

China and Peacekeeping in Africa

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Abstract

China is becoming an international expectation while making positive and tangible contributions to global peace and security especially her contributions to the United Nations peacekeeping Operations in Africa. Peace and stability are the common aspirations of all people. To help maintain peace, and rebuild war-torn countries, China has actively participated in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Contrary to the conventional wisdom focusing on China's involvement in African economy, China's engagement in multilateral organizations such as the UN for sustainable international peace and security especially in Africa is wonderful. Again while China's foreign aid and investment in developing nations has been well documented, less familiar is its key role in peacekeeping missions in troubled regions like Africa. Based on this, this work using the theory of systems aims to explore this new China shift towards Africa and conclusively proffer reasons why she took this decision. For clarity and easy comprehension the work is compartmentalised into five sections: - introduction, theoretical framework, the concept: peacekeeping, China's peacekeeping mission in Africa, and conclusion.

Keywords: Peacekeeping, Operations, United Nations, Missions, and Africa

Introduction

The need for stable markets in Africa and a positive trade environment, along with China's growing responsibility as a leading global power underpins her increasing commitment to peace in Africa. Given China's significant military capacity, in terms of personnel numbers and the urgent need to build peace in Africa, a positive synergy is evident. Considering the reluctance of the US and other Western powers to become involved in African conflicts, China's willingness to increase its commitment is to be strongly welcomed.

One way in which China is projecting itself as a responsible great power and playing a positive role in the continent is with regard to Beijing's increasing involvement and contribution to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. That a Security Council member is now taking its responsibilities as a peacekeeper seriously somewhat puts to shame the reluctance of other great powers to get involved. Once opposed to any form of international intervention in the domestic affairs of states, the Chinese government is becoming an active participant in UN peacekeeping, providing more than 7,500 military observers, engineers, medical teams and other specialists in support of peace and stability (David: 2012.10).

It was China's status as an emerging great power that instigated a change in this approach. Conscious that it needed to behave as a responsible power, commensurate with its new standing, Beijing has embarked on a period of unprecedented international activism, with Africa being a key proving ground. Chinese peacekeepers have served under the UN flag in various peacekeeping missions across Africa: in Burundi from 2004; in Cote d' Ivoire from 2004; in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2001; in Ethiopia and Eritrea from 2000; in Mozambique from 1993 to 1994; in Liberia from 1993 to 1997 and again from 2003 to present; in Sierra Leone from 1998 to 1999 and again from 1999 to 2005; in Sudan from 2005; and in Western Sahara from 1991 (Bonny Ling: 2007.14). Despite China's use of its peacekeeping commitments as a lead-up to its public strategy for Africa, this aspect has garnered less media attention than fears over the emergence of China as another colonial power on the continent.

Theoretical Framework

The systems theory is the theoretical postulation this work used. The main proponents of this theory are Kaplan, Bertalanffy, Rosenau, Chandra, and McClelland (Rosenau: 1969.20). This theory came into being in the 1950s. Its underlying assumption is that there is order or system in international relations. It sees nations as being in constant contact in an intricate framework of relationships resulting from the process of interaction. Every nation is involved in some degree of participation in the international environment. A nation's behaviour according to McClelland is a two-way activity of taking from and giving to the international environment. It is this process of exchange that is referred to as the international system. Based on this systemic explanation, China decides to engage in this peace efforts to Africa in order to maintain the stability that holds the international system, which will have a catastrophic impact on her developmental pursuit if not maintained.

The theory emphasizes the significance of the interaction of behaviour of states. It believes that it is possible to find out certain regular modes of behaviour within the structure of a political organization. Each small system (sub-system) affects the workings of the large system. The mutual relationship between two systems is called feed back which may be negative or positive. In this case China wants the relationship between her and African countries to be positive and hence her effort in seeing that peace is maintained and sustained in Africa.

The systemic postulation views the international system as a result of diverse actions. International relationships are conceived as the consequences of vast number of particular purposes, intentions, expectations and efforts. Since the international system is the result of inter-actions it is closely connected with the idea of transformation in some form or the other, this is because the interaction of state behaviour is always subject to change under the impact of new factors. For instance the post-cold war realities plus the tremendous growth in the Chinese economy has forced China to reconsider her perception of the UN peace keeping missions.

The system theory at the description level sees the world system to exist in an environment and to be composed of parts which through interaction are in relation to each other. At the explanation level, the world is divided into a number of national entities possessing sovereignties, while at the analysis level, it focus on arrangement of actors, interaction of actors or recurring patterns of individual state behaviour. It is the urge to maintain this systemic stability which in the long run will favour China can one effectively explain her peacekeeping effort in Africa.

The Concept: Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping, as defined by the United Nations, is ways to keep countries torn by conflict create conditions for sustainable peace. Peace-keeping operations are intended to create stable, peaceful relations by civil and military means (Eric: 2010.15). They are generally based on UN mandate, and as a rule guided by the following principle: impartiality, the consent of the conflicting parties to the deployment of the peace-keeping troops, minimal use of force.

In addition, peacekeeping refers to activities that tend to create conditions that favour lasting peace. United Nations peacekeeping was initially developed during the cold war as a means of resolving conflicts between states by deploying unarmed or lightly armed military personnel from a number of countries, under UN command, to areas where warring parties were in need of a neutral party to observe the peace process.

UN peacekeepers-soldiers and military officers, civilian police officers and civilian personnel from many countries-monitor and observe peace processes that emerge in post-conflict situations and assist ex-combatants in implementing the peace agreements they have signed. Such assistance comes in many forms, including confidence-building measures, power-sharing arrangements, electoral support, strengthening the rule of law, and economic and social development.

The Charter of the United Nations gives the Security Council the power and responsibility to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. For this reason, the international community usually looks to the Security Council to authorize peacekeeping operations. Most of these operations are established and implemented by the United Nations itself with troops serving under UN operational commands. In other cases, where direct UN involvement is not considered appropriate or feasible, the Council authorizes regional organisations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Economic Community of West African States or coalitions of willing countries to implement certain peacekeeping or peace enforcement functions.

Chinese Peacekeeping Missions in Africa

One security area where China receives positive marks from nearly everyone is its contribution to UN and African Union peacekeeping efforts. A study prepared by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said that by sending engineers, transport battalions, and medical units, China provides critically needed material assets at a time when multilateral peacekeeping is severely overstretched (Bates:2009.30). The report added: 'Chinese peacekeepers are consistently rated among the most professional, well-trained, effective and disciplined in UN peacekeeping operations' (Bates:2009.30). In 2008, in remarks about China's peacekeeping role before students at Beijing's Foreign Affairs University, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said 'this is an area where China stands tall' (Ian Ransom:2008). Prior to the 2007 arrival of Hu Jintao to Liberia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf praised the help of Chinese peacekeepers, adding 'Liberians will never forget the friendship of Chinese peacekeeping soldiers (The Star: 2007.12).

When China took its place on the UN Security Council in 1971, it opposed peacekeeping operations, which it considered interventions in sovereign countries manipulated by superpowers (Stefan: 2008.18). It underwent a gradual change in attitude between 1981 and 1987 after which it began to cooperate in some UN peacekeeping operations. In 1989, for the first time, China deployed personnel to a UN peacekeeping operation, when twenty Chinese military observers took part in the UN Transition Assistance Group monitoring elections in Namibia. Beginning in the early 1990s, China sent small numbers of peacekeepers to several UN operations in Africa: the Western Sahara beginning in 1981, Mozambique from 1993 to 1994, Liberia from 1993 to 1997, and Sierra Leone from 1998 to 1999. While China did not contribute troops to the two UN missions in Somalia from 1992 through 1995 or the US-led operation from late 1992 until early 1993 that separated the UN missions, China supported all three operations in the Security Council because of their 'exceptional' humanitarian missions (Taylor:2011.35).

Beginning in 2000, China contributed ten observers to the UN mission along Ethiopia-Eritrea border (Shinn: 2007.17) In 2003, China expanded significantly its engagement in UN peacekeeping in Africa by sending a 175-person engineering company and 43-person medical unit to the DRC, where it had earlier assigned a small number of military observers. In announcing the troop contribution, Senior Colonel Dai Shaoan, director general of the peacekeeping affairs office in the Defense Ministry, said China is now ready to play a more prominent role in peacekeeping operations and planned to set up a peacekeeping training centre (AFP: 2003.26) Several months later, China sent a 275-person engineering company, 240-person transportation company, and 43-person field hospital to Liberia. This engagement by China quickly followed the decision by Liberia to end recognition of Taiwan and re-establish relations with Beijing. Until mid-2003, China was also a major buyer of Liberian timber from the Charles Taylor regime in violation of UN sanctions. In 2004, China sent a small number of military observers to Burundi and Cote d'Ivoire, where they continue to be assigned.

China now considers peacekeeping a core activity of the UN, and this is reflected in its policy documents. China's 2008 white paper on defence states that it 'has consistently supported and actively participated in the peacekeeping operations consonant with the spirit of the UN Charter (China National: 2008.24). While that statement overlooks earlier history, it certainly is true since about 2000. The various papers prepared by China and Africa on the China-African summits have increasingly stressed the role of peacekeeping. The action plan prepared after the 2003 summit in Addis Ababa called on China to intensify its participation in peacekeeping. Following the 2006 Beijing summit, China promised to take an active part in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. China agreed at the 2009 summit in Egypt to continue to support and participate in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and intensify cooperation with African countries in peacekeeping theory research, peacekeeping training and exchanges, and in supporting the building of peacekeeping capacity in Africa (FOCAC:2012.16).

As of mid-2011, China had 1,550 troops, 40 police, and 42 military experts for a total of 1,632 personnel assigned to the six UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. This was far more than any other permanent member of the Security Council and compares with twenty-eight for the United States, although Washington provides about 26 percent of the global UN peacekeeping budget and Beijing only 3 percent. The largest number of personnel was in Liberia (564 troops, 18 police, 2 military experts); followed by Southern Sudan (444 troops, 22 police, 12 military experts); Darfur (324 troops); and the DRC (218 troops, 15 military experts). China also had three military experts in Cote d'Ivoire and ten in the Western Sahara.

(www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2011/may11-3pdf). In 2007, Ban Ki-Moon appointed a Chinese general as commanding officer of the peacekeeping mission in the Western Sahara, a position China continues to hold. This was the first time that a Chinese national led a UN peacekeeping mission.

As an indication of its commitment to global peacekeeping, China now has three facilities engaged in some aspect of peacekeeping training. There is the International Relations Academy in Nanjing and the China Police Peacekeeping Training Centre at Langfang in Hebei Province, which is designed for police officers deployed to UN missions. In 2009, the Defence Ministry opened the first military peacekeeping training centre at Huairou in suburban Beijing. It offers English-language training, simulated UN peacekeeping camps, demining training areas, swimming, and diving. It is also primary location for international peacekeeping exchanges

China's most controversial deployment of peacekeeping forces has been in Darfur because of Beijing's close ties with Khartoum and the fact that about 6 percent of its imported oil comes from Sudan. China also has peacekeeping forces in South Sudan, but there has been a ceasefire since 2003 and the Chinese troops have not come under criticism. Even in Darfur, the Chinese forces has acted professionally and taken no sides politically. In 2007, China agreed to send 315 troops comprising three engineering platoons, one well-digging platoon, and one field hospital. The UN asked the Chinese to build roads and bridges and dig wells ahead of the arrival of an enhanced hybrid African Union/UN peacekeeping force. The deployment followed criticism of China by human rights groups and some governments over Beijing's reluctance to support a more robust international force in Darfur.

A commander of one of the Darfur rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), said that Beijing is an 'accomplice' of Khartoum in Darfur and 'we can't trust them or cooperate with them' (Sudan Tribune: 2007.13). The leader of the other major rebel group at the time, the JEM said that the people of Darfur do not welcome the Chinese troops but 'we will not target the Chinese peacekeepers' (Sudan Tribune: 2007.13). China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang responded that China could not tolerate criticism from any party for its participation in the peacekeeping mission in Darfur and promised unremitting efforts to promote the peace process (People's Daily: 2007.20). The SLM and JEM and human rights activists, particularly in the United States, continued their criticism of the Chinese peacekeeping presence. Meanwhile, China and the commander of the African Union/UN force touted the good deeds performed by the Chinese engineers and medical teams. While rebel groups in Darfur apparently have never targeted Chinese peacekeepers, the JEM carried out three attacks on Chinese oilfield operations in the Kordofan region.

China has provided diplomatic support and modest funding for African Union and African sub regional peacekeeping efforts. China considers African regional organizations well situated to make judgments on issues that impact the sovereignty and internal affairs of their members. China agreed to support an arms embargo on Cote d'Ivoire in 2004 because of strong agreement within the African Union. In 2009, however, when the African Union asked the UN to impose sanctions on Eritrea for supporting extremists in Somalia, China objected but eventually abstained on the UN resolution. China provides financial assistance on an ad hoc basis. It made its largest donation to the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Darfur. In 2006, it provided \$1 million in budgetary support to the African Union mission and \$2.5 million in humanitarian assistance for the people of Darfur. In 2008, China provided \$300,000 to the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Somalia and another \$400,000 in 2009 (China Monitor: 2010.35). These are small donations in view of the huge expense of the operations. China is still working out its security cooperation with the African Union and sub regional organizations.

Conclusion

Africa, Western countries, and the UN all welcome China's participation in peacekeeping operations generally and in Africa particularly. The UN is always looking for more troop contributing countries and Western nations, especially the United States, are not anxious to send troops to African conflicts. But peacekeeping generally and in Africa particularly has benefits for China. It allows China to respond to African requests and build confidence with both African governments and African regional organizations. Increasingly, China wants to be seen as a 'responsible great power'. Peacekeeping is a relatively low cost way to help achieve this goal in a non threatening way. This positive role for the Chinese army also contributes to efforts by the Chinese leadership to improve its position in the international community. China gains practical policy benefits from its peacekeeping presence in Africa.

It is not coincidental that its four large peacekeeping efforts occur in three countries where China has or once had significant interest in natural resources: oil in South Sudan and Sudan, minerals in the DRC, and, in an earlier period, hardwood timber in Liberia.

Finally, there are important operational considerations for the Chinese army. U.S. Marine Colonel Philippe Rogers explained that UN peacekeeping operations provide an opportunity for distant operational experience. The Chinese army gains insights about operational logistics, multinational operations, combat, and civil engineering. It learns valuable knowledge about logistics, ports of debarkation, lines of communication, lines of operations, operational intelligence, and the best way to sustain forces in Africa over pro-longed periods. At the tactical level, there is nothing like lessons learned on the ground. The experience of travelling across the Sahara Desert under harsh conditions using GPS cannot be replicated in the classroom. Repeated deployments to UN missions in Africa permit the Chinese army to build an extensive information base. (Rogers: 2007.22). Rogers concluded that China's 'efforts is outpacing Washington's efforts dedicated to operations in Africa by a considerable margin. Conceivably, the United States will one day turn to the Chinese military for help and expertise in missions in Africa' (Rogers: 2007.22).

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