

Peacekeeping Operations of China in the Changing International Power Structure and World Political Order

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Abstract

With the power struggle among international political forces as well as the changes in world power structure, at present, the relational construction between rising countries and defending powers, and the cause and effect of world order and international geopolitics has become the focus of attention in the academic circle of international relations. Two distinguishable schools have interdependently evolved over the past years—the Rise of China and the Threat of China. Under such theoretical frameworks and international realities, new significance has been added to China’s participation in the overseas peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. On the basis of current situation of national powers, this paper, guided by structural realism, mainly explores the following issues from the perspective of the change of power structure: a) In the new circumstances, what effects will China’s increasing constructive efforts in overseas peacekeeping operations make on regional security pattern and world political order? b) To what a suitable degree should China undertake overseas peacekeeping operations? and c) How should China address the challenges and opportunities of world order change during the peacekeeping operations?

Key words: China’s peacekeeping operations; World political order; Changes in power structure; Structural realism

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INTRODUCTION

Establishing preventative diplomacy is in conformity with the United Nations’ fundamental purpose—maintaining world peace. Each country’s contribution in peacekeeping operations in the framework of the United Nations not only shows their wishes to comply with the mechanism of the United Nations, but also creates a potential opportunity for them to project their national power. As is mentioned by Zhao (2001), since 1990s, the general development of China’s peacekeeping operations can be divided into such four stages as “condemnation as onlookers,” “patient observation,” “active participation,” and “constructive participation.” As the global geopolitics changes with the rise of China, great changes have taken place in the pattern of international peacekeeping forces. China’s status in international peacekeeping operations is on the rise. While celebrating the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, Xi Jinping, the president of China, made the following promises: a) China will join the new reserve and standby mechanisms of prompt peacekeeping capacity of the United Nations; and b) China will take the lead in setting up a permanent peacekeeping police squad and build a peacekeeping standby force of 8,000 troops. Besides, China will provide a total of US \$100 million of free military assistance to the African Union in the next five years to support the establishment of the African Standby Force and the African Mobile Troops for Immediate Response to Crisis. China has taken an active part in the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, and has become one of the major countries offering military forces and funds in peacekeeping operations.

As the estimated statistics from the United Nations Budget Allocation Committee shows, in 2016, China's contribution in the budget allocation for peacekeeping operations has proceeded from the sixth place to the second, surpassing Japan and approaching USA. As an important force in maintaining world peace, Chinese peacekeeping efforts in the United Nations have brought in new conception of international peacekeeping as well as increasing investment in military forces, and have initiated great changes in the international political power structure. Early in 1800s, Clausewitz (1830), a Prussian military strategist, noted that war was a continuum of political struggle through another option, and therefore, a nation's military action was also the continued efforts of a certain political agenda.

According to the theory of structural realism, the world is in a state of anarchy in which power and interests vary with the change in the distribution pattern of national powers. That is, the political system and acting state units influence each other in structure. Kenneth Neal Waltz (1979), a leader of international relations, first proposed that a national state is a unit that helps to interactively create an international political systematic structure and that such interactivity will last for a long time. In other words, different state actors in international political wax and wane to adjust the systematic structure, and, in turn, modify the unit behaviors of each state. Keohane (1986) argued that structure was defined by the array of parts and only change in the array means structural change. Kissinger (2015) stated that, among the many factors for international order crises, one was that the old international order could no longer adapt itself to the big changes in power relations. In a new world stage, significant structural changes are taking place as a result of differences of power and interests among the participating nations in the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. From the perspective of power structural change, this study analyzes China's overseas peacekeeping operation in the following three aspects: its influence on world political order, the challenges and opportunities of Chinese military presence in world peace.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINA'S PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN THE CHANGING GEOPOLITICS

In the current world, with peace and development as the major themes, peacekeeping operations are necessary measures of crisis management to solve international conflicts and are initiative steps toward a regional peaceful environment and an international stable order. When it came to the reestablishment of a new international system and order, Kissinger (2015) pointed out that a general strategy was needed to establish a unified order conception in every region that can connect different

regions to the same political structure. Peacekeeping operations are closely related with the world politics and will make noticeable impact on the changes of world political order.

a) The changes in the power pattern of international peacekeeping operations reflect the changes in power distribution structure of big powers. A nation's strength is the supporter of its diplomacy, and so is the military forces the supportive foundation of military diplomacy and operations. The improvement of China's comprehensive strength has been motivated by the political agenda of China Dream—the great rejuvenation of Chinese nations. The great-leap-forward development of China's military forces is such a typical showcase of the rising China. Peacekeeping operations are an important military mobilization based on national strength, national responsibility and national interests. The changes in the power pattern of international peacekeeping operations eventually usher in the changes in power distribution structure of big powers. The first is the change in China's national big strategy pattern. Since 2014, the most representative arrangement in China's national strategy pattern is the establishment of "One Belt and One Road" and "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank". As seen from the geographical layout covered by the initiative of "One Belt and One Road" and current distribution of member state of "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", these strategic economic ambitions have often been preceded or accompanied by China's peacekeeping operations in the involved regions.

b) Peacekeeping operations are also a process of adjusting power and interests of geopolitics during the construction of logistic system of public products of international security. Peacekeeping operations is one of the specific measures of the collective security system in the framework of the United Nations. International peacekeeping operations have become an important international public security product, whose supplier changes its attitude according to its national power and interests in the designated actions. Barrett (2012) pointed out that when the global public products are in good supply throughout the world, people in every place will benefit from it. The member state of the United Nations should initiate such a historic and timely mission. In recent years, China has adjusted the views of security and order from "Asian Security", "Overall Security" to "A Community with Shared Destiny." China is actively engaged in constructing international order and even has the intention of playing a leading role that will influence the international security order. China has made great efforts to increase the scale of overseas peacekeeping actions and allows other countries to take advantage of what has been achieved. Such behaviors signal big changes in the "go out" strategy of the military forces and new thinking in national diplomatic strategies. Moreover, it is a move to participate in the adjustment of

global power and interests by contributing security public products to construct an international security system.

c) The peacekeeping operations show the emerging differences of hardware and software between USA and China as reflected in their overseas military presence as well as the different trials of strength over regional order construction. USA has always been playing a hegemonic role in overseas military action. Its military strength has been projected outward through the coordination of traditional avenues of warfare campaigns and non-warfare avenues of manipulation. The huge worldwide network of military bases of USA demonstrates clearly its assertive and predominant international military existence. However, China, confined by the limiting factors at home and abroad, has always cautiously and conservatively used its military forces to conduct related military missions while emphasizing more on non-warfare mechanisms and peace-seeking strategies. So the nature of China's overseas military presence is more about software and low profile. The different overseas military existences of China and USA also lead to their somewhat different approaches towards regional order in terms of attitude, methodology and intensity, and thus sustains a temporary status of balance of strength over regional order construction. When the situation of regional order is increasingly getting worse or out of control, USA, eager to lead and control the international order through its global strategy and powerful military capabilities, has been constantly at odds with China's application of regional strategy and military force.

d) The increasing overseas peacekeeping operations of China will cause more changes in the geopolitical structure, and the competition and cooperation of Sino-American geostrategy. USA has consistently carried out the active and outward diplomatic and military strategies, imposing far-reaching impacts on geopolitics while implementing such diplomatic and military campaigns as "Africa Transformation Program", "Chessboard of the Pan-Middle East", "Pan-Middle Asia Program" and "Great Western World," etc.. Today, under new circumstances, the increasing overseas peacekeeping operations of China have made itself a major military influence in Southeast Asia, Africa and other regions, and are counted for its great potentials for contributing to the future peace and stability of Middle East. Now China has joined in the United Nations peacekeeping standby system, and is facing realistic issues such as competition, cooperation and game playing of Sino-American geostrategy.

e) The contention between China and USA will be further amplified in the conception and application of political world order while conducting their joint or respective peacekeeping operations. As for national strength, China so far can not pose a threat to USA's hegemony. But according to Ju's (2014) view, "from the American perspective, the rising China is the biggest threat to its hegemony." For some time, the basic theories USA and its western allies have pursued are "Hegemonic

Stability Theory" and "Democratic Peace Theory" when constructing international relations. USA's overseas military action meets the need to uphold its world hegemony and is a forefront for promoting its Western "universal value." But under the specific confinements of history and culture, and the realistic needs of development, China, by its understanding of international relations and order, has been pursuing state act logics like "Community of Common Destiny" and "World of Harmony." The different understanding of order, which poses challenges to peacekeeping operations and inevitably causes conflict of ideas concerning the order and power between participating countries, is also the fundamental point for peacekeeping operations to achieve success, and even the key to determine the long-term stability of international order rather than continual unrest.

2. CHALLENGES FOR CHINA'S PEACEKEEPING UNDER THE CHANGING INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ORDER

There are basic requirements for conducting peacekeeping operations. According to the two research institutions, UNITAR and IPS (2006), the two major challenges for the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations are the troops supply from OECD countries and the complexity of peacekeeping operation and its extended effectiveness. The success of peacekeeping operation is essentially dependent on the persistence of unification of objective and practice, principle and method. Generally speaking, as Bellamy (2010) mentioned,

The peacekeeping operation is initially an instrument for an international community to uphold order between countries, and it should be based on the principle of state sovereignty. Most importantly, it should not violate or intervene the domestic affairs of other countries.

Therefore, when participating in the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, China has to follow the basic principles and truly play the role of a peace maker when facing the increasingly complex regional and international circumstances.

With the expansion of peacekeeping operation, China should pay more attention to keeping balance of projecting military force outward and maintaining modest and cautious acumen in military contest. Since peacekeeping operation is an overseas military action, it naturally involves the conflict of power and interest between countries, and is inevitably connected to three major international political traps: Paul Kennedy (2006) Trap, i.e., the overextended battle line of an empire caused by the excessively expanded national strategy; Thucydides (5th century BC) Trap, i.e., the inevitable warfare caused by the increase of national

power objectively and the fear raised in other countries subjectively, and Olson (2010) Trap, i.e., the failure of collective action caused by individual activities of rationality and self-identity. Furthermore, China should avoid the action logics in the three aspects of “want to be hegemonic but hegemony is immoral”, “no self-imposed hegemony” and “unilateralism” in peacekeeping operation. In 21st century, the rise of China also brings challenge to the structure of international system. Kissinger (2015) said the leaders of China and USA (major competitors in 21st century) compromised to construct a “brand new relationship between major powers” that prevented the repetition of the European tragedy. How to overcome the political psychology and act logic traps of strategic game of major powers in peacekeeping operations and avoid military conflict between them are realistic issues that need balanced considerations.

China is learning to properly use military forces and civil police personnel to improve its peacekeeping efficiency. As pointed out by Zhao (2011), along with the increasing peace-emphasis in UN missions, civil personnel have become the leading forces of peacekeeping operations, and have spread their influence in larger scopes and in the center of local peacekeeping duties instead of performing their original supporting and auxiliary roles. So far, China has deployed its armed forces mainly in Africa, with little combative intention in contrast to medical treatment and infrastructural engineering. Its civil police service and peacekeeping operations were conducted separately in Southeast Asia, Haiti, the Middle East and Central Asia. This indicates that, on the one hand, China has taken a cautious attitude towards regional complex realities, and on the other hand, China is still formulating strategic policies for its overseas peacekeeping forces. Certainly, the combination of military forces and civil police service involves some dilemma of international laws, such as dispute between sovereignty and human rights, the principle of no interference in internal affairs, etc. that demand careful consideration.

Meanwhile, these peacekeeping operations are also meant to promote positive national images so as to refute the China threat theory through humanistic contributions and constructive diplomacy. Considering the four stages in peacekeeping China has experienced, we can find that China has been in a dilemma for independent participation. International communities have criticized China’s “thumb a lift” strategy for those operations China has passively participated in. However, when China joined international communities actively later and made positive efforts, the “China threat theory” surfaced and became a major disappointing obstacle that has blurred China’s identification of its own “international responsibility” and “national image.” Under such new circumstances, China should do their best to maintain an international public security product supply system and achieve a balanced functionality of “international responsibility” and “national

image.” At present, China can follow a proper dimension of peacekeeping in local areas in accordance with the principles of “protective responsibility” and “humanitarian intervention” as prescribed in international laws, instead of getting into the traps of “interventionism” and “hegemonism.”

China is facing traditional and non-traditional challenges in terms of international security issues and peacekeeping methodology. International security is currently considered in both traditional and non-traditional dimensions: On the one hand, traditional common peacekeeping practices such as military interference and mediation; and on the other hand, non-traditional and innovative operations such as diplomatic negotiations, civil order policing and peaceful coexistence, etc.. With the overlapping development of international traditions and traditional security threats due to complicated regional order and international environment, international peacekeeping operations should adopt a combination of common traditional measures and unconventional peacekeeping services. Although China faces all sorts of security challenges in peacekeeping, it shares the common practices accepted by all the concerned interest groups as put forwarded by Dell (2013): “All peacekeeping efforts aim to decrease riots, control and resolve conflicts.” Therefore, it is necessary to make any efforts to guarantee that peacekeeping serve the purpose of security.

China will have to deal with the disputes of interest caused by the changes of power structure of regional politics and religious sects. However, such antagonism or differences are usually a result of deeply-rooted ideological prejudices that cannot be resolved in a short while. It is crucial for peacekeepers to stay away from such factional contention. Nowadays, most war stricken areas are moving towards a “disorder era,” as described by Richard•Hass (2014). The chaotic political struggles of ethnic, racial, national or religious preferences may easily drag the peacekeeping forces into local armed conflicts and make the situation even worse. This was exactly what happened with the military intervention of Soviet Union and USA in Afghanistan. USA can also have a number of other examples to illustrate the devastating consequences of hasty intervention. The lesson for China is the attitude of prudence that requires strict adherence to the principle of peace and neutrality and helps to prevent peacekeeping forces from getting involved in the disputes of local interest groups, or contending other countries for political or economic interests.

3. OPPORTUNITIES OF PEACEKEEPING FOR CHINA

Among “Kissinger’s Worries” and “Hass’s Questions,” China is seeking its fair share of political power, economic interests and national influence in the international

communities. As the world order and power structure have evolved, China has changed its diplomatic policies from “Patient Observation and Self-discipline” to “Progressive Participation” and “Proactive Construction.” Accordingly, new adjustments have been made for its national defense and military power structure, and thus facilitate the new opportunities for its peacekeeping operations.

International peacekeeping operations accelerate the diversification of China’s military performances and diversified application of its armed forces. According to Shang (2015), since 1990s, along with the ongoing reform of military affairs, China has sent successful peacekeeping troops to overseas regions and joined various military missions of the UN. As one important avenue to showcase the diversification of national military power, experiences accumulated in peace keeping operations became indispensable assets for strengthening the modernization of China’s military forces, such as non-warfare military operating capacity, learning the development pattern and trend of foreign military forces, and promoting national defense. China has undertaken new innovation of national defense and military construction. Chinese military forces are undergoing fast transformation of fighting capacity, and China is witnessing a modern military power system with Chinese characteristics that is competent to win information wars and carry out highly technical missions. Overseas peace keeping mission is naturally a most important component of China’s new military power system.

Through peacekeeping operations, China is willing and able to showcase the peaceful, humanistic and altruistic nature of its rise to international political power. China’s growing military power has caused strong and different reactions among its neighboring countries, world powers and other foreign countries. “The rise of China” and “The rise of Chinese military power” are usually two equivocal points of view that move between praise and fear. Through peacekeeping operations, China is showing to the outside world that the rise of Chinese economic or military power is based on the conception of common prosperity. As Zhang (2014) explained, under the general framework of peaceful development, the Chinese peacekeepers often displayed the will to protect social justice while diversifying their military functionality, rectified the idea of maintaining world and regional peace when they “never attacked others” or “defended the weak,” and portrayed civilized connotations of their military actions when they insisted that international laws and the sovereignty of other countries be respected. In this way, these peacekeeping operations become powerful and effective messages about the peaceful rise of China and the peaceful rise of Chinese military power, and will convince the international communities.

China’s intensifying peacekeeping efforts make it comparatively easier to enhance national interests and achieve international prestige. A contrastive example,

as Kuang (2012) described, is USA which often resorted to force or threat by force without hesitation for its national interests when non-warfare measures became less successful or when the American authority believed that military violence would be more effective. It has used forces on many regions and countries around the world. The examples of its peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya prove its violent nature. But it is not so with China which has often avoided maintaining national interests or even sacrificed its overseas interests for the sake of international trust and morality as shown in the instances of the overseas Chinese being massacred in Indonesia and the ethnic Chinese interests being damaged in Myanmar. But China has gained the trust of the world especially after its successful 23 escorts in Somalia and the Gulf of Aden from 2008 to 2016. So far about 3,000 Chinese peacekeepers have been sent to South Sudan, Lebanon, Mali and other riotous countries. China has become the leader of peacekeeping operations among the five permanent members of the United Nations. Through its active peace forces in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, China has played a significant role in today’s world order. Helps it gain a good international reputation and also helps maintain its national interests in these regions.

CONCLUSION

China’s peacekeeping operations are breaking up the “Wolfe” behavioral logic, that is, a super power will be hegemonic and a rich country will be conceited as portrayed by the theory of structural realism. China’s peaceful military diplomacy helps to create its positive international image. However, the fundamental principle of peace and neutrality should be further implemented in order to make its UN peacekeeping missions more sustainable and amplify its real benevolence before the voices of “the rise of China” and “the threat of China.”

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