China's New Roles and Behaviour in Conflict-Affected Regions: Reconsidering Non-Interference and Non-Intervention

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"No country in the world can enjoy absolute security. A country cannot have security while others are in turmoil, as threats facing other countries may haunt itself also. When neighbours are in trouble, instead of tightening his own fences, one should extend a helping hand to them."

- Xi Jinping, speech to the United Nations Office in Geneva, January 2017.

Introduction: China's Growing Security Spectrum

One of the key questions in current international politics discourse is not *whether* China will become a great power, but rather what sort of great power the country will be. More specifically, what are Beijing's foreign policy goals as its security interests expand, and what do the Chinese leadership under President Xi Jinping deem the most appropriate strategies to achieve those goals? These questions become salient when the current state and future of the post-Second World War global liberal order are coming under increasing strain. Analysts have begun questioning the sustainability of the global liberal order, having seen the current uncertainties in American foreign policy and the overall state of the West. In the context of the rising number of inter-state and domestic conflicts, global policy prescrptions in the current liberal order often fail to offer sufficient solutions. Examples abound, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, but also in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa where weak states and insecure borders have resulted in emerging security challenges.

This special section discusses the implications of China's rise in the changing global liberal order by focusing on international intervention policies and practices, and the questions for Beijing of "non-interference" and "non-intervention." Could China construct a new global norm for these policies as an alternative to Western-dominated ones, and if so how? The answers could be linked to the argument that Beijing is shaping many aspects of the global governance to become more in line with its own visions and interests, including through bilateral diplomacy and global initiatives such as emerging financial institutions and the “Belt and Road” (*yidai yilu* 一带一路 , or BRI) trade routes promoted since 2013 by President Xi.[1]

In response to these open-ended questions, the following articles will examine China’s changing roles and behaviour in conflict-affected regions, emphasizing Beijing’s evolving approaches to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention in intra-state and regional conflicts. Beijing’s long-held principles of non-interference and non-intervention in conflict-affected regions form the basis of a nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of China’s position in the global liberal order, as China’s adherence to those principles was one of the key elements applied to distinguish China from the so-called “international community,” primarily the West, in the late- and post-cold war period. Since the 1950s (except some periods when China did intervene in other countries as will be discussed later), China has largely adhered to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries in its diplomatic policies.

However, as the country’s global strategic and commercial interests expanded with its emergence from international isolation in the late 1970s, and especially since the period of “deep reform” in the 1990s, Beijing’s view on the sanctity of state sovereignty has slowly but inexorably been transformed. External factors have played a role in this change. These include a shift in global power away from cold war bipolarity and towards a more unipolar system, and a shift in global economic power more overtly towards the Asia-Pacific region. Endogenous factors, including Beijing’s growing international economic and strategic interests as well as increasing numbers of Chinese citizens abroad who have been affected and sometimes threatened by crises and conflicts in other countries, are also relevant. Moreover, increasingly open debates about the rights and responsibilities of China as a great power have emerged in the country, making it increasingly difficult for Beijing to adhere to its previously rigid principles of non-interference and non-intervention. These changes have taken place within a milieu of domestic-level debates concerning China’s foreign policy directions as the Xi government expands its global interests, as [Author A] details in her paper.

With these changes in mind, three important questions guide this special section:

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[1] Huang 2016, 314-21.

1) What do the principles of non-interference and non-intervention mean to China today? Has China already departed from its previous adherence to these principles, and if so how?
2) Why, and how, has China become active in peacebuilding and conflict mediation, especially under the Xi government?
3) What implications does China's approach to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention have for its position in the global liberal order?

The examination of these questions will address three major omissions within the current literature. First, there have been few comparative analyses of China's cross-regional diplomacy in relation to crisis management, intra-state conflicts, and war-to-peace transitions. Current work on China's regional relations has tended to focus on economic and military activities at the state level, including the BRI and recent maritime and territorial disputes. Regarding strategic matters, China had traditionally concentrated on state-to-state diplomacy, largely restricted to the governmental level, but as the articles in this special section demonstrate, recent behaviours suggest that the country has begun involving itself in intra-state security issues, including in Africa and the Middle East. Comparative analyses of China's regional diplomacy in terms of conflict-affected regions have revealed a new phase in the debate both about the implication of the rise of China for the global liberal order, and also about the nature of China as a great power.

Second, there exist few studies defining the principles of non-interference and non-intervention in theory and practice within a Chinese context. The principles, while lacking agreed-upon definitions in the West, represent a greater puzzle for China as a rising power and a country with a tangled history of internal conflicts since well before the establishment of the People's Republic. Moreover, the types of conflicts that the entire global community is facing, with the greater incidences of civil conflicts and hybrid warfare, are not those observed in previous decades. As [Author A] details, Beijing is searching what it means to make a "legitimate great power intervention" so that such a new concept reflects China as a responsible great power while distinguishing its policies from those of the West, especially the United States. Beijing must accomplish this while deflecting global criticisms about an assertive Chinese strategic agenda, especially given ongoing security concerns closer to Chinese frontiers such as the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

To better address the issue on non-interference and non-intervention in intra-state conflicts and to better understand how Beijing may be developing its own model to address these events, it is necessary to examine the wide variety of ways in which China engages in modern intra-state conflicts. The case studies included in this special section range from highly visible ones like Afghanistan, to more limited wars and crises of instability in such weak or fragile states as Mali and Yemen, and to problems of complex regional politics in the Middle East. This variety of case studies underscores China's multi-dimensional approaches to addressing intra-state and regional conflicts, while also emphasizing that a doctrine or authoritative guideline on this issue remains to be fully developed by Beijing. These case studies will also reflect on China as a rising power, one which is still trying to construct a grand strategy that reflects its emerging status while also presenting new principles. In many cases, Beijing still suffers from *qiechang* (怯场) or "stage fright,"[2] when taking up the cause of intra-state conflicts as a great power, especially when conflicts rage far from Chinese borders. However, with China seeking to modernize its cross-regional diplomacy with new financial regimes and the Belt and Road projects, the country can no longer afford to "jump off the stage" when a complex security problem appears, even when it is far from Chinese shores.

Third, and related to the second issue above, studies about the relationship between China and conflict-affected regions tend to focus on traditional international politics and economic relations, rather than on the intersection between international issues and Chinese domestic concerns. The following case studies not only explain how and why China is rising to become an established power, but also explore how Beijing attempts to coordinate complex economic and political strategic interests, making choices in addressing the problems of intra-state conflicts, and most importantly integrating international and domestic concerns as they pertain to non-traditional security, peacebuilding and intra-state and regional conflicts. These issues are extremely important at a time of the return of great power politics, not only involving China but also with the uncertainty of American foreign and security policies under a mercurial Donald Trump administration, as well as a potentially resurgent Russia. Thus, the question of how and why great powers choose to interfere or intervene in civil conflicts is also again rising in importance.

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. Firstly, it reviews the historical and legal discussions on the principles of non-interference and non-intervention and provides a working definition of these principles. Secondly, it provides insights as to how China's expanding economic power brought with it a problem of how to interpret the questions of non-interference and non-intervention. Thirdly, it offers a conceptual framework consisting of materialist, international status and domestic factors to analyse why and by what means China has become active in peacebuilding and conflict mediation. Finally, the articles and case studies of this special section will be prefaced.

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[2] Lanteigne 2013, 10.

Non-Interference and Non-Intervention: What Are They?

Despite the fact that non-interference and non-intervention remain central themes in international relations, very few studies to date have provided a clear, current definition of these principles, perhaps because defining the principles is not only a legal exercise but also a political activity. Historical and legal analyses of the principles below show that the principles have been created and interpreted in a process of foreign policymaking of great powers. While the articles within this special section focuses on today's examples of Chinese foreign policy which address these principles, including the *realpolitik* nature of the ways China deals with the principles today, these examples should be understood within a historically political nature of the principles.

From an historical viewpoint, the principle of non-interference is one of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," which derived from both materialist and normative requirements for the CCP in the 1940s and the 1950s.[3] Materially, the CCP needed to pursue its development in the aftermath of conflict and Japanese and Western colonialism. Normatively, the Chinese communists wanted to challenge the US-dominated capitalist and liberal model of international relations. The Five Principles were an efficacious tool to address both necessities at the time of the establishment of the PRC. Their usefulness was demonstrated by the *Panchsheel* (or "Five Virtues") Agreement struck by China and India in April 1954, which codified the Five Principles in an official international document for the first time.

The two countries found the Five Principles to be useful for issues other than bilateral relations and applied them to the Indochina conflicts. The Indian government publicly advocated the five principles in the Geneva Conference meetings of 1954.[4] For China, emphasizing the importance of the Five Principles was also a means to challenge US domination and to deter expansion of Soviet control over China. Lacking the military or economic means to match the expansion of two superpowers, China had to rely on the superiority of the Five Principles over those taken by superpower hegemonism. As Richardson argued, "the principles were China's way of trying to offer an alternative to a world of bipolarity, military alliances and dependent development."[5] Such was the rationale of the watershed Bandung conference in April 1955,[6] and later of the Non-Aligned Movement, which China joined as an observer upon its inception in 1961.[7]

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[3] Five principles consist of (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) mutual non-aggression; (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; (4) Equality and mutual benefit; and (5) Peaceful coexistence."

[4] *Ibid.*, 13.

After the Sino-Soviet Split in the 1960s, however, the developing world took on even greater importance for the Five Principles as well as Maoist foreign policy, including economic development projects and support for leftist movements in Africa and Asia. Maoist foreign policy that supported the Five Principles contradictingly included activity that can be interpreted as an intervention in domestic affairs. For example, China supported indepenedence and revolutionary activism in Algeria, Zanzibar, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Cameroon, Nepal, Malaysia and Burma.[8]

During the détente era in the 1970s, the Five Principles offered diplomatic flexibility in normalizing China's relations with various states, firstly with the major states in the "developed capitalist" camp, the US and Japan. The Principles allowed China to normalize diplomatic relations with those countries without agreeing with their capitalist policies,[9] permitting China to maintain its firm commitment to its communist doctrine, while being flexible in its diplomatic approach. This explains mention of the Five Principles in two major documents in 1972: the Sino-American Shanghai Communiqué, and the Japan-China Joint Communiqué. The Principles were also useful in mending Chinese relations with developing states, such as Pakistan, in the wake of previous Chinese aims to export its revolutionary politics during the 1960s which had damaged some bilateral relations. In stressing Beijing's commitment to the developing world, the Chinese representative to the United Nations, Qiao Guanhua, made a speech at the UN General Assembly in November 1971, underscoring the Five Principles as the basis of its approach.[10]

From the time of Deng Xiaoping's "opening up" policy of 1978 to just after China's "go abroad" (*zouchuqu* 走出去) strategy took effect in the 1990s, and with many Chinese companies and citizens beginning to invest in developing regions in the turn of the century, the Five Principles remained a useful means by which to maintain relations with both the developed and developing regions while focusing on its economic development. China emphasized that the Principles demonstrated China's intent to seek "peaceful development" without seeking hegemonism, and not an attempt to change a political regime of developing countries. The discourse of "win-win relations" based on equality prevailed in China's diplomacy with much of the "Global South," especially when China under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping began to deepen its political and economic relations with Africa, the Middle East and other regions outside of the Asia-Pacific.

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[5] Richardson 2012, 9.

[6] *Ibid.*, 13-14.

[7] "China had to be an observer, despite it agreed with the principle of the movement, this is because China had already concluded Sino-Soviet Mutual Treaty in 1950, which meant that China could not meet the NAM's requirement to not have any alliance with major countries."

[8] Van Ness, 1973.

[9] *Ibid.*, 16-17.

[10] *People's Daily*, 17 November 1971.

At the same time, China was also obliged to accept some ideas that seems to go beyond the Five Principles, to save some "image cost" on the international stage. The key example is the concept of "responsbility to protect" (R2P), which was conceived as a framework legitimaizing the use of force against states to protect civilians.[11] While China's endorsement of the R2P concept at the UN seems to contradict the Five Principles, it has sought to re-define the concept to suit the Five Principles, by distancing the R2P concept from military action taken without the consent of the host state.[12] Indeed, "the consent of the host state" has been the corner stone of China's current approach to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention in the 2000s and 2010s, as all of the articles demonstrate. Today, however, China's approach to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention sometimes goes even beyond the "consent of the host state," particularly in a multilateral context. As [Author B] discusses, there were some, albeit limited, occasions in which China's mediation efforts went without the consent of the host state (in her case, the Afghan government) when they were made in a multilateral channel.

In summary, China has adhered to the Five Principles since its official inception in 1954, except for a short period during the Cultural Revolution, because they constantly served as essential and convenient means to support China's *Realpolitik* in addition to economic considerations in its foreign and domestic policies. It is the task of this special section to examine how the principles of non-interference and non-intervention serve China's *Realpolitik* in the 2010s, how they were put into practice, and whether and how said principles concurrently set limits on China's diplomatic choices.

Turning to the legal dimensions, while it is important to recognize the concepts of non-interference and non-intervention as elements of such political tools as the Five

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[11] Liu 2012.

[12] Teitt 2011.

Principles, a working definition of the concept is essential. This special section offers a wide definition of the term, not only military intervention but also recommendations, fact-finding missions, discussions, and many "duties and rights" of a state as indicated in the UN Declaration in 1981. The articles to follow will attempt to investigate, in different contexts, the types of intervention and interference China is or is not engaging and the reasons forming the interpretations and evolvement of Beijing's principles of non-interference and non-intervention. The principle of non-intervention is central to international law, which stipulates two different relationships: horizontal and vertical. The first relationship is a horizontal one between equal sovereign states.[13] Even though the reality of international relations is such that there are never "equal" relations among states with varying levels of power, the idea of sovereign equality has been the legal and normative basis of international relations since at least the eighteenth century.[14]

Today, the principle of non-intervention based on sovereign equality remains a core component in China's "south-south" diplomacy, although some elements have evolved since the Maoist era. This special section seeks to illustrate how these changes in thinking have manifested themselves, including in the case of ongoing conflicts and war-to-peace transitions. The claim that China takes seriously the sovereign equality among all states, regardless of varying levels of economic wealth and political stability, is still a cornerstone of its diplomacy with developing regions even though China has moved well away from its era of "national humiliation" (*guochi* 国耻) which Chinese narratives have claimed was the dominant *zeitgeist* in the decades before the founding of the People's Republic. China's self-proclamations that it was a developing country, with harsh experiences of colonization and unequal treaties, in the years before the start of the Xi administration adds to China's claims of a special understanding of the sanctity of state sovereignty. However, as the following articles demonstrate, Beijing's changing views on intervention have also meant an adjustment to the responsibilities of this new thinking.

Sovereignty has been defined as "organized hypocrisy," with the principles of non-intervention with the idea of sovereign equality having "already been violated."[15] China's increasing political and economic power indicates there are very few who claim the sovereignty of China and developing states remains in a state of parity, a perception which has been examined in the case studies outlined in this special section, and the horizontal sense of the principle of non-intervention may be nothing more than words on paper. Now that China is widely acknowledged as a great power and given the long history of great power behaviour of other states, there is scepticism as to Beijing's ability to adhere to its traditional, cold-war era views on sovereignty as its power and international interests grow in scope. To examine this claim empirically, it is necessary to develop a clearer understanding of the principle of non-intervention.

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[13] Nasu 2013, 27-31.

[14] Stirk 2012, 647.

[15] Krasner 1999, 24.

The second relationship is a vertical one "between an international organization and its Member States, regulating the exercise of jurisdictional authority by the international organization and, at the same time, protecting the jurisdictional autonomy of its Member States."[16] This relationship is an important one, because its roles and behaviour in conflict-affected regions often relate to China's role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, or as a major UN peacekeeping (UNPKO) contributor, which will be examined more fully in [Author B's] article. This, again, leads to the definition of "jurisdictional authority". In the age of globalization, the state border becomes porous in relation to not only economic and social realms but also the security realm. Globalization brought about a situation in which traditional and state-to-state security is no longer sufficient to protect people's security. Non-traditional and human security threats, such as food shortages, environmental degradation, and transnational crimes such as human trafficking, ignore state borders and permeate various states. Differentiating the domestic from the international in the understanding of security threats is an almost impossible task further complicating the issue of defining the principle of non-intervention.

What is "intervention"? Among the key official documents that provide the international legal basis for the term is Paragraph Four, Article 2 of the UN Charter, which states "all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."[17] However, the Charter does not provide a clear understanding of what constitutes intervention, resulting in many cases of selective interpretation, including by great powers. Analysts and international legal experts provided wide-ranging interpretations. In 1950, Sir Hersch Lauterpach, later a judge in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), adapted a narrow definition stating that intervention is "dictatorial interference in the sense of action amounting to a denial of the independence of the State."[18]

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[16] Nasu 2013, 27-28.

[17] The United Nations 1945. In the UN Charter, the terms "non-intervention" and "non-interference" are not used. The only closest reference to those terms is in Paragraph Seven, Article 2: "*Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.*"

This description prompts a discussion about the difference between intervention and interference. Lauterpach does not explain what being "dictatorial" means, but he states elsewhere that "therefore intervention must neither be confused with good offices, nor with mediation, nor with intercession, nor with cooperation, because none of these imply dictatorial interference."[19] Bloyd and van Djik inferred from this statement that Lauterpach's take seems to be that intervention, or dictatorial interference, is of coercive nature.[20] In other words, while the interference "takes place against the will of the country in question," the intervention is associated with "the actual coercion or pressure involved."[21] In contrast, other commentators suggested that "recommendation, fact-finding missions, and even discussion would constitute an intervention."[22]

To address the ambiguity of the term, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the "Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Internal Affairs of States, A/RES/36/103" (9 December 1981) (hereafter "the Declaration"). The Declaration points to several specific state rights and duties to protect the "principle" of non-interference and non-intervention- note the singular use of the term, "principle." This document refers to intervention and interference in one category, without making any distinction between the two. Following are a few examples demonstrating the width of the UNGA's interpretation of the acts from which all states should refrain, to protect the principle of non-interference and non-intervention:

> II (a.) "The duty of States to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any form whatsoever to violate the existing internationally recognized boundaries of another

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[18] Lauterpacht; cited in Nasu 2013, 29.

[19] Lauterpacht; cited in Bloed and van Dijk 1985, 61.

[20] Bloed and van Dijk 1985, 61.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Wright; cited in Nasu 2013, 29-30.

> State, to disrupt the political, social or economic order of other States, [or] to overthrow or change the political system of another State or its Government."
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> II (i.) "The duty of States to refrain from any measure which would lead to the strengthening of existing military blocks or the creation or strengthening of new military alliances, interlocking arrangements, the deployment of interventionist forces or military bases and other related military installations conceived in the context of great-Power confrontation."
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> II (o.) "The duty of a State to refrain from any economic, political or military activity in the territory of another State without its consent."

This wide definition is particularly favoured by developing state governments, most of which, including China, voted in favour of the Declaration, while many Western governments voted against it, including the United States.[23] For China, the necessity to protect regime security led them to accept this interpretation of the "principle" of non-intervention and non-interference. China's subsequent practice of non-intervention and non-interference went so far as to refrain from criticizing the actions of other members of the Global South towards their own peoples, even those involving systematic suppression of human rights.

In the context of such a wide definition of the principles of non-interference and non-intervention by the UN, the interpretation of the principle cannot remain purely in the realm of international law. Interpretation is a political act, and as previously discussed, these principles serve as a political tool for states. The way in which a state uses such tools depends on the power relations between those who use the political tools and those who are intervened or interfered with, as a result.

Non-Interference and Non-Intervention: Why Do They Matter Now?

As the forthcoming articles suggest, Beijing's approaches to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention relate to our understanding of China's international relations, especially as the country continues to rise as a great power, raising the possibility of a power transition with the United States. This is firstly because they show the impact of the country's increasing *economic* activity outside of its territory on its approaches to international *politics*, and secondly because they also reveal a snapshot of the relationship between China and the global liberal order. Since the 1970s, Chinese foreign policy has often sought to create comfortable distances between political and business interests in countries, such as those in Africa and the Middle East, where it has commercial investments, especially in essential resources such as fossil fuels, and to avoid intra-state conflicts. Beijing no longer has the luxury of those options, however, as the country completes its transition from medium to great power status.

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[23] The draft resolution was adopted by 120 votes to 22, with six abstentions. See United Nations 1981.

Moreover, the safety of its expanding overseas assets and numbers of citizens is increasingly threatened by local political disturbances, and the Chinese government and citizenry now pays more attention to its international reputation as a means by which to enhance the image of a responsible great power and a country that seeks to rise and develop peacefully. China's recognition of its entangled economic and political interests overseas has resulted in two "inconvenient truths," namely that China is sometimes forced to intervene in intra-state conflicts to protect its citizens and commercial interests, and that Beijing is becoming more resourceful, knowledgeable and adept at using economic instruments to facilitate its diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts.

China is sometimes forced to use political and military means to protect, and sometimes evacuate, its citizens and commercial assets abroad as more of its economy becomes globalized and more Chinese workers seek overseas opportunities, including in regions in which security is not a given. Since the start of its "reform and opening up policies" (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) of the late 1970s, China has pursued a pragmatic foreign economic policy. Regardless of other countries' ideological inclinations or political situations, China encourages them to be open to its exports and investments; it cultivates economic interdependence for diplomatic gains, and diplomatic relations for commercial gains. The twenty-first century has seen a drastic expansion of Chinese overseas investment, encouraged and supported by the state to varying degrees. In developing countries, China has invested widely in energy and natural resources projects and related infrastructure such as oil and gas pipelines and railways. A key part of the BRI is building a growing array of communications and transportation infrastructure across Africa, Europe, Eurasia and South and Southwest Asia.

China's expanding international economic engagement is accompanied by a growing presence of overseas Chinese citizens and assets, and the state is obliged to protect them when they are threatened by political or security turmoil. That is not only because overseas economic interests are crucial to the health of the Chinese economy, hence to the legitimacy of the communist regime, but also because the state has faced domestic criticism when it was viewed as failing to protect its assets and especially citizens, including workers, officials, businesspeople and peacekeepers.[24] As Beijing continues to engage developing regions, including in unstable areas, public concerns about the safety of Chinese citizens abroad are becoming more prevalent, as the article by [Author C] explores in the Mali case. Thus, it can be argued that the current legitimacy of the Chinese communist regime comes not only from maintaining domestic economic growth, but also from the image of a respected “responsible great power”, able to protect its interests in the international sphere. As will be explored in the following articles, China’s legitimacy on an international level is being tied to its activities in civil conflicts and areas of problematic security.

China has learned from crises, including the current conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, South Sudan and Yemen, that it can no longer remain aloof from intra-state conflicts, even those which affect areas where Beijing has no direct economic interests (see Author C’s article). It has changed its foreign policy from non-interference to active mediation, supporting UN sanctions, and contributing to UNPKO missions. While Beijing was initially surprised by the post-2010 “Arab Spring” revolutions, China intervened to safeguard thousands of its citizens and its growing commercial interests, (especially oil facilities), in North Africa and the Middle East. Protecting regional stability, particularly in energy-rich Middle East countries, through international collaboration is written into China’s 2012 White Paper on Energy Policy.[25] In Africa as a whole, China’s growing commercial (and diplomatic) interests have provided a strong impetus for Beijing to take on a more activist role in promoting peace and development on the continent.

China has also learned from intra-state conflicts that it requires stable environments for investments and overseas citizens, and that it is time to build up longer-term strategic relationships. Under the Hu and Xi governments, Beijing began to develop infrastructure and diplomatic ties along vital sea-lanes emanating from the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Africa to better protect China’s energy and trading interests while developing new economic prospects, with many of these interests later folded into the BRI. To ensure the safety of its maritime trade routes, Beijing has sought to secure commercial ownership over strategic trading ports, and in some cases, such as Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), and Sittwe and Maday Island (Myanmar), developing ports for potential strategic use. In August 2017, China formally opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti, with a statement stressing the role of the facilities as a supply depot and a coordination hub for humanitarian missions in Africa and Southwest Asia.[26]

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[24] Wong 2013; Parello-Plesner, Washington and Duchâtel 2015.

[25] Information Office of the State Council 2012.

Moreover, in contrast to its traditional approaches of dealing with the incumbent government or only one side in a conflict situation, China has also learned not to "put all its eggs in one basket" and instead to engage with multiple parties in a political or security conflict. It is not only because China would like to facilitate the creation of a stable political environment for its citizens and assets, but also due to the requirement to hedge against uncertainties brought about by regime change in host countries, and occasionally to recognize that certain regions in a country are under *de facto* control by opposition forces. For example, in Myanmar, the Xi government broke with longstanding tradition and initiated dialogue with the then-opposition National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi before the watershed November 2015 elections which brought her party to power.[27]

In Afghanistan, as [Author B]'s article details, the Chinese government has made consistent efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiation tale with the Afghani government since 2014, and managed to do so in two occaions leading to two joint discussions ssuccessful occastions in 2016. As [Author D]'s article notes, in the Gulf Region, China has adopted a more balanced position between its old friend Iran and pro-US countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Saudi Arabia, and has tried to walk a fine diplomatic line when relations broke off between Qatar and other major GCC governments in mid-2017. Further, China pressed rival factions to enter talks in the cases of Darfur in 2007, Libya in 2011, South Sudan in late 2013, and Venezuela in 2016. However, in each of these cases and others, Beijing was also required to accumulate greater knowledge, and at times intelligence, of a particular security situation to better understand sub-state conditions and more effectively craft policy responses.

For example, when tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia accelerated in January 2016, China dispatched an envoy to the two countries for mediation and called on both to exercise restraint in their diplomatic clash.[28] In Afghanistan, as [Author B]'s article explains, Beijing has been one of the major actors, working closely with the US, in trying to bring about a political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. That is not only because China fears Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for Uyghur militants, but also because Chinese-invested mines, such as the copper mining facilities as Mes Aynak, and the nascent US$54 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are under potential threat by Taliban and other extremist interests. In the case of Syria, China has largely remained out of the conflict, but Beijing hosted Syrian government and opposition figures separately in late 2015 and early 2016 in an effort to accelerate peace negotiations in the hopes of distinguishing it from the West and Russia as a helpful partner in peacebuilding.[29]

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[26] Kynge *et al.* 2017; Song 2017.

[27] Lanteigne 2017.

[28] Tiezzi 2016.

Secondly, with its growing economic power, China has more economic tools at its disposal to be effective in conflict mediation, peacekeeping and diplomatic negotiations, and consequently the country is becoming increasingly adept at such roles as well, using both carrots and sticks, or both incentives and sanctions. In other words, China has greatly developed its "commercial diplomacy", meaning the ability to make its economic power more fungible, and to translate said power into other forms, including for strategic purposes.[30] Beijing is using many resources for economic diplomacy via aid, contributions to global or regional institutions, loans issued by policy banks, and overseas investment by state owned enterprises (SOEs), and this is evidenced in its diplomacy in conflict-affected regions as well. Globally, China had been the third-largest contributor to UN peacekeeping budgets and became the second-largest in 2016.[31]

Regionally, Beijing has sponsored conflict response mechanisms, including grants for an international monitoring mechanism to record ceasefire violations in South Sudan in 2014 and the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crises in 2015. Bilaterally, China convinced the government of conflict-ridden South Sudan in 2014 to permit the UN to relocate a camp of 15,000 displaced victims of one of the fighting ethnic groups, by having one of its major SOEs construct a new camp.[32] During Iran's long nuclear impasse with the West, the Chinese government reportedly instructed its SOEs to slow down energy investments in the country between 2010 and 2013 in an effort to pressure Tehran to abandon its nuclear weapons programme and to engage in the "P5+1" nuclear talks, while avoiding the risks of both US sanctions and instability in Iran (see Author D's article).

With the expanding reach of China's Belt and Road, the country's pledge to help other countries build infrastructure, or inviting them to join organisations such as the Asian

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[29] Li 2015; Wang 2016.

[30] Breslin 2009, 817-35.

[31] Weng 2016.

[32] Jorgic 2014.

Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a very attractive option, as the AIIB only lends to member states, and the promise of further infrastructure in the developing world has entered into the calculation of some countries when they engage with China. Questions about the long-term political and economic health of both the US and the European Union, as well as overall concerns about the future of economic globalisation, may serve to further heighten China's visibility. President Xi stated during a speech at the World Economic Forum conference at Davos, Switzerland in January 2017 that protectionism should not be allowed to take root in the global economy.[33] Not only was this statement indicative of the fact that Beijing was rapidly adopting the role of banner-holder for global liberalized trade, but it also suggested that China still very much links security and stability with economic development.

China's more interventionist foreign policy also has implications for its place in the global liberal order. In the post-cold war period, an international milieu open to intervention and/or interference has evolved. The flourishing of the global liberal order is predicated on the assumption that every state subscribes to at least the following three major features, each of which assumes the existence of a political system allowing the free movement of goods, services and ideas among states. If states do not subscribe to these features, intervention and/or interference might arise in order to ensure the maintenance of global stability.[34] The first feature is the idea of free trade, as codified in the Bretton Woods system, in which governments in the "first world" assume the right to decide matters related to the domestic politics of the "third world."[35] The second involves "ideas about political freedom and representative democracy," implying "the free movement of ideas," and which supports the first feature's ideas about free trade.[36] The third feature is an increasing number of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations around the world, each seeming to interfere in the "domestic affairs" of various states.

Where does China fit in this global discussion? If Beijing is more frequently taking on an "interventionist" approach, this can mean that China is socializing into the global liberal order. China's increasing and deepening participation in UN peacekeeping, in terms of greater troop contributions, which now include combat forces, seems to signify such a tendency. However, China's policy behaviour in civil conflicts, Beijing's increasing roles in international mediation, and increasing economic activity in conflict-prone regions, suggest that the interventionist approach which China is taking seems to be somewhat different from Western practices. Is Beijing trying to establish something new, or does the difference simply derive from different historical experiences? Does the Xi government now have a systematic policy towards the principles of non-interference and non-intervention?

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[33] *Xinhua* 2017.

[34] Evans and Newnham 1998, 279-80.

[35] Ruggie 1982.

[36] Evans and Newnham 1998, 279-80.

Conceptual Framework: Why and How China has Become Active in Peacebuilding and Conflict Mediation

These questions can be addressed by using conceptual framework consisting of three frames: materialist, normative, and domestic frames. From a materialist frame, China as a rising power needs to protect two major sets of assets in conflict-affected regions today, and China's active participation in peacebuilding initiatives and conflict mediation can be explained by the need to protect the two assets. First, Chinese citizens, especially in the wake of "go abroad" strategies since the turn of the century, which have encouraged growing numbers of out-migration, have required protection. There has been an increasing number of cases where Chinese citizens abroad have been directly threatened by conflict, with one notable example being the rushed evacuation of over 36,000 Chinese workers and nationals from Libya in March 2011 as the country began its descent into civil war. Chinese naval vessels provided cover for the removal of approximately six hundred Chinese citizens from Yemen in March 2015, as well as more than two hundred foreign nationals, when fighting erupted there, an event depicted in the popular 2018 Chinese film *Operation Red Sea* (*Honghai Xingdong* 红海行动). [37]

Secondly, China's growing economic power has meant that the assets it oversees abroad have also grown both in terms of value and importance to its economy, and this includes energy and natural resource projects, the development of new infrastructure, including ports, roads, railways and pipelines, as well as factories and trade routes which will also require protection. Furthermore, with its significant economic power, China can access an array of financial instruments for diplomatic objectives, including contributing both money and resources to peacekeeping missions and facilitating conflict mediation and peace negotiations.

From a normative standpoint, China's concern for its international status is a point of enquiry. China is no longer a medium power, which means the country cannot rely on its previous (self-proclaimed) status as a “large developing state” as it conducts its international affairs, including in the strategic realm. As a great power, ready or not, China is now expected by the international community, and particularly by conflict-affected regions, to become a “responsible great power”[38] by being more active in conflict-affected regions, rather than assuming an attitude of indifference. However, what is the composition of a responsible great power? China’s emerging approaches towards interventions present a useful window from which to examine these inquiries.

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[37] Rajagopalan and Blanchard 2015.

In the areas of intervention, is Beijing a norm-maker or norm-taker? At present, China continues to be accepting of many international norms regarding security issues, but the country also appears to be more comfortable in proposing alternatives to Western norms. In addition, Beijing also emphasizes the importance of development in resolving intra-state conflict. Furthermore, Chinese interpretations of sovereignty have been changing from a very strict understanding of Westphalian principles to a more flexible approach, but does that necessarily mean China is becoming a state like the West (or a “normal great power”)? Finally, to what extent has China learned from its recent experiences (positive and negative) in conflict-affected regions, such as building a more conflict-sensitive approach? As China’s international exposure to conflict areas deepens, standard operating procedures are starting to appear, and they too are now worthy of study when one examines the country’s approach to intervention. If a great power experiences similar challenges in conflict-affected regions, does China’s experience, and lessons learned, lead the country along the same paths of those experienced in the West? As an alternative, will China’s historical identity, and past familiarity with itself being subject to colonialism, mean that the country’s approaches to conflict-affected regions are quite different from those of the West, as China claims?

A domestic framework, which is often forgotten in international relations debates which tend to focus on international material and normative structures, is also useful in explaining the ways in which China varies its approach to conflict-affected areas. Chinese citizens, both within the country and abroad, have expressed significant concerns about the safety of Chinese overseas nationals, having witnessed, in recent years, kidnappings and the deaths of workers and professionals abroad. These concerns have also grown with China’s increased participation in peacekeeping missions, as [Author C] notes in the article examining the evolution of China’s peacekeeping contributions in Mali. In the space of less than twenty years, Chinese policy towards UNPKO was transformed from wariness and avoidance to acceptance and enthusiasm. However, the increased numbers of blue berets, and more frequently policies and combat forces have placed Chinese personnel in harm's way, and Chinese peacekeepers have been killed in action during UN operations in Haïti, Mali and South Sudan.

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[38] Cui and Buzan 2017.

Apprehension about the safety of Chinese citizens might lead to the country's deeper engagement in various forms of conflict resolution, including in regions beyond the Asia-Pacific, but at the same time it can also promote a more cautious approach to interventions within conflicts, given international concerns about revisionist Chinese security policies and its growing defence budget, (estimated at US$175 billion in 2018).[39] For example, although Beijing had stressed repeatedly that the Belt and Road is an economic endeavour, the strategic dimensions of the initiative, as well as the fact that it covers key areas of resource interest, (Africa, Eurasia, the Indian Ocean and the Arctic), is significant. A comprehensive understanding of risks, including political, economic and cultural, is emerging in the domestic discussions as well as in the halls of power in Beijing. Chinese citizens have another expectation, namely that the country will play a larger role in international affairs, appropriate to the size of its economy, as potentially part of a "Chinese Dream" (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) which Xi elucidated shortly after taking office. Thus, a more activist approach to intervention may also be interpreted as a means for Beijing's increased participation on the world stage, in keeping with the country's great power status and its potential emergence as a global power.

The Structure of the Special Section

This special section addresses one or more of the overarching questions stated above, including the meaning of the principles of non-interference and non-intervention to China today; the reasons and the process of China's shifting approaches to the principle; the implication of the shifting approaches for China's position in the global liberal order; and how the developing world perceives China's shifting approaches to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention. Under the heading of "the search for legitimate great power intervention", [Author A]'s article examines the domestic debate within China on how Beijing can protect and promote Chinese global presence and interests while at the same time continue to "stay within" the principle of non-intervention. It will show how new distinctions, particularly the distinction between "intervention" and "interference", and approaches are developing and will discuss how these new distinctions and approaches are reflected in the Chinese foreign and security policy practice, which has become much more flexible and pragmatic. This relates to how an authoritative new policy on the principle of non-intervention has yet to emerge from Beijing, making it possible for the different Chinese foreign policy actors to pursue several new initiatives and approaches simultaneously.

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[39] Shepherd and Martina, 2018.

This is followed by a case study by [Author B], analysing China's practices of the principle of non-interference, with particular attention devoted to the country's conflict mediation efforts in Afghanistan from 2014 to date. Conflict mediation involves direct engagement with rebels such as the Taliban, which is a clear departure from the country's rhetoric and most of the past practices, which focused on the government-to-government interaction. Her article establishes an analytical framework that helps to assess the relationship between the types of approaches to mediation and the level of interference each implies, and assess the nature of China's mediation by using the framework. It argues that China's mediation effort in a bilateral context is compatible with the principle of non-interference, while that in a multilateral channel shows a medium level of interference in domestic affairs.

[Author C] examines Chinese conduct within the framework of UN peacekeeping and war-to-peace transitions in Chinese contributions to securing a peace in Mali since conflict broke out in 2012. Beijing's decision to support international intervention in Mali, in order to rescue the state from immanent collapse and vulnerability to extremist and terrorist organisations, including the Islamic State, was also a departure from previous policies of targeting peacekeeping engagements, especially in Africa, in accordance with resource and economic interests. However, the complexity of the Malian conflict, and the ongoing problems in securing a lasting ceasefire, have meant that the Mali mission has become a crucial test for China's ongoing support for UNPKO initiatives.

The Middle East is the arena for the final article, not only because this region has become crucial for much of Chinese foreign policy, not least as a source of fossil fuels and as a crucial component of the Belt and Road routes. [Author D]'s article analyses changing Chinese strategies in the Gulf (with a focus on the past decade) and demonstrates how the Gulf states' expectation of China fits with China's shifting approach to intervention to this unstable region. The author argues that Gulf States' expectations are powerful explanations for China's regional strategies that have shown growing adapatility in an unstable regional order; these expectations emerge around issues that implicate Gulf states directly or are relevant to them (such as relations with the US, and the wars in Yemen and Syria). China's approach to the Gulf demonstrates that it has been incrementally integrating local demands in its strategizing, especially by finding common ground with Gulf states despite their own differences; China has done so while not being tied to a "hegemonic idea", i.e. it is not trying to control or define Gulf politics. The article finds that Beijing's incrementalist, adaptive, and non-hegemonic regional approach has significantly increased Gulf States' acceptance of its interventions. In describing multifaceted intervention processes in China's Gulf policy, [Author D]'s article argues that intervention is best understood as a continuum, where economic intervention can have crucial political and security consequences just as military intervention has economic dimensions.

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