). Consequently, the Brahimi Report came to inform the UN PKO policy, by adopting the Peace Support Model.

According to Stahle (2008), there are five types of PKOs. The first type is called Traditional Peacekeeping, which bears greater resemblance with the foundational operations. In this vein, traditional peacekeepers intend to facilitate political dialogue and build confidence among the parties, creating an environment conducive to the resolution of a conflict rather than attempting to do so themselves. They adhere strictly to the three UNPKO principles. The second kind is named Transition Management, these missions have a more multidimensional approach since their mandate entails transforming states and societies by supervising electoral processes, building democratic institutions, training law-enforcement agents and the armed forces, promoting post-conflict rehabilitation, and protecting human rights (Stahle, 2008).

The third type are Wider Peacekeeping Operations, said operations were initially conceived as traditional PKOs, yet the content of their mandate was progressively broadened. For instance, in circumstances of fragile temporary ceasefires and standing violences, the missions have assumed the additional tasks of securing the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protecting civilians from imminent threats to their physical integrity and lives. These operations reveal a less strict understanding of the foundational principles of UN PKOs. The fourth kind are peace enforcement operations, the rationale behind these PKOs is that under the authorization of the UNSC, military force could be used to coerce parties in conflict to comply with a previously consented agreement. Finally, the fifth type of PKO is the Peace Support Operation, which have a multifunctional nature, since they encompass the presence of a strong military force and a solid civilian pillar which is charged with civil administration, civilian policing and humanitarian relief tasks (Stahle, 2008).

As I have analyzed, PKOs have had a constant evolution which has broadened its nature and mandates. This encompassing approach involved nation-building along liberal democratic lines, creating institutions, legal frameworks and even administering territories. For China, this broader scope of action was deeply problematic, since in the name of human rights or democracy, China's sovereignty could be affected.

Consequently, after analyzing the origin, the conceptual framework and the evolution of UN PKOs, in the next sections I intend to analyze how China's stance towards these operations had a significant evolution over the years. I will evaluate how China's national role conceptions influenced its conceptual and policy shifts vis a vis UN PKOs. On the light of evidence, I will posit that China's acceptance

and involvement in PKOs was inversely proportional to the weakening of the initial characteristics of PKOs and directly proportional to its growing national role as a great power and the diversification of its overseas interests.

THE STALWART OF ANTI-IMPERIALISM: CHINA'S INITIAL CONDEMNATION OF THE UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS (1950-1971)

In order to understand China's national role conception and the evolution of the country's position toward PKOs, it is crucial to understand how China conceived the world and how it came into contact with the principle of sovereignty. Therefore, a crucial historical period to understand China's zeal for a stricter notion of sovereignty is the so-called Century of Humiliation. (Wu and Taylor, 2011) During this period of time, several traumatic events took place within China, such as the Opium Wars, the Sino-Japanese wars, the Invasion of the Eight Allied Powers, among other military incursions which caused a deep sense of victimization (Fairbank y Goldman 2006).

Furthermore, since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, China's position regarding the United Nations was ambivalent. On the one hand, the new China understood that being part of the UN would provide its with political recognition and legitimacy. Therefore, since 1950, the PRC had claimed to be recognized as the sole and legitimate representative government of China. To this end, the PRC's government sent written requests to the UN, on a monthly basis, expecting to have its recognition demands acknowledged and to rightfully claim its seat at the Security Council. Nonetheless, the PRC would have to wait almost 22 years to take the UN seat as China's legitimate representative.

Nonetheless, this long period of time was plagued by events which shaped China's posture towards the UN. Firstly, shortly after the foundation of the PRC, the Korean War broke out in 1950. The invasion launched by the North Korean forces against South Korea had a deep impact in the international community, prompting a multinational UN led force to come into the South's rescue. As Garver notes, the PRC regarded North Korea as a buffer zone between its industrial heartland in the country's northeast and the United States' military forces based in South Korea and Japan. (Garver, 2016) Therefore the participation of UN forces and their relentless advance towards China's border was regarded as an existential threat to its national security.

Even if strictly speaking, the UN forces did not conduct a PKO on Korean soil, the fact that its intervention had been sanctioned by UN Security Council resolution 84 and the General Assembly through the Resolution Uniting for Peace, lent weight to

China's acrimony towards the organization. Hence, in 1950, when the UN-led force counterattacked pushing North Korean Forces very close to the border with China, PRC's government regarded this development as a red line which had been crossed. Therefore, the PRC sent more than one million troops to support their North Korean comrades. Nevertheless, technically, said troops were part of the Popular Army of Volunteers, not of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This mechanism was used by China to prevent the UN forces from invading China, by plausibly denying the direct involvement of the PLA in the war (Garver, 2016).

Consequently, the Korean War had a profound impact on China's strategic thought and shaped its perception of the UN, conditioning its ulterior conception pertaining PKO's. Furthermore, Beijing's rejection towards the UN PKO's reached a peak when the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations was established in 1965. Hence, in that year, the PRC accused the UN of becoming a US-controlled headquarters of international gendarmes to suppress the revolutionary struggles of the world's peoples (Indonesia quits UN ..., 1965). In line with this stance, in 1965, the official newspaper of the Communist Party, the People's daily, condemned the UN as 'a pliant tool of US Imperialism, which has degenerated into a dirty international political stock exchange in the grip of a few big powers; the sovereignty of other nations, particularly that of small ones, is often bought and sold there by them' (Zhang, 2007, p. 3). Furthermore, closely aligned with the criticism made by the official media, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai considered that the UN was under the manipulation of US Imperialism that had to be thoroughly reorganized (Indonesia quits UN ..., 1965). On the other hand, adding fuel to the fire, the PRC's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chen Yi, called for the creation of a revolutionary United Nations, considering that that UN had been controlled by the United States and that it had become a space where said country and the USSR conducted political transactions, despite the efforts of the Afro-Asian and peace-loving nations to bring change to the organization (Indonesia quits UN ..., 1965). In this context, China's pivot to the third world became more pronounced, grounded on both ideological and strategic imperatives and upholding its identity as a post-colonial and anti-imperialist country.

Furthermore, Mao Zedong's Two Intermediate zones Theory and the Theory of the Three worlds became the theoretical underpinnings on which Chinese foreign policy came to be constructed. According to Mao, the United States and the USSR were considered to be first world countries, the Western European countries, Japan, Canada, New Zealand and Australia belonged to the second world, while Asia, Africa and Latin America were considered to be part of the third world. (Yee, 1983). Mao regarded the countries which belonged to the second and third world as two

intermediate zones which were considered to be areas of contention against first world powers. Hence, the purpose behind Mao's strategy was to unite the progressive third world states and win over the second world countries, isolating the United States and the USSR while creating a buffer zone which would strengthen China's security. (Yee, 1983 & Gillespie, 2004). Therefore, the third world was regarded as a crucial intermediate zone, where their peoples opposed American Imperialism. (Mao, 1963). Consequently, the CCP created The Asia, Africa and Latin America Training Center (亚非拉培训中心) to host revolutionary cadres from post-colonial countries, which received military training and ideological preparation (Lovell, 2019).

Furthermore, as Matsuda notes, prior to assuming the role of China's representative in the UN, Beijing expressed an outright opposition to all ten UN PKOs had taken place until then, condemning said operations as «invasions» by the UN or as «tools of US neo-colonialism.» (2016). Furthermore, when Indonesia decided to withdraw from the UN in 1965, the PRC firmly supported its decision and protested against the notion of UN PKOs. (Matsuda, 2016). This reveals a sense of absolute rejection toward the organization not only on the grounds of the alleged instrumentalization by the United States, but also by the USSR.

Consequently, in the mid-50s the Sino-Soviet schism began to deepen right after Stalin's passing. Khrushchev's promotion as the Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party and the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) marked an epochal shift in Soviet Foreign Policy. After these events, the CPSU embraced the doctrines of peaceful coexistence and peaceful conquest of power, which significantly diverged from Mao's zeal for armed struggle. During the decade of the 60s, and especially during the first phase of the cultural revolution, China intended to break up the international system, claiming that PKOs were manipulated by American Imperialism and later by Soviet social imperialism. Furthermore, the growing political, ideological and geopolitical differences even led to a military confrontation in 1969.

Therefore, conforming with the national conception role of champion of the world's revolution, China's support for Maoist inspired movements throughout the developing world became a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Hence, by the end of 1967, China had supported armed insurrections in 27 countries, while the PRC's official propaganda machine made strides to position Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought as the salvation of the peoples of the world (Garver, 2016). Hence In a context where the new China actively promoted maoist-inspired revolutions, UN PKOs were regarded as an instrument to contain the legitimate aspirations of national liberation movements in the third world. As Zhang argues, China then

had two images of the UN, on the one hand the UN described by its foundational Charter and the UN under effective control of the United States (Zhang, 2007).

Nevertheless, despite the harsh rhetoric aimed at American Imperialism and its subservient organizations, China's strategic context and national security imperatives were shifting due to the growing pressure the USSR's threat placed upon Beijing's borders. Therefore, this context presented a fertile land for rapprochement between the United States and China. Hence, the first signal of rapprochement can be traced to 1967, when the then Presidential hopeful, Richard Nixon wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs*, where he posited that China could not be excluded from the family of nations forever. Mao Zedong read the article and understood that despite the deep ideological differences which set them apart and against the orthodoxy of the Cultural Revolution, with Nixon there was room for dialogue. Hence, upon his election as the 37th president of the United States, in 1969, Nixon took the opportunity of his inaugural speech to say that no country, small or big, could live in isolation. This speech was translated and published on the People's daily, official mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party.

On the other hand, in the same year, the Sino-Soviet armed conflict was a catalyst for the rapprochement. In this process, the dialogue between Chinese and American diplomats in Warsaw and the good offices of Pakistan and Romania were crucial for the advent of Kissinger's visits and the Ping Pong Diplomacy (Garver, 2016). Consequently, China and the United States could be on the antipodes on almost every realm, except for the fact that both countries considered the Soviet Union as the main threat to their security and coincided on the need to contain it. This process of rapprochement paved the way for the normalization of Sino-US relations and directly impacted the PRC's accession to the United Nations as the sole legitimate representative of China.

THE NON-DISRUPTIVE OPPOSER (1971-1981)

As I noted in the previous section, until 1971, the PRC's attempts to join the United Nations had been systematically deflected from the outset, excluding it from the organization while recognizing the Taipei-based Republic of China as the State's legitimate representative. Hence, in line with its national role conception of Champion of World's Revolution, Beijing construed the UN PKOs as instruments of great powers, a perception which gained traction after the Korean War (Lanteigne, 2020).

Nevertheless, in the early 70s, China had emerged from a tumultuous period of history, where the Cultural Revolution was in full swing and the memories of a

military clash with the Soviet Union were fresh. Therefore, China construed the Soviet Union as its major threat. Hence, despite the gulf of ideological differences which separated the PRC and the United States, the shared notion of the USSR as the greater evil brought them together. Therefore, PRC's recognition as China's legitimate representative at the UN in 1971 implied it came to enjoy international respect and recognition, yet this status entailed assuming obligations to uphold global peace and security. Furthermore, in a context where nuclear deterrence made a conventional military confrontation not viable, the cold war was fought through proxy wars that led to the growth of interstate and intrastate conflicts. In this context, PKOs constituted an instrument to de-escalate crises and prevent hostilities from broadening their geographical reach.

Consequently, as I argued in the previous section, in the light of its historical experience and its strict zeal for sovereignty, China saw PKOs as a blatant infringement of principles such as sovereignty and territorial integrity and as an instrument of world powers which could be wielded against it. Therefore, China strongly condemned PKOs and expressed its outright opposition to them in three ways. In the first place, China refused to participate in any debates held by the Security Council on the matter. Furthermore, China declined taking part in the process of drafting resolutions regarding the matter or considering the requests of third world countries. In the third place, China rejected making financial contributions to PKOs on the grounds of its principled-based rejection of said operations. (Zhang, 1996).

Furthermore, as Wuthnow notes, the grievances held by the PRC in the 1970s also derived from the belief that PKOs might be used as political instruments which would enable superpowers to consolidate their political influence in the Third World. (2013: 16). Hence, in 1973, in the wake of the Arab-Israeli War, the Second United Nations Emergency Force II (UNEF II) was established to supervise the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 340. (UN Security Council, 2022). Hence, ahead of the approval of the resolution, PRC's permanent representative, Huang Hua, reiterated his country's opposition to PKOs, considering that these operations paved the way for further international intervention and control on the part of superpowers. Furthermore, he argued that such operations would steer sovereign Arab states of the Middle East into an area of international control, adding that South Korea was a living example of such *modus operandi* (Security Council Document S/PV.1750, 25 October 1973, 2). Nevertheless, despite its principle-based opposition to PKOs, the PRC refrained from vetoing the resolution on the grounds of the requests made by the victims of aggression. Furthermore, China's outright opposition to PKO's would be left behind. Hence, after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the launch of the Reform and Opening, China's National Role Conception as the champion of

the world's revolution changed gave way to a more pragmatic understanding of its domestic imperatives and how attaining them ultimately hinged upon its foreign policy orientation.

THE CHAMPION OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD 1981-1988

The context in which China shifted its position from condemnation to cooperation was marked by the Reform and Opening. This process launched in 1978, intended to advance China's economic and social development through foreign investment and trade. During this period of time China's priorities lay within its borders, ensuring world stability was crucial for its growth and required a more cooperative foreign policy. Hence the conflicts with the United States during the first Reagan administration and the shift in China's development strategy had a deep imprint in China's foreign policy (Zhang, 1996). Furthermore, the 12th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held in 1982, marked the beginning of the independent foreign policy orientation, which sidelined anti-sovietism and the tacit alignment with the United States in regards to the USSR.

Therefore, As Fravel posits, in the early 1980s, the PRC intended to emphasize its national conception role as self-proclaimed leader of the developing world and therefore sought to distance itself away from the partnership it had forged with the United States. (1996). This greater engagement toward the developing world implied the need for a more cooperative approach toward the UN and PKOs, given the salience said institutions had for several developing states. Furthermore, China's brand-new commitment to PKOs made evident China's willingness to cooperate for the sake of enhancing its external environment, thus contributing to the progress of its economic construction. (Zhang, 1996).

Consequently, China first casted a vote on peacekeeping in 1981, when it voted to authorize the extension of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Another milestone decision took place in 1982, when China made its first financial contribution to fund UN peacekeeping operations. Moreover, on 15 October 1984, China's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at a UN Special Political Committee meeting, further elaborated the rationale behind China's emerging commitment to PKOs: 'In this most turbulent and volatile world, there is a universal demand for strengthening the peacekeeping capability of the United Nations, China is determined to make the greatest endeavor possible to strengthen the role of the United Nations' (In Zhang, 1996)

Hence, from 1981 to 1990, China supported all UN resolutions pertaining to peace operations. This shift responded to a new orientation called independent foreign policy of peace (独立自主的和平外交政策) which was enshrined in the PRC's 1982 Constitution. This orientation emerged in a context where China's Reform and Opening Policy was underway and where Beijing recognized the relevance of world's peace and stability to advance its economic and development imperatives (Wu and Taylor, 2011).

Hence, if in 1965 China called for the creation of a revolutionary United Nations Organization, 20 years after, the country came to praise the UN as a paramount actor to ensure international peace and security. Consequently, this more constructive vision of the UN had an impact on its position regarding PKOs. Therefore, In 1985, during a speech delivered at the UN General Assembly, the Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang praised the UN saying it 'has done much and has played an active part in safeguarding world peace, opposing armed aggression and occupation of one country by another, encouraging the restructuring of the inequitable international economic order and promoting international economic and technological cooperation.' (1985).

Furthermore, in 1988, China, for the first time in its history, commended UN PKOs, considering that said operations received the universal praise and support of the international community (Matsuda, 2016). Shortly after this declaration, China manifested its will to become a member of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. (Gill and Huang, 2009) Therefore, China's behavior from 1981 to 1988 reflected a significant foreign policy shift from outright rejection to a low-key participation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that during this period of time, China's commitment toward PKO's faced minor contingencies since the UN did not approve new operations until 1988 (Fravel, 1996).

THE LOW-PROFILE COUNTRY (1988-1999)

The period of time which ranged from 1988 to 1999 brought massive transformations to China and to the International System. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War and emergence of a unipolar moment where the United States became the world's greatest power and the champion of an international liberal order which preconized free trade, international institutions and democracy. Nevertheless, in the wake of China's harsh response to the Tiananmen protests, the country was subjected to international condemnation and heavy sanctions. Therefore, mindful of the situation, the PRC's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping decided to focus on domestic growth and embrace a low-profile foreign policy approach. Said foreign policy orientation was called Taoguang Yang Hui, a

dictum composed by 16 characters which could be loosely translated as: «to calmly observe hold one's ground, react firmly act but keep a low profile, stand firmly» (冷静观察、稳住阵脚、沉着应付、韬光养晦、有所作为) (Pang, 2020).

Furthermore, as we noted in a previous section, as China strived to continue with its reform and opening endeavors and pursued the aforementioned low-profile approach to foreign policy, significant changes were taking place within the international community and in the realm of PKOs. As Foot posits, after the end of the Cold War, the UN has engaged in PKOs embracing a wider definition of what constitutes a threat to international peace and security (2020). This more encompassing perspective was marked by the end of a form of polarized politics which had prevailed at the UN during the Cold War. Hence, Intra-state conflicts began to be regarded as serious threats to international peace and security. (Foot, 2020). Furthermore, the massive human rights violations and killings perpetrated against civilians in countries such as Rwanda and Bosnia Herzegovina in the 1990s became intolerable for the international community. Furthermore, in 1994, the concept of human security emerged, significantly broadening the traditional scope of security and PKOs beyond defense matters.

Nonetheless, China was wary of the expanded mandate and dimensions of PKOs. Given its zeal for a stricter notion of sovereignty, the country was also concerned on the lack of consent of all parties prior to implementation of PKOs, about the growing connection intertwining of said operations with human rights and feared that certain operations could infringe upon the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of states (Wuthnow, 2013).

Furthermore, beyond China's regarding the growing scope and frequency of UN PKOs, China came to confront situations where its core interests clashed with its international standing as a guarantor of the world's peace and security. On the one hand China had to present itself as a responsible international power, yet its responsibilities as a global player came to clash with its core foreign policy interests. For instance, China vetoed a resolution which intended to send ceasefire observers to Guatemala in 1997 and the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (currently North Macedonia), since said countries had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China, whose government was based in Taipei. Moreover, in 1991 China abstained to vote for resolution 688 whose purpose was to create safe havens within northern Iraq to protect members of the Kurdish minority, nevertheless China considered that this resolution infringed upon Iraq's internal affairs (Zurcher, 2019).

Nevertheless, China's first engagement in a PKO took place in 1989, when China sent civilian observers to support the United Nations Transition Assistance Group

(UNTAG) in Namibia. The Chinese civilian personnel served with the UNTAG's electoral unit, which was in charge of organizing and monitoring the elections (Zurcher, 2019). A month after the deployment of civilian personnel to Namibia, five Chinese military observers were sent to serve with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East. In 1991, China would also deploy military observers for the UN Mission for the Referendum of Western Sahara (MINURSO) and to the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM). Nevertheless, a major breakthrough took place in 1992, when China deployed its first major contingent to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). This development is significant since it was the first time China deployed peacekeepers to a country in its vicinity and in which China had been involved for several years. Furthermore, the UNTAC was the first mission in which the UN was fully in charge of the government and it was the largest PKO in the UN's history, so far. Therefore, for UNTAC it was significant to count with 400 Chinese military engineers and 49 military observers (Zurcher, 2019).

THE RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDER (2000-2012)

Furthermore, even if during Jiang Zemin's term, China's foreign policy had privileged its relations with great powers and neighboring countries, the then Chinese leader came to regard China as a responsible great power (负责人大国). Therefore, this role entailed greater responsibilities toward the international community and a growing commitment regarding the UN PKOs. Furthermore, the adoption of the Going Out policy in the late 1990s dramatically increased China's investments overseas. Therefore, in a context where China's economic growth demanded a steady flow of energy and raw materials, the Going Out policy enabled Chinese State Owned Enterprises to invest abroad and secure their access to said coveted resources (Pearson, 2015) Hence, China's greater global economic footprint brought to the fore unprecedented security imperatives, making the stability of developing countries even more salient for China's interests.

Therefore, in line with this understanding, Hu Jintao's term as Secretary General between 2002 and 2012 was marked by a foreign policy orientation which stressed the notion of peaceful rise. Hence China portrayed itself as a constructive force emerging from the Global South, which was going to become a great power through peaceful means, rejecting hegemonism and embracing the democratization of international relations (Zheng, 2005). Consequently, Hu broadened China's foreign policy engagement beyond its vicinity and its relations with great powers, by extending its

reach towards Africa and Latin America. In this context, China's national conception role as a responsible stakeholder gained greater prominence.

Therefore, in 2000 China sent a group of police officers to the PKO in Timor Leste. Furthermore, in 2003, China sent 3000 troops and logistics personnel to the UN PKO in Liberia, which marked a milestone for China, since it was its largest deployment of personnel so far. In addition, in 2004, China became the main peacekeeping troops contributor within the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council. It is noteworthy to point out that between 2000 and 2010, China participated in 16 PKO's, most of which took place in Africa.

Furthermore, an expression of China's growing commitment was the creation of two facilities devoted to the training of peacekeepers. Hence, in 2000, the China Peacekeeping Civilian Police (CIVIPOL) Training Center was established in the city of Langfang, while in 2009, the Ministry of National Defense opened its Peacekeeping Center in Beijing's Huairou District (Hirono and Lanteigne, 2012). Consequently, beyond providing training to Chinese prospective peacekeeping forces, both centers have provided training to foreign personnel and welcomed foreign scholars and trainers. Furthermore, China's positive stance towards UN peacekeeping has allowed the country to diversify its strategic interests and demonstrate its support for non-traditional security cooperation, as well as MOOTW, especially in the developing world (Lanteigne, 2020).

THE GREAT POWER (2012-2023)

Xi Jinping's first term as Secretary General marked a major shift in Chinese foreign policy, leaving behind Deng Xiaoping's low profile approach and adopting an orientation called Striving for Achievement. (Chávez Mazuelos, 2022) Said assertive and ambitious approach has been translated into a greater commitment toward UN PKOs. Hence, in 2013, China contributed 403 soldiers to Mali, who were in charge of developing engineering projects. Furthermore, in 2014 in South Sudan and Darfur, China expanded UN military capabilities by increasing intelligence operations, using drones and attack helicopters to check on the threats caused by irregular groups. Furthermore, in 2015, deployed 1031 combat troops and a helicopter squadron to the embattled areas of South Sudan.

Furthermore, at the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly held in 2015, Xi Jinping committed 8,000 troops to a UN peacekeeping standby force. 800 of these troops were going to join a vanguard brigade (a rapid response force). Moreover, China committed 1 billion dollars to a 10-year joint China-UN and

development fund which would be partially devoted to PKO's. In addition, Xi informed that until 2015 China had trained 1100 foreign peacekeepers in Beijing and that it intended to train an additional number of 900 blue helmets until 2020.

On the other hand, China's growing engagement in peacekeeping was reflected into strategic documents developed by the Party-State. For instance, the PRC's military strategy of 2015 underscored China's commitment to fulfill international responsibilities in observance of the mandates of the United Nations Security Council, enhancing PLA's reputation by providing public security goods. Moreover, it acknowledged that PKOs entailed an opportunity to upgrade the capabilities and expertise of the PLA, enabling its members to gain combat experience through UN sanctioned missions. Furthermore, these new missions ramped up Beijing's capacity to respond to non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, weak states, state collapse and transnational crime. Therefore, PKOs have become a central component of China's Military Operations Other than War strategy (MOOTW) (Lanteigne, 2020).

In addition, part and parcel of China's great power status hinges upon the globalization of Chinese economic interests. Henceforth, in a context where China's investments and personnel are widespread in risk prone regions, enhancing the stability of areas where Chinese economic interests could be jeopardized is a priority. Nevertheless, China faces the dilemma of how can modern peacekeeping be reconciled with deeply held Chinese notions regarding state sovereignty, impartiality, and being playing the role of a responsible major power (Lanteigne, 2020)

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that even if between 2012 and 2022 there has not been a dramatic increase in terms of personnel deployment. In addition, it is important to note that China currently has 2227 peacekeepers deployed in 9 missions (UN Peacekeeping, 2013). Hence, as of February 2023, China had 1031 troops serving at UNMISS (South Sudan), 410 at UNIFIL (Lebanon), 328 at MINUSMA (MALI), 216 at MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of Congo) and 86 at UNISFA (Abyei). These figures do not include neither staff officers, nor experts on mission. (UN Peacekeeping, 2023). According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing has deployed over 50,000 peacekeepers to almost 30 PKOs in over 20 countries and regions (China MFA, 2023). Furthermore, 25 Chinese Peacekeepers have perished throughout the years of China's involvement. Nevertheless, financial contributions have grown steadily. Therefore, for the fiscal year 2020-2021, China was the second biggest contributor to PKOs, covering 15,21% of the budget (UN Peacekeeping, 2022). An almost four-fold increase from 2012, when its financial contribution covered merely 3.9% of the budget.

Nevertheless, a question which lingers is whether China will be able to sustain its growing participation in PKOs as its great power profile consolidates. The rationale behind this concern is that great powers are less prone to participate in these operations since given the global extent of their interests, it is increasingly challenging for them to be neutral or to be regarded as such (Lanteigne, 2020). In addition, in stark contrast with countries which are able to rely on alternative security arrangements to deploy peacekeepers, such as the EU and NATO, China's commitment to the UN peacekeeping regime as its only mechanism to promote peace and security (Richardson, 2011) Therefore, China has condemned operations which bypassed the UN, such as the NATO-led operation in Kosovo (Lanteigne, 2020).

On the other hand, the pandemic also had a profound imprint in PKOs worldwide. Hence in a context where there was a high demand for Covid-19 vaccines, in early May 2021, during a telephone call with the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, Xi Jinping reiterated a pledge made in march, to offer 300,000 doses of chinese homegrown vaccines for personnel taking part in UN PKOs (State Council Information Office, 2021). The donation was ultimately handed over in September, as a contribution to protect frontline peacekeepers, mainly in Africa (MOD, 2021).

Furthermore, in a context of greater complexity and strategic competition with the United States and its network of allies, the word security was mentioned 91 times during Xi Jinping's opening report at the 20th CCP's Congress. This is noteworthy, since at the 19th CCP Congress, the term was used 54 times, which speaks of the greater salience security has gained in the field of public discourse and policy. Furthermore, it is relevant since national security has been regarded as the bedrock of China's national rejuvenation (Xi, 2022). Henceforth, the international security situation and China's national security imperatives cannot be decoupled from its national development and modernization goals towards the second centennial 2049. On the other hand, China's engagement toward the Global South has been underscored as a priority for Beijing's foreign policy at the CCP's 20th Congress (Xi, 2022). Therefore, PKOs and development assistance programs have been regarded as crucial to increase China's impact in the developing world.

In addition, in line with this understanding of the international security situation, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) was launched by Xi Jinping at the Boao for Asia Security Forum in April 2022. According to the GSI Concept Paper, released in February 2023, the initiative aims to address the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and changing era and to promote peace and development across the globe (China MFA, 2023) The cornerstone of the GSI is notion

of indivisible security, which stresses that no State should increase its security at the expense of another State. China considers that this principle should be a pillar of the international order. Furthermore, the GSI advocates for the respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States, of the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, commits to respect the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously, advocates for the peaceful settlement of disputes and commits to maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains (China MFA, 2023). The GSI is regarded as an initiative which condenses the principles which China intends to advance in order to reform the international security governance, therefore its outcomes will be relevant for the reform of the governance of PKOs in the future.

On the other hand, according to Beijing's latest National Defense White Paper, China's overseas interests are regarded as core national interests. Therefore, the document states that one of the missions of the People's Liberation Army is to effectively protect the security and legitimate interests of the Chinese persons, organizations and institutions overseas (State Council, 2019). Said approach was ratified at the 20th Chinese Communist Party Congress, where the CCP vowed to increase China's capacity to protect the security and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens and enterprises abroad. Consequently, since most of the PKOs in which China participates are in countries with close trade ties with Beijing and which receive significant Chinese investments, the protection of its overseas interests cannot be decoupled from its involvement in UN PKOs.

CONCLUSIONS

UN peacekeeping operations have had a significant evolution in terms of scope and depth since its inception in the 1950s. Furthermore, the transit of China from an outright opposer of PKOs to a responsible great power was conditioned by a change in national role conceptions, changes in the structure of the International System, the development of capabilities and the emergence of new security and foreign policy imperatives. As I have argued, initially, China had deep reservations about PKOs on the grounds of its historical zeal for a restrictive notion of sovereignty, which is grounded on its experience during the so-called century of national humiliation. Hence, China's national conception role as stalwart of anti-imperialism made it regard the UN as a pliant tool of western domination whose initiatives and operations had to be contested.

Nevertheless, when China joined the United Nations, it embraced the role of a non-disruptive opposer which did not support PKOs, yet refused to veto new operations. Furthermore, when China embraced a more pragmatic foreign policy and

assumed the role of the champion of the developing world, making financial contributions and deploying personnel to PKOs became a way to contribute to international security within the framework of the United Nations. Moreover, beyond the normative dimensions its role entailed, China needed a stable and safe international environment to navigate through the process of Reform and Opening. Hence PKOs presented an opportunity to fulfill its role and advance its development imperatives without compromising its zeal for sovereignty.

Furthermore, China's growing global economic footprint transformed Beijing from a responsible power to a great power which construes PKOs as mechanisms to provide public global goods and upgrade its military capabilities through Military Operations Other than War and enables China to safeguard its citizens and interests overseas. In addition, said involvement, strengthens Beijing's political goodwill and presence in the Global South, advances its global governance reform agenda and burnish its credentials as constructive major power in a context where said status is strongly contested by the United States and its network of allies. In addition, over the course of the last decade, China has become a global actor which aims to transit from the position of a norm-taker to a norm-maker in the global governance agenda through mechanisms such as the GSI. Nevertheless, despite China's growing deployment of personnel and financial contributions, it remains to be seen to what extent China's political values, foreign policy imperatives and international relations principles will impact both the governance, nature and operation of UN PKOs in the future.

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